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Peace policy for the world of the 21st century

A discussion paper
of the Initiative
NO TO WARS – PUT DOWN YOUR WEAPONS! *

Contents:

1. Understanding the upheavals in the international system
 - 1.1 The USA remains a superpower
 - 1.2 Superpower China and the new role of the Global South
 - 1.3 Russia's resurgence as a major power
 - 1.4 The EU in the new world order
 - 1.5 The German 'Zeitenwende'
2. The central conflict on the way to a multipolar world order
 - 2.1 Washington wants to continue to dominate the world order
 - 2.2 Nuclear winter instead of global warming?
 - 2.3 New US nuclear weapons against Russia on German soil
 - 2.4 Democracy versus autocracy?
3. Dealing with controversies in the peace movement
 - 3.1 Democracy, human rights and national sovereignty
 - 3.2 Contradictions between peace and human rights?
 - 3.3 Instrumentalisation of human rights provokes corral behaviour
 - 3.4 War, morality and rationality
4. Requirements for peace policy in keeping with the times

* The Initiative '*NO TO WARS – PUT DOWN YOUR WEAPONS!*' is an informal group of about a dozen individuals in Germany, brought together by a concern for security and peace. They come from a diversity of political backgrounds and are well connected to different political currents. Among other things they initiated an anti-war demonstration in Berlin on 3 October 2024, which was attended by over 40,000 people.

Peace policy for the world of the 21st century

The international system is undergoing a radical change of historic importance. The dominance of the USA is coming to an end. There will be no new hegemonic power in the foreseeable future. A multipolar world order is emerging. None of the generations alive today know such a system from their own experience.

The upheaval raises new questions about war and peace. For example, the positioning of the peace movement in the rivalry between the major powers, the risks to stability of a multipolar system, the relationship between a country's domestic conditions and the international system, and the connection between war and peace and the global problems of climate change, poverty and technological changes such as digitalisation and artificial intelligence. We are dealing with an enormous increase in complexity.

The task of peace policy in tune with our epoch is to find answers to the new developments in the world order and to process them strategically.¹ This text aims to stimulate discussion about the changes in the power structure and dynamics of the international system and the consequences of this for peace policy. We do not claim to have covered the topic in all its dimensions. Comments, criticism and disagreement are welcome. It is essential to get the discussion started.

1. Understanding the upheavals in the international system

The central determinant of the structure and dynamics of the international system in the foreseeable future is its transformation into a polycentric system. The transformation is unstoppable. The geopolitical dominance of the USA and its allies is coming to an end. It is leading to the 'de-Westernisation' of the international balance of power. This is the real 'Zeitenwende'². A plurality of geopolitical centres of power emerges, albeit with varying degrees of importance.

1.1. The USA remains a superpower

The USA remains a superpower. It continues to hold a leading position in all key power resources - military, economic potential, technology, political influence and soft power. With its military alliances and over 800 foreign military bases, its corporations, the dollar as an international currency, its secret services, media and cultural industry, it maintains a unique presence around the world. NATO is a particularly important instrument in terms of power politics. It was founded by the USA and is under its leadership. No issue of importance can be decided upon in NATO against Washington's will. Washington is also currently forming a system of military alliances against China in the Indo-Pacific.

The availability of the entire spectrum of power resources gives Washington a variety of options for action that no other country has, and constitutes an asymmetry in all foreign relations - with friend and foe alike. This also means that the USA can assert its interests more than anyone else through power resources below the military threshold, including through technological and economic sanctions and many forms of political pressure. Economic sanctions can also have devastating and deadly effects. According to UN figures, for example, at least half a million people died as a result of the embargo

¹ Contributors to the text were: Prof. Michael Brie (former director of the Centre for social analysis in the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation), Prof. Erhard Crome (Director *Welt Trends*-Institute for international relations), Prof. em. Frank Deppe (political scientist), Peter Wahl (expert on international relations & political economy). The final responsibility lies exclusively with the *Initiative Never again War*.

² Zeitenwende = Turning point of history. The German expression has been introduced by chancellor Scholz to describe the turn towards bellicism and the militarisation of Germany. See chapter 1.5. (remark by the translator).

against Iraq between 1990 and 2003.³ Developing countries are particularly vulnerable. In addition to their favourite enemies China, Russia, Iran, Cuba, Nicaragua, North Korea and Venezuela, around 15 low-income countries are also on Washington's sanctions list.⁴ The arrogance of power becomes particularly clear when sanctions are imposed extraterritorially, i.e. against third parties who do not want to submit to Washington. Even the German government considers this to be contrary to international law - at least it did until *Nord Stream II* was blown up.

The extraordinary amount of power also shapes the US elites mentality. Just as it is part of the nature of hegemony that those who succumb to its influence see it as normal and quasi-natural, the claim to global leadership is self understood by the political class in Washington. Any questioning is perceived as a threat. For example, former President Obama says: '*America must always lead on the world stage ... I believe in American exceptionalism with every fibre of my being*'.⁵

The availability of power resources constitutes the balance of power in the international system and explains - not exclusively, but to a large extent - a country's foreign policy.

