The Security Times

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Putin's zero-sum foreign policy has the world on a knife's edge

Follow the fight for diplomacy on pages 2 to 9

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ALL TOGETHER NOW

DETLEF PRINZ,
PUBLISHER

There's no question that the Munich Security Conference (MSC) is being held this year in a perilous international political environment. We hope that all participants can take full advantage of the opportunity for intensive discussion, debate and negotiation. This is what matters, now more than ever.

As delighted as I am to greet the large US delegation, I'm deeply disappointed that no member of the Russian delegation is making the trip to Munich. The MSC at the Bayerischer Hof is unparalleled in the opportunities it provides for on-stage and behind-the-scenes dialogue. Nevertheless, I very much hope that this year's meetings will contribute to mutual understanding and further détente – disarmament is the order of the day in war zones as well as well as media outlets. The problems facing people worldwide are so great, there's simply no time for saber rattling and the drums of war.

Hunger, a global pandemic, environmental degradation, oppression, discrimination and the plight of refugees, these are the issues that politicians worldwide must address in order to help create a more peaceful world.

This conference marks the end of an era, as Wolfgang Ischinger bids farewell to his role as chair of the MSC. Over the past 10 years, he has transformed the conference, making it what it is today – *the* security summit where the international community's top political, diplomatic and academic minds convene.

Wolfgang Ischinger deserves our heartfelt gratitude for his peerless commitment and tireless efforts. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to his successor, Ambassador Christoph Heusgen. The MSC has a bright future with him at the helm.

PLEDGE OF ALLIANCE

NATO and the EU can rely on Germany

BY CHRISTINE LAMBRECHT

For more than a decade, the strategic focus of global politics has been shifting steadily toward Asia. And yet, today, at the Munich Security Conference, the emphasis is once again on Europe. After Russia's annexation of Crimea, which was carried out in violation of international law, and after the war in Donetsk and Luhansk, it is uncertain what the Federation's next move regarding Ukraine will be. Either way, the threatening situation created by Moscow as a result of its massive troop presence along the border – together with its exaggerated diplomatic demands – reminds us just how fragile European security really is. Peace in Europe is by no means a "done deal." It's not something we achieved once and for all time. It's something we must fight for and defend, over and over again. This requires vigilant defense, unity among allies, large-scale investment and constant diplomatic effort aimed at building trust and defusing conflicts.

Against such a backdrop, Germany once again finds itself at the center of the security policy debate. This is no surprise. Our geographical location, political power and economic strength make us a major player. The new German government, of which I am a member, is highly aware of this. We are conscious of the responsibility we bear, and we know how much scrutiny decisions made in Berlin receive.

In NATO and the EU, Germany has always shown that its commitment to and solidarity with the alliance can be fully relied upon. This is also the case today with regard to the current crisis on NATO's eastern flank. And this applies not only to diplomatic efforts seeking to achieve peace and trust, as is the case in the Normandy Format; it also applies to the Bundeswehr, for example, in the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Lithuania, where we are once again strengthening our forces.

> PEACE IN EUROPE IS BY NO MEANS A DONE DEAL

It can be seen as well in the NATO Response Force, where we stand ready to provide credible defense for the alliance and rapid crisis management and where we're currently amid intense preparations for our obligations in the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force next year. We believe in dialogue and negotiation, but we also believe in the strength and steadfastness that allows diplomacy to succeed. Germany can do both. And we're ready and willing to put both to work wherever needed.

We are steadfast in our commitment to the fundamental principles of peace and freedom on our continent, from state sovereignty and the inviolability of borders to the freedom of each country to choose its own alliances. We are prepared to draw far-reaching consequences if these principles are attacked. And we will make a firm contribution to ensuring that these principles are enforced over the long term. Security is and will continue to be a key challenge. And it's not just about today's crisis diplomacy; it's about ensuring that our children and future generations can also enjoy the peace and freedoms we may take for granted today. We must invest in the security of our continent now to ensure that generations to come can lead good lives in freedom and in peace.

The Bundeswehr is working at full speed to meet these urgent investments. We are seeking to get the German armed forces into shape so they can effectively meet future threats. We are in the process of acquiring modern systems designed to increase our combat capabilities and consolidate our role as an alliance partner in NATO. The forthcoming replacement of our Tornado fighter aircraft fleet is one example of this, as is the procurement of armed drones and the joint Eurodrone project for the Bundeswehr. Between 2014 and 2021, Germany's defense budget increased by 45 percent, and a

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PERMACRISIS EUROPE

The West v. Russia

BY WOLFGANG ISCHINGER

The question of war and peace has returned to the European continent," said then-Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the Munich Security Conference (MSC) in 2015. Less than one year earlier, Russia had invaded and annexed Crimea in a cloak-and-dagger operation. What followed was international condemnation and a period of intense shuttle diplomacy between Moscow, Kyiv and capitals in the West. Arriving directly from talks in Moscow, then-Chancellor Angela Merkel warned on the main stage at Hotel Bayerischer Hof that "the foundations of the peace order in Europe are by no means self-evident."

Exactly seven years later, Europe is once again facing an eerily similar moment of crisis: Europe's security order is in peril on the eve of the 58th Munich Security Conference in 2022. Russian troops are massing at NATO's eastern flank. Shuttle diplomacy is in full swing. A new German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, will return from Moscow just before world leaders meet in Munich to discuss the most pressing challenges for foreign and security policy. And once more, the MSC will be a platform for dialogue between East and West. Europe's permacrisis – the persisting tensions between Russia and the West – will continue to shape the debates on Europe's security for years to come. The tasks before Europe are momentous.

> EUROPE'S SECURITY ORDER IS IN PERIL

One thing is certain: In retrospect, Russia bears great responsibility for why its relations with the West have reached a new nadir. Yet, before NATO-Russia relations soured to the worrying low point we witness today, there were signs that a more cooperative age of security in Europe was in the cards.

Faced with the NATO membership aspirations of Poland, Hungary and other former member states of the Warsaw Pact, the trans-Atlantic allies were tasked with a delicate balancing act in the wake of Soviet Union's collapse. While Russia was less than enthusiastic about the new NATO membership of its western neighbors, a revamped, more cooperative basis for NATO-Russia cooperation appeared to be an acceptable compromise to the Russian leadership in exchange for the admission of new members into NATO.

Enshrined in the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act, both the admission of new members – albeit with far-reaching restrictions on troop and missile deployment – and the creation of what later became known as the NATO-Russia Council were agreed in writing. Russia's ability to deploy personnel and arms close to NATO's eastern flank remained untouched. Thus, by signing the document, Russia officially accepted the principle of enlargement of the North Atlantic alliance.

The agreement with Moscow enabled NATO to proceed with its deliberations on the admission of new members shortly thereafter. The decisions made at the 1997 Madrid summit – namely, admitting Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to NATO in a first round followed by later enlargement rounds set to include Romania, Bulgaria and the Baltics – were informally discussed with Moscow to avoid a renewed fallout. In hindsight, this was a masterpiece of responsible *Ostpolitik* with Berlin in the driver's seat.

But relations went downhill from there. While Russia is without a doubt responsible for most of the lost trust in East-West relations, NATO, too, must acknowledge past mistakes. Starting with its 2007 Bucharest summit, an enlargement crisis began to weigh heavily on NATO-Russia relations. The Alliance greenlit a compromise

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Pledge of Alliance

substantial additional amount will be invested in 2022. I'm committed to ensuring that this trend continues in the coming years. And I know that Chancellor Scholz is on my side in this matter. All of these efforts are evidence that we're building an armed force that is ready for action, one that we can rely on and that will also guarantee our security in the long term.

Germany is also eager to position itself clearly in conceptual terms. By the end of the year, we will have defined our country's security policy role for the first time in the form of a national security strategy. There are two basic considerations that are crucial for us in this regard. First, we must update the concept of the networked approach – i.e., a broadly integrated security policy that reaches across all fields of action – and bring it into accord with the era in which we live. Ours is an era of global power shifts, new threats and quantum leaps in technology, an era in which climate change, economic development and global trade are just as much a part of security as migration, women's rights and social equity.

Second, we want to harmonize our national security strategy with NATO's new Strategic Concept and the EU's Strategic Compass. European security and Germany's contribution to it must form a unified whole. In realizing this goal, we will also incorporate into our new strategy the experiences gathered from joint operations in recent years. In addition, part of our responsibility to foster peace and freedom in Europe and the world involves practicing self-criticism. We owe it to ourselves and our soldiers to evaluate the sometimes-bitter disappointments we experienced over two decades of NATO operations in Afghanistan. We must take these experiences into account as lessons learned. Although we're still at the beginning of this process, we've already drawn the first important conclusions. In the future, all Bundeswehr missions abroad will be regularly evaluated and recalibrated. When we send soldiers out on missions, they must be able to trust that their deployment is meaningful and that their commitment will achieve its goal. This applies to our important engagement in the Sahel just as much as to our advisory and training missions in the Middle East and our operations on the high seas. Of course, we will always conduct these evaluations in close coordination with our partners and allies.

This culture of partnership is also demonstrated by Defender 2022, the large-scale cycle of NATO exercises in Europe that will get underway this year almost simultaneously with the Munich Security Conference. As part of Defender 2022, more than 13,000 US soldiers will come to Europe by June to demonstrate – together with their comrades from across NATO – what alliance solidarity means in concrete terms. Germany is proud to participate in this military mobility as well as to act as a central hub for the alliance.

Germany as a major contributor to the power of the alliance and as an alliance member able to prepare the ground for defense-oriented military exercises that display solidarity and act as an effective deterrent – these two functions are emblematic of the role we seek to play now and in the future. They also illustrate the new German government's security policy: Germany will continue to stand firm and steady in the alliance while remaining a partner, an ally, a framework nation and a leading authority in security matters.

CHRISTINE LAMBRECHT
is Defense Minister of Germany.

"Germany sometimes walks around Europe like it owns the place."

In an interview with *The Security Times*, Sigmar Gabriel discusses Germany's complicated relationship to the US, to Russia and to the states of Eastern Europe.

The Security Times: What role does the German-American partnership still play in 2022? Is Berlin still a reliable ally of Washington? And vice versa?

In light of the near-tectonic shifts in the world's economic, political and military axes of power, democratic states around the globe need each other as much as ever. Almost all democracies face two major challenges: reducing the polarization that is wreaking havoc among their populations and navigating geopolitical tensions with authoritarian regimes around the world. We live in a world that no longer has a global power emanating stability and order. The US, which had assumed this role after World War II, no longer wants to play this role. And it can't continue to, because it now has a serious competitor: China. The US political scientist Ian Bremmer describes this world without order as "G Zero." Neither the G7, nor the G20 nor even the international conferences of the UN creates order; instead, we once again find ourselves living in a time of great power rivalries and cutthroat interest-driven politics. The question remains as to who will determine the new world order. If the US and Europe, and Germany in particular, want a say in the game, they can only do it together. Bowling alone is a dangerous game in the 21st century.

Can or should there be something approximating equidistance between Germany and Russia and between Germany and the US? What significance does the German-American partnership still hold? Has German confidence in the US not returned under President Joe Biden?

I've never understood this talk about Germany's alleged equidistance from Russia and the US. Of course, we have far more in common with American democracy than with China's one-party dictatorship or with authoritarian Russia. This was true even under the presidency of Donald Trump, who, by the way, could be, and was, voted out of office. Anyone who questions Germany's close ties with the US is, de facto, also working to destroy European unity. We Germans sometimes have a short memory and believe our history only began after 1945. Our European neighbors have a much longer memory. For many – not only in Central and Eastern Europe – Germany only became predictable through its close ties to the US. One need only remember that the governments of the United Kingdom, France and Italy opposed German reunification in 1989, as they feared the return of the German Reich. It was the US that was able to break this resistance through its guarantee that even a reunited Germany would remain integrated in the trans-Atlantic and European spheres.

Why is NATO's eastward expansion looked upon so critically in Germany?

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Sigmar Gabriel

What is the basis for what you describe as the "threat perception of the encirclement of Russia"?

This is indeed astonishing, because the eastward expansion of NATO has created Europe's most stable and lasting peace since the Peace of Westphalia. Just imagine if there was some kind of gray area and power vacuum from the north to the south of Europe. For decades, it would have been an invitation for all kinds of external destabilization attempts. NATO's eastward expansion prevented that from happening and thus, in a well-understood sense, created security for Russia as well. There are probably several reasons for the kind of "guilty conscience" present in Germany, in particular concerning NATO expanding east. It has something to do with the immense suffering Germany wrought upon Russia in World War II. Germany rightly wanted and wants to reconcile with this Russia. The problem is that our historical memory has gaps, because the Ukrainians, the Poles, the Baltic states and other Central and Eastern European countries suffered just as much from Germany's Nazi-era murder machine as Russia did. Today, these countries see their security and freedom endangered by Russia and hope to get the same protection from joining NATO as we West Germans and West Berliners received during the Cold War. Reunited Germany, the Berlin Republic, has forgotten how to perceive European developments through the eyes of our neighbors. Geography and history determine the peoples' view of the present and future. And the geographical situation and historical experience of Poland, the Baltic states or Ukraine are quite different from ours. It would do German politics and the German public a lot of good if we were to acknowledge this again. Divided Germany was much better at this; we knew we had to understand our neighbors if we wanted to live in peace. Reunited Germany, on the other hand, sometimes walks around Europe like it owns the place.

SIGMAR GABRIEL
was German Foreign Minister from 2017 to 2018 and party leader of the SPD for five years. He is chair of the Atlantic Bridge, which was founded by John McCloy and Eric M. Warburg.

What can Germany do to help ease tensions at the Russian-Ukrainian border?

It can reexamine the basis of Willy Brandt's policy of détente, but not with the naïve sentimentality that some are currently indulging. Brandt's détente was only successful because it was absolutely clear where the West German Federal Republic stood: that is, with both feet in the Western alliance and in the trans-Atlantic community of NATO. Strength and readiness for defense on the one hand and readiness for dialogue and détente on the other are two sides of the same coin. If there had been doubts about West Germany's reliability, Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* would have become a pawn in the strategic machinations of the Soviet Union, rather than a negotiating partner to be reckoned with. Even today we are only taken seriously if, when in doubt, we are also prepared to make the price as high as possible for whoever breaks the peace in Europe and is prepared to go to war. Not in the military sense, but most certainly in the economic sense. And we must not fear the fact that this will also demand something of us. Peace also requires the courage to defend it.

The SPD repeatedly refers to Willy Brandt's* Ostpolitik. *What lessons remain relevant for us as we deal with Russia today?

The essential difference to the situation back then is that the Soviet Union was, at the time, a status quo power. It was concerned with securing its borders and its sphere of influence. With the Helsinki Accords and its acceptance of the Oder-Neisse border, the West guaranteed this security. And in exchange, the Soviet Union was willing to sign on to the recognition of human rights. It was not for nothing that the civil rights movements in Poland, in the former Czechoslovakia and in the USSR referred to this agreement in Helsinki. But today's Russia wants to change borders. It is not a status quo power; it wants to impose a revisionist policy. Changing borders in Europe and returning to the policy of a limited sovereignty of states in Northern, Central and Eastern Europe, as the Russian leadership now intends, cannot be a basis for détente. On the contrary – they create tension.

You recently said that Europe and Germany do not lack the willingness to negotiate and engage in dialogue or the will to ease tensions with Russia, but that they lack the will to "show toughness if necessary" when it comes to peace. What could or should this toughness mean?

To be prepared to threaten a high price for breaking the peace in Europe. If Russia really does use military force against Ukraine, this will not only mean the end of Nord Stream 2, but Germany and Europe must also be prepared to end energy cooperation with Russia altogether. That wouldn't happen overnight and it would cost us money, but you have to be tough if you want to be taken seriously as a negotiating partner.

Former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder has been nominated for the supervisory board of Russia's state-owned gas company Gazprom. He recently spoke of "saber-rattling Ukraine." What influence does Schröder have on the alignment of the SPD's foreign and energy policy?

My impression is that Gerhard Schröder speaks for himself. And he's allowed to do that. And even if I don't agree with him one bit on this point, I think it's right that he doesn't duck out of the way and that he takes his stand. What should concern us more is that there are serious voices in the US who believe that Russia has every right to grant its neighbors only limited sovereignty in their foreign policy. It is these ultra-realpolitikers who expect good behavior from the neighbors of great powers like the US, Russia or China that worry me more than Gerhard Schröder's posturing. It shows that we Europeans can by no means be sure that US presidents are prepared to defend European interests against Russia. In the future, we will have to do this on our own if there is any doubt.

The questions were posed by Lutz Lichtenberger and Jonathan Lutes.

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Permacrisis Europe

formula for the accession of Ukraine and Georgia, stating that "these countries will become members of NATO." The Kremlin regarded this as a prospectus for former Soviet territories to gain NATO membership.

What followed is the well-documented Russia-Georgia confrontation, the separation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia as well as Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its subsequent active support of separatist groups in Ukraine's Donbass region.

How to turn the tide? Today's lack of mutual trust reinforces a profound crisis of Europe's security order. The task of reconciling Russian requests with NATO's room for compromise is a challenging one at best – and an impossible one at worst. The proposal now presented by Russia for a permanent and explicit rejection of Ukrainian NATO accession goes far beyond earlier Russian demands and runs counter to the established principles of Europe's security architecture.

NATO's reaction to Russia's dangerous game should follow a tried and tested strategy, the dual-track approach combining deterrence and dialogue. While the West should spell out in no uncertain terms the immense costs of any Russian advances into Ukraine, NATO should not simply dismiss Russian proposals categorically; it should see them as the opening foray in a long and cumbersome diplomatic process, such as within the framework of the OSCE.

"If foreign policy is in high demand, it is seldom a good sign for the state of the world," said German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier exactly seven years ago in his speech in Munich. As world leaders meet for the MSC 2022, foreign policy and diplomacy are indeed in high demand. Europe's permacrisis requires more dialogue and more resolve to shake off the collective sense of helplessness in the face of Russia's misconduct.

WOLFGANG ISCHINGER
is chair of the Munich Security Conference and professor for international security and diplomatic practice at the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin.

Passing the diplomatic torch

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Christoph Heusgen is taking over as chairman of the MSC at the closing bell of this year's conference.

Germany's former ambassador to the United Nations and long-time foreign policy advisor to Chancellor Angela Merkel takes over from current chairman Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger, who will remain president of the Foundation Council. Ischinger has headed the conference since 2008.

