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Nine Theses about the War in Ukraine

What conclusions and consequences can we draw so far from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine?

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Nine Theses about the War in Ukraine

What conclusions and consequences can we draw so far from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine?

Introduction

In late February 2022, Russia began to intensify its ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine ('Russia's Special Military Operation in Ukraine': Военная спецоперация России на Украине or 'Special Operation for the Denazification and Demilitarization of Ukraine': спецоперация по денацификации и демилитаризации Украины). The aim was to seize the capital in a quick offensive – which eventually turned out to be unsuccessful – in order to overthrow the government and 'demilitarize' and 'denazify' Ukraine, as Russian propaganda put it. Initially, the war that led to the conquest of Crimea in 2014 had been confined to the areas of Donetsk and Luhansk, where it has been fought with high numbers of casualties ever since. At present, the Russian army is attacking from the east and south, trying to conquer and subjugate large parts of the areas of Donetsk and Luhansk as well as the coast of the Sea of Azov in Southern Ukraine and the area north of Crimea up to the Dnipro river.

The Russian aggression, which is reminiscent of the behaviour shown by major powers in the 19th and 20th century, and the fact that over the last few weeks the campaign has apparently not been as successful as planned have raised a number of questions touching on topics such as future foreign policy, the defence of the West and the maxims and planning of future military action in general. Even though many of these questions cannot yet be answered conclusively, e.g. the question as to the outcome and results of Russia's current war of aggression against Ukraine, we do believe it is possible to gain some insights even now and to present them in the form of theses. We will do so in the following, organising our theses according to the timeline and factual course of the conflict to date: We will draw conclusions from the prerequisites and conditions of the conflict as well as from its development and the consequences that will likely result from it.

Thesis No. 1: From a military economic perspective, Putin's war of aggression does not make much sense as the costs faced by Russia are grossly disproportionate to the benefits of the war.

Generally speaking, economic decisions can be attributed to rational considerations in which the actual value of the expected costs resulting from a certain decision is weighed against the actual value of the expected benefits. Accordingly, all war-induced effects

should be included in such considerations, ideally at the beginning of hostilities, which for the war in Ukraine would have been 24 February 2022.

For Putin's autocratic system, one purpose of his actions is probably to preserve his regime. What this regime seems to consider a great danger is not necessarily a Ukraine that, if integrated into the West, would violate Russia's vital security interests, but rather a Western-oriented, democratic neighbouring country and 'fraternal nation' that could represent an alternative and a pattern for the population of the Russian Federation to follow, and thus a factor of influence. Moreover, a 'victory' in the fight against an alleged common enemy ('Nazis', 'genocide') would surely be of great propaganda value at home. In order to preserve its power, the regime may have taken into account the loss of tens of thousands of soldiers and combat vehicles. It seems, however, that it has set this cost at a significantly lower level than Western countries would have done. It did probably expect the costs resulting from the Western sanctions, although perhaps at a lower level. This is indicated by the significant gold and dollar reserves [held by Russia] as well as by the remarkably low storage levels of Russian-controlled German gas storage facilities since autumn 2021. The Russian regime certainly acted on the basis of false assumptions regarding the legitimacy and recognition of the government in Kyiv as well as Ukraine's readiness to defend itself and the capabilities of all troops involved. This can be concluded from the fact that as early as on the second day of the war, the regime mistakenly published a victory report via the news agency RIA Novosti. The article, which was later deleted, celebrated the swift victory, the 'reunification' of Russia and Ukraine and the end of the 'Western' world order.¹ The fact that the Russian troops, after major losses, discontinued their attack on Kyiv and withdrew from Northern Ukraine after six weeks provides another indication for the aforementioned misjudgement.

From Russia's perspective as a state within the international system, a potential gain in resources and a possible weakening of the West must be balanced against military dangers and almost certain economic losses in the long run. These considerations were based on serious misjudgements.