1.2. Superpower China and the new role of the Global South

At the centre of the upheavals is the rapid rise of countries in the Global South, first and foremost China. Its breathtaking development from a developing country to a superpower within two generations is an economic, political and psychological provocation to Western thinking of superiority in general and the USA's claim to global dominance in particular.

In terms of power resources, China is hot on the USA's heels. Measured in *purchasing power parity*⁶, the Chinese economy has already overtaken the US, even if it has only reached the level of countries such as Serbia or Bulgaria in terms of *per capita income*.⁷ In military and technological terms, China is now a superpower and, with its unprecedented development successes, has considerable soft power, particularly in the Global South.

India, now the most populous country in the world, already has the third largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity. The Indian leadership also openly formulates its claim to great power status. However, there is still a big gap between aspiration and reality, and it will probably take some time before the country moves up into the first rank of world powers.

China and India symbolise the new political significance of the Global South, where countries such as Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa, Saudi Arabia and NATO member Turkey are also attempting to play a more independent geopolitical role. Far more than the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War 1.0. the Global South has become a power-factor today. The failure of the West to win it over to its side in the Ukraine war is one indicator out of many. Projects such as the *BRICS* or the *Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)* want "*a multipolar, equitable and democratic world order, based on international law, equality, mutual respect, cooperation, coordinated action and collective decision-making of all States*".⁸

The aim is therefore not to replace one hegemon with another, but to question the principle of hegemony as such.

In other words, the self-organisation of the South is objectively directed first and foremost against the

³ UN Economic and Social Council (2000): *The adverse consequences of economic sanctions on the enjoyment of human rights*. E/CN.4/Sub.2/2000/33 21 June 2000

⁴ The Washington Post, 25.7.2024: How four U.S. Presidents Unleashed Economic Warfare across the Globe. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/interactive/2024/us-sanction-countries-work/>

⁵ Speech in Westpoint, 28.05.2014. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/05/28/remarks-president-united-states-military-academy-commencement-ceremony>

⁶ The gross domestic product (GDP) is quoted by the IMF, World Bank and other institutions in both exchange rate and purchasing power parity (PPP). As the production costs for all goods and services produced domestically can be considerable due to differences in labor costs, access to raw materials, economies of scale due to the domestic market, etc., and therefore have a corresponding impact on economic performance, the calculation based on exchange rate parities often distorts the picture. For example, a change in the exchange rate of a currency can result in a higher or lower GDP overnight, even though nothing has changed in the real economy.

⁷ IMF, data. <https://data.imf.org/?sk=388dfa60-1d26-4ade-b505-a05a558d9a42>

⁸ BRICS summit 2010, final declaration.

dominance of the US and its followers. That is what actually unites them. Otherwise, the Global South is not a homogeneous interest group. In some cases, there have even been armed conflicts between them, for example between China and India, between Pakistan and India, or Armenia and Azerbaijan.

1.3. The renaissance of Russia as a major power

After its defeat in the Cold War 1.0, Russia was also finished as a world power. The attempts to move closer to the West after 1991 - even at the beginning of the Putin era - without simultaneously subordinating itself to US hegemony failed.

The decisive role here was played by the fact that the USA blocked the development of a closer alliance between the EU or key member states and Russia from the outset. The most important instrument here was NATO's eastward expansion. Although it was a breach of the principle of equal and undivided security, anchored in many international treaties, it corresponds to an essential element of Washington's foreign policy doctrine: *"to prevent the emergence of a hegemon in Eurasia"*⁹ at all costs.

In the 2000s, there was not only an internal consolidation, but the modernisation of Russia's nuclear forces also marked the beginning of its renaissance as major power. The country has superpower status in the strategic nuclear weapons sector. This means that there is a strategic parity (of terror) with the US. Even in the event of a nuclear first strike by the USA, Moscow would still be able to reduce the USA to rubble with its second-strike-capability.

This is difficult for the US elites to stomach. There are therefore repeated discussions about a decapitation strike that could eliminate the Russian second-strike capability. The eastward expansion of NATO and in particular the potential inclusion of Ukraine is perceived by Moscow as an opportunity by NATO to do so. As a threat scenario, this is part of the Russian military doctrine. Even in the absence of war, the ability to decapitate would be a powerful means of exerting pressure of imposing Washington's will on Moscow. This is what Putin meant in his speech justifying the invasion of Ukraine: *"Tomahawk cruise missiles would require less than 35 minutes to reach Moscow, 7 to 8 minutes for ballistic missiles from the Kharkov region and 4 to 5 minutes for hypersonic missiles. This is like having the knife at your throat."*¹⁰

As for all other power resources, starting with the conventional military, Russia is far inferior to the USA. However, this should not lead to the underestimation expressed in Helmut Schmidt's phrase of *"Upper Volta with nuclear missiles"*. In terms of purchasing power parity, Russian capitalism is in sixth place in the IMF's global ranking, behind Japan and Germany, and well ahead of the UK (9th place) and France (10th place). It is significant that the ranking according to PPP is rarely mentioned in the major media. But even according to exchange rate parity, Russia still occupies 11th place (2023) - and the trend is rising.