Heusgen is looking forward to "the exciting task at the top of the Munich Security Conference. It is a great honor for me to take over the legacy of Ewald von Kleist, the unforgettable founder of 'Wehrkunde,' Horst Teltschik, Helmut Kohl's confidant, and Wolfgang Ischinger, who developed the MSC over the past 13 years into the world's most important forum for debates on foreign, security and defense policy."

SECURITY STRATEGY

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DOWN TO THE WIRE

The blow-by-blow of Europe's ongoing crisis in Ukraine

BY DMITRI TRENIN

1 The current crisis in Russia-West relations is not primarily about Ukraine, but essentially about the architecture of European security. Russian President Vladimir Putin's current goal is not to take over Ukraine or wrestle it back to the Russian sphere of influence. Rather, it is to replace the post-Cold War system, which is dominated by the United States and managed through NATO with a construct that rests on two pillars, the US/West and Russia, and is regulated by agreements between the two.

2 Russia has been unhappy about the US politico-military dominance in Europe since at least the mid-late 1990s, when the NATO enlargement process got underway, and NATO interfered in the Kosovo crisis and carried out an air war against Serbia. For a long time, Moscow was powerless to do much about it, and it entertained a hope that, having had to reluctantly accept the inclusion into NATO of Central European, Balkan and even former Soviet Baltic states, it would be able to exercise a sufficient degree of influence to prevent new Eastern European states like Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and Georgia from going down the same path.

3 Of these countries, Ukraine and Belarus have been historically of vital strategic importance to Russia. Moscow considered their potential loss to the Western alliance intolerable.

4 The Ukrainian Maidan of 2014 dramatically changed the situation in Europe's east by bringing to power a coalition of pro-Western and anti-Russian elements. To President Putin, even though Russia immediately took control of Crimea and supported anti-Maidan militants in Donbass, this was the biggest strategic loss of his presidency. Since then, preventing Ukraine's membership in NATO became his last stand in matters of European security.

5 Putin essentially concluded that Western countries, above all the US, only understand the language of force. Moscow doubled down on upgrading its military capabilities. By 2018, Russia had developed an array of new weapons (hypersonic systems and others) that made the Kremlin more confident in dealing with Washington. In Putin's memorable phrase from his speech to the Russian parliament, but addressed to the Americans, "you did not listen to us before. Listen now."

6 By early 2021, Putin had lost all expectations – which were revived after Zelensky's election – that the situation in Donbass and more generally relations with Ukraine could be resolved or managed in a direct dialogue with Kyiv. Worse, in late 2020, suspicions began to circulate in Moscow that Ukraine was planning an attack on Donbass modeled on the successful Azeri operation in Nagorno-Karabakh. To deter the Ukrainians and to send a stern message to Washington, Putin in March-April 2021 ordered the massing of Russian forces along Ukraine's borders.

7 Russia's troop demonstration got America's attention, as Putin must have calculated. US President Joe Biden invited him to a meeting in Geneva in June 2021, where the two leaders agreed to start talks on strategic stability and cyber security, but on the issue of Ukraine there was no movement. Moreover, from the Kremlin's perspective things began to deteriorate quickly: Kyiv's clampdown on Russia-friendly political figures and media outlets in Ukraine; more frequent and more daring NATO exercises in the Black Sea area; the testing of Russia's new maritime borders off Crimea by a UK frigate, and other similar developments.

8 In response, starting in October 2021, President Putin decided to apply military pressure again. The troop concentration on Ukraine's borders this time was even more impressive. Talking to Russia's senior diplomats in November 2021, Putin remarked that creating tension in the adversarial camp was helpful to Moscow's political goals. Again, this worked, up to a point. Presidents Putin and Biden spoke on the phone and had a videoconference. Biden was open to hearing out Russian security concerns. Russian diplomats passed their maximalist proposals/demands to the US and NATO in the form of draft treaties and a draft agreement. In-depth diplomatic discussion followed between Russia and the US and between Russia and NATO, as well as at the OSCE. US and Russian foreign ministers met. The US and NATO gave written responses to Russian proposals. For the first time since the downfall of the Soviet Union, the US and its allies began actually discussing Russian concerns rather than dismissing them.

9 Yet Vladimir Putin found Western responses wanting. The core Russian demand for Ukraine to be formally excluded forever from NATO membership was predictably rejected, as was the demand of rolling back NATO's infrastructure to where it was in 1997, when Russia and NATO signed their Founding Act on relations. At the same time, Washington expressed willingness to discuss arms control issues, notably the non-deployment of INF systems in Europe, and abjured any intention of placing strike weapons or forces in a combat role in Ukraine, as well as a range of confidence building measures. In the past, Russia had advocated these measures – a moratorium on INF systems in Europe, a cap on military exercises – but the US had not been interested. Now that has changed.

10 Faced with this mixed bag of US counterproposals (the NATO response was judged in Moscow as politicized and overly ideological), the Kremlin did not immediately use the rejection of its core demands as a pretext for engaging in military measures (read: invasion of Ukraine) or taking military-related steps (read: new permanent deployments of troops and weapons). Instead, Russia continued the dialogue. French President Emmanuel Macron came to Moscow, to be followed by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Between those visits, UK foreign and defense secretaries visited Russia. Political directors of the Normandy countries – France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine – met in Paris and Berlin to discuss the implementation of the Minsk agreement on Donbass. Finally, Presidents Putin and Biden spoke again.

11 This intense top-level diplomacy was taking place against the backdrop of Russian military exercises in Belarus and the Black Sea, US troop reinforcements in Europe and White House warnings of an immediate Russian invasion of Ukraine. By mid-February 2022, the war of nerves between Russia and the US reached its culmination.

12 The future is unpredictable, but here are a few conclusions and an analytical outlook:

- Russia has been using its demonstrations of force, which

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MR. PRECEDENT

What Russian intervention in Syria says about Putin

BY KRISTIN HELBERG

The West is bewildered. What is the driving force behind President Vladimir Putin's foreign policy? What are his goals and what tools is he willing to use to achieve them? To answer these questions, it would be wise to take a look back at Syria – Putin's longest, most extensive foreign intervention. Since 2011, Moscow has worked to secure the rule of Bashar al-Assad, a president beset by an armed insurgency. In doing so, Putin has restored Russia's position as a global power, succeeded the US as the force for order in the Middle East and expanded Moscow's military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean – and thus on NATO's southern flank. Tracking Putin's moves here helps us understand his potential foreign policy actions elsewhere.

Putin wants respect

The Russian president aspires to communicate at eye level with the world's most powerful leaders. He runs an empire and wants to be treated accordingly. This is precisely what he's achieved in Syria with the three instruments at his disposal: diplomatic clout, military strength and propaganda.

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Moscow has held its protective hand over Assad for 11 years. Between 2011 and 2020, Russia vetoed 16 resolutions on Syria. As a result, crimes against international law committed by the Syrian regime could not be referred to the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Billions of dollars of UN aid, which had to be distributed in agreement with Damascus, was misused by the regime in order to consolidate its power. Ultimately, this aid benefited only those loyal to the regime.

Only the extremist-controlled province of Idlib, a refuge for millions of Assad opponents, received direct humanitarian aid from abroad – via the last of originally four cross-border aid corridors set up by the UN to supply regions outside the regime's control. This cross-border aid had to be renewed by the Security Council every six months, at which point the West would beg Putin to allow them to continue providing it. In diplomatic terms, the Kremlin leader has come a long way in Syria.

When Russia failed to stymie resolutions, it simply weakened them in such a way that its allies were protected. The best example of this is Resolution 2254 from December 2015 – the UN document to which all actors involved in the Syria conflict still refer today. The resolution was the result of intensive talks between Moscow and Washington, which in October 2015 seized on the International Syria Contact Group as the only serious diplomatic initiative that could resolve the conflict. Both countries were already militarily engaged in Syria at the time – the US since September 2014 to fight the Islamic State group (IS), and Russia since September 2015 to rescue Assad, who had lost control of large swaths of the country. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his then-US counterpart John Kerry met at eye level – just a year and a half after President Barack Obama had degraded Russia by referring to it as a "regional power" in March 2014.

Resolution 2254 called for an end to attacks on civilians, unimpeded humanitarian access and the release of individuals arbitrarily detained. For months, Lavrov and Kerry sought de-escalation. Together, they led two negotiating groups in an attempt to contain the violence and provide humanitarian aid to the people – to no avail. The war not only continued as before, it escalated.

Russia became not only the crucial partner in this campaign, but the *game-changer* of the war. In the summer of 2015, Putin began sending troops and military equipment at Assad's request – partly in the hope that involvement in Syria would end Russia's international isolation, which was triggered a year earlier by the war in Ukraine and the earlier annexation of Crimea. Damascus granted Moscow free and unlimited use of Khmeimim Airport, which Putin then upgraded to a Russian air base.

The supply of personnel and weapons also passed through the Russian naval base in Tartus, which Moscow has maintained since 1977. It is Russia's only access to the Mediterranean Sea. In January 2017, Putin secured the rights to use the port for a virtually indefinite period; if neither partner objects, the 49 years contractually agreed upon are automatically extended for 25 years at a time. The site is of great strategic importance to Putin. It guarantees the Kremlin influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, which he needs to prevent NATO's dominance over the entire Mediterranean Sea. From Tartus, Moscow is able to pose a military threat to NATO's southern flank and thus counter the alliance's expansion.

In short, Putin leveraged his unflinching diplomacy, military determination and media manipulation to gain respect.

Putin is a tactician, not a strategist

Despite appearances, the Russian leader lacked a long-term strategy for Syria in 2011. The decision to keep Bashar al-Assad in power was a reaction to NATO's muscle-flexing in the region, particularly in Libya. In March 2011, Moscow's abstention in the UN Security Council enabled NATO's intervention in Libya. Shortly thereafter, NATO bombed Muammar al-Gaddafi's regime out of existence, even though its mission under the UN mandate had been to protect civilians. Putin was determined to prevent a repeat in Syria. After all, Assad was Moscow's last ally in the Middle East. During the 2000s, the entire region had fallen almost entirely under US influence.

Putin's plan for Damascus was thus limited to preventing Western-backed regime change. The Kremlin chief emerged as Assad's most powerful patron, making himself indispensable to all parties. Eschewing rigid calculations, Putin simply reacted to current events – the more dynamic, the better for him. Indeed, as a short-tempered tactician and autocrat, he uses every crisis to his advantage, whereas Western politicians must take public opinion into account, involve their parliaments and coordinate their actions.

As a result, in September 2013, Putin achieved his greatest tactical coup. After the August 21 poison gas attacks on the Damascus suburbs that killed more than 1,400 people, President Obama found himself under pressure to act. A year earlier, he had referred to the use of chemical weapons as a red line; now he was desperate to avoid a military strike, fearing the US could be drawn into another endless war. Putin helped him out of a tight spot. He persuaded the Syrian regime to surrender and destroy its chemical weapons stockpile through the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), providing Obama with a welcome excuse not to attack. Instead of being punished for gassing hundreds of civilians, the Assad regime became a partner, the OPCW inspectors received the Nobel Peace Prize shortly thereafter, and Putin began looking like a confident crisis manager.

Even the military buildup in Syria was not the result of any far-sighted strategy, but reflective of an ad hoc response to shifting needs. On several occasions, Putin announced that he would withdraw troops, only to then intensify and consolidate Russia's military presence.

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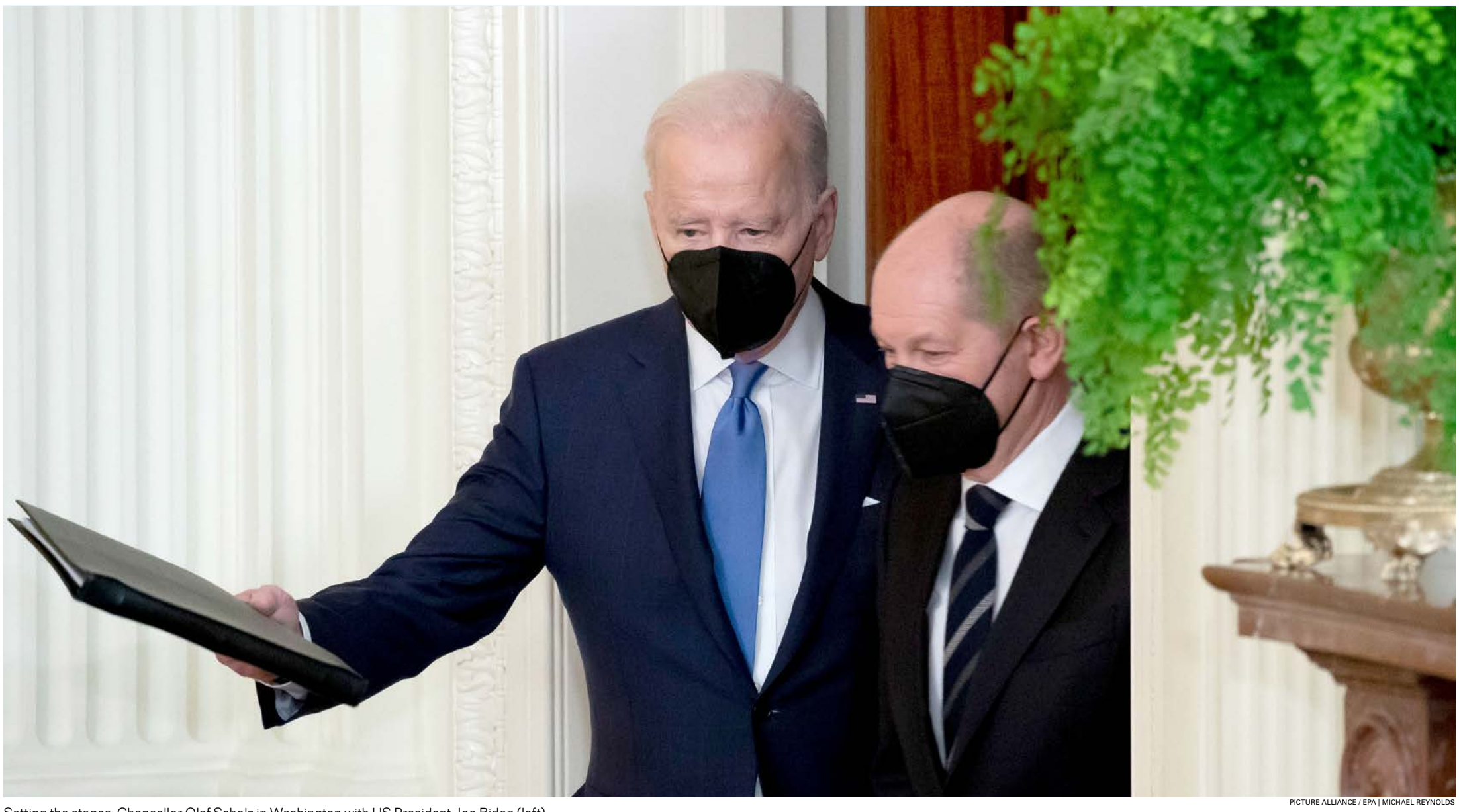
SECURITY STRATEGY



Setting the stages: Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Washington with US President Joe Biden (left)

PICTURE ALLIANCE / EPA | MICHAEL REYNOLDS

Separating chimeras from realities

Behind Moscow's roar lies the realization that its international influence is on the wane

BY RÜDIGER VON FRITSCH

German weapons for Ukraine?" "Will Nord Stream 2 sink to the bottom of the Baltic if Russia attacks?" If German and international policymakers continue to focus on naval-gazing issues like these, they face the grave danger of losing sight of the real challenge we're facing in the debate over Russia: The leadership in Moscow aims to make unilateral and long-term changes to the European peace order – to our detriment.

The massive military threat against Ukraine is more or less the vehicle Russia has chosen to force the West to accept its demands. After all, it's not just a matter of preventing Ukraine from making decisions regarding its own security; Russia has murmured similar threats to both Finland and Sweden. The Federation's goal is to strip our East-Central European partners of military might, disallowing NATO troops or facilities on their territory. As few as 6,500 Estonian soldiers would then be facing one million Russian soldiers. Moreover, Russia wants the US to withdraw its nuclear umbrella from Europe – the very foundation of our security.

Moscow knows that it once negotiated and agreed upon the very same rules and principles it has now grown tired of. But that is of no interest to the Russian leadership. It seems that Moscow might have once again miscalculated just how united the West is and its readiness to take consequential action, if necessary. After all, we simply cannot revert back to the 19th century, when great powers decided among themselves how smaller countries should position themselves, with the help of buffer zones and spheres of influence. It was an approach that failed horribly and led to two world wars. Even Viktor Orbán, always eager to cozy up to Moscow, must see his country's security in jeopardy in the face of Russian demands. His friend Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is even supplying Ukraine with high-performance drones and consistently refuses to recognize the annexation of Crimea.

So how do we explain Moscow's behavior? What on earth is it up to? Paradoxical as it may sound, Moscow's belligerent posture exposes the fact that Russia's international influence is destined to continue its decline if it fails to act. The country's wealth is almost entirely based on the export of raw materials, oil and gas, the very fossil fuels we'll buy less and less of in the foreseeable future. In spite of some progress – robust military equipment is now Russia's second largest export – the autocratic leadership in Moscow is making no headway in eliminating the structural deficiencies of its finite economic model, which include excessive bureaucracy, impediments to private enterprise, discouraging conditions for foreign investors, corruption and kleptocracy. All these shortcomings may be well-known and addressed in public debates, but they remain unremedied. If Russia were as economically successful as China, it would not have to make use of alarming threats to wield its influence on the international stage. Such a development would present us with a completely different set of challenges.

The fact that Russia, too, sees its security threatened may also strike us as paradoxical. Nothing has changed with regard to the poor prospects of Ukraine and Georgia becoming NATO members since the 2008 summit in Bucharest, when this state of affairs was established. Indeed, NATO was not the first military alliance to expand after the end of the Cold War; instead, it was the Russian-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization that expanded with the accession of Belarus in 1992. And where would the trans-Atlantic alliance get the suicidal idea of attacking a nuclear power like Russia anyway?