The decision to start this war cannot be understood as a rational one from the perspective of Russia as a state, but at best only as that of a regime intent on self-preservation. In any case, the contrast remains between high costs and very improbable returns that can only be realised if the Russian public does not recognise the discord between the 'liberation' of a 'fraternal nation' on the one hand and the ruthless fight against 'Nazis' and the alleged genocide on the other as the contradiction that it actually is.

However, the withdrawal of the Russian armed forces from Kyiv and their concentration in the Donbas region are a sign that the Russian regime is trying to learn from the situation. Regardless of this, this decision is likely to be wrong, too, and the large number of casualties and the massive destruction resulting from it will be disastrous.

As a matter of principle, one should thus assume that both Putin and his government are acting rationally – in other words, that they attempt to act in accordance with their own best interests in the long run. It is only under this assumption that we can hope to be able to somehow understand and possibly influence Russia's actions. One may assume that the Russian government is not only willing but also able to think rationally and that it has the intellectual competences as well as the necessary minimum of self-

¹ Akopow 2022/Mayshev 2022.

control. However, the military economic aspects of Russian actions must always be considered from the perspective of the Russian regime, and not primarily from a Western point of view. In fact, Russia's considerations are likely based on considerable misperceptions and misjudgements. It is probably in the West's interest to use appropriate diplomatic and other communication channels to try to influence Russian perceptions and assessments. One may assume that a more intensive exchange with Russia and a better knowledge of the country will be of great importance in the near future and in the years to come.

At present, the regime in Moscow seems to think that ending its war of aggression would be more costly than continuing it, because without a Russian 'victory' the very existence and safety of the regime itself might be at stake. This is unlikely to change in the short term, regardless of either arms deliveries or stricter sanctions. Nevertheless, measures designed to maximize Russian costs – such as the delivery of weapons, aircraft and ammunition as well as sanctions – can be an effective means of possibly encouraging Russia to consider a negotiated solution. What is much more important for the supporters of Ukraine, including the German government, however, is to minimize the benefits Russia is expecting from this war, at least in the medium to long term, in order to make a continuation of the war in Ukraine and its expansion beyond Ukraine less likely. For this purpose, it will be crucial to have a smart, more consistent, sustainable and effective sanctions regime in place and to pursue a policy vis-à-vis Russia – both as a supplier of natural resources and a sales market – that is more distanced and based less on hopes and more on reciprocity, and to express this in a clear and unambiguous manner.

Thesis No. 2: In the decade leading up to 2022, German policymakers (with their energy policy, their refusal to supply arms and their general policy towards Ukraine and Russia) failed to understand the social and cultural prerequisites of the conflict, thus making the outbreak of war more likely rather than preventing it.

From 2008 at the latest, Germany's foreign and security policy was faced with an increasingly aggressive and expansionist rhetoric and policy pursued by the Russian leadership. At the NATO summit in Bucharest in early April 2008, shortly before the end of his term as President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin gave a speech in which he denied Ukraine's right to exist, stating that one third of the Ukrainian population were ethnic Russians and that Crimea was Russian territory.² This speech was, even then, interpreted as an announcement of an upcoming war on Ukraine. In mid-April of the same year, Russia placed its relations with the Abkhaz separatists on a sound legal footing and, in the following months, paved the way for a short war, provoking the Georgian government so that it commenced hostilities in the summer of the same year. Also in that year, at the NATO summit in Bucharest, Ukraine was given a prospect of accession to the Alliance.³ However, the process subsequently stalled, not least due to Germany's objections to Ukraine becoming a member of NATO. In 2014, Russia conquered Crimea and attacked the areas of Donetsk and Luhansk. Since then, a regional

² UNIAN 2008.