The wrong estimations of the impact of sanctions is another typical example of the notorious underestimation of Russia. The German Foreign Minister's bold announcement that she wanted the country *"to be ruined"* turned out to be an arrogant illusion.

In the meantime, there has been a far-reaching economic decoupling from the West. Moscow has made turning away from the West the strategic goal of its foreign policy.¹¹ It began before the Ukraine war and has accelerated enormously since 2022.

A strategic alliance has emerged with China on the basis of complementary interests. Russia benefits from China's superior economic power and technological know-how. Conversely, in its confrontation with the USA, Beijing is interested in having a strategic partner, a domestically stable neighbour and supplier of important raw materials along the 4,000 km common border.

⁹ Congressional Research Service. U.S. Role in the World: Background and Issues for Congress. Updated January 19, 2021 <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R44891>.

¹⁰ Putin, speech to the nation; 21.2.2022. <https://www.anti-spiegel.ru/2022/praesident-putins-komplette-rede-an-die-nation-im-wortlaut/> (in German)

¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2023). The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation. https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/

1.4. The EU in the new world order

In 1900, Europe accounted for almost a quarter of the world's population. At present, the EU still accounts for 5.5%, which will fall to 4.5% by 2050. The centre of gravity of the global economy has already shifted from the transatlantic region to East Asia. The EU's share of global GDP is forecast to shrink from the current 14% to 9% by 2050. In 1980 it was still over 20%.¹²

In a multipolar world order, the EU wants to be an independent pole, on an equal footing with the USA and China. To this end, all policy areas are to be placed at the disposal of geopolitical ambitions: Climate, energy and raw materials, economy, technology, media, etc. In the words of the Strategic Compass, this means *“utilising the full range of EU policies and their levers as instruments of power.”*¹³ Enlargement policy is also being used to acquire geopolitical power.

In the case of the EU, however, the difference between ambition and real capacities is particularly great. It is not a state, but a hybrid of an alliance of states and supranational elements of statehood. With this complicated construction, it has significantly less capacity to act than a classic state. Weak growth and losses in competitiveness and cutting-edge technologies are putting the EU under enormous pressure, while internal contradictions and centrifugal tendencies are increasing, as the 2024 elections to the EU Parliament showed.

In addition, NATO sets tight limits on the EU's geopolitical independence. This leads to subordination to the USA in the essentials of international politics.

Some member states, especially in the East, want this to happen. They trust the US more than the EU's leading powers France and Germany. Even with Trump, this subordination to the USA would not fundamentally change. Above all, he wants NATO Europe to contribute more to the costs of securing US hegemony and shift the burden of the war in Ukraine. As long as NATO exists, the EU's desire for autonomous world power status is likely to remain unfulfilled.

Against this backdrop, the controversy over *‘strategic autonomy’* and *‘transatlantism’* is an expression of fears of decline: *“The coming decades will fundamentally challenge this continent ... I fear we will remain a dwarf in terms of foreign policy if we do not get out of unanimity,”* says Manfred Weber, leader of the Conservative EPP group in the European Parliament (EP).¹⁴ After 500 years of colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism in Europe, this is a serious affront to the self-esteem of the European elites and their sense of superiority. As early as 2016, a resolution of the EU Parliament stated *“that the EU must strengthen its security and defense capabilities, as it can only use its full potential as a world power if it combines its unique ‘soft power’ with ‘hard power’ as part of a comprehensive EU approach”*.¹⁵

Panic about decline shines through in such formulations. It is a strong driver of militarisation and warmongering. Symptomatic of this is the resolution of the new EU Parliament on Ukraine in July 2024, which is imbued with the spirit of militaristic slogans of perseverance, whereas the requirement in international law for diplomacy and negotiations does not appear.¹⁶ The nomination of *Kaja Kallas*, a fanatical Russophobe, as High Representative for Foreign Affairs also fits in the picture.

1.5. The German *‘Zeitenwende’*

Fears of decline are also driving the German ruling elite. Federal President Steinmeier declared *‘self-assertion’* to be the task of our time, because *“rough, tougher years”* were coming.¹⁷

Germany is indeed experiencing a downward trend in various areas. The economy is facing far-reaching structural adjustments for which it is not certain that they will succeed. Decarbonisation, in itself sensible and necessary, but without a coherent concept, the decoupling from Russian natural gas and thus from a competitive advantage that has lasted for decades, China's competitive strength, lagging

¹² Price Waterhouse Cooper (2017): The long view: how will the global economic order change by 2050. London

¹³ Rat der Europäischen Union (2022): *Ein Strategischer Kompass für Sicherheit und Verteidigung*. p. 7

¹⁴ Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung. 2.6.2024; p. 2.