Some of these security anxieties are built to be instrumentalized, while others undoubtedly have deep roots in a form of intelligence-driven thinking that sees Russia as being surrounded by conspiracies and attempts by the West to instigate a "color revolution" there as well. But perception is reality, of course, which is why it's essential that we talk about it, that we try to understand the other's point of view, to separate chimeras from realities and come to agreements – over transparency, confidence-building measures and arms control – without surrendering the principles that have successfully guaranteed peace in Europe. We should take it as a marker of success that Western policy has succeeded in opening numerous channels of dialogue in the face of ultimatums and demands backed by threats of violence. If, conversely, Russian leadership considers it a success that it is now again talking "eye to eye" to the US, then that's something we would all be happy to concede. After all, it's also a question of how the Kremlin will find a way out of the dilemma it has created for itself. In a heated atmosphere dominated by enormous amounts of propaganda, all parties must also be able to declare victory at home.

But diplomacy has its limits – after all, it takes two to tango, and the Kremlin more or less refuses to engage. So, unfortunately, it remains unclear whether Russia will refrain from taking military action against Ukraine. Even a naval blockade of the Ukrainian coast between Crimea and the Romanian border would pose an enormous challenge to Kyiv, but also to the international community. One of the most important elements of Western policy should be to clearly identify in advance such scenarios and objectives.

> THE MASSIVE MILITARY THREAT AGAINST UKRAINE IS MORE OR LESS THE VEHICLE RUSSIA HAS CHOSEN TO FORCE THE WEST TO ACCEPT ITS DEMANDS

PICTURE ALLIANCE/DPA/RUSSIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY

Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock with Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov

For Russia, the consequences of such an approach would be dramatic in several regards. Western sanctions would be massive and drastic – and they would target the Achilles heel of the Russian leadership. No matter the size of its current financial cushion, Moscow is dependent on its enormous revenues from oil and gas exports, on international banking connections and on high-tech imports from the West. Western sanctions would likely jeopardize the leadership's power base – and this is something it truly fears.

Russia would also be tasked with weathering the burdens of a major war at home. They've already attempted – sometimes using brutal methods – to conceal the fact that Russian soldiers were killed in the Donbass conflict. And beyond that, an attack on Ukraine would render it impossible to achieve other goals the Russian leadership has set for itself. Moreover, it is likely that the hitherto restrained debate regarding NATO membership for Sweden and Finland would kick into high gear, and that NATO – which has done everything in its power to honor its commitments under the Founding Act agreed to with Russia – would take a completely different tack in East-Central Europe. A further probable outcome is that critics of a German nuclear arsenal would begin to rethink their position.

And what about Germany? To paraphrase Mark Twain's appraisal of Wagner, the German government's policy is actually far better than it sounded at first. By now, the line taken by Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) and Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (Green Party) is clear. Scholz has succeeded in committing his party to pursuing a unified course; he's not talking about putting an end to Nord Stream 2, yet he isn't ruling it out, with some in the SPD hoping it won't come to that. Scholz will be less ambiguous in talks with both the US and Russian presidents than he lets on in subsequent press conferences. The irritation with Germany's position expressed by participants in the international debate was caused to a great extent by the cacophony of distractions from the sidelines. Germany has much to contribute and is actively doing so. The revitalized Normandy Format is the only forum in which Ukraine and Russia speak directly to one another.

Incidentally, China, too, has yet to recognize the annexation of Crimea. As important and weighty as the demonstrative closing of ranks between Xi and Putin at the Olympic Games in Beijing may have been, its long-term significance should not be overestimated. Russia is already the junior partner in this relationship and the discrepancy will only grow as China pulls further ahead. China ships 16.9 percent of its exports to the US and only 1.9 percent to Russia, of which 90 percent are processed goods. In contrast, 90 percent of Russia's exports to China are raw materials. If there's one thing Russian leaders fear, it's being embraced amicably such that it leaves them out of breath.

But Russia has an alternative – Western Europe. We don't have to become best friends to create a mutually beneficial relationship. We should stick to the proper approach of responding robustly to peace violations and while using dialogue to highlight prospects that might be attractive to Russia. These could range from ensuring security in Europe to devising joint solutions for other major issues, such as terrorism, migration, pandemics and climate change. In doing so, we should always be clear that we're the more attractive alternative to China, a nation that poses an equal short-term challenge to us all – but a greater one to Russia in the longer term. We're an alternative that seeks to ensure an adequate and peaceful coexistence on the Eurasian landmass. But this doesn't mean the Europeans don't still have a lot of homework to do – not least because no one can predict who'll be sitting in the White House after 2024. And the Russian leadership must be willing to engage in a conversation that actually has the interests of both sides in mind.

RÜDIGER VON FRITSCH was German Ambassador to Russia from 2014 to 2019.

SECURITY STRATEGY

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Down to the wire

PICTURE ALLIANCE/DPA/TASS | IRINA YAKOVLEVA

Beleaguered: Volodymyr Zelensky

appear as preparation for an invasion, as leverage to get the US to listen to its concerns and act on its demands. This is Putin's personal diplomatic approach to the US.

- Russia's demand of NATO's non-expansion to the former Soviet space cannot be formally met, but there is no chance of Ukraine or Georgia actually making it to NATO as long as Russia regards this as a *casus belli*.

- The US agreement to negotiate a ban on the deployment of INF systems in Europe is Russia's gain – in the recent past, Moscow's proposal of a moratorium was ignored. It makes sense for the US too, as Russia possesses systems (e.g., the Zircon missile) that can be deployed on board submarines patrolling the US coastline and create a similar threat to critical US assets.

- Washington's openness to inspections of its BMD sites in Romania and Poland (and reciprocal inspections of Russian sites) takes care of another Moscow concern – as it addresses US apprehension with regard to some Russian cruise missiles.

- The willingness of the US to discuss the non-stationing in Ukraine of strike weapons or forces in a combat capacity is another potential win for Moscow.

- Talks with the US and allies on confidence-building measures (limiting the scale and scope of military exercises and the like) would be useful, though clearly of secondary importance.

- On Ukraine, by contrast, there has been no real progress. Kyiv cannot implement the terms of Minsk – such as constitutional autonomy, amnesty and regional elections before regaining control of the region – against the opposition of Ukrainian nationalists who regard Minsk as high treason; the US support for Minsk is half-hearted while German/French influence in Kyiv is insufficient.

- A massive unprovoked Russian invasion will remain a threat and can be effective as long as it is a threat. Actually invading would not be in Russia's or Putin's own interest.

- Once the peak of the crisis has passed, one should expect tensions to subside somewhat but remain at a fairly high level for the coming weeks and months.

- Resolution of the current crisis can only be achieved as a result of an agreement on Donbass, along the lines of Minsk, and on Ukraine, along the lines of some kind of a non-bloc status that is appropriately fixed in some form. Neither looks likely in the near or even medium-term future.

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Mr. Precedent

This back-and-forth fueled an image of the Kremlin leader as unpredictable. However, viewed in terms of Russia's power interests, some of his moves were predictable. Given Putin's tendency to fill in the void left by (primarily) Western actors, it makes sense to not hesitate and to proceed with consistency and predictability when engaged in conflict with him.

Putin never overestimates himself

In everything Russia does in Syria, Putin knows his limits. He calculates his moves precisely, minimizing his risks.

The intervention in Syria was far away and thus unpopular for most Russians, so Putin was careful to mitigate his own losses. From the outset, he limited the mission to military advisers, the air force, some naval units and a few special forces.

He left the war on the ground to others, first and foremost Iran, which was building up the National Defense Forces in emulation of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. For years, this mercenary army had been recapturing opposition areas for Assad. Without Russian air support, however, it would have failed, and in this respect, Putin provided exactly what the regime needed – expertise and modern technology with as little personnel as possible – without risking too much. By testing new weapons systems in Syria, the Russian army was able to both modernize and increase its sales. In this sense, the operation in Syria served as a military and technological litmus test for a possible confrontation with Ukraine.

Putin is pragmatic and flexible

More than any other conflict, the Syrian war was characterized by shifting alliances. Intervening powers did not stick to long-standing associations, but entered into short-term alliances of convenience to advance their own interests. And Putin perfected this skill.

In early 2017, after years of diplomatic cooperation with the United States, Moscow launched new talks in the Kazakh capital of Astana. Putin banked on reaching an understanding with the regional powers of Iran and Turkey, as talks with Washington under Donald Trump were simply pointless and the Europeans no longer had any say in Syria.

The idea was to have the three most influential warring parties defuse the conflict and thereby facilitate negotiations. Ceasefires became "de-escalation zones," but that was a misnomer – Russia and Iran continued to fight alongside Assad, while Turkey opened another front against the Kurds in the north in early 2018.

At this point, Putin found a sparring partner in Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Erdoğan had turned his back on his former friend Assad at the start of the uprising and had been funding Islamist militias for years, which meant that Turkey and Russia were on opposing sides in the conflict.

Yet they still worked together. In Idlib, Putin promised to put the brakes on Assad's plans to recapture the city, so that millions of internally displaced people would not be pushed further toward Turkey, while Erdoğan was tasked with containing jihadists. Neither of them succeeded. In the Kurdish-majority, autonomously administered northeast, Russian and Turkish soldiers patrolled together to maintain a buffer zone between Turkey and the Kurdish People's Defense Units (YPG). However, the region continued to suffer violent clashes.

The highly complex and tense relationship between the two autocrats worked only because each was extremely pragmatic in his thinking. Putin treated the various conflicts with Turkey separately – when the situation in Idlib escalated, it was prevented from affecting Turkish-Russian cooperation east of the Euphrates. Erdoğan also prevented military clashes in one area from affecting relations with Russia elsewhere in Syria.

After 11 years of war in Syria, Putin now finds himself in a comfortable position. He has earned the devotion of the Damascene dictator, whom many countries are likely to acknowledge again sooner or later. Russia's interests in the Middle East seem secure in the medium term. Yet the current situation in Ukraine is different, as President Zelensky wants to lead his people in the direction of the West. For Putin, the biggest difference is the time factor – while it works in his favor in Syria, it is likely to work against him in Ukraine

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Tenacity required: Cleaning up after the Visegrád Four in Katowice, Poland in June 2021.

PICTURE ALLIANCE / NURPHOTO | BEATA ZAWRZEL

WARSAW UNPACKED

How will Central Europe react to Russian aggression against Ukraine?

BY PAWEŁ KAROLEWSKI AND CLAUS LEGGEWIE

After 1990, it seemed that all was right with the world. With the demise of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, the hitherto semi-sovereign states of Central and Eastern Europe were given the opportunity to determine their own security policy interests. And their choice was clear: They wanted to join NATO and the EU and drop the Brezhnev Doctrine, which had chained the region to the Kremlin in a Moscow-controlled zone of influence. Any democratization at home would only be able to succeed if the former satellite states no longer had to fear Russian imperialism, which had been equally virulent before 1917 and 1945, not infrequently in a conflict-ridden alliance with Prussia/Germany.

Today's situation is more complicated. The Baltic states most threatened by Russia (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) understand the gravity of the crisis; like the UK and US, they profess to want to supply defensive weapons (such as Javelin systems) to Ukraine. The security policies of the other countries in the region, however, are no longer so clear-cut, as can be seen in the example of the Visegrád Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia).

Hungary is a prime example of one of the Kremlin's "Trojan horses" (Mitchell Orenstein/ Daniel Kelemen). Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's recent visit to Russia provided evidence of this. It was not his first visit, and Hungary had already criticized the EU sanctions levied against Russia in 2014, and had thwarted the EU's search for consensus vis-à-vis Putin's Russia. The focus was always on cheap gas and cheap loans, but it was also about old scores with Ukraine. For example, in 2018, the Hungarian consulate in Berehove, in western Ukraine, issued Hungarian passports to Ukrainian citizens, a blatant violation of Ukrainian law and a pro-Russian provocation, as Ukraine does not recognize dual citizenship. Orbán sought shelter in Moscow from the criticism emanating from Washington and Brussels regarding Hungary's democratic decline; and in the Trump era, Hungary moved closer to the autocrat in the White House. Regardless of Putin's radicalization, Hungary continues today to block cooperation between NATO and Ukraine. In exchange, Moscow grants Budapest special prices for gas and hands out cheap loans and Russian technology for the expansion of the nuclear power plant in Paks. The fact that Hungary currently receives Russian gas at roughly 20 percent of the market price provides ideal campaign ammunition shortly before the decisive parliamentary elections in April 2022.

Orbán is servicing Putin's unmistakable intention to divide the EU. In doing so, the Hungarian leader is contributing to the erosion of European sovereignty. Signs of this are also apparent in other Visegrád states. For example, the Czech political elite are divided on Russia. The fact that Trojan horses can also come in the form of individual domestic political actors is already evident in the fatal example of Germany's ex-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. Similarly, the current president of the Czech Republic, Miloš Zeman, is a staunch supporter of Putin (and, incidentally, a big fan of Donald Trump). Among other things, Zeman's fractured relationship with the Czech constitution and the involvement of his disciple Andrej Babiš, who was prime minister until 2021, in kleptocratic networks have brought him closer to Moscow. Recently, for example, it emerged that important investigative documents regarding a 2014 ammunition depot explosion in Vrbetice had disappeared from the armored cupboards of the presidential office, presumably because Zeman had them shredded. Czech investigators suspect that the Russian military intelligence agency GRU was behind the explosion, as the ammunition was destined for Ukraine. The prosecutor's office, which, after the change of government in Prague, broke away from the old boy network peopled by the likes Zeman and Babiš, is investigating the mysterious disappearance of these documents.

A similar split in other countries in the region can be observed. At the end of January 2022, Croatian President Zoran Milanović, the former prime minister from 2011 to 2016, threatened to withdraw his country from NATO in the event of an escalation of conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which he blamed not on Putin but on NATO, the US and the UK. According to Milanović, Ukraine is "one of the most corrupt countries in the world" and should not be admitted to NATO, although this isn't even up for debate at the moment. He also argued that a confrontation with Russia should be avoided at all costs in view of rising gas prices. Shortly thereafter, Croatian Foreign Minister Gordan Grlić Radman rejected these remarks, saying that the president was speaking only for himself and not for the country.

In Slovakia, where Russian propaganda via social media is particularly strong and effective, Robert Fico and his SMER party are among Putin's most important friends. The ex-prime minister was driven from office for his involvement in corruption networks and mafia-like groups. Today, as one of the opposition leaders, he is campaigning with radical right-wing parties for early elections and has expressed his intention, if successful, to ban NATO troops from Slovakian territory. His actions illustrate how right-wing populists are taking advantage of the moment and the situation relating to the Ukraine crisis in particular. It is also clear that Putin not only wants to block the accession of new countries to NATO, but also to remove longstanding member states from the alliance. In contrast, Slovakia's liberal President Zuzana Čaputová has taken the opposite position, blaming Russia for the escalation of the conflict with Ukraine and insisting on the presence of NATO in Slovakia.

> ORBÁN IS SERVICING PUTIN'S UNMISTAKABLE INTENTION TO DIVIDE THE EU. IN DOING SO, THE HUNGARIAN LEADER IS CONTRIBUTING TO THE EROSION OF EUROPEAN SOVEREIGNTY

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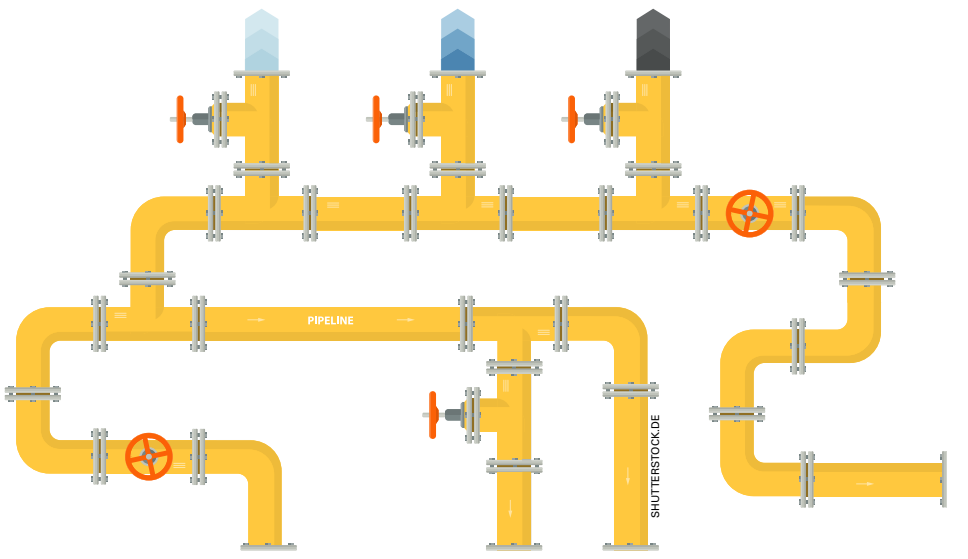
Poland provides a very interesting special case. Back in 2014, the country was one of the most diplomatically active countries in the Russia-Ukraine war; it supported Ukraine with loans; the Polish foreign minister traveled to Kyiv with his German and French counterparts in the "Weimar Triangle"; and foreign policy coordination between Berlin and Warsaw was still working well. The idea was to give Ukraine a shot at national self-determination and democracy building, against kleptocrats like Viktor Yanukovych, who sought to secure Russia's influence in the country. Today, the Polish government is driving a hard-line anti-EU course, which is now taking on anti-Ukrainian overtones. Indeed, the post-WWI/ pre-WWII Polish nationalism on which PiS draws in its conflict with the EU was not only anti-German and anti-Russian, but also anti-Ukrainian, but this could change in the current crisis. As an openly pro-Russian position in Poland is hardly possible, and the security situation in Poland is just as precarious as in the Baltic states, the Russia-critical rhetoric remains while the PiS proceeds in pursuing an anti-Ukrainian foreign policy.

Two observations serve to illustrate this trend. First, the PiS government waited a very long time before addressing the seriousness of the situation in public, despite the fact that Poland would be directly affected by the conflict, for example, as a result of a new wave of refugees from Ukraine. Contrary to the custom up until that point, there were also no consultations between the defense ministries in Warsaw and Kyiv, as the Ukrainian defense minister indicated in an interview. It was only after pressure from public opinion, the Polish opposition and NATO partners grew that the PiS government decided to deliver ammunition to Ukraine. Second, in January 2022, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki traveled to Madrid – in the midst of the brewing conflict – to meet with Europe's predominantly pro-Russian right-wing populists. They included France's Marine Le Pen, whose previous election campaigns were financed by Russian banks, and Santiago Abascal of Spain's Vox party, known among other things for his attempts to rehabilitate the Franco dictatorship. An information portal critical of the government in Poland already counts Morawiecki among the "Putintern," which the portal describe as a new "international" that designates Ukraine and Belarus as belonging to the "Russian world" and wants to reverse the dissolution of the Soviet Union under the banner of a neo-Slavophile ideology.