³ NATO 2008.

war between Russia and Ukraine has been raging in that region. After the annexation of Crimea, Germany and France unsuccessfully tried to combine elements of a cease-fire and a peace treaty in the ‘Minsk agreements’.⁴ Peace was not achieved – neither by these agreements nor by the fairly weak sanctions imposed on Russia in the following years. These sanctions did not prevent Germany from launching the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project with Russia just one year after the annexation. The decision has had a lasting negative impact on Germany’s relations with Ukraine and with many of its NATO partners in recent years – all in the name of a ‘multilateral’ foreign policy.⁵ Since then, Germany has taken a very reserved stance not only towards the possibility of Ukraine becoming a member of NATO or the EU but also towards most forms of cooperation and any kind of criticism of the pipeline project. Unlike the United States, Germany did not supply weapons even when the deployment of Russian forces at Ukraine’s borders had become obvious in 2021, and to this day, the German government has been more reluctant than many of its NATO partners to support the country with weapons and equipment. For a long time, Germany was not supportive of efforts taken particularly by the United States and NATO partners in Eastern Europe to deter a renewed Russian attack against Ukraine. As a result, there was a pronounced degree of heterogeneity and inconsistency of positions within NATO over issues regarding Ukraine for many years. Consequently, Germany did not contribute to reducing the probability of an attack; it primarily pursued its own economic interests.

In Germany, Russia’s increasingly aggressive actions were largely ignored, even though the expansionist intentions of the Russian leadership were well known and its propaganda rhetoric was quite obvious.⁶

Legitimate warnings and tangible experiences of Western and Eastern European partners were brushed aside as being unjustified. In this context, German policymakers and industry leaders coined the narrative that the former confrontation with the Eastern Bloc had been overcome and special historical ties were now being maintained with the East. Actually, Germany played a major role in making the Western community take a more indifferent stance towards Ukraine than towards its larger neighbour Russia.

The fact that Western-oriented Ukraine could not count on clear support is likely to have contributed to Russia’s escalation of the situation in the European periphery. The degree of determination that Europe, the West and, above all, Germany will be able and

⁴ Handelsblatt online 2015. Combining the usual ceasefire-type agreements such as a cease-fire, the withdrawal of weapons and the exchange of prisoners with peace treaty-type agreements on border controls, local elections and constitutional reforms in an interstate treaty is unfortunate, because agreements with so widely diverging timelines as constitutional reforms on the one hand and troop withdrawals on the other cannot be implemented on a quid pro quo basis and are not equally binding. Moreover, a lack of willingness to comply with the long-term commitments would undermine the willingness to fulfil the short-term commitments and vice versa. Consequently, the design of the Minsk agreements was faulty from the outset. The ‘Steinmeier formula,’ which sought to combine the different timelines of local elections in the Donbas region with the adoption of new regional autonomy statutes (provisional entry into force of the special status law, local elections held in the Russian-controlled territories, evaluation of the fairness of these elections by international observers, final entry into force of the special status law), has never been accepted by Russia or Ukraine as a solution to the fundamental faults in the construction of the treaty, and until today, Ukraine has considered it to be part of a deception manoeuvre.

⁵ Cf. Energie Vision.

⁶ Schmid 2016.

willing to show from now on will be one of the deciding factors as regards the further developments in Ukraine and in Europe as a whole.

There were a number of social and cultural indicators that should have alerted German policymakers: the changing structure of the Russian public towards a monopoly of opinion held by the government, combined with the expansionist propaganda for Great Russia and partly for a pan-Slavic entity also aimed at the Balkans; the fact that large parts of Russia's gross national product had been put into armaments efforts; Russia's openly hostile propaganda and activities against Ukraine and, last but not least, the lack of sustainable development of Russia's society and economy. As a result, it should have been possible for Germany's decision-makers in foreign and security policy to recognise these signs of Russia's imminent war of aggression against Ukraine at an earlier point in time.

Russia's expansionism had been evident since the Second Chechen War, if not before, and in the time leading up to Russia's intervention in Syria. Even clear violations of intergovernmental agreements and declarations of intent, such as the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, according to which Russia committed itself to guaranteeing Ukraine's territorial integrity while Ukraine committed itself to eliminating all nuclear weapons on its territory⁷, did not lead to any real changes in Germany's foreign, security and economic policy towards Russia or to any painful consequences for Russia's breaches of law, and did not cause Germany to adopt a more considerate policy towards its partners in NATO and the EU. This vacillating policy followed by Germany⁸ led Russia to believe that, in the light of the experiences of 2008 and 2014, it would not have to fear any strong reactions from the West, and certainly not from Germany, if it were to invade foreign territory again.