¹⁵ European Parliament. 14.12.2016. P8_TA-PROV(20216)0503

¹⁶ European Parliament. 17.07.2024 (2024/2721(RSP))

¹⁷ Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. 24.05.2024. p. 1

behind in digitalisation, signs of infrastructure decay, inflation and falling real wages - all of this threatens the future of the German economic and social system.

However, economic strength has so far been the foundation for Germany's role in the EU and for a certain global standing. As this fundament is beginning to crumble, the military as a power resource is now to be utilised in order to escape the loss of geopolitical significance.

This is not just about military hardware. There is also a mental rearmament with the mothballing of the old enemy image of the danger from the East and with blatant historical distortion. The public and other major media outlets have become state-supporting echo chambers of the new bellicosity.

At the same time, this implicitly recognises that the EU is inadequate as a military factor. This is why the nation-state card is now being played in parallel. This also has the advantage of gaining weight vis-à-vis France in the rivalry for leadership in the EU.

However, with a nuclear bomb and a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, Paris has a trump card that is unattainable for Berlin. Macron is trying to capitalise on this by offering the force de frappe as a replacement for the US nuclear presence. This would offer a degree of strategic autonomy, but would also establish French hegemony in the EU. Neither Berlin nor the member states in the east want this. They prefer the transatlantic option.

As a result, the EU's centre of gravity in terms of power politics is shifting from Western Europe to the East. Poland and the Baltic states see themselves as frontline states and derive their claim to greater influence from this. Germany's position in the EU has been strengthened thanks to its central geographical position, its strong economic presence in the eastern member states and its epochal "*Zeitenwende*". while the Franco-German axis is losing importance. A claim to leadership is promptly being made in Berlin, for example by the co-chairman of the SPD, Klingbeil: "*Germany must claim to be a leading power. After almost 80 years of restraint, Germany now has a new role in the international system of coordinates.*"¹⁸ However, this claim to leadership only relates to the EU and does not call into question Germany's subordination to US hegemony.

This will remain the case even after the Ukraine war. Whatever its outcome may be, the confrontation with Russia will remain for a long time and draw a new '*Iron Curtain*' across the continent.

Domestically, '*Zeitenwende*' means that the lower classes will have to bear the costs. There is already a redistribution from the social to the military, while the profits of the armament industry continue to reach new heights.

And - as always in such cases - democracy is one of the losers. Loyalist conformism is demanded. What used to be the *traitor* is now the *Putin apologist* and *lumpenpacifist*, while hero kitsch, the ability to fight and the cult of the warrior are once again becoming en vogue. In addition to the example of the support for Israel, the commitment to NATO and rearmament is now de facto being elevated to '*raison d'état*'. Those who do not join in risk being marginalised from the permitted discourse.

2. The central conflict on the path to a multipolar world order

A multipolar world order is a step towards the pluralisation of international relations and real multilateralism. It expands the participation of rising countries in decisions on the development of the international system. At the same time, it increases the agency of medium-sized and smaller countries. Room for maneuver is created when simultaneous or alternating cooperation with various major powers becomes possible. '*Multi-vector foreign policy*' is the keyword here.

On paper, all of this already exists in the UN Charter, for example in the principle of sovereign equality of all states and the ban on interference in internal affairs. In practice, the power-political functioning of the international system has repeatedly ignored this.

However, the upheaval also harbours considerable risks. Historically, changes to the hegemonic order have often led to war. A Harvard study has analysed 16 such cases in world history. War broke out in

¹⁸ Klingbeil, Lars, Rede zur Zeitenwende. 22.6.2022. S. 5. In: IPG Journal. <https://www.ipg-journal.de/rubriken/aussen-und-sicherheitspolitik/artikel/lars-klingsbeil-rede-zur-zeitenwende->

twelve of them, including the two world wars.¹⁹

But even without war, multipolarity can easily lead to an increase in competition, tensions, instability and unpredictability. The core problem here is that the established hegemonic power is not prepared to give up its supremacy and to peacefully adapt to the new order.

Unlike previous upheavals of this kind, what is new is that the geopolitical change coincides with risks unique in human history due to climate and other environmental problems, the solution to which actually requires global cooperation.

2.1. Washington wants to continue to dominate the world order

The USA is not prepared to give up its dominance. The official security strategy of the Biden administration states: *“There is no country better suited to lead with strength and resolve than the United States of America”*.²⁰ This is not just a claim; Washington attempts to put it into practice on a daily basis. And not just since today. As early as 1992, it was declared that a rival like the Soviet Union would never emerge again: *“Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere,”*²¹ it was stated in the so-called Wolfowitz Doctrine. And even before the Ukraine war, the main enemies were explicitly marked in numerous official documents: *“China and Russia are the most important threats to an era of peace and prosperity in the world”* states the US Navy's 2020 military doctrine, for example.²²

It is therefore impossible to understand the international system without the actions of its most powerful actor. This has nothing to do with anti-Americanism.