Separate signals came from recent diplomatic initiatives in Central Europe: Poland's Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau, as chairman of the Vienna-based OSCE, initiated a "Renewed European Security Dialogue" designed to force Russia to reveal its colors by making use of the organization's unanimity principle. Warsaw also revived the "Weimar Triangle" with Berlin and Paris in an attempt to foster parallel progress. At the same time, the "Austerlitz Format" was also renewed, in which Vienna, Prague and Bratislava declared that Ukraine's security was their business, too, and announced the delivery of Czech artillery shells. The Ukraine crisis acts as a catalyst, whether this involves accelerating the progress of the Visegrád states along the Western path or pulling them back into the instability of an interim situation.

SECURITY STRATEGY

The Big Chill



The security crisis unleashed by Putin in Europe has the SPD rethinking its Russian policy

BY HENNING HOFF

In politics, timing is often everything. And, sometimes, when a particular series of developments appears simultaneously, it can lead to moments of clarity and truth. This is precisely what has happened to Germany's governing SPD with regard to how they intend to face the challenge posed by Russia and President Vladimir Putin – an issue that is essential to the future of German foreign policy.

For weeks, the SPD presented Germany's allies with a confusing picture of its position, which is, at its very core, strongly linked to the future of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. In doing so, the party ended up inspiring the exact opposite of trust abroad. Chancellor Olaf Scholz needed some time to convey a clear line in response to Putin's massive threats of war against Ukraine. A renewed Russian violation of Ukraine's borders and sovereignty, Scholz argued, would have serious consequences, and when it came to sanctions, "all options" were on the table, including Nord Stream 2.

At that point, former German Chancellor and SPD leader Gerhard Schröder entered the scene, completely disrupting things – as he's been known to do in the past. He accused Ukraine of "saber rattling" yet refrained entirely from attacking Putin's Russia, which by that time had already stationed an invasion force of well over 100,000 men at the Ukrainian border and militarily involved Belarus as well, just for good measure. Soon after Schröder's statement, it was reported that he'd been appointed to yet another executive position relating to Russia's strategic oil and gas companies. After holding posts on the supervisory boards of Nord Stream, Nord Stream 2 and Rosneft, Schröder will now also sit on the supervisory board of Gazprom. He will replace Timur Kulibayev, son-in-law of Kazakh ex-president Nursultan Nazarbayev, whose family lost influence as a result of the recent unrest in that country. In other words, for all intents and purposes a former German chancellor will be in league with post-Soviet kleptocrats.

Schröder has thus arrived at an end-point toward which a particular faction of the SPD had been heading for some time with regard to Russia. This point, as Gerd Koenen put it recently, was derived from "a policy of latent equidistance between Washington and Moscow" that emerged after the Iraq war of 2003, which Germany had rightly not supported. While Schröder's distance to Russia would eventually be reduced to zero, the SPD's feel-good term *Ostpolitik* would also degenerate into a cipher for "good relations with Moscow" at virtually any price.

Simultaneous to the announcement of Schröder's latest coup, the new SPD leader Lars Klingbeil heralded a tangible turnaround: "A positive agenda with Russia is unfortunately a long way off at the moment," he told the Reuters news agency on Feb. 3. It's now in Putin's hands, Klingbeil argued, whether there'll be a return to closer cooperation. "If he de-escalates, the prospects of that kind of cooperation will increase again." But Klingbeil also noted the need for some "fundamental" self-reflection, asking: "Are our old convictions about foreign policy still valid?"

In fact, there is more at stake in this issue than merely a departure from a long-held SPD policy. After all, this policy has always failed to recognize the true character of the "Putin system," which owes its power "to a coalition of intelligence services, organized crime and the sale of fossil energy," and which, journalist and SPD expert Nils Minkmar wrote in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, "a Germany governed by Social Democrats cannot consider a partner."

Evidence of a shift in the SPD's approach to Russia thus far can also be found in the fact that two of its top men – foreign policy spokesman Nils Schmid and chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the German Bundestag Michael Roth – are by no means Schröder fans. Still, a complete reorientation will not happen overnight. For Germany's oldest political party, which, like Putin's Soviet Union, sprang from the international workers' movement, the task will also involve removing some of the emotion associated with the topic of Russia, as well as burying a number of myths.

One of those myths is Willy Brandt's supposedly "peaceful" policy of détente in the early 1970s. It would be wise to remember that Brandt, Germany's first SPD postwar chancellor, had approached Moscow, Warsaw and East Berlin from a position of military strength. Under his chancellorship, defense spending rose sharply and was well above 3 percent of GDP. These days, however, the SPD chooses instead to remember Helmut Schmidt's wrangling with his own party over the NATO Double-Track Decision.

If the SPD is serious about European sovereignty, there is no avoiding a similar step. This case would involve making significant investment in European defense capabilities. Even if Europe's protection from Putin's nuclear, hypersonic, space and "doomsday" weapons can only be guaranteed with the help of the US for the foreseeable future, Europe must finally begin the process of military catch-up it's been delaying for decades.

This kind of security would also make it easier to achieve what the SPD parliamentary group set out to do in 2018 and what Heiko Maas already attempted to implement in some measure during his tenure as foreign minister: a European policy toward the East that entails a reorientation of Germany's strategy toward Russia and places much more emphasis on Germany's "real" neighbors in Central and Eastern Europe, who are often overlooked in the pursuit of special relations between one "agenda-setting power" and another. In this context, the narrative of historical guilt, which has been fixated on Russia to date, could also be brought to a level that truly corresponds to the realities of the Holocaust and the war of extermination in the East.

Roth, the former deputy foreign minister in charge of European policy under Heiko Maas, noted recently that this would involve a "European policy toward the East that does not envisage any national unilateral action, but primarily takes into account the historical experiences and concrete fears felt by large sections of society in Central and Eastern Europe." Such a policy does not see the Russian president as a "flawless democrat," as Schröder once did.

It's becoming clear that Scholz and the majority of the SPD are ready for a new "European Ostpolitik" along these lines, one that includes a "realistic" approach to Putin that reduces German and European dependency – especially on Russian gas – and sees its true Russian partners in that county's repressed pro-democracy and civil-society movements rather than in its president-for-life. This alignment would be a better fit for German social democracy.

In any case, it would be advisable for the SPD to broaden the scope of its gaze. And if the "traffic light" coalition succeeds in achieving its intended CO2-neutral restructuring of the economy within a good two decades, the issue of the so cheap, but geopolitically so expensive Russian gas will become irrelevant. At that point, the question will focus more on whether Germany and Europe wish to build up a hydrogen relationship with Russia, or whether they'll prefer to look for other partners. When that time comes, what will remain of the empire Putin is so eager to expand, even at the risk of war?

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SECURITY STRATEGY

ORIGIN STORY

Putin's doomed attempt to reconcile Russian myth with today's realities

Bearing the brunt of history: The Motherland Monument in Ukraine's capital Kyiv

PICTURE ALLIANCE / ALEXANDER FARNSWORTH | ALEXANDER FARNSWORTH

BY MARTIN SCHULZE WESSEL

Russian President Vladimir Putin is a leader who scrupulously weighs his interests, calculating the risks of each policy and balancing them against the potential rewards. The limited military interventions pursued thus far by Russia in Georgia, Syria and Ukraine, for example, would seem to confirm this theory. But while Putin clearly sees himself as a political strategist, he also sees himself as a leading man on the stage of history. In recent years, he's begun to see his mission not merely against the backdrop of Soviet history, but increasingly vis-à-vis the history of pre-revolutionary Russia. Rulers such as Peter the Great and Catherine the Great left indisputable marks on history during their long reigns. In Russian history books since the 19th century, the concept of "making history" has often meant "gaining Russian lands," that is, reuniting the territories of the Kyivan Rus' lost during the Mongolian invasions. Viewing the Russian president's behavior in terms of his role as a historical actor means recognizing the inner tensions between that role and his more pragmatic role as a political actor, where he must weigh risks and act rationally in picking battles.

The Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 marked a convergence of historical mission and calculated political maneuvering. In his speech to the Federal Assembly a few months after taking the peninsula, Putin emphasized the peninsula's sacred meaning for Russia. He spoke of how the first-ever Christian ruler of the Rus', Saint Vladimir, had been baptized in Kherson on the Crimean Peninsula, and argued that the site's significance to Russians was similar to that of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem for Jews and Muslims. Also in 2014, in addition to this questionable attempt at historico-religious legitimation, a popular campaign was initiated in Russia that declared a broad yet somewhat unspecific claim of ownership: "Krym naš!" (Crimea is ours!). According to a poll conducted by the Moscow-based Levada Center, Russians rate the annexation of Crimea as their greatest national achievement, ahead of even the most impressive feats of Soviet space travel and Russian literature. Although the poll was conducted under the influence of state-sponsored media propaganda, the annexation of Crimea undoubtedly tapped into a widespread sense of historical ownership among Russians. In other words, in this particular case, Putin successfully fulfilled both roles -- as a political and historical actor.

Historically speaking, depicting Crimea as a "proto-Russian" territory is simply wrong. This narrative draws on a mythologization of Crimea, dating back to Czarist Russia, as the "pearl of the empire" – which is also the title of Kerstin Jobst's thoroughly readable book (*Die Perle des Imperiums*) examining the Russian discourse on Crimea. Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea was in fact preceded by an earlier annexation in 1783 by Catherine the Great, who conquered the peninsula in a war against the Ottoman Empire. Unlike the territories annexed by the Czarina as part of the partitions of Poland, however, Crimea never had any connection to Russian rule, nor was it settled by Russians. For centuries, the entire Black Sea region had been marked by widespread multiculturalism, with Crimean Tatars comprising the majority of the peninsula's population. Nevertheless, in a manifesto issued after the annexation, the Czarina proclaimed Crimea to be – from that point on and "forever" – within the Russian Empire.

> THE RUSSIAN ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA IN 2014 MARKED A CONVERGENCE OF HISTORICAL MISSION AND CALCULATED POLITICAL MANEUVERING

In addition to its strategic location on the northern shore of the Black Sea, its mild climate and natural beauty, it was Crimea's significance to Europe that made it so valuable to the enlightened rule of Catherine the Great. Only after Russia had conquered the peninsula did Europeans begin to take an interest in and travel to Crimea. "Russia is a European power" was the first sentence of the famous instruction issued by Catherine the Great in 1769. The annexation of Crimea and its mythic value in Russian and European discourse seem to support that narrative.

Following its annexation, Crimea was integrated into the Russian Empire politically, administratively and economically. In the course of the 19th century, this also included the settling of Slavic-Russian and Ukrainian inhabitants on the peninsula. These settlers took up positions in state administrative offices and in the navy, especially after the Crimean War of the 1850s, which led to the flight of local Crimean Tatars to the Ottoman Empire. Russian and Ukrainian peasant families also came to settle on the peninsula. Though this radically shifted population ratios, Crimea remained a multicultural melting pot.

It was only in the 20th century that Crimea was subject to brutal policies targeting ethnic homogeneity through deportation and genocide. Before and during Nazi Germany's attack on Crimea, the Crimean Germans and Crimean Tatars, whom Stalin suspected of collaborating with the Nazis, were deported. The launch of the German occupation in December 1941 marked the beginning of efforts by Einsatzgruppe D of the Sicherheitspolizei and the Sicherheitsdienst, working in cooperation with Wehrmacht units, to murder almost the entire Jewish population on the peninsula. The Simferopol Massacre became a symbol of this brutality. While the German occupying force planned to settle Germans from South Tyrol to Crimea (which was renamed Gotengau), developments in the war kept the planned resettlement from taking place. In postwar Germany, Wehrmacht general Erich von Manstein, who'd commanded German troops in Crimea, was remembered more as the conqueror of Sevastopol than for any crimes against humanity. Sentenced to 18 years imprisonment at an Allied war crimes trial, he was released early in 1953 and went on to play an advisory role in establishing the Bundeswehr.

After Stalin's death, several population groups in the Soviet Union that had been deported during the war were permitted to return to their homeland. Chechens and Ingush, for example, were able to return from exile to their North Caucasian homeland. The Crimean Tatars, however, were denied this opportunity. They continued their protests against this injustice into the 1980s and the era of Perestroika until, finally, they were allowed to return. But the influx of Crimean Tatars did little to alter the peninsula's transformed demographics, which had been profoundly affected by World War II. After the war, Russian peasant populations settled in those areas previously populated by Crimean Tatars. This resulted in a predominantly Russian Crimea, which, according to the Ukrainian census of 2001, consisted of 58 percent ethnic Russians, 24 percent Ukrainians and 12 percent Crimean Tatars. Crimea had also become a predominantly Russophone region, as even the Ukrainians living on the peninsula spoke Russian.

Paradoxically, at the very moment in history when Crimea had become predominantly Russian, it was "given away" by the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. This handing-over of Crimea took place as part of the celebrations marking the 300th anniversary of a treaty that Moscow believed had sealed Ukraine's incorporation into the Czardom of Russia. In the Treaty of Pereyaslav, the Zaporozhian Cossaks had taken an oath of allegiance to Russian Czar Alexis in 1654. In 1954, the anniversary served as a kind of celebratory reaffirmation of the somewhat fraught friendship between the two Slavic peoples. In the early 1930s, after Stalin began suspecting Ukraine of lacking Soviet loyalty, the leadership in Moscow made decisions that led to the deaths of millions in a famine known as the Holodomor. During the anniversary celebrations of 1954, Ukraine was granted prominent status among the hierarchy of Soviet peoples, more or less second only to the Russians themselves. And it was precisely within this context that Crimea was handed over to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

There has been much speculation about the motives behind this gesture. One entirely unsatisfying explanation takes up the biography of then-acting General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev, who'd risen in the ranks of the Ukrainian Communist Party and who, as party head, enjoyed long-established loyalties with Ukrainian functionaries. In 1954, however, Khrushchev did not yet occupy a strong enough position of power within the party that would have allowed him to make decisions as consequential as handing over Crimea against the wishes of the Central Committee. That theory aside, there were a number of pragmatic reasons for the transfer, including the fact that it was not possible to reach the peninsula from Russia but only through Ukraine. Also, from the Russian perspective, the fact that Crimea had been considerably damaged during the war – only three percent of Sevastopol had remained intact – and would require considerable funds to rebuild may also have played a role. Indeed, after the handover, these costs would fall to Ukraine. And, finally, the fact that in 1954 the Soviet Union was at the zenith of its power and legitimacy as a supranational state rendered unimaginable the notion that it might one day fall apart – and that Crimea would become a foreign country for Russians. The handover of Crimea from Russia to Ukraine as a staged act of friendship between nations served to underscore the concept of the Soviet Union as a supranational power and was possibly intended to erase any remaining Russian-Ukrainian fissures relating to the Holodomor.

However, the totality of these explanations falls short, especially considering the great symbolic significance Crimea acquired in the Russian discourse of the 19th century. As the Ukrainian-American historian Serhii Plokhy has argued, the transfer of Crimea was a "lavish gift." Moreover, the gift was beneficial to the gift-giver only for as long as the basic foundation of the gift – that is, the supranationality of the Soviet Union – remained intact. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the return of Russian strategic interests in using Black Sea ports as a naval base, this foundation disintegrated. As a result, Crimea became a key sticking point in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Putin's insistence that Khrushchev had handed Crimea over "like a sack of potatoes" solely on account of his own personal ties to Ukraine is an impressive sign of this shift in perspective. In his article "On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians" published in July 2021, Putin denounced the 1954 gift as being "in gross violation of legal norms that were in force at the time," as if legal norms had ever been a determining factor in the relationships among peoples living in the Soviet republics.

Russia's current efforts to revise a European order that is based on territorial integrity and self-determination, and is anchored in the 1990 Charter of Paris, have led to a series of frozen conflicts in those neighboring states where Moscow has extended its influence as master manipulator. Only in the case of Crimea has Russia resorted to formal annexation, which points to the peninsula's outsized emotional value in the Russian discourse. Drawing on this symbolism, Putin was able to reconcile in 2014 his competing roles as political and historical actor, scoring a "historical" success that was anchored in his rational evaluation of the risks involved. Due to the unexpectedly high degree of unity among European states in imposing sanctions against Russia in response, however, those risks ultimately turned out to be higher than originally calculated. Moreover, the initial gain in prestige Putin garnered from his subjects by retaking Crimea has ultimately faded over time.

With the current conflict, which Russia has provoked by stationing a menacing mass of troops in Eastern Ukraine, Putin will find it hard to achieve a similar harmony of political and historical roles. The objectives that are seemingly in reach – at least according to the Russian calculus – through a limited deployment of resources, such as the consolidation of the territories of the so-called People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, have little symbolic value in the Russian discourse. The only success that would count as "historic" would be the repatriation of the part of Ukraine that lies east of the Dnieper, which includes Kyiv. That, however, would involve incalculable political and military risks for Russia, which are hardly compatible with the political role Putin has played thus far.

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SECURITY STRATEGY

Back in the USSR

Putin's gaze spans the entire Soviet sphere of influence

BY OLIVER ROLOFS

A Russian invasion of Ukraine, reminiscent of the 2014 incursion, is a real possibility. With Russian forces once again massing on the Ukrainian border, the European Union must take heed of Ukraine's security concerns. Appeasement of the Kremlin would have disastrous consequences – not just for Ukraine but for the whole of Europe, as well as for countries farther east such as Kazakhstan.

To shield Ukraine and other countries previously in Moscow's orbit, Western allies must understand that Russian aggression is not limited to tanks and troops. The Kremlin's hostilities towards Ukraine run deep and are part of a broader pattern of belligerence, which includes economic warfare, cyber-attacks by state sponsored hackers and energy blackmail.

Russia is using gas as a political weapon at a time when Europe is being hit by a crippling energy crunch. This is not a new tactic and Ukraine is by no means the only victim. A few months ago, Moscow weaponized the energy card to discourage the new pro-EU Moldovan government from strengthening links to the bloc. Beyond pipeline politics, Russia has threatened Ukraine's territorial integrity through underhanded economic warfare aimed at forcing the Ukrainian Government into a financial cul-de-sac. These pressure tactics have included tightening customs procedures that lead to long delays for exporters at the border, imposing import bans for Ukrainian products and launching campaigns to shutter factories in Eastern Ukraine. Some of these flashpoints are taking place on neutral turf. Ukraine is currently waiting to learn the judgment of a UK Supreme Court hearing linked to a $3 billion loan. Ukraine accepted the loan from Russia under extreme duress in 2014, months before being invaded. Now Moscow is insisting that Ukraine settle up – a morally and geopolitically outrageous demand given the hundreds of billions that Russia has violently extracted from Ukraine since the loan was made. Russia's current troop mobilization and its latest threats should therefore be taken seriously – and put into context. According to a recent report published by the Thomas More Institute, Russian aggression against Ukraine has cost the latter at least $120 billion, as a result of asset seizures and loss of tax revenues in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine and the subsequent impact on trade and investment. This, of course, is just the stone-cold economic analysis. The human toll has been far greater, with 14,000 dead and counting.