One thing has become clear: Germany's 'multilateral' foreign policy with but little consideration for its partners in Central Eastern Europe, combined with the refusal to deliver arms to Ukraine in the run-up to the war, the economic cooperation between Germany and Russia, and Germany's ambivalence towards Ukraine, by means of which Germany hoped to get access to Russia and maybe achieve a pacifying effect ('change through trade'), were in fact no suitable means to bring about the desired pacifying result.

Thesis No. 3: The greatest barrier to adapting to a changing environment (organisational learning) is the inability to 'unlearn'. The Bundeswehr's (and society's) continuous contemplation about self-image, traditions, mindsets and regulations, i.e. the Bundeswehr's entire organisational memory, has not only been an obstacle to the promotion of what is strategically important – it actually made us blind to it.

The armed forces, which have been increasingly marginalized in social discourse in recent years, have failed to participate actively and objectively in the discussion of

⁷ UN 1994.

⁸ According to the protocol of the Bucharest NATO Summit, Ukraine was to be invited to join NATO, but Germany was one of the countries that slowed down this development considerably. The sanctions imposed on Russia remained very limited and Germany even intensified its energy cooperation with Russia despite the war of 2014.

strategic issues. It seems that they have resigned to their existence at the margins of public perception and become internally focused on the development of their bureaucratic system and its rules and regulations (procurement and contract law). Consequently, even in the last weeks the formal and legal aspects alluded to here have still clearly affected discussions for instance about what weapons and materiel could be delivered to Ukraine, what guarantees could be given for the use of this materiel, which lists and forms would be relevant in this context or which regulations would be applicable to stockpiling and storage times etc. In the current situation, it is obviously still difficult for the Bundeswehr as an organisation (and probably also for German society as a whole) to adapt to the often-mentioned *Zeitenwende*, the watershed moment declared by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, in terms of orientation, speech, thinking and organisation. To this end, society, the military and their way of communicating with each other will probably have to undergo profound changes. And this certainly also means cutting back the military bureaucracy that was built up in peacetime to a more functional level and practicing organisational unlearning in the Bundeswehr in order to be able to shape the *Zeitenwende* in a way that is tailored to current requirements.

The Federal Republic of Germany, its society and its government, should listen to their own military experts and trust their judgements. The armed forces, on the other hand, should do what has been internally demanded for a long time – they should open up to the public and let go of their hesitant, formalistic approach and fear of causing offence. Armed forces who see themselves committed to leadership development and civic education (*Innere Führung*) and to mission command (*Auftragstaktik*) should also be able to stand their ground as actors in the political system and the media. In this context, it is really important to discard inhibitions and acquire new communication skills.

Thesis No. 4: On both sides, the war is fought not only with regular and particularly professional military personnel, but also with conscripts and, as regards Ukraine, with volunteers and civilian defence forces as a kind of people’s war. We should think about total defence and, to this end, acquire cultural knowledge about the world, potential actors and risks/threats.

The phenomenon of a popular uprising was already described by Clausewitz, who addressed the matter after the Prussian Army had suffered a crushing defeat against the army of Napoleon. For Clausewitz, giving arms to the people was a specific form of defensive war.⁹ In the Russian war against Ukraine, the Ukrainian defenders have also taken up arms, rising up against a foreign invader and trying to compensate for the inferiority of their regular military forces in terms of staffing and equipment. They are facing the numerically and technically superior army of a country intent on submitting them. As in the case of the Napoleonic Wars, this also involves dangers of unconstrained violence and atrocities.

As for the Ukrainian defenders, a large majority of the population is ready to offer resistance and fight the invaders. The imposition of martial law and the fact that men under the age of 60 are not allowed to leave the country, combined with the lessons

⁹ Clausewitz 1980 [1832]: Book VI, Chapter 26; Müller 2021: Chapter 10.

people have learned from the war in the eastern part of the country in the past eight years, have had a catalyst effect on the development towards ‘total defence’.