If China and Russia are declared to be the main enemies, it is not surprising that they in turn are being pushed to form camps, even though China in particular is trying to avoid a bloc formation through pluralistic networks. The massive sanctions against China, particularly in the high-tech sector, are intended to prevent it from catching up with or even overtaking the US. Tensions over Taiwan are escalating. At the same time, the US is utilising its potential to form camps in the Indo-Pacific with Japan, Australia, South Korea and the Philippines. India should also be drawn into the US camp - even if the prospects for this are rather slim.

The war in Ukraine has been transformed into a proxy war against Russia. The declared aim of the war is to weaken Russia as much as possible, both economically and militarily, combined with the hope of regime change in Moscow. However, the continuation of this war prevents the US from fully focusing on the fight against China.

In order to assert its claim to hegemony over Beijing and Moscow, Washington primarily resorts to the use of its military, technological and economic instruments of power, while a reconciliation of interests through political conflict resolution, negotiations and diplomacy remains out of question.

2.2. Nuclear winter instead of global warming?

For the first time in human history, the nuclear bomb is a weapon with which the species homo sapiens can be wiped out. It is true that under the shock of the Cuban Missile Crisis there were arms control treaties which, by way of the balance of terror, enabled a certain degree of stability and détente. However, we are now back in a highly dangerous situation: the treaties have been cancelled, starting as early as 2001 with the cancellation of the ABM Treaty by the Bush administration, and there are new, completely unregulated technologies whose military application creates incalculable risks, including the outbreak of war due to technical errors.

The confrontation is no longer only taking place on land, at sea and in the air, but also in space and cyberspace. This further increases mistrust between the parties to the conflict and leads to even more instability. The further the escalation is driven, the more likely it is that control can be lost. The

¹⁹ Allison, Graham. *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* Boston/New York. 2017, p. 42 ff.

²⁰ The White House. National Security Strategy. October 2022.

²¹ New York Times, 7.3.1992. <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/08/world/us-strategy-plan-calls-for-insuring-no-rivals-develop.html>

²² Department of the Navy: *Advantage at Sea. Prevailing with Integrated All-Domain Naval Power.* December 2020.

Ukrainian attacks on the Russian nuclear radar for the early detection of approaching nuclear weapons point to this risk.

If negotiations not take place soon, at least on arms control, the world could face a nuclear winter instead of global warming.

The hot wars in Ukraine and the Middle East are already absorbing huge material and political resources and capturing the public's attention. Consequently the climate and environmental crises are taking a back seat.

The war in Ukraine caused CO₂ emissions of around 120 million tons in the twelve months of 2023, which is roughly equivalent to the emissions of a country like Belgium.²³ Globally, greenhouse gas emissions from the military are estimated at at least 1,644 and up to 3,484 million tons per year. That is 3.3 to 7.0 percent of global emissions.²⁴ And that is only for current military operations, excluding the current wars. That is roughly the emissions of a country like Russia or India. The military burdens were deliberately not included in the figures underlying the 1997 *Kyoto Protocol* and the 2015 *Paris Agreement*.

2.3. New US nuclear weapons against Russia on German soil

In view of the many escalations, the US decision to station Tomahawk cruise missiles, SM-6 medium-range missiles and the Dark Eagle hypersonic weapon on German soil from 2026 represents a new level of escalation. Tomahawk and Dark Eagle can be equipped with both conventional and nuclear weapons and can attack targets throughout the European part of Russia, while the warning time is drastically reduced compared to the so-called nuclear sharing fighter bombers deployed in Büchel.

Once again, this is a US measure on the territory of a third country that Moscow cannot respond to symmetrically, e.g. by stationing missiles on Washington's doorstep, as the Soviet Union did in Cuba in 1962 in response to US missiles in Turkey. The stationing shifts the strategic balance in favor of the USA.

And in the logic of deterrence and counter-deterrence, it will lead to Russian measures that make Germany the preferred target of Russian missiles. By submissively accepting the stationing, which has been planned since 2021, the German government is exposing the country to a new nuclear threat - while Washington is 8,000 km away.

The official justification for the stationing is the claim of a '*security gap*', since Russia has been deploying *Iskander* medium-range missiles with a range of 500 km in its Kaliningrad exclave since 2018. This would be a breach of the *INF Treaty*.²⁵ Moscow claims that the missiles only have a range of 480 km and are therefore in compliance with the treaty.

In the dispute, the German government is omitting the fact that the USA installed the *AEGIS/SM-3* missile defense system in Romania in 2016 and in Poland in 2018.²⁶ Moscow sees this as an impairment of the strategic balance. On the other hand, Washington did not respond to the Russian proposal for mutual verification of *Iskander* and *AEGIS/SM-3*.