So where to go from here? We have seen how the threat of invasion is activated every time President Putin seeks to squeeze concessions from the West. Even if current tensions do not boil over into full-fledged war, Ukraine will remain under Moscow's thumb unless decisive action is taken.

The European Union has the tools and political muscle to push back – but can it act fast and decisively enough? The EU must carve out a new strategic framework for dealing with Russia. In the first instance, Brussels should unpack its regulatory toolbox and continue the diversification and unbundling of energy markets. Working in tandem with France, the German government should open the door to tighter regulation of Nord Stream 2 and strongarm Gazprom into supplying gas to the Russian-Ukrainian border. The recent suspension of Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline by Germany's energy regulator sends a powerful, albeit overdue, message to the Kremlin that its bullying tactics will no longer go unchecked. The European Green Deal, tasked with meeting the continent's ambitious climate targets, can also be used as a pressure point. Climate change creates new geopolitical realities that, over time, will cost Russia lucrative sources of income and its main means of influence.

Sadly, the region's woes don't stop with Ukraine. Distracted by the Russian war clouds gathering over Ukraine, the West is still trying to make sense of the largest protests in the history of modern Kazakhstan. Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has claimed that constitutional order has been restored and the threat to his country averted. But questions remain over his country's credibility as a Western partner after Tokayev refused an independent investigation into the riots. Will Kazakhstan's long-treasured stability become a casualty of the Russian-Chinese geopolitical catfight in Central Asia? Can a modernizing autocracy maintain warm relations with the West while truncheoning dissent, locking up key officials on trumped-up treason charges and temporarily inviting Russian troops into the country?

PICTURE ALLIANCE / ZUMAPRESS.COM | THOMAS KRYCH

Geopolitical masterminds: Europe's plans to develop a sustainable energy supply would not only help the environment but also defang petrostates. Demonstrators in London in late 2021.

Kazakh authorities blame "armed extremists financed from abroad" for the deadly clashes that claimed the lives of at least 227 protestors in January. This vague caricature is deliberately misleading given that the demonstrations started at a grassroots level in response to a steep rise in the price of fuel. An investigation is needed into the shooting of demonstrators and the situation concerning the many detainees, including Karim Massimov, the head of the National Security Committee and former two-time prime minister, who was arrested on suspicion of treason. It is unclear why he is being detained, although there are speculations that it's his loyalty to former President Nursultan Nazarbayev, the founder of the modern Kazakh state, or his refusal to order his men to gun down protestors.

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Massimov played a pivotal role in managing the peaceful transition of power from Nazarbayev to Tokayev in 2019. His arrest should be of special concern to Europe as well as China, as he was the architect of Nazarbayev's multi-vector foreign policy that allowed the regime to balance friendly relations with the West with maintaining strong ties to its powerful neighbors Russia and China. It was an uneasy balancing act, but one that proved successful in attracting foreign investment from Europe and strengthening economic cooperation with Beijing, while positioning Kazakhstan as a global leader in nuclear non-proliferation and humanitarian assistance.

On the domestic front, steered by Massimov's counsel, Nazarbayev managed to loosen the Kremlin's Soviet-era chokehold on Kazakhstan while protecting the rights of the large ethnic Russian minority. Unlike President Lukashenko in Belarus, Nazarbayev chose to keep both the West and Russia close, rather than play them off against each other. This equilibrium could now be a thing of the past. Even if Russian troops do not return to Kazakhstan, political and security dependence on Moscow is likely to remain high. For China, this new power dynamic coupled with the arrest of key ally Massimov could spell trouble for the security of its Western border.

Europe, too, should be concerned – not least because Kazakhstan is the world's largest producer of uranium and has enormous copper, chromium and zinc reserves. Its geographic location makes it an important trading partner for Europe. Despite its democratic shortcomings, Kazakhstan is both a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace program and an OSCE partner.

If President Putin attempts to nudge both Ukraine and Kazakhstan back into Russian patronage, or if he makes a heavy-handed attempt to recreate the old Soviet Union, it won't just be the people of Kazakhstan and Ukraine who suffer. Putin will end up destabilizing the whole of Eastern Europe and Eurasia. The new German government should use its communication channels with Moscow to draw clear red lines that drill home the cost of Russian aggression and its toxic influence in Eastern Europe. Europe faces a dicey future indeed if the combined diplomatic and economic power of the EU, US and UK fails to deter Russia.

SECURITY STRATEGY

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Cracking China

Will China succeed in what some call its grand strategy of displacing American power? Whichever scenario emerges also depends on the strategy the US chooses in response.

BY JOSEPH S. NYE, JR.

Many Chinese elites saw the Great Recession of 2008 as a sign of American decline. Leaders abandoned Deng Xiaoping's strategy of hiding capacity and biding their time and became more assertive in ways ranging from building artificial islands in the South China Sea to economic coercion of Australia to abrogating guarantees to Hong Kong. On the trade front, China tilted the playing field with subsidies to state-owned enterprises, coercive intellectual property transfer and cyber theft. Donald Trump responded clumsily with a tariff war that included penalties on allies as well as on China, but he was correct to defend against companies like Huawei, whose plans to build 5G telecommunications networks pose a security threat. Some people in Washington began to talk about a general "decoupling" and a "new Cold War," but it is mistaken to think the US can completely decouple its economy from China without enormous economic costs.

All historical metaphors are imperfect. While the Cold War metaphor can help mobilize publics for a prolonged competition, it can also mislead policy makers about the nature of the strategic challenge China poses. In the real Cold War, the Soviet Union was a direct military and ideological threat, and there was almost no economic or social interdependence in the relationship. Containment was a feasible objective. With China today, the US has half a trillion dollars in trade and millions of social interchanges. Moreover, with its "market-Leninist" political system, China has learned how to harness the creativity of markets to authoritarian Communist party control in a way the Soviets never mastered. China cannot be contained in the same manner as the relatively weak Soviet economy. More countries have China as their major trade partner than they do the US. While many countries welcome an US security guarantee against Chinese military domination, they are not willing to curtail their economic relations with China as Cold War allies did with the Soviet Union.

With the Soviets, the US was involved in a regular two-dimensional chess game in which there was high interdependence in the military sphere but not in economic or transnational relations. With China, the US is involved in a three-dimensional game with different power distribution at each level. At the military level, the world is still unipolar and the US is the only military power with full global reach. However, at the economic level, the distribution of power is multipolar with US, China, Europe and Japan as major players. On the transnational board of interdependent networks that are outside the control of governments (such as climate and pandemics), power is chaotically distributed and no one country is in control.

If the US downplays the power relations on the economic or transnational levels and the vertical interactions among the boards, it will suffer. If one plays only two-dimensional chess in a three-dimensional game, one will lose. A good strategy for China must encompass all three dimensions of the interdependence, and the Cold War metaphor is too focused on the traditional two-dimensional model. The strategic challenge China poses is a hybrid system of economic and political interdependence that it can manipulate to support authoritarian governments and to influence opinion in democracies to prevent criticism of China – witness its economic punishment of Norway, South Korea and Australia as well as private companies and organizations.

Moreover, with regard to the ecological aspects of interdependence such as climate change and pandemics, the laws of physics and biology make decoupling impossible. No country can solve these transnational problems alone. The politics of global interdependence involves power *with* others as well as over others. For better and worse, the US is locked in a "cooperative rivalry" with China in which it needs a strategy that can accomplish two contradictory things at the same time. This is not like Cold War containment.

Meeting the China challenge will require a more complex strategy that leverages US hard and soft power resources to defend and strengthen a favorable rules-based system. Some pessimists look at China's population size and economic growth rates and believe that the task is impossible. But allies are assets. The combined wealth of the allied Western democracies – North America, Europe, Japan, Australia – will far exceed that of China and Russia combined well into this century. China has few allies. While Russia and China have a diplomatic alliance of convenience, Russia cannot solve China's balance of power deficit. Of course, America's allies do not all see China in exactly the same way the US does. Rhetoric about a new Cold War may have more negative than positive effects in the maintenance of those key alliances. A metaphor that may be useful for recruiting domestic political support at home can be counterproductive as a strategy overseas.

Since no single future exists, good strategy must allow for multiple scenarios, and set feasible objectives. Rather than planning for maximal outcomes beyond our reach and a theory of victory involving regime change, the objective should be competitive coexistence within a favorable rules-based system. As former Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd has argued, the objective for great power competition with China is not defeat or total victory over an existential threat, but prevailing in a "managed competition." A "hot war" between the two would represent a calamitous strategic failure. A sound strategy avoids demonization of China and instead sees the relationship as a "cooperative rivalry" or "competitive coexistence" with equal attention to both parts of the description.

A good strategy also requires careful net assessment. Underestimation breeds complacency, while overestimation creates fear – either of which can lead to miscalculation. China has become the second largest national economy in the world (measured by exchange rates) and may surpass the US in terms of GDP in the coming decade. But even if it does, China's per capita income remains less than a quarter that of the US, and it faces a number of economic, demographic and political problems. Its labor force peaked in 2015, its total factor productivity rate is low, its economic growth rate is slowing, and it has few political allies. If North America, Japan and Europe coordinate their policies, they will still represent the largest part of the world economy and will have the capacity to organize a rules-based international order that can help shape Chinese behavior. That alliance is the heart of a strategy to manage the rise of China.

Moreover, for all its many problems, the US has some long-term power advantages that will persist regardless of current Chinese actions. One is geography. The US is surrounded by oceans and friendly neighbors. China has borders with fourteen countries and has territorial disputes with India, Japan and Vietnam that set limits on its soft power. Energy is another American advantage. A decade ago, the US seemed hopelessly dependent on imported energy. Now the shale revolution has transformed it from importer to exporter, while China depends on oil imports across the Indian Ocean, where the US and India have a dominant naval presence.

The US also enjoys financial power derived from its large transnational financial institutions as well as the role of the dollar. Of the foreign reserves held by the world's governments, just a few percent are in yuan, compared with 64 percent in dollars. While China aspires to a larger role in digital payments, a credible reserve currency, whether digital or not, depends on currency convertibility, deep capital markets, honest government and the rule of law – all of which are lacking in China and cannot be quickly developed. While China could divest its large holdings of dollars, such action would risk damaging its own economy as much as that of the US. Although American overuse of financial sanctions creates incentives for countries to look for other financial instruments, the yuan is unlikely to displace the dollar until China develops deep and flexible capital markets and a rule of law.

The US also has demographic advantages. It is the only major developed country that is currently projected to hold its place (third) in the demographic ranking of countries. While the rate of growth has slowed in recent years, the US is not shrinking in population as is projected for China, Russia, Europe and Japan. Seven of the world's fifteen largest economies will face a shrinking workforce over the next decade and a half, but the US workforce is likely to increase while China's will decline.

America has also been at the forefront in the development of key technologies (bio, nano, info) that are central to this century's economic growth. China aspires to lead "the 4th Industrial Revolution"; its government is investing heavily in research and development, and it competes well in some fields now. Given the importance of machine learning as a general-purpose technology, China's gains in artificial intelligence are of particular significance. However, a successful US response to China's technological challenge will depend upon progress at home more than upon external sanctions, and a 2017 ranking by Shanghai Jiao Tong University showed that sixteen of the top twenty global research universities were in the US; none were in China.

In other words, the US holds high cards in its poker hand, but the cards must be played skillfully. Discarding the high cards of alliances and international institutions would be a serious blunder. Another possible mistake would be to try to cut off all immigration. When I once asked former Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew why he did not think China would achieve its goal of displacing the US, he cited the ability of America to draw upon the talents of the whole world and recombine them in diversity and creativity, and that was not possible for China's ethnic Han nationalism. But if the US were to discard its high cards of external alliances and domestic openness, the odds would change.

A successful American strategy starts at home and must be based on (1) preserving the democratic institutions that are the basis of its ability to attract rather than to coerce allies; (2) a plan for investing in research and development that maintains US technological advantages; (3) maintaining openness to the world rather than retreating behind a curtain of fear. The US must not neglect its soft power to attract others. The US should (4) restructure legacy military forces to adapt to technological change; (5) strengthen alliance structures including NATO, Japan, Australia and Korea; (6) enhance relations with India; (7) strengthen participation in and supplement the existing set of international institutions that set standards and manage interdependence; and (8) cooperate with China where possible on issues of transnational interdependence.

In the near term, given the rising nationalism and assertive policies of the Xi government, the US will probably have to spend more time on the rivalry side of the equation, but if it avoids ideological demonization and misleading Cold War analogies, and maintains its alliances, the US can succeed with a realistic "no regrets strategy." In 1946, George Kennan correctly predicted it might take decades to succeed with the Soviet Union. The US cannot contain China in the same way, but it has the assets to shape the environment in which China rises or reaches a plateau. The US should avoid succumbing to fear or belief in its decline. If the US-China relationship were a card game, the US has been dealt a good hand, but even a good hand can lose if played poorly.

THE US HOLDS HIGH CARDS IN ITS POKER HAND, BUT THE CARDS MUST BE PLAYED SKILLFULLY

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SECURITY STRATEGY

OPPORTUNISTIC BEDFELLOWS

China and Russia have formalized their alliance against the West

BY THEO SOMMER

PICTURE ALLIANCE / ASSOCIATED PRESS | ALEXANDER ZEMLIANICHENKO

Strongmen walking: Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin

The 2022 Winter Olympic Games in Beijing will not go down in history as an exhilarating event; with just a smattering of snow and no spectators, they turned out a rather macabre affair. But when the history of international affairs in our century is written, the 38th meeting of Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin, at a working lunch before the opening of the Games, is certain to be accorded outsized importance. It cemented the relationship between the two leading authoritarians of our time, upgrading it to an ominous quasi-alliance.

The two presidents released a 17-page, 5300-word "Joint Statement on the International Relations Entering a New Era." It has found only scant notice in the press, but it highlights a tectonic shift in global geopolitics that poses a severe challenge to the West.

China and Russia, presenting themselves as "world powers with rich cultural and historical heritage" and "long-standing traditions of democracy," make no bones about their aim: a "transformation of the global governance architecture and world order" and the "redistribution of power in the world." Xi and Putin underscore that their "new interstate relations… are superior to political and military alliances of the Cold War era. Friendship between the two states has no limits, there are no forbidden areas of cooperation." In this context, particular mention is made of "strengthening bilateral strategic cooperation," which portends a de facto security alliance. Joint naval drills and deepened collaboration on nuclear and space technology may only be the beginning.

As Frederic Kempe has noted, Russia and China are throwing in their lot with one another in an unprecedented manner, in each other's regions and around the world. Russia reaffirms its support for the One-China principle and its opposition to any form of Taiwanese independence; China in turn promises to stand against outside forces attempting to undermine security and stability in Russia's near abroad. China opposes NATO enlargement and declares that it "is sympathetic to and supports the proposals put forward by the Russian Federation to create long-term legally binding security guarantees in Europe." Russia registers its opposition to the AUKUS defense pact between Australia, UK and the US and other closed bloc structures and opposing camps in the Asia-Pacific region. Moscow applauds Xi Jinping's concept of constructing a common destiny for mankind, while Beijing returns the favor by undergirding Putin's purported efforts to establish a just and multipolar system of international relations.

Surprisingly, the Joint Statement bears no mention of Ukraine. China has never officially recognized Putin's annexation of the Crimea; it has chosen to abstain from voting for key UN Security Council resolutions regarding the dispute. In keeping with its obsession over territorial integrity – with Uighur and Tibetan separatism in mind – it disapproves of any secession as a matter of principle. But Xi is keeping a close eye on how the West would react to a minor or full-fledged Russian invasion of Ukraine. As the *Economist* put it, Xi might conclude he can safely invade the self-ruled island of Taiwan if he finds Joe Biden's resolve in any way wanting.

Dialogue, coordination and cooperation in many fields are designed to bolster the new state of Russian-Chinese relations. Dealing with climate change, artificial intelligence, development of the Arctic and fighting the Covid-19 pandemic are some of the domains they have in mind. They also plan to raise the volume of trade from last year's meager $140 billion to $250 billion. To this end, they intend to link their economies through closer collaboration between Xi's Belt and Road Initiative and Putin's Eurasian Economic Union.

Putin and Xi characterize their countries' relationship as "the best it has ever been." This is an accurate description. While there are certainly limits to their profusely promulgated entente, wide economic disparities and vexatious, lingering historical memories, they are currently buried under a new narrative – the intention, as the Joint Statement puts it, is "to strengthen foreign policy coordination, pursue true multilateralism, strengthen cooperation on multilateral platforms, defend common interests, support the international and regional balance of power, and improve global governance."

An increasingly assertive China and an ever more destabilizing Russia are ganging up on the West. The US and its partners are challenged all across the board. They will have to react to the deepening alignment between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China – with resolve but without obsessive bellicosity. A judicious Western pushback is the best way to thwart an obnoxious Chinese-Russian push forward. Yet fastening our seatbelts for a rocky road ahead is most certainly a wise move.

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GETTY IMAGES / DIRCK HALSTEAD

Then: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and his wife Suha together with US President Bill Clinton and Hillary Rodham Clinton at the dedication ceremonies opening Gaza International Airport in December 1998.

THAT OTHER CRISIS

Israel-Palestine risks becoming a forgotten conflict – the world should pay attention

BY DANA LANDAU AND LIOR LEHRS

In January 2001, US President Bill Clinton met with President-elect George W. Bush and presented him with a priority list of the most important global security issues. At the top were two issues – Osama bin Laden/al Qaeda and "the absence of peace in the Middle East." The meeting took place shortly after Clinton's intensive efforts to achieve an Israeli-Palestinian permanent status agreement had failed. Twenty years later, the position of the Israeli-Palestinian issue on the US priority list, and that of the international community in general, has changed dramatically. International interest and engagement have faded during the last decade while the peace process has been paralyzed since the collapse of Secretary of State John Kerry's peace initiative in 2013–14.