The beginning of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was followed by the policy statement delivered by Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz on 27 February 2022, in which he announced an increase in Germany’s military budget and the introduction of a debt volume of 100 billion euros to close existing investment gaps in the Bundeswehr. This along with a noticeably changed perception of the threat posed by Russia is likely to have increased general awareness of the importance of defence in large parts of German society, too. The example of Ukraine’s defence against the Russian attack should be taken as an opportunity to think about the benefits of total defence, i.e. area defence, a form of defence linking both civilian and military actors, but also about those aspects inherent in such an approach that would likely cause the conflict to escalate.¹⁰

Moreover, the conflict between Ukraine and Russia and the way in which the war between the two is developing shows that it would be useful for the Bundeswehr to gain more knowledge about the cultures, attitudes, views and situation in other countries of the world, especially in Eastern Europe. At the beginning of the war, [our] defence experts obviously did not have a correct idea either of the problems of the Russian Army or the will and ability of Ukraine’s society and Army to successfully defend their country. It is precisely the apparent nonchalance with which the Central European perspective is often projected onto other cultures, systems and forms of behaviour that entails a great danger of misperceptions and wrong judgements. Cultures, languages and literatures of the world should play a greater role in the training of officers, too. In a world of global conflicts, one professorship for Eastern European history will hardly suffice to increase the Bundeswehr’s capabilities in the fields of regional history and cultural awareness. Officers should equally have the opportunity to study and research Arab, Asian, African and South American cultures, languages, systems and developments in a competent manner. It would be a small investment in our security in the world compared with the efforts that are being made in the fields of business and technology.

Thesis No. 5: The unity engendered by the war in the actions of the European countries is remarkable. Despite the Strategic Compass, however, there has been no discernible increase in Europe’s and the EU’s capacity to act. European (security) policy continues to be based on coordinating the individual states’ interests and actions in order to explore a possible divergence of interests and to achieve convergence of actions. Leadership in Europe and through the EU still remains dependent on this.

The degree of unity of ‘the West’, and particularly of Europe, varied considerably during the build-up to the invasion. For quite a long time, Russia apparently assessed it to be low or at least something that would not become a reality in the medium term. Since Russia’s attack, this unity and solidarity have grown enormously and at a very high speed. This is completely different from what happened after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Now, the EU has appeared on the scene as a visible actor – with the European Commission taking action and the EU becoming an organiser and broker of individual

¹⁰ Spannocchi/Brossollet 1977; Afheldt 1976.

national support to Ukraine. This certainly surprised Putin, too. Europe's unified front against the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine can so far be interpreted as one of Putin's greatest miscalculations prior to the war.

As regards a coherent security and defence policy of the EU, however, the closing of ranks among the Europeans vis-à-vis the Russian aggressor was the result of extrinsic rather than intrinsic motives. This has become evident in the European struggle for further sanctions on coal, oil and gas imports to Europe and in the discussion on how Europe should deal with the suspension of gas supplies to Poland and Bulgaria. Moreover, sanctions always carry the risk of being bypassed. There have been indications recently that this might be happening, even in EU member states. At this stage of the war, which Ukraine has fought for a longer time and more successfully than many had expected, differences in the positions of the individual EU member states are once again becoming increasingly apparent. Against this background, Europe's Strategic Compass appears to be a declaration of intent from the member states rather than a political programme aimed at strengthening the common security and defence policy. However, given the intergovernmental nature of the Strategic Compass, there is reason for concern that if the external pressure (which has been put on the EU on a regular basis by continued exceptional circumstances) is reduced, Europe's united front could crumble in the medium term – which Putin could eventually benefit from. Europe's politicians should avoid such a situation vis-à-vis Putin and keep this risk in mind in order to ensure that this potential weakness cannot be exploited. The aggressor himself has been testing Europe again and again by selectively suspending gas supplies to certain EU member states.