The logic of deterrence becomes apparent in the way the blame game is assigned: one's own intentions are concealed, which is then declared to be rational policy with the pompous term '*strategic ambiguity*', and the enemy is to be frightened, while one's own armament is labelled as a purely defensive measure. The result is an increase in tension and uncertainty on both sides.

2.4. Democracy versus autocracy?

Ideologically, the West justifies the policy of confrontation with the construct '*democracy versus*

²³ 20 years climate focus. Climate damage caused by Russia's war in Ukraine (First and second interim assessments).

<https://climatefocus.com/publications/climate-damage-caused-by-russias-war-in-ukraine/>

²⁴ ²⁴ Auer, Martin (2023): Der CO₂-Stiefelabdruck des Militärs. <https://at.scientists4future.org/2023/05/15/co2-stiefelabdruck-des-militars/>

²⁵ 1987 treaty banning land-based medium-range missiles in Europe with a range of 500 - 5,500 km. The treaty was cancelled by the Trump administration.

²⁶ Washington explained that the systems served to protect the EU from Iranian missiles. It is 1,500 kilometres from the Iranian border to Romania and 2,000 kilometres to Poland. Poland, on the other hand, borders directly on the territory of the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad.

autocracy' By invoking 'values', a post-heroic population is to be motivated to be ready for war again. This necessitates the method that has been practiced for ages of portraying the other side as the absolute evil. *"It's about the difference between good and evil,"* says Nikki Haley, former US ambassador to the UN, representing the views of many.²⁷

However, looking more closely, the seemingly highly moral division of the world into good and evil is revealed to be a double standard. The US security strategy mentioned above states: *"The most pressing strategic challenge to our vision comes from powers that combine authoritarian rule with a revisionist foreign policy."* In addition, another category of autocracy is introduced: *"Many non-democracies are joining the democracies of the world in renouncing these [revisionist] behaviors."*²⁸ So it is not about autocracy as such, but about what Washington declares to be 'revisionism', i.e. the rejection of US dominance. Two types of autocracy are created: the revisionist ones in Beijing and Moscow and the non-revisionist ones that are accepted as partners. Lars Klingbeil is also a supporter of such double standards: *"It is clear that we must also work with countries that do not share our values or even reject our social order."*²⁹

The central contradiction in the international system is by no means between autocracy and democracy, but rather between advocating a non-hegemonic, multipolar world order on the one hand, and attempting to maintain US/Western dominance on the other.

The political function of the narrative of the contradiction between autocracy and democracy is to make the dogma already proclaimed in antiquity *"If you want peace, prepare for war!"* plausible. However, this ignores its fundamental defect, namely that the other side thinks the same way, and the spiral of conflict is thus constantly fueled. The above example of medium-range weapons shows the practical consequences.

In contrast to conflicts of interest, there can be no compromises with regard to moral conflicts. In this respect, they resemble religious wars, unless there is agreement - as was the case in the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 - on the peaceful coexistence of different faiths. An ideological conflict between democracy and authoritarianism stimulates a spiral of escalation with confrontation, arms races and the Cold War - until it leads to a loss of control, the hot war.

3. Dealing with controversies in the peace movement

The narrative of *'autocracy versus democracy'* has some appeal, even in parts of the peace movement and the left. This is based on an originally emancipatory intention: to free the damned of this earth. The founding of *'sister republics'* by French revolutionary troops in the 18th century already had this motive.³⁰ The affinity with this understanding of internationalism - e.g. in the Communist International in its early years and its goal of world revolution³¹ or Che Guevara's attempted revolution in Bolivia - is unmistakable. However, foreign policy messianism from the left can become extremely dangerous under conditions of conflict and tension in the international system, especially when it converges with the *'liberal internationalism'* with which the West likes to justify an aggressive foreign policy.

3.1. Democracy, human rights and national sovereignty

In any case, a broad concept such as democracy is always controversial, even within the peace movement. And it is questionable whether a consensus can ever be reached on it. All the more so when it concerns the internal affairs of another country. The present controversy whether there is Apartheid in Israel or not is an example. However, this is not necessary if one respects the UN Charter on sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs (in particular Article I, paragraph 2, Article II,

²⁷ Quoted after: Telepolis, 24.08.2023. <https://www.telepolis.de/features/Republikaner-Debatte-Blutbad-ueber-die-Ukraine-und-was-ist-mit-China-9283499.html>

²⁸ The White House. National Security Strategy, op.cit. p. 8

²⁹ Klingbeil, Lars; op.cit. p. 4

³⁰ Which was already controversial at the time. Robespierre wrote: *"No one loves armed missionaries; the first advice that nature and prudence give is to repel them as enemies."*

³¹ This was later withdrawn for good reason and the organisation was dissolved in 1943.

paragraph 1 and paragraph 7). The Charter is based precisely on the insight that, in view of different cultures, value systems and political orders, utter chaos and destruction would arise if every country tried to impose its own ideas on others or even force them on them by force.