The Biden administration has not appointed a special envoy on Israeli-Palestinian affairs and has shown only low-level engagement with the conflict. Secretary of State Antony Blinken explained at his confirmation hearing that the new administration supports a two-state solution, but added: "I think realistically it's hard to see near-term prospects for moving forward on that." There seems to be a lack of urgency and no clear international strategy on Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking, as evidenced by the fact that the Quartet (the US, Russia, UN and EU) is not playing an active role, despite broad expectations that the Biden administration would revitalize the group's activity after its paralysis during the Trump years. The 2020 normalization agreements between Israel and UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan are further proof that the prominence of the Palestinian issue in some parts of the Arab world has declined.

Many international actors criticized Trump's policy toward the conflict, especially regarding issues such as Jerusalem and settlements. They also welcomed the fact that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's annexation plans were shelved as part of the Israeli-UAE normalization agreement, and that the US, under President Biden, has returned to international consensus. The Biden administration has stressed its alignment with international law and the well-known parameters for resolving the conflict, renewed the dialogue with the Palestinian leadership in Ramallah (after a three-year rift) and resumed US aid to the Palestinians (and to UNRWA). But it did not reverse some of Trump's actions, and in particular, despite its promises, did not reopen the US consulate in Jerusalem, which conducted contact with the Palestinians over the years and was folded into the embassy by Trump. Most importantly, it has failed to pursue diplomatic initiatives to get the parties to the table.

Explanations for this lack of US attention are easy to find in the bigger crises occupying this administration: the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, China, Ukraine, as well as more pressing regional issues in Iran, Syria, Afghanistan and Yemen. Yet the Israeli-Palestinian context itself offers ample reasons: the repeated failures of past rounds of negotiations tell a cautionary tale for any international actor hoping to advance talks, leading them to focus resources elsewhere. It is easy to conclude from the realities on the ground that the time is not ripe for talks. On the Palestinian side, the deep rift between the Hamas ruling Gaza and the Palestinian Authority (PA), with its own deficits in democracy, raise the question of who could credibly negotiate on behalf of the Palestinian people. While the international policy of isolating Hamas has not diminished its grip on power in the Gaza Strip, the PA's approval ratings have reached historic lows, the 2021 elections have once again been postponed and a whopping 74% of respondents in the West Bank and Gaza Strip now say they would welcome the resignation of PA President Abu Mazen, who's in his sixteenth year in office. On the Israeli side, four consecutive elections between Spring 2019 and Spring 2021 finally brought a "change" government to power. Yet this government, united only in its desire to end Benjamin Netanyahu's long tenure, comprises coalition partners from across the ideological spectrum – and even includes a Palestinian party for the first time – and is thus not in a position to take any bold steps in possible negotiations. Furthermore, rightwing and hawkish positions continue to dominate the Israeli discourse on the Palestinian issue; both Israeli and Palestinian public opinions have gradually lost faith in the peace process and in the possibility of a two-state agreement. International hesitancy to invest political capital in attempts to kickstart talks under these conditions thus comes as no surprise.

The escalation of violence and war in Gaza in May 2021 briefly brought the conflict back into the headlines and social media channels, and to the forefront of international politics. Initially centered around evictions of Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and clashes between Palestinians and Israeli police at the Damascus Gate and the Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa compound, violence quickly escalated across towns with mixed Jewish and Palestinian populations throughout Israel proper and culminated in an 11-day war between Hamas and Israel. However, following international involvement in brokering a ceasefire, led by the Biden administration and Egypt, even this war failed to generate lasting international engagement.

Signals emanating from the new Israeli government, formed in June 2021, are mixed. While some of its leaders, such as Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, express support for a two-state solution and the resumption of the peace process, others, among them Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, oppose peace negotiations and a Palestinian state. After years of political disconnect, the new government renewed high-level dialogue among Israeli and Palestinian officials – including meetings between Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz and PA President Abu Mazen and between Lapid and PA Civil Affairs Minister Hussein Al-Sheikh – and agreed on certain confidence-building measures addressing civil and economic issues. Nevertheless, the situation on the ground has not meaningfully changed; the expansion of settlements proceeds; de facto annexation inches closer to reality; settler violence is on the rise; the eviction of Palestinian residents from their homes in East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighborhoods continues apace; and the Israeli government has criminalized the work of Palestinian civil society groups.

The reluctance of international actors to get involved in attempts to renew Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking is accompanied by a misleading sense of stability and calm. The world should pay attention to forces inherent in the status quo that are anything but stable. Ongoing settlement expansion and gradual de facto annexation undermine any prospects of a viable two-state negotiated outcome, which is still the official international consensus; tensions continue to rise at various points of friction in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, with settler groups' increased use of violence and efforts to create new outposts; the deep political and economic crisis in the Palestinian Authority, together with continued Hamas-Fatah strife and Hamas' efforts to ignite the West Bank, raises concerns over the stability of the PA and potential chaos in the West Bank; and given the explosive situation and humanitarian crisis in Gaza, another Israel-Hamas flare-up is always possible.

Against this background, the US and the international community cannot afford to ignore the conflict, nor focus only on small-scale de-escalation and economic measures; conditions call for addressing the structural and deep-rooted problems directly while working toward a long-term political vision that includes a real transformation of the situation on the ground. On Jan. 19 of this year, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland crystallized this point in an address to the UN Security Council: "Piecemeal approaches and half measures will only ensure that the underlying issues perpetuating the conflict continue to fester and worsen over time" and "efforts by the parties and the international community to stabilize and improve conditions on the ground should be linked to a political framework." While it's easy to surmise that the Biden administration is focused on preventing war and not brokering peace, history exposes the pitfalls of this short-sighted vision – short-term efforts at preventing escalations will not suffice to stop the forces at play, which over time increasingly mitigate against an agreement. Without a political vision, confidence-building measures and economic incentives aimed at "shrinking the conflict" are unsustainable. The war in May 2021 made clear that when they so desire, international actors can pressure Israelis and Palestinians and achieve results. The world should not wait for the next escalation to put this into practice.

THE US AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY CANNOT AFFORD TO IGNORE THE CONFLICT, NOR FOCUS ONLY ON SMALL-SCALE DE-ESCALATION AND ECONOMIC MEASURES

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PICTURE ALLIANCE / AA | MUSTAFA HASSONA

Now: An airport and attendant hopes razed to the ground.

SECURITY STRATEGY

Judgment of Paris

On the institutional disadvantages of democracy vis-à-vis climate

BY CAMERON ABADI

PICTURE ALLIANCE / HE JINGHUA / COSTFOTO | HE JINGHUA / COSTFOTO

Surging Solar superpower? Huai 'an City in China's Jiangsu Province

In the international rivalry between China and the West, the bloc of traditional democratic states has plenty of reason to think it can outcompete Beijing. But in the struggle against climate change, China's system of government has shown some advantages over Western democracies. The challenge facing the United States and Europe is severe: on one of the defining international problems of our time, the West cannot assume the systemic competition tips in its favor.

To be sure, neither the US nor Europe nor China has placed itself on a plausible path to fulfilling the overall goals of the Paris climate agreement – namely, the limiting of global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, or the less ambitious, and murkier, target of "well below 2 degrees C."

But China has compiled an impressive track record when it comes to implementing its stated policy commitments. China has already achieved, ahead of schedule, 9 of the 15 targets it made at the 2015 Paris negotiations. On the same token, there is good reason to take at face value China's current commitment to reach peak carbon emissions in 2030 and full carbon neutrality by 2060. The Chinese government has already released overarching plans for reaching those targets; and over the next year, it plans to release specific documents to steward its most carbon-intensive industries, including steel, cement and transportation.

It's fair to debate whether China's commitments are ambitious enough. But the West faces the more fundamental problem of overpromising and underdelivering.

The US and Germany both recently held national elections that placed climate change policy squarely at the center of national debate. It was an unprecedented democratic experiment: two of the world's five largest economies committed to addressing the climate crisis through public discourse and public voting. And the results were auspicious: in both countries, the victorious parties vowed to uphold the Paris Agreement by translating it into policy.

But in neither country have subsequent policies fulfilled that promise. Germany's Green Party succeeded at joining the national government, having earned a record-breaking 15 percent at the polls, after presenting the most detailed plans for limiting climate change to 1.5 degrees Celsius. But little of the party's platform found its way into the governing agenda for the next four years. The Greens claimed a higher carbon price was necessary; no mention of any such increase made it into the coalition agreement. The Greens insisted that ending the domestic excavation of coal by 2030 was nonnegotiable; the government has failed to make a firm commitment to go that far. The Greens claimed the country would need to invest an extra €50 billion per year in renewable energy infrastructure; the new government has vowed instead to maintain a balanced budget.

A similar slippage occurred in the US. President Joe Biden's election platform boasted a carbon-free electricity sector by 2035 and full carbon neutrality for the entire US economy by 2050. But the central policies intended to achieve those timelines have no realistic chance of passing Congress. The administration will receive nowhere close to the $2 trillion that Biden claimed would be necessary to fund renewable energy infrastructure. Meanwhile, Senator Joe Manchin from the coal-producing state of West Virginia has refused to pass any law that explicitly disincentivizes the energy sector's use of fossil fuels, as the Biden campaign had envisioned. At the same time, the Biden administration has openly lobbied the Middle Eastern oil-producing countries of OPEC to increase production, in hopes of lowering the price of gasoline for domestic drivers.

Representatives from the US and German governments claim their policies are the result of the necessary compromises demanded by the democratic process. Indeed, the structural impediments posed by domestic small-d democracy are daunting.

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Perhaps the biggest failure of the domestic democratic process centers on the special interests with the most to lose from stringent reforms. Climate policy always involves a new configuration of winners and losers. Politics thus becomes a distributive struggle, with those less attached to the economic status quo pushing for a dramatic renegotiation of economic and social structures while facing resistance from interest groups that stand to lose out from such change.

The latter group typically has advantages in any such struggle, especially in liberal democracies that welcome interest group participation in the political process. As the economic beneficiaries of the current system, they start out by enjoying advantages in terms of their access to the political process and even to political veto points. By influencing lawmakers and the general political debate, they can help block policies such as carbon taxes or massive public investments to transform energy and transportation systems.

But even if those in favor of far-reaching climate policies organize themselves in opposition and succeed in making a strong showing in a national election, their adversaries won't have disappeared – they will still be exerting their influence in society. The democratic process steers distributional disagreements of this sort toward compromise. This is precisely what happened after the German and US elections. If one side of an argument runs up against resistance from an opposing side, it's good democratic practice to split the difference. The result is moderate climate policies, including less public money for an energy transition and extended timelines for exiting fossil fuels.

From the perspective of international rivalry with China, however, the moderation inherent to Western democracy may be another way of restating a fundamental problem. According to climate science, the timelines to limit warming aren't an expression of subjectively perceived urgency but of objective measures defined by the boundary of a catastrophic climate tipping point. As the clock on that climate timeline continues to tick, China will be in a position to claim a greater share of global leadership – unless the West finds more effective ways of implementing climate policy consistent with its democratic values.

SECURITY CHALLENGES

PICTURE ALLIANCE / ALEXANDER FARNSWORTH | ALEXANDER FARNSWORTH

Crossing the aisle: Norbert Röttgen of the opposition Christian Democrats talking to Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock of the Greens

A MORE PERFECT UNION

A change in Germany's foreign-policy mentality is long overdue

BY NORBERT RÖTTGEN

For the first time in 16 years, the CDU/CSU finds itself in the opposition after a federal election. Observers abroad are now looking to see what course the new German government's foreign policy will take. They are likely also curious to see how the CDU/CSU will position itself in foreign policy matters without Angela Merkel at the helm. Our basic position is clear: regardless of whether we're in government or in the opposition, ensuring a responsible foreign policy for Germany and Europe will always be a central tenet of CDU and CSU activity. This means that ensuring reliability for our allies and responsibility toward our soldiers – who risk their lives to protect German security interests – will continue to be our priority, rather than any attempt to raise our party's political profile.

But being in the opposition also means delivering sharp criticism, when necessary. It is now our political responsibility to hold a mirror up to the government when it takes unclear action, when it gives rise to doubts or appears contradictory. Still, we want to be more than just critics: Even in opposition, the CDU/CSU sees itself as a contributor to German foreign policy and is eager to cooperate. On the basis of our Christian Democratic compass – which is European, trans-Atlantic and multilateral – we're keen on presenting our own perspectives and solutions. What does this mean in concrete terms with regard to the foreign policy challenges facing our country, Europe and the West? Allow me to highlight four fields of action and, in each case, outline precisely what foreign policy responsibility means for the CDU/CSU.

The European Peace Order

Due to the pressing nature of the current situation and the immediate threat to the European order, it's only fitting to start with Europe and focus first on the conflict with Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin has amassed 140,000 Russian soldiers on the Ukrainian border and set up supply lines designed to enable a military attack on Ukraine. In addition to having to withstand a steady flow of warmongering rhetoric, Ukraine finds itself under massive threat without itself posing any kind of threat to Russia. The CDU/CSU stands clearly by Ukraine, its territorial sovereignty and its right to defend itself. To be clear, it's not NATO threatening Russia. What most threatens Putin's authoritarian system in Russia is the desire expressed by the people of Ukraine – and other states neighboring Russia – for freedom, democracy, the rule of law and a market economy. Everything points to the fact that Vladimir Putin is determined to change Europe's post-Cold War political order. He lacks the means to achieve this by leveraging the laws of attraction, hence his use of aggression. Europe's lack of unity is currently the West's greatest weakness, and this could be taken as an opportunity by Putin. In this crisis, Western unity is the prerequisite for a credible policy of deterrence that can prevent violence and pave the way for political solutions. From the point of view of both Washington and Moscow, in Europe, everything depends on Germany. For this reason, it is imperative that we form part of a unified Western deterrent. These efforts will be measured by our willingness to link the future of Nord Stream 2 to Russian aggression. The pipeline can have no future if Russia attacks Ukraine.

Europe as a foreign policy actor

The Russia crisis has revealed Europe's greatest weakness. We have not yet succeeded in speaking with one unified voice, nor have we become capable of taking action in a unified manner. We now must reproduce abroad the unity we've achieved internally with the single market. As Europe's largest economy, Germany plays a decisive role in this process. If varying interests prevent a European foreign policy with the support of all member states in the foreseeable future, then Germany should join with like-minded states and begin to shape a common foreign policy. In a world of dramatic geopolitical change, we cannot afford to remain powerless in the realm of foreign policy. The West's failure in Afghanistan demonstrated quite clearly the consequences of our impotence. In the same way that our European and international partners ask that Germany take responsibility and engage in concrete action, so, too, do our own values and interests call on us to step up to the plate.

Restructuring trans-Atlantic relations

Germany and Europe taking on more responsibility is also the basis for the urgently needed restructuring of trans-Atlantic relations. Even under President Biden, the US is no longer prepared to bear all the costs alone. The focus of US foreign policy has also shifted and is now geared towards China and the Asia-Pacific region. This goes hand-in-hand with the fact that US involvement in other regions, such as the Middle East, is ebbing. As Europeans, we should not be passive bystanders; we should insist to the US that we share the burden. After all, it's our neighborhood; it's where we ourselves must become more involved. Unlike the US, we cannot detach the security and stability of our own societies from the security and stability of this region. When there are fires in the Middle East and hunger and desperation in Africa, people will leave their homelands and come to us. It is in our immediate interest to tend to crises in these regions.

Restructuring the trans-Atlantic partnership also means working to tackle new issues. For example, it would behoove us to use the Biden presidency and his commitment to environmental issues to pursue a much more engaged foreign climate policy together with the US. We must first show that sustainable growth and climate protection are not opposites but actually the only economic model that can lead us to future success. We must provide proof of this. Drawing on this, it should then also be our goal to take climate protection to those locations where CO_2 emissions are rising rather than falling.

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China as the biggest foreign-policy challenge

Trans-Atlantic cooperation is needed not only in the realm of security and climate issues. The greatest common foreign policy challenge facing the West is China. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, the country is determined to upset the rules-based international order in favor of Chinese interests. This determination is rooted in the conviction that his own authoritarian system is superior to the West's liberal model. Not only does China possess enormous economic, technological and political means to reach its goal, it also has the will to achieve it. The resulting battle-of-the-systems is being waged, above all, in the realm of technical leadership. And in that arena, the only way for Europe to hold its own is to work in unison with the US. This is why it's so important that we first coordinate at the European level and then at the trans-Atlantic level on our way to achieving a joint China strategy.

The CDU/CSU is keen to lend a helping hand to the new German government. We are determined to tackle these enormous foreign policy challenges cooperatively for the benefit of Germany and Europe. We are aware that the process of taking on responsibility will require a change in mentality on the part of Germans. Foreign policy in our new era must be explained and justified in terms of its goals and instruments. Only then will it be possible to execute it with success.

SECURITY CHALLENGES

Learning to drive

Germany faces its bugbears: geopolitics, deterrence, resilience

PICTURE ALLIANCE / ALEXANDER FARNSWORTH | ALEXANDER FARNSWORTH

Sizing up: Alexander Graf Lambsdorff of the Free Democrats, one wing of the tripartite (SPD, FDP, Greens) coalition governing Germany

BY ALEXANDER GRAF LAMBSDORFF

Good policymaking begins with a sober look at reality. One of today's realities is that war and the threat of military force have by no means disappeared from Europe. Indeed, Clausewitz's dictum continues to apply: War is merely the continuation of politics by other means. Russia is already using its 140,000 soldiers stationed at the Ukrainian border as an extension of its political and diplomatic arm. The reasons for the maneuver ostensibly have to do with security guarantees, short- and medium-range missiles and NATO. But behind the rhetoric lies a policy of geopolitical revisionism by which the Kremlin wants to reverse the results of the Cold War – by military force, if necessary. Above all, however, it's about the incessant lure of freedom and democracy, which is also a thorn in China's side.

It's no coincidence that Beijing and Moscow have come together in autocratic unity against NATO's eastward expansion. It's also not by chance that China levied a broadcasting ban on the BBC in 2021 for its coverage of the situation in Xinjiang and that Germany's Deutsche Welle had to shut down its operations in Russia in February 2022. Those of us who are reminded of the Cold War would do well to note that our societies and economies are more interdependent today and thus more vulnerable than in the 1970s and 1980s. We might even be looking at a "Cold War Plus" – a militarily charged systemic rivalry in which both sides could inflict much more serious damage on one another below the threshold of military force than was the case during the Cold War of the 20th century.