Thesis No. 6: The course of the war so far has proven the decisive role of a distributed and lateral approach to knowledge mobilisation and exploitation that goes beyond the armed forces and includes other actors as well. A static and monolithic understanding of leadership is called into question by forms of multipolar opinion formation and open information policy.

The course of the war so far has proven the decisive role of a distributed and lateral approach to knowledge mobilisation that does not only take place along hierarchical lines but goes beyond the armed forces to include other actors and systems. Examples of this are the Ukrainian government calling on its own population to produce Molotov cocktails and use them for defence purposes¹¹ or the activities of the Anonymous hacker group, which according to Twitter is officially at war with the Russian government and has carried out cyber attacks, for example, against the Russian Ministry of Defence.¹² The drone fans who founded the Aerozvidka group to support the Army and especially the artillery with data are another example of lateral knowledge mobilization; the group has even been referred to as a 'war startup'.¹³ In many such cases, it is the internet that provides opportunities for mobilisation, networking, coordination and the transfer of knowledge. In this context, the provision of information is not subject to state control.

¹¹ Euronews 2022.

¹² Milmo 2022.

¹³ Tucker 2015.

Even though self-organised attacks on and defensive actions against Russian armed forces and/or the Russian state have provoked discussions about whether the actors involved are legally entitled to combatant status, not all of them are under direct command of the Ukrainian military. Particularly Anonymous, which by self-definition is not an individual or identifiable actor, cannot be steered nor can its actions be coordinated by the Ukrainian government. Nevertheless, this actor is able to achieve effects that can be in line with the Ukrainian government's objectives, at least in the information environment.

The phenomena that can be observed in Ukraine are putting the hierarchical understanding of the command and control of armed forces, which is based on clearly defined and institutionalised structures, to the test. There is a high risk in cooperating with actors who are under nobody's direct command, who cannot be considered in the planning process, whose effects cannot be controlled and who pursue objectives of which the armed forces can only hope that they are in line with their own. Nevertheless, in the eyes of the Ukrainian government the benefits of this cooperation seem to outweigh the risks, and so it is navigating this balancing act.

One conclusion to be drawn for the Bundeswehr is that now is the time to embark on a discussion of how to deal with forms of multipolar opinion formation and open information policy and to establish best practices. Aside from an evaluation of Ukraine's course of action, one possible approach is to explore administrative assistance operations with regard to cooperation relations with the population and civilian organisations. Moreover, the Bundeswehr should examine the command and control structures of actors involved in insurgencies, since they also usually rely on lateral knowledge mobilisation and on the internet and do not always have a hierarchical command and control structure.

The Bundeswehr should also develop ways to communicate strategic objectives so that independent actors can act in accordance with these goals. However, it has to be borne in mind that communication that is too open may jeopardise the achievement of these objectives, particularly at the tactical and operational level.

Thesis No. 7: Russia has lost the war strategically. But the economic consequences of the war will have to be borne to a large extent by the people in Europe.

Russian President Putin's declared intention was to prevent Ukraine's accession to NATO, to bring about a change of regime ('denazification') and to this end seize the capital Kyiv, to 'demilitarise' Ukraine and to establish a land bridge between the Donbas region and Crimea. According to the original plan for the invasion, the Russian troops should even have been welcomed as liberators, they should have seized Kyiv quickly and presented the world with a new order after no more than two days. In fact, this triumph was announced in a news article wrongly published by RIA Novosti on 26 February 2022.¹⁴

Ukraine has been seeking to join NATO since 2008 (NATO summit in Bucharest), but influential NATO member states, among them Germany, opposed this. Consequently, Ukraine's accession to the alliance seems to have been put on hold for quite

¹⁴ See above Fn. 1.