The same applies to human rights when the term is used as a battle cry for geopolitical interests. Universality of human rights means the obligation of all member states to implement human rights in their own country (UN Charter Art. I, Paragraph 3). This also includes social human rights, which the West often likes to ignore. However, it is not a license for regime change from outside, or even for a NATO war of aggression, such as in 1999 against Yugoslavia, when the German Foreign Minister said that "*a new Auschwitz must be prevented*".

Moscow's justification for invading Ukraine, "*to free the country from fascism*", also falls into the category of unilateral presumption to intervene in another country.

The UN Charter (Article VII) only provides for precisely defined exceptions for extreme cases such as genocide. Accordingly, only the UN Security Council can grant the authority to use force against a country. This also applies to the so-called *Responsibility to Protect*, which was popular in the 2000s when Western hegemony still seemed unbroken.³² The hurdles for intervention are very high, not least due to blockades in the Security Council. This is always loudly complained about with Russian vetoes. The situation is different with US vetoes when it comes to Israel. However, the decision for a ceasefire in Gaza on June 10, 2024 shows that there is another way; even if the decision - with Western tolerance - was not implemented by Israel, as in the General Assembly resolutions on many other conflicts too.

Among leftists, there are political currents that have a very distant relationship to national sovereignty and the obligation to non-interference. They refer to the excessive nationalism in history. The high value placed on sovereignty and non-interference in international law is, however, a reaction to the long history of the subjugation and exploitation of foreign countries in colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism. This is not forgotten in the Global South.

In addition, the West itself reacts extremely sensitively when it feels that other countries are interfering in its internal affairs. However, with regard to the outrage over actual or alleged disinformation and cyberattacks from Russia and China, it is often difficult to distinguish between facts and fake, between reality, propaganda and conspiracy theory.

3.2. Contradictions between peace and human rights?

The ideological charging of interstate relations by way of unilateral value orientations leads to fundamentalist contradictions being assumed and strategies being sought to contain or completely eliminate the other.

Of course, the stoning of adulteresses in Saudi Arabia, the theocracy of the mullahs and the Taliban, the discrimination of religious, ethnic, political and other minorities in many parts of the world - including in the West - are difficult to bear. Criticism and protest from civil society is of course legitimate. Internationalist solidarity with pacifists, conscientious objectors and other war opponents who are subjected to repression and persecution remains on the agenda for the peace movement. However, it must clearly distance itself from the geopolitical instrumentalisation of human rights by governments or militaristic forces.

In addition, peace policy is also human rights policy per se, because the inhuman brutality of war, the dead, the mutilated, the traumatised, the war crimes and the social and political consequences of destruction and hatred are the most serious violations of human rights.

Human rights issues are often linked to the right of self-determination of national minorities, especially when the minorities are subjected to discrimination. When these minorities then strive for independence, sharp conflicts arise in which the right of self-determination comes into conflict with the right to territorial integrity of the majority state. Spectacular examples are Kurdistan, Kosovo, the wars between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, Northern Cyprus and the Western

³² Resolution A/RES/60/1 of the UN-General Assembly, 16.09.2005

Sahara, but also Catalonia and Scotland. And of course the Taiwan and Palestinian issues. In Ukraine, too, the right of self-determination of the inhabitants of Crimea and Donbass is an important component of the conflict. Such conflicts become even more explosive when they are part of geopolitical interference by foreign powers and are exploited accordingly.

3.3. The exploitation of human rights provokes siege behavior

The geopolitical exploitation of democracy and human rights creates permanent tensions in the international system. A climate of confrontation also leads to the emergence of authoritarianism and repression in a country that feels threatened, or to the further intensification of repression where it already exists. The siege mindset occurs, i.e. a defensive attitude towards the outside always leads to pressure to conform within.

This applies to all sides. The EU's ban on Russian broadcasters and newspapers and the cancel culture against everything Russian, or the German '*raison d'etat*' in the Gaza war, have not yet reached the level of authoritarianism as in Ukraine and Russia, but basically the same corral logic applies here.

A new dimension is created by the Internet and the integration of cyberspace into the confrontation. Here, too, the US is leading the way. According to official figures, its intelligence system - 18 institutions with over 800,000 employees - had a budget of 99.6 billion dollars in 2023, of which 27.9 billion was for the military sector.³³ By comparison: Russian military spending in 2023, the second year of the war in Ukraine, totaled 109 billion dollars.³⁴

3.4. War, morality and rationality

Closely linked to the narrative of *autocracy versus democracy* is the way conflict and war are dealt with in purely moral terms. This leads to a convenient reduction of a complex reality to two variables: 'good' and 'bad'. These, in turn, are usually based on long-established bogymen images and archetypal clichés, such as the "*danger from the East*" or the image of *David & Goliath*. In these, for example, '*David Ukraine*' becomes the victim of '*Goliath Russia*'. Many young people in particular also have the perception: '*Goliath Israel*' versus '*David Palestine*'! These are strategies for removing one's own identity from the real contradictions and submitting to one side or the other. An autonomous peace movement is therefore impossible.