Such a situation would be extremely threatening for Germany; perhaps no other country benefits as much from free and fair trade and from a rules-based multilateral world order. If Germany wishes to survive in turbulent times, it's going to have to make an active, tangible and appropriate contribution to the security of liberal democracies and the rules-based order. Germany's new "traffic-light coalition" possesses the tools to meet these challenges. In the fall of 2022, we will present a national security strategy paper that defines our values, interests, goals and priorities while enabling us to align our political actions accordingly. In terms of foreign policy, we are well-known as a stable force for peace at the center of Europe, and we are also valued for our dependability, our clear commitment to NATO, the EU and to the trans-Atlantic partnership as well as for our historical links to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. These constants are also reflected and confirmed in the new government's coalition agreement.

In spite of these positives, however, it remains necessary that we rethink German foreign policy, even in some of the categories that have always been difficult for us in light of our history, such as geopolitics, deterrence and resilience. Our strained relationship to Russia once again demonstrates how necessary it is to join with France and the US in emphasizing dialogue, while at the same time fulfilling our obligations as NATO members; this sends a clear signal to our partners in Central and Eastern Europe and is an indicator of our reliability with regard to the US and Canada, our key trans-Atlantic allies.

Even in a "traffic-light" government, we need a credible nuclear deterrence, at least as long as nuclear weapons continue to play a role in NATO's strategic concept. For the first time ever, a German federal government has included in its coalition agreement a commitment to take up the concerns of our partner states in Central and Eastern Europe in its own policy development. It is equally legitimate for us to articulate our security interests with regard to Russia. These include credible disarmament, arms control and a revival of the INF Treaty. It is understandable that partners such as Poland and the Baltic states are thinking aloud about whether Germany should or should not deliver weapons to Ukraine. It is equally appropriate that this has become the subject of controversial debate in Berlin. However, it is also true that the debate should not be reduced to one issue. There are many useful ways to show support for Ukraine that include political, economic and military means.

As a coalition committed to strengthening multilateralism, the German government believes it would make sense to reform the UN Security Council to reflect the realities of the 21st century. Before this can come to pass, we must pursue a smart foreign policy that coordinates closely with friends and allies but also with problematic partners around the world. First, we're eager to revive the trans-Atlantic alliance and work more closely with democracies across the globe. The US continues to act as the guarantor of our foreign security policy. In the fall of 2021, 71 percent of Germans felt relations to the US were good or very good. As democratic countries, we must be ready to stand by states like Australia and Lithuania when they face economic pressures from Beijing. And we must use formats such as the Summit for Democracy, the Alliance for Multilateralism and the G7 presidency to defend the liberal world order.

The only way the EU can make itself heard on the world stage is to speak in a unified voice. Efforts to introduce majority voting in the EU Council of Ministers and to strengthen both the European External Action Service and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy are part of our coalition agreement. Joint action should be the rule and nation-state unilateralism the exception.

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Europe must become more independent in the realm of energy supply and raw-material imports. It is equally important that Germany once again become the driving force behind a leading region for technology based on European values, and also that we establish clear regulations against the spread of disinformation. We can no longer afford to sit idly by as China and Russia use modern technologies to export their worldviews and suppress their populations, while we possess neither a European 5G network nor any adequate means to fight propaganda.

Good politics begins by looking at reality, but it doesn't stop there. As Free Democrats in the "traffic light coalition," we at the FDP are eager to improve reality. We want a clear commitment to more freedom and guaranteed human rights. Our policies stand for active climate protection, free trade and economic prosperity. Above all, Germany, led by its "traffic light coalition," has made a solemn promise to actively seek to create peace and stability, even in a *Cold War Plus*. Germany accepts and will meet its responsibilities as an economically strong tech leader, a reliable NATO partner and a resilient democracy.

After the forever war

Since mid-August, the Taliban have once again taken full control of Afghanistan. Scenes of a chaotic NATO withdrawal, bungled evacuations and the failure of a twenty-year war effort are shaping Western perceptions

PICTURE ALLIANCE / NEWSCOM | JACK HOLT

Last man leaving: Major General Chris Donahue, commander of the U.S. Army 82nd Airborne Division, the final American service member departing Afghanistan on Aug. 30, 2021.

BY EMRAN FEROZ

For several days, *Zafar Hashemi* has made the trip to the passport office in Kabul to apply for new travel documents for himself and his family. The jostling in front of the building, located in the southwest part of the Afghan capital, has been the same for years. Hundreds of people stand in line, usually with one common goal: to get out of Afghanistan. Many of them have traveled all the way from other Afghan provinces specifically for this purpose. Even before the Taliban regained control, getting a new passport was an expensive endeavor. Passports alone cost roughly $70 to $100 per person. But then there's the cost of bribing officials who otherwise won't lift a finger and are wont to keep applicants waiting for weeks or even months.

For years, the Taliban have portrayed themselves as the enemies of corruption, always blaming problems on the Kabul government, which has now been overthrown (or rather, fled), and its Western allies. This narrative fueled their popularity in many regions of Afghanistan; after all, there was no question that the previous regime was corrupt. But little has changed at the Kabul passport office since the Taliban has returned. In fact, corruption has increased. "One of my relatives paid $600 for a passport a few days ago," says Hashemi. "Others had to fork out up to $1,000. This is usury, especially in these times." There are reasons for the current situation; demand is high and the corrupt officials who worked for the previous regime still hold the same positions. The new head of the passport office is a Talib, that is, a member of the Taliban. He recently returned from exile in Pakistan and by all accounts has little control of the situation. "We've fired several employees on corruption charges," he claimed in a recent interview with an Afghan television station. "Anyone caught will face harsh penalties." Hashemi and other Afghans don't consider him trustworthy. "He's either stupid and doesn't notice what's happening right under his nose, or he's taking a piece of the pie himself," says Hashemi.

Even so, corruption is likely one of the less pressing problems facing those living under the current Taliban regime. Immediately after the withdrawal of international troops, the insurgents – who already controlled numerous regions at the time – took over the entire country. The last-ditch effort to resist in the provinces of Panjshir and Baghlan and led – at least verbally – by Ahmad Massoud, son of the famous Mujahideen commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, who was killed by Al Qaeda in 2001, was quickly crushed. As soon as the last US soldiers left, the Taliban captured the airport amid a flurry of propaganda. They soon began to hold meetings and conferences in the same luxurious Kabul hotels they'd once sent suicide bombers to destroy. The old state apparatus was abolished, the white Taliban flag was hoisted – and many at-risk groups and individuals were left behind.

These included *Samir*, who once worked for the German armed forces as a local officer, and *Mustafa*, who served in the Afghan army. Their calls for help were ignored for months, even by Germany. And by the time the Taliban had reached Kabul, it was already too late. No one wanted to evacuate them. The two men hardly leave the homes anymore; they are afraid of revenge attacks. According to a report by the US organization Human Rights Watch, dozens of members of the Afghan security forces have been hunted down, tortured and killed by the Taliban in recent weeks and months – in spite of a general amnesty announced in August. The Taliban blamed the incidents on disloyal fighters and insisted the amnesty would remain in place at least as far as its leadership was concerned. But many observers find this explanation implausible and speak of a façade amnesty intended primarily to satisfy international donors.

After all, in economic terms, Afghanistan remains more dependent than ever. Due to the US sanctions in place since the Taliban's return, the country is essentially in a state of free fall. Moreover, Afghanistan's state reserves abroad, amounting to around $10 billion, were frozen by Washington until President Biden's executive order of Feb. 11, which freed up $3.5 billion for a trust fund to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, and $3.5 billion for families of victims of the Sept. 11 attacks. Those suffering the most, however, are not the extremists, but the millions of regular Afghans. They are now being exposed to a potential humanitarian catastrophe that could cost more lives than the preceding 20 years of war. Responsibility for this state of affairs lies not only with the Taliban, but also with the elites who fled Kabul and with the countries that waged war in the country. Even after two decades, and despite billions of dollars in aid from abroad, nothing even resembling an economically sovereign state has been established. In many respects, the Western mission in Afghanistan was geared toward fostering a short-term war economy, and this ultimately served only to encourage the swamp-like corruption that already existed among political elites. If the international community now forgets about Afghanistan once again, the country will face the same isolation it suffered in the 1990s.

> THE SITUATION IS SIMILARLY DANGEROUS FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVISTS, WHO HAVE SUFFERED PHYSICAL ATTACKS AFTER DEMONSTRATIONS PROTESTING THE CLOSURE OF GIRLS' SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

Should Afghanistan be isolated once again, the Taliban's reign of terror will likely expand. There are signs that this is already the case, as evinced by reports of censorship and restrictions on freedom of the press and freedom of expression. "We're already censoring ourselves," says one journalist in the southeast of the country, who continues to live and work in Afghanistan and therefore wishes to remain anonymous. The country has been among the deadliest for journalists for years. The Taliban make no secret of the fact that many media outlets and journalists are a thorn in their side. While they court international media outlets and grant them protection, many local reporters continue to be helplessly exposed to the whims of the Taliban. Some have been threatened, arbitrarily arrested and tortured. The situation is similarly dangerous for women's rights activists, who have suffered physical attacks after demonstrations protesting the closure of girls' schools and universities. Some of these women have even been abducted and murdered by unknown perpetrators. At the moment, the situation varies from region to region, and some educational institutions are open to both boys and girls. However, classes are more strictly segregated by gender than before. Female students and teachers don't have to wear burqas, but they do have to veil themselves more strictly.

The Taliban claim to have nothing to do with the kidnapping and murder of activists, but their statements are anything but credible. After all, they're now the only authority controlling the country. With the fall of the last Afghan government and the flight of ex-president Ashraf Ghani, the entire Afghan security apparatus, i.e., the army, police and intelligence services, also collapsed. Only the Afghan cell of the Islamic State group (IS) is causing the new Taliban regime any serious headaches. It is resorting to the very same means once part of the Taliban's own repertoire – bombings and suicide attacks – to wipe out its targets, which include religious minorities, such as Shiites.

The Taliban count themselves among the arch-enemies of IS. This is perhaps one of the reasons why regional states wish to cooperate with the new, old rulers in Kabul. It is also why Western actors such as the EU and the US will likely soon find themselves doing the same.

**Names have been changed to protect the identities of the speakers*

EMRAN FEROZ is an Austro-Afghan journalist and war reporter born and raised in Innsbruck. His latest book, *Der längste Krieg – 20 Jahre War on Terror* (tr. The Longest War – 20 Years of the War on Terror) became a bestseller after the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in August 2021. Also in 2021, Feroz was awarded the Austrian Concordia Prize for Journalism in the human rights category.

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SECURITY STRATEGY

BRIDGING THE GULF

America's turn to Asia leads to new partnerships among the Gulf States

BY JAMES BINDENAGEL

The abrupt withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan and the end of the mission in Iraq manifests a process that is clearly leaving its mark. The US "Pivot to Asia" strategy, initiated under President Barack Obama, shifts more responsibility to the Gulf States for security in the region. While these states have responded positively, will this strategy work with zero US involvement? Together with Europe, the US should remain engaged in the region and avoid a vacuum filled by adversaries.

The American geopolitical shift towards Asia has caused the Gulf States to rethink their strategic positions. They have intensified efforts to improve their relations with old (arch) rivals. This strategic review has led to surprising tectonic plate shifts in foreign policy in the Middle East region in recent months, yet with positive implications for stability in the Gulf. For example, Saudi Arabia, together with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt, had isolated and imposed a trade embargo on Qatar to force it to renounce its support for Islamist forces. But after some lively diplomatic exchange, heads of state of Saudi Arabia and Qatar declared their willingness to intensify bilateral cooperation and strengthen security and stability in the region.

The troubled region has been a source of concern for decades and, dependent ultimately on an American security umbrella, is beginning to organize itself. However, after the signing of the Abraham Agreement, diplomatic channels between Israel and the United Arab Emirates opened with surprising speed, while concrete opportunities for cooperation in agriculture, food security, cutting-edge technology, health and renewable energy appeared within reach.

The tiny emirate of Qatar, which is smaller than Connecticut, is situated along the conflict line between Saudi Arabia and Iran. As a result, it has been loomed particularly large in its new role of fostering good neighborly relations.

Qatar has the world's third-largest natural gas reserves and the highest per capita income globally. It now focuses on dialogue as an alternative to wars and on the option of mediation in resolving conflicts. Qatar recently demonstrated its willingness to help defuse the Afghanistan evacuation crisis last summer, when it emerged as a "hub for dialogue and the peaceful settlement of disputes." New foreign and domestic policy paradigms recently formulated by the Qatari emir emphasize this conflict-defusing role. That role should be a reason for the US, with Europe, to remain engaged in the region. For Washington in particular, Qatar is increasingly a helpful partner as a diplomatic mediator at a time when US priorities lie more in Asia. In addition to its diplomatic role, at al Udeid, the emirate hosts one of the largest American airbases outside the US. Furthermore, with his new regional diplomacy policies, the Qatari emir can offer more substantial support for continuing US and European efforts toward an active reshaping of security in the region.

PICTURE ALLIANCE / NURPHOTO | SIMON HOLMES

All circus, no bread: Qatar is getting ready for the FIFA World Cup, having been under scrutiny for human rights abuses and exploiting migrant workers on its large-scale projects.

Qatar and the US established diplomatic relations as early as 1972. Together they have carefully expanded the partnership include economic, scientific and political ties. Cooperation between universities in the two countries – there are hundreds of Qatari students in America and branches of six US universities in Qatar – has created an extensive people-to-people network; this provides crucial, mutual understanding and space for collaboration. The economies of Qatar and other Gulf States are currently undergoing a profound and sustainable transformation towards a modern, high-tech industrial knowledge society. The ongoing generational shift is also setting in motion a social transformation against the backdrop of an overwhelmingly young and well-educated population. Qatar can harness this generational change for deeper cooperation with the US.

However, with the World Cup planned to be held in Qatar, the Gulf state once again finds itself in the spotlight. FIFA's decision to hold the World Cup in the emirate in autumn 2022 remains highly controversial. Qatar should take the accusations of human rights abuses seriously and continue to work on improving the situation in the country to ensure that it retains its new and hard-earned strategic role. A boycott of the World Cup, which has been called for in Europe in particular, conflicts with European interests in regional stability. Would punishing Qatar or rather negotiating agreements to protect human rights be in the best interest of improving the human rights conditions in the emirate? Sustaining the dynamically changing geopolitics in the region puts the West in bind. A boycott risks abruptly halting social and political change in Qatar and the region and jeopardizes hard-won foreign policy ties. The adage that "sport unites" seems to be wise counsel. Negotiating around sports is an opportunity to boost the region's positive social and political developments by deploying the best weapon for regional change: the soft power of the West.

US and European interests are best served by supporting social change to ensure long-term strategic cooperation with partners in the Gulf region, which is sure to further consolidate and expand well-developed trade relations. In the Ukraine conflict, too, Europe cannot ignore that its interests lie also in Qatar as a significant exporter of natural gas. The emirate can quickly step in with gas supplies if Russia uses its gas as political leverage and continues to curb its supplies to Europe. A model for such a backup rescue operation already exists: Eleven years ago, Qatar sent its gas tankers to Japan to mitigate energy shortfalls from the tsunami.

The US remains a leading nation. Especially in such a rapidly changing world, it must remain an influential partner with Europe. The goal of the trans-Atlantic partnership can find purchase amid the swift transformations experienced in the Gulf States – a region ever more susceptible to confrontations with adversaries such as Russia and China.

The time is ripe for the US, together with its European and Gulf partners, to fill the power vacuum in the Persian Gulf and pursue a pragmatic foreign policy that corresponds to today's geopolitical realities and helps further defuse the complex conflicts in the Middle East. As a close partner of Washington and Europe, Qatar can be a bridge and platform for a continuing US security presence in the region. In relying on partners like Qatar and its neighbors in the Gulf, the West can prevent the vacuum from being filled by adversaries in the Arab world.

JAMES BINDENAGEL is a former US Ambassador and the founding Henry Kissinger Professor at Bonn University. He has published widely on international security issues in the 21st century and currently teaches strategic foresight. His most recent book is titled *Germany from Peace to Power? Can Germany lead without dominating?*

SECURITY CHALLENGES

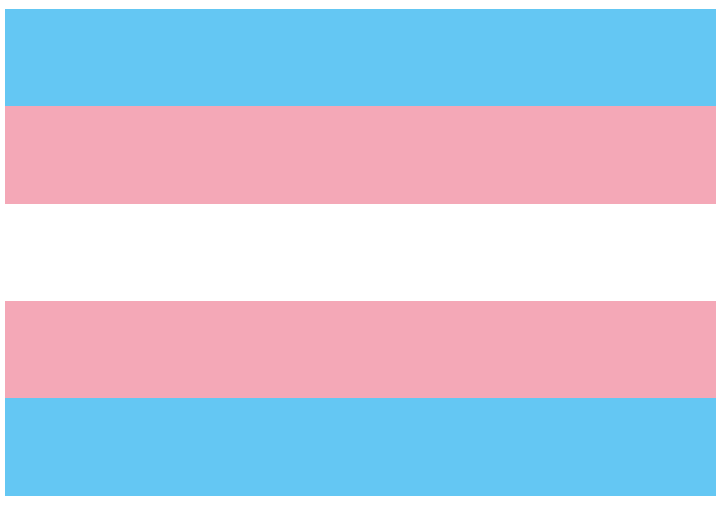
Hello. My name is Vladimir (he/him)

Anti-gender backlash in Russia's foreign policy strategy

SHUTTERSTOCK.DE (9)

BY LEANDRA BIAS

Vladimir Putin's 2012 campaign for a third presidential term invoked the term "Gayropa" as a popular concept to describe a perverted, subordinate Europe. The same period saw concerns aired on Radio Echo Moskvy that "homosexual Europe will be harassing normal Russia under the pretense that it is teaching us democracy." Not long after, the Security Council of Russia itself weighed in on the need to strengthen "national security in the moral sphere" in light of the West's "aggressive" promotion of homosexuality.