some time, although the Ukrainian constitution explicitly provides for an accession to NATO. Nevertheless, Russia will never be able to claim that its war has been a strategic obstacle to the accession and Ukraine's general integration into the West. On the contrary, there were other factors that had a far more significant impact: the decision taken at the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008 – and the fact that NATO adhered to it even after 2014, which meant that, despite the threat Ukraine was facing, it could not accede to NATO – as well as the fact that Ukraine was not granted membership in the EU. Russia will hardly be able to achieve a regime change in Ukraine. In this respect, Russia will by all accounts suffer a strategic defeat, since such a regime change seems now even more unrealistic than it did before the beginning of the war. Moreover, the attack on Kyiv, which was to bring about this change of regime, failed and had to be aborted, as Russia was forced to admit.¹⁵

However, the prerequisites of the Russian strategy, i.e. the alleged illegitimacy of the government in Kyiv and Russia's assumptions regarding the fundamental discord in the 'collective West' and the insufficient capabilities of the Ukrainian army, have turned out to be wrong. In this respect, Russia is no longer able to achieve its key strategic goals (swiftly taking Kyiv and replacing the government) and has thus lost the war strategically.

For propaganda reasons, Putin's Russia will try to make any result of the war look like a victory; and it will always present itself, also internationally, as the liberator of Russian minorities in the Donbas and Luhansk regions.

Whatever happens, and however the war will end in Ukraine – Russia, with its weak economy, will hardly be able to repair the damage caused by the war and rebuild Ukraine. Nonetheless, from an economic and security perspective, it should be in Europe's interest to significantly promote this reconstruction effort and, once the country has been rebuilt, to firmly integrate Ukraine into the international system of value creation, possibly by launching an initiative similar to the US Marshall Plan, which helped reconstruct Europe's economy after World War II. It should also be in Europe's interest to bring Ukraine much closer to the EU and to prevent China's potential influence from becoming too strong.

Thesis No. 8 A post-war order without Putin is hard to imagine. However, thinking about this now is a key strategic task.

'The West' must think about how to deal with Russia in the medium future. Possible options range from fantastic scenarios of the 'tyrant' being murdered and a restitution of the security architecture in Eastern Europe in some way or other to scenarios that are based on Vladimir Putin or a similar successor emerging from his system continuing to rule Russia in an authoritarian manner. Modifications of the aforementioned scenarios might also be an option.

Media coverage during the past weeks has focused on the war in a personalised manner. Likewise, Federal Chancellor Scholz has referred to the war as 'Putin's war' and US President Biden has called Putin a 'war criminal'. It may be helpful to move away from such personifications in order to be able to develop theoretical concepts for a possible Russian future with sufficient openness and to outline a strategy for how to

¹⁵ Watling/Reynolds 2022.

deal with Russia and its society in times to come. The war is not a project of President Putin alone, but also of the military and the security apparatus, of the party ‘United Russia’ (Единая Россия) that supports Putin, and of the publishers and journalists who back him.

One important task will be to identify gateways and communication channels to access these very groups and the Russian elites. After all, the Russian power apparatus being overthrown in a revolution is a rather unlikely scenario, and potential future dialogue partners will have to be recruited primarily from this apparatus. Much will depend on the extent to which those actors themselves will want to communicate with Europe and the United States in the future. Eventually, the question of how an authoritarian and only partially innovative Russia will deal with the task of its own economic and military reconstruction will be decisive for any new cooperation projects. However, any future relations with Russia should – more clearly than those of the past – be governed by the principles of reciprocity, equality, verifiability and plausibility.

Irrespective of how this might be put into practice, i.e. how much cooperation and trade will be considered adequate in the future and what degree of distancing from Russia will be considered allowable or appropriate: In the future, NATO members, Europeans, Germany’s neighbours and Germany should, more often than in the past, take joint decisions on these matters. The fact that since 2014 at least, Germany, in particular, has consistently opposed the declared interests of its neighbours and allies for the sake of its ‘multilateral’ foreign policy has not only weakened NATO, it has made the situation of these neighbours precarious and has been an additional threat to Ukraine, which has received very little support in its protracted war with Russia since 2014. Until the start of the war in February 2022, Germany gave precedence to its own economic interests over the interests, insights and experiences of alliance partners in the immediate vicinity of Russia. In the future, Germany should take care to base its relationship with Russia on coordination with its neighbours and alliance partners. What will likely be more important than the question of how much economic cooperation with Russia is appropriate, however, is the matter of how economic cooperation can help to rebuild Ukraine and how Ukraine can become once again a functioning element of the Western value creation system.