Moral partisanship is also attractive because it conveys a feeling of superiority. Because "*we*" are of course "*the good guys*". Morality then mutates into self-righteous moralising, as is very typically represented by the bellicose, left-liberal avant-garde, the militaristic mainstream and their narrative of a '*values-based foreign policy*.'

However, morality is only credible as long as it is indivisible. Those who trample on international law themselves, such as NATO in Yugoslavia, or the US-led '*coalition of the willing*' in Iraq in 2003 – which, by the way, included Ukraine with the sixth largest troop contingent of 36 countries - practice double standards.

Double standards are also at play when it comes to the right to self-determination, e.g. of Kosovo or Taiwan. In these cases, the West's enforcement of this right through war or military threats is considered justified, while the same process in the case of Crimea or Donbass is declared to be separatism and its suppression by military means is supported.

Hypocritical double standards also apply to the issue of annexations. The annexation of Northern Cyprus and parts of Kurdish-populated northern Syria by NATO member Turkey, or the annexation of the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem by Israel, have had no practical consequences from the West. Contrary to clear UN resolutions, the annexation of Western Sahara by Morocco was even formally recognised by the USA, and France is about to do the same.

All of this is not a plea for amorality. Emancipatory peace policy also needs a moral compass. But if war

³³ Office of the Director of the National Intelligence. <https://www.dni.gov/index.php>

³⁴ SIPRI. Trends in Military expenditure, 2023. https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/2404_fs_milex_2023.pdf

is to be prevented or must be ended, moral outrage or even moralising hatred is of no help. On the contrary. Hatred generates counter-hatred and the desire for revenge, thus driving the spiral of violence ever further. Instead, the causes of conflict must be understood rationally. Knowledge and rational insight are the prerequisites for responsible moral decisions.

4. Requirements for a contemporary peace policy

The first task of a contemporary peace policy is to understand the complexity of the new world order and to incorporate it into argumentation and practice. What is needed is an enlightened realism, a sober approach to geopolitics, but based on peace policy values.

This includes a clear stance against death and destruction through war and orientation towards the UN Charter: diplomacy and political conflict resolution, cooperation, undivided, common security, sovereign equality of all states, peaceful coexistence, arms control and disarmament.

A qualified debate on bellicosity and militarism and their seemingly plausible arguments is necessary. The peace movement and the social and political left should not follow the siren songs of a '*truce inside the besieged fortress*' that the Social Democrats embarked on during the First World War.

It is important to confidently avoid defamation such as *Putin supporter*, anti-Americanism and the misuse of the accusation of anti-Semitism, etc., which lead to thought taboos and the suppression of the freedom of speech.

Peace policy does not identify itself in principle or permanently with any one country or camp. This also applies to one's own country or camp, i.e. rejection of nationalism, Euro-nationalism and identification with any corral mindset, including even that of the West.

This does not rule out supporting proposals from one side in a specific case if they make sense in terms of peace policy. This also applies to corresponding initiatives from '*enemy countries*'.

In an interdependent world and under conditions of existential threat from weapons of mass destruction, the attitude "*They're all imperialists, that has nothing got to do with us*" is not possible.

Strategic autonomy of the EU, which would mean becoming a classic great power, is not a peace policy option. What is needed is an autonomy that goes hand in hand with a different type of policy based on peace, coexistence, disarmament, common security and cooperation.

Even in pre-war times, criticism of ideological bogeyman images, which create an essential prerequisite for foreign policy aggressiveness, is one of the tasks of peace policy. To this end, it is also necessary to develop autonomous expertise about '*the enemies*' in order not to be dependent on state-supporting '*experts*', self-appointed think tanks and pertinent institutes.

A different foreign policy in each country is the responsibility of the respective peace forces in that country. No one can take that away from them and it must be the focus of their work. Their task is to counter the militarisation of society, rearmament and the great power ambitions of the ruling bloc - be it their country, the EU or NATO.

Controversies within the peace movement should be resolved in a sober and solidarity-based manner and should not lead to confrontation and mutual exclusion. Limitations on tolerance only exist in relation to right-wing extremist, nationalist, militarist and similar forces.

The ruling policy is leading to the dismantling of democracy and to social burdens, especially on the subaltern classes and strata. This must play an important role in peace policy arguments, not least because this is where extremely important starting points for the formation of counter-power lie.

The Cold Warriors have still not succeeded in winning the population over to their side, despite intensive ideological massaging by the state-supporting media. As surveys repeatedly confirm, there are still strong post-heroic attitudes and a rejection of large parts of the population to be trimmed in order to be "*ready for war*".

This gives every reason to be confident that the peace movement can become strong again.