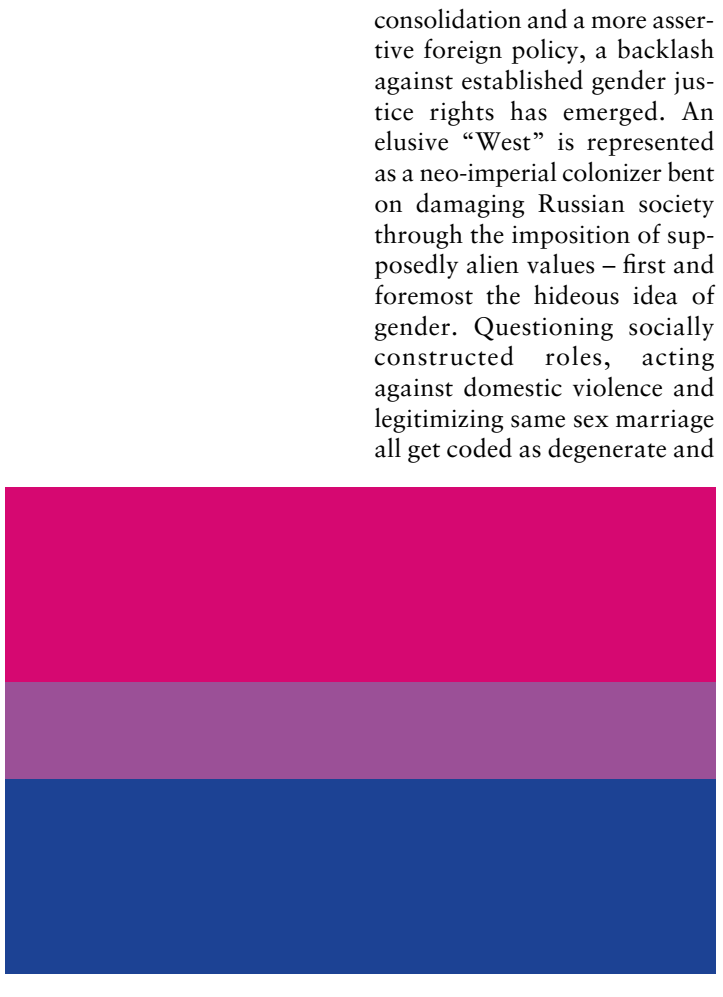


Ever since Russia took a decisive turn towards authoritarian consolidation and a more assertive foreign policy, a backlash against established gender justice rights has emerged. An elusive "West" is represented as a neo-imperial colonizer bent on damaging Russian society through the imposition of supposedly alien values – first and foremost the hideous idea of gender. Questioning socially constructed roles, acting against domestic violence and legitimizing same sex marriage all get coded as degenerate and incompatible with traditional Russian values. Gender equality is cast as a threat to Russian integrity on par with a military strike, which in turn justifies defense mechanisms.

Such is the chain of logic employed to argue that the preservation of Russia's moral sovereignty necessarily requires a "sovereign democracy." In other words, by fashioning gender into a security threat and the West as its main source of dissemination, Russia justifies its own mode of governance. Researchers have long reached consensus that gender acts as a form of "symbolic glue." It becomes an umbrella term that can rally together different factions by acting as a placeholder for other messages. Depending on the context, anti-gender campaigns across the globe have at times associated gender with increased individualism, globalization, neoliberalism and even communism. In the case of Russia, the issue of gender is portrayed as a symbol of Western cultural imperialism and is therefore used as a shortcut to delegitimize democratization and human rights altogether.

Importantly, the anti-gender backlash also allows Russia to reassert itself. A patriarchal global order still prevails where not just nation-states, but also their relationships among one another are a gendered phenomenon. Valerie Sperling, whose research focuses on issues of gender in Russian politics, theorizes that masculinity has been a vector for Putin to claim power. In what political sociologist Koen Slootmaeckers terms "competing masculinities" between states, Putin's assertion of an ideal-type (according to patriarchal standards) masculinity both as an individual and even more so in his foreign policy has allowed the entire nation to regain status. It is no coincidence that Putin quoted the popular rhyme "whether you like it or not, my little beauty, you will have to endure it" – a barefaced normalization of rape – at a press conference with Emmanuel Macron in early February in reference to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. This performance is a rendition of that type of masculinity that is linked to ultimate power.

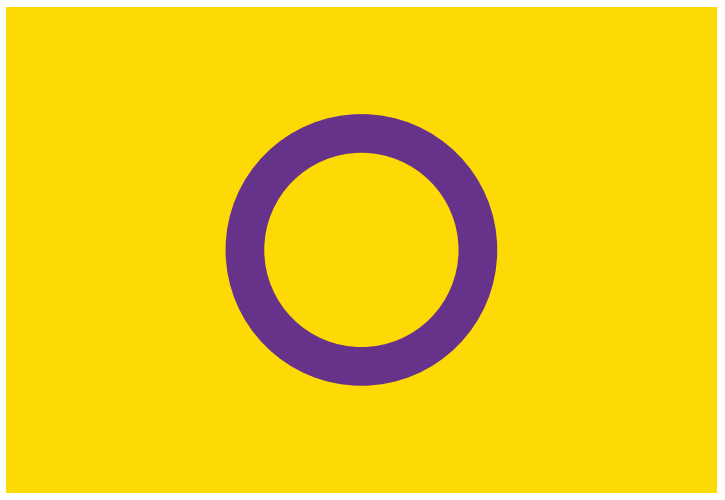
Displaying force, dominance and misogyny alongside his framing of the West as emasculated by gender equality policies enables the Kremlin to position Russia as the last "real man" standing. There is no irony lost in Russia's depiction of itself as the bedrock of Christianity and of Western civilization, precisely because of its preservation of traditional patriarchal values.



LEANDRA BIAS
is a senior researcher at swisspeace. Her work examines anti-gender backlash in authoritarian regimes and advances alternatives with which Feminist Foreign Policy can respond.

It would behoove security policymakers to note that Russia's anti-gender backlash goes beyond its role of legitimizing aggressive foreign policy in reaction to alleged Western imperialism and casting authoritarian governance as an unavoidable mechanism of defense. Indeed, as with every authoritarian system, foreign policy strategy also fulfils a domestic purpose. In this case, the backlash also serves to justify repression on the home front in the name of bolstering regime survival.

On the policy level, the "foreign agent" law, adopted in 2012, was used to quietly shut down gender studies. The Gender Studies Centre in Moscow was forced to close in 2013 and the same fate awaited the Ivanovo Centre a few years later. The European University at Saint Petersburg was forbidden from teaching for over two years, officially because it was violating building safety standards such as fire regulations. The affair began when Duma member Vitaly Milonov, using the anti-gay propaganda law introduced in 2013, filed a complaint against the university for spreading homosexual propaganda. Four years later, in February 2017, Russian law levied a dramatic blow to the daily lives of women by decriminalizing domestic violence.



Russia and Belarus are the only post-Soviet countries to lack a separate law on domestic violence. Feminists have campaigned for its adoption since the 1990s. In 2016, a law was passed that at least distinguished domestic battery from other forms of violence – but its dismantling took a mere six months. Duma member Yelena Mizulina had euphemistically deemed it the "slap bill" and claimed it was pushed by a Western-led "feminist lobby" and thwarted Russia's sovereignty and values.

These examples are testament to the potency ascribed to gender issues, such that anyone advocating for them is cast as a fifth column insurrectionist out to undermine the Russian nation. Anti-gender backlash is a handy cover to justify authoritarian tactics, both at home and abroad.

And this in anything but an isolated incident. Last year, research undertaken by the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights established that the backlash against gender equality stems from a transnationally organized and financed network, where Russia plays a prominent role. Russia has been at the forefront of the attempts to dilute women's rights enshrined in the UN system. Since 2009, more than $700 million has been spent in Europe on campaigns against sexual and reproductive rights, of which $180 million can be traced to Russia.

Recognizing anti-gender backlash is imperative not just for those addressing human security, but also for those who define security only in military terms. After all, demonizing gender advocacy as imperialist, and juxtaposing an effeminate West with a virile Russia while repressing equality proponents within, serves to consolidate authoritarianism and acts as a gateway to violence elsewhere.

SECURITY CHALLENGES

ALWAYS THE DIPLOMAT

Wolfgang Ischinger is chairing the Munich Security Conference for the last time in 2022. Hats off to a dyed-in-the-wool German diplomat

BY GÜNTER BANNAS

PICTURE ALLIANCE/DPA | SVEN HOPPE

Instant classic: the EU hoodie. MSC 2019

What times they were, what incredible experiences, what achievements, what a legacy. Wolfgang Ischinger's career spans entire epochs of contemporary history: the Cold War, its end culminating in German unification, the hope for a lasting peace, the subsequent disappointments and, finally, globalization and its new – or maybe not so new – conflicts.

Wolfgang Ischinger, who will chair the Munich Security Conference for the last time this February, has been an exceptionally influential figure in German, European and global politics and diplomacy. He has served as a leading government official, an ambassador, a policy advisor, an organizer, a host with an affinity for the arts and a much-sought-after commentator on politics and current affairs. But above all, he has been – and will always be – a person who enjoys bringing people together, if not as friends, then at least to break bread and engage in dialogue. This requires a great deal of ambition – and chutzpah – along with the ability to endure slings and arrows from all sides. But most of all, it requires having the ability to see crises as challenges and challenges as opportunities; one must be able to abandon conventional certainties and well-trodden paths in favor of creative solutions and new ways of thinking.

In retrospect, it looks as if Ischinger might have been fulfilling his calling from the very beginning. Born in 1946 in Baden-Württemberg, he lived for a time as an exchange student in the United States, completed a law degree in Bonn and Geneva, then went on to study international law and global economic relations at Harvard. It's likely that the brief time he spent as a young man in 1970s New York working in the cabinet of then-UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim proved influential in prompting him to think in global political terms. In 1975, he joined the German Foreign Service, working in Bonn under Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher (FDP). Policy planning was one of his duties there, and he soon found himself working in immediate proximity to Genscher – as personal advisor and then as head of the Parliament and Cabinet Division. Notwithstanding the political indeterminacy embodied in the term "Genscherism," the foreign minister was a mentor to Ischinger. His most important lessons learned were to always leave one's interlocutor a way out and to never commit oneself in such a way that excludes potential solutions other than the ones initially agreed upon. The notion of *tertium non datur* (no third possibility given) had no place in Genscher's teaching, at least not at the heights of diplomacy.

Ischinger was not the only member of Genscher's close professional circle to become *Staatssekretär*, or deputy foreign minister, in Germany's Foreign Office, even after the FDP stalwart was no longer head. This of course has a lot to do with the particular customs of that body: party loyalties (or their suspected presence) in the Foreign Office don't carry the same weight as they do in other ministries. Joschka Fischer from Bündnis 90/Die Grünen would also capitalize on Ischinger's considerable experience, some of which was gained during his involvement in the Dayton Accords, the peace agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina he negotiated together with Richard Holbrooke, the US special envoy for the Balkans. Ischinger's role in those talks was greater than the actual influence levied by the federal government in Bonn. Holbrooke was known for making rather lofty appearances as US ambassador in Bonn – as is the wont of the representative of a global power – and legend has it that Ischinger hosted a farewell dinner for Holbrooke, where he handed the black-red-and-gold German flag as a memento to the American.

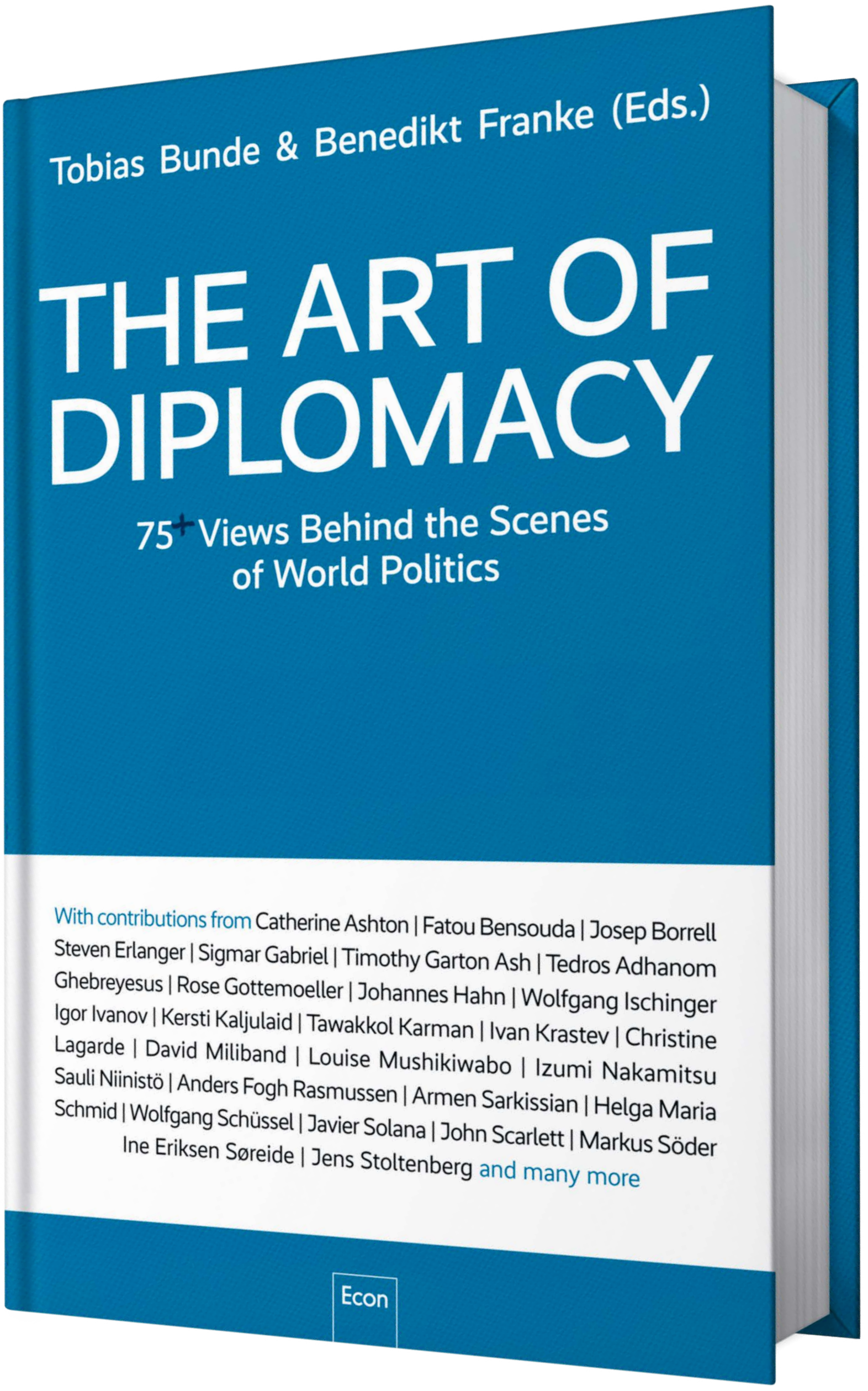
From 2001 to 2006, Ischinger was Germany's ambassador in Washington. During that time, he was faced with unparalleled challenges, including the September 11 terror attacks in New York and Washington only months after taking office. Ischinger advised then-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder to act immediately in expressing Germany's "unlimited solidarity" with the US. Later, after Schröder refused to take part in the invasion of Iraq, Ischinger had the unthankful task of representing a non-participant country that nevertheless insisted on its continued loyalty to the Western alliance, at every turn trying to assure the American people of Germany's commitment to an indivisible partnership. And that's exactly what he did, in countless interviews and talk shows, at a myriad of events and by organizing German-American friendship weeks. It's not often that an envoy of Germany's Foreign Office is required to make a series of appearances bearing messages of goodwill in an attempt to solicit sympathy – not in spite of Germany's non-participation in the Iraq war, but precisely because of it, and because of the fissures in the personal relationship between the leaders of the two countries. These years represented Ischinger's greatest political challenge, as well as the likely highpoint of his activity in the Foreign Office.

GÜNTER BANNAS
was Berlin bureau chief at the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and is currently a columnist at the weekly *Der Hauptstadtbrief*.

Once again, in retrospect, it's as if Ischinger's time in Washington was merely preparation for what came next. Years later, in 2012, after the resignation of German President Christian Wulff, members of the CDU-FDP governing coalition approached Ischinger and considered moving beyond their preliminary inquiry in the search for a successor. By then, however, he'd already found a new job.

When he left the Foreign Service in 2008, Ischinger embarked on a new path. He became General Representative for Government Relations at Allianz SE in Munich and took over as chair of the Munich Security Conference (MSC). At the MSC, as successor to Horst Teltschik, a former security advisor to Chancellor Helmut Kohl, Ischinger – ever the civil servant diplomat – entered the theater of geopolitical dialogue and exchange. He'd found his calling. In keeping with the historical developments of the time, he transformed an event that had hitherto focused on trans-Atlantic and East-West relations into a platform that addresses a variety of global perspectives and themes, such as the containment of regional conflicts and global wealth distribution. During his tenure as head of the MSC, the number of participants and attendees multiplied, without any decline in the quantity and quality of prominent guests, which to this day include presidents, chancellors, ministers, democrats and autocrats. Where else – except perhaps at the United Nations – have so many representatives from such different backgrounds gathered under one roof as at the Munich Security Conference?

The fact that new challenges lay ahead was foreseeable, all the more so in times of COVID-19 restrictions. Still, it's possible that the handover of the leadership of the Munich Security Conference to Christoph Heusgen marks not an end to Ischinger's journey, but a layover on his way to something else. Ischinger will continue to foster a deep connection to the MSC – beginning now as president of the Foundation Council.



The Art of Diplomacy:
75+ Views Behind the Scenes of World Politics

What is diplomacy? An art, a craft? Or something in between? Is there such a thing as a diplomatic secret recipe? What actually makes a good diplomat? What tips and tricks help to break the deadlock? When does humor help, when only bluffing? How do diplomatic cultures and styles differ in different countries? How undiplomatic can, and perhaps even must, a diplomat sometimes be? How does the work of today's diplomats differ from that of their predecessors? And why do we need diplomats today, when half the world is just a click away from the next video conference?

In this book, renowned companions of Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger, on the occasion of his 75th birthday, reflect on fundamental questions of diplomacy. Taking the reader behind the scenes of diplomacy, the contributors – ranging from several sitting presidents, foreign ministers and heads of international organizations to Nobel Peace Prize laureates and public intellectuals – reveal their most astonishing experiences, successes, and failures on the diplomatic stage, or outline their ideas for the diplomatic handling of unresolved challenges. A book for anyone who wants to better understand what matters when negotiating war and peace.

Tobias Bunde and Benedikt Franke (eds.), The Art of Diplomacy: 75+ Views Behind the Scenes of World Politics, Berlin: Econ, 2022, ISBN: 9783430210775

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