Such a common approach taken by NATO and the EU should also be the best remedy against the growing strength of aggressive autocratic systems with a global sense of mission and a declared opposition to the democratic order. Efforts should be made to codify a set of common foreign policy values and to foster the willingness to implement and assert them.

Thesis No. 9 The war has changed the way policymakers and society see the armed forces, who must learn to deal with the fact that they are now interacting with an attentive, benevolent and supportive public.

After the reunification of Germany, the country’s foreign policy was for a long time based on the widely shared axiomatic belief that peace – the establishment and maintenance of a rule-based order as well as the resolution of interstate conflicts – could be ensured by diplomatic means alone. To some extent, the West also used economic power (sanctions) to enforce its own demands, and reserved the use and threat of

military force for cases of humanitarian disaster management and so-called state building. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, the German public has surely realised that this axiom is flawed and simplifies matters. The subordinate role ascribed to the military by a policy committed to upholding that axiom was reflected by the underfunding of the military and the generally low appreciation for the armed forces and their members. The sudden insight into the constitutive character of military security for our national and social security now translates into increasing expenditure, increased interest, greater benevolence and clearer recognition for the military.

In the past, both state and society lacked interest in military matters and in the Bundeswehr and, as a consequence, the Bundeswehr made little effort to develop an ability to somehow satisfy any such interest. With a view to German society, the Bundeswehr understood ‘strategic communication’ as recruitment and advertising. Both externally and internally, the Bundeswehr is neither capable nor willing to engage in dialogue, to justify decisions and enter into debates. Quite the contrary, it is clearly more reclusive and withdrawn into itself today than it used to be in times of conscription. The current situation in Ukraine has sparked a broad media debate on the role and necessity of the Bundeswehr, and it is quite striking that many former and only very few active officers and soldiers have a say in this discussion.

However, the increasing media presence of the Bundeswehr should be seen as an opportunity to become an integral part of society despite the suspension of compulsory military service. To this end, the Bundeswehr and its personnel must be able and willing to engage in debates. The Bundeswehr must learn to listen, to think, to talk, to put forth arguments and to present its views.

Outlook

Germany and the Bundeswehr are facing major changes. It is not only politics, society and the economy that will have to develop a great ability and willingness to learn and to adapt themselves. This will bring politics and society in closer contact with military matters and the Bundeswehr and its problems, but also vice versa – in society, politics and in the media, the Bundeswehr will have to communicate more clearly and listen more intensively, while at the same time having to comprehensively rethink, plan and explain issues related to warfare and the prevention of war.

This will require great efforts and a change in the communication culture of the Bundeswehr. Openness must replace the common practice of evading and being wary of political, scientific, economic and cultural discourse. Courage, the spirit of innovation and the freedom of thought and speech should replace the safeguarding mechanisms resulting from bureaucracy, which are so widespread in the Bundeswehr.

The Bundeswehr universities could, and should, become the drivers of such a development. They should develop study programmes that focus on the conflict regions of the world of the 21st century in a scientific manner. For instance, these could be African studies, Slavonic and Eastern European studies, South American studies or Asian studies. In research and teaching, they should delve deep into matters such as AI, drones and robotics and place a greater emphasis on studying these technologies in their social, economic, political and historical contexts, in other words: consider them as cultural practices.

This change in the culture of the Bundeswehr, which will be imperative for addressing the foreseeable threats of the next decades, can hardly be achieved without openness and freedom. To put it bluntly, a Bundeswehr that takes an interest in general developments and participates in debates and discussions on matters of peace, security, defence and armament should no longer regard its universities as barracks that are ‘restricted military areas’ separated from society.

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