



Win the peace - not the war!

Declaration by the German *Initiative Lay Down Your Arms* on the anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine

With the invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops on 24 February 2022, the seven-year war of low-intensity in the Donbass which according to OSCE caused 14,000 deaths, including 4,000 civilians, two-thirds of these in the breakaway territories - escalated to a new quality of military violence. The Russian invasion was a serious breach of international law and has led to even more deaths, destruction, misery, and war crimes.

Rather than seizing the opportunity for a negotiated settlement (negotiations initially did, in fact, take place up until April 2022), the war was escalated into a "proxy war between Russia and NATO", as even government officials in the USA now openly admit.

At the same time, the UN General Assembly resolution of 2 March, in which 141 countries condemned the invasion, had already called for the immediate settlement of the conflict "through political dialogue, negotiations, mediation and other peaceful means" and demanded "adherence to the Minsk agreements" and explicitly also through the Normandy format "to work constructively towards their full implementation." Despite all this, the call of the world community has been ignored by all parties concerned, albeit they otherwise like to refer to UN resolutions in as much as they concur with their own positions.

The end of illusions

Militarily, Kiev is on the defensive and its general warfare capability is shrinking. As early as November 2022, the head of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff advised for negotiations to commence as he considered a victory by Kiev unrealistic. Recently in Ramstein he repeated this position. But though the politicians and the media cling to the illusion of victory, the situation for Kiev has deteriorated. This is the background to the latest escalation, i.e., the delivery of battle tanks. However, this will merely prolong the conflict. The war cannot be won. Instead, this is but one more step along a slippery slope. Promptly thereafter, the government in Kiev demanded the supply of fighter jets next, and then further, the direct involvement of NATO troops – leading subsequently to possible nuclear escalation? In a nuclear scenario Ukraine would be the first to perish.

According to UN figures, the number of civilian deaths last year was over 7,000, and the losses among soldiers were in the six-digit range. Those who allow the continuation of the shooting rather than negotiating must ask themselves whether they are willing to sacrifice still another 100,000, 200,000 or even more people for delusive war aims. Genuine solidarity with Ukraine means working to stop the killing as soon as possible.

It's geopolitics - stupid!

The crucial factor why the West is playing the military card is that Washington senses an opportunity to thoroughly weaken Moscow by means of a war of attrition. As the global dominance of the USA subsides due to the transformation of the international system, the US is striving to reassert its claim to global leadership - also in its geopolitical rivalry with China. This is essentially in keeping with what the US did already early after the Cold War to try and hinder the emergence of a rival of the same stature as the Soviet Union. Thereby, the most important instrument was NATO's eastward expansion with Ukraine as the "un-sinkable aircraft carrier" on Moscow's doorstep as its crowning achievement.

Concurrently, Ukraine's economic integration into the West was accelerated by way of the EU Association Treaty which had been negotiated from 2007 onwards - and which stipulated Ukraine's decoupling from Russia. Anti-Russian nationalism in Eastern Europe was kindled as an ideological basis. In Ukraine, this escalated in the violent clashes on the Maidan in 2014, and in response to that also in the Donbass, which then duly led to the secession of Crimea and the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Meanwhile, the war has become an amalgam of two conflicts:

- On the one hand, the conflict between Ukraine and Russia is a result of the chaotic disintegration of the Soviet Union which is itself heavily burdened by the contradictory history of the formation of a Ukrainian nation, and on the other hand,
- the long-standing confrontation between the two largest nuclear powers.

This brings into play the dangerous and complex problems of the nuclear power balance (of terror). From Moscow's perspective, the military integration of Ukraine into the West harbours the danger of a decapitation strike against Moscow. Especially since the arms control agreements, from the ABM Treaty under Bush in 2002 to the INF and Open Sky Treaty under Trump which were agreed during the Cold War period have all been terminated. Regardless of its validity, Moscow's perception should therefore be heeded. Such fears cannot be allayed by mere words alone, but require strictly trustworthy measures. However, in December 2021, Washington rejected corresponding steps proposed by Moscow. In addition, the abuse of treaties codified under international law is also one of the West's practices, as shown, among other things, by Merkel's and François Hollande's admission that they only concluded Minsk II to buy time to enable the arming of Kiev.

Against this background, the responsibility for the war - and this is all the more true since we are dealing with a proxy war - cannot be reduced to Russia alone. Be that as it may, the Kremlin's responsibility does not in any way vanish. Nationalist sentiments are also spreading in Russia and the authoritarian state is being further strengthened. But those who look at the long history of escalation only through the lens of simple black-and-white bogeyman images can ignore Washington's - and in its wake the EU's - share of responsibility.

In Bellicose Fever

The political class and the mass media sweep all these interconnections under the carpet. Instead, they have lapsed into a real bellicose fever. Germany is a de facto war party and the German government has become a war government. The German foreign minister in her presumptuous arrogance believed she could "ruin" Russia. In the meantime, her party (The Green Party) has morphed from a peace party into the fiercest warmonger in the Bundestag. When there were some tactical successes on the battlefield in Ukraine, whose strategic importance was exaggerated beyond all measure, the illusion was created that a military victory over Russia was feasible.

Those pleading for a compromise peace are scathed as "subservient pacifists" or "secondary war criminals". A political climate typical of the home front during wartime has emerged asserting massive pressure to conform which many do not dare to oppose. The image of the enemy from without has been joined by an increasing intolerance from within the laager compound. Freedom of speech and freedom of the press are eroding as illustrated by the banning, among others, of "Russia Today" and "Sputnik".

The Economic War - a damp squib

The economic war against Russia which had already begun in 2014 took on historically unprecedented proportions after the Russian invasion. But this has had no effect on the Russian fighting capability. In fact, the Russian economy did shrink by three percent in 2022, however, Ukraine's shrank by thirty percent. It begs the question, how long can Ukraine endure such a war of attrition?

Simultaneously, the sanctions are inducing collateral damage to the global economy. The global South in particular has been hard hit. The sanctions exacerbate hunger and poverty, increase inflation, and provoke costly turbulences in world markets. It is therefore no wonder that the Global South is neither willing to participate in the economic war nor want to isolate Russia. This is not its war.

However, the economic war has negative effects on us as well. The decoupling from Russian natural gas exacerbates the energy crisis which effects socially weaker households and may lead to an exodus of energy-intensive industries from Germany. Armament and militarization are always at the expense of social justice. At the same time with fracking gas from the USA which is up to 40% more harmful to the climate than Russian natural gas, and with the recourse to coal, all CO₂ reduction targets have already landed in the wastebin.

Absolute priority for diplomacy, negotiations and a compromise peace

War absorbs political, emotional, intellectual and material resources that are urgently needed to fight climate change, environmental degradation and poverty. Germany's de facto involvement in the war divides society and especially those sectors that are committed to social progress and socio-ecological transformation.

We advocate that the German government ends its war course forthwith. Germany must start a diplomatic initiative. This is what most of the population is calling for. We need a ceasefire and the start of negotiations embedded in a multilateral framework involving the participation of the UN.

Eventually, there must be a compromise peace that paves the way for a European peace architecture that meets the security interests of Ukraine, of Russia and of all those party to the conflict and which allows for a peaceful future for our continent.