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# SECURITY TURNAROUND AFTER UKRAINE: REGIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL IMPLICATIONS

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*The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine represents a turning point for European and Austrian security policy. It calls into question previously established paradigms of international security and international crisis and conflict management. A week after the start of the attack, it is still too early to make a final assessment. Nevertheless, some effects in the regions and security institutions relevant to Austria can already be discerned. Regardless of the actual outcome of the war, the following theses assume a fundamental paradigm shift in international relations.*

## Geostrategic impact

The attack on Ukraine must be seen as an attempt to unilaterally reshape the European peace and security order through power politics. The political reactions to it that have already taken place or are still to be expected represent a security policy “trend break”. From an analytical point of view, the following structural and sustainable developments are to be expected:

- Massive weakening of multilateralism and the willingness to jointly tackle global challenges. This can also mean a lack of mandates for ongoing or new peace operations, for example in the Western Balkans.
- The need to strengthen European territorial defence and strategic deterrence. Even if it has been possible so far to preserve the unity of the West (USA, NATO and EU), it cannot be ruled out in the future that, in the event of a simultaneous military challenge by the USA in Asia (for example around Taiwan) or in the event of a change in

domestic political circumstances after the next US presidential elections, Europe would have to stand up to a potential aggressor militarily on its own. In any case, the EU is called upon to assume much more responsibility for its own military security, to bundle its forces much more strongly than before and to coordinate the announced investments in defence in the best possible way.

- Europe cannot develop an effective defence capability against a major military power on a purely national level, but ultimately only within a collective European framework. Therefore, the national armed forces must be aligned with pan-European needs in a consistent manner, based on burden-sharing and with regard to strengthening the European defence industrial base.

- In view of Ukraine's negative experience in connection with the abandonment of its nuclear weapons, a tendency towards increased proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to protect against wars of aggression cannot be ruled out.
- Russia's confrontation with Europe has the potential to escalate other conflicts or "proxy wars" in other regions, especially in West Africa, the Middle East and the Western Balkans.
- In future, European armed forces will no longer focus primarily on crisis management, but rather on defence and resilience.
- Concepts of overall and territorial defence or of comprehensive security provision, which cover all dimensions of security, will gain in importance as well as security strategies will have to be fundamentally rewritten.
- The EU's "Strategic Compass", which is currently being developed, should also provide initial answers to the turning point in security policy. At the very least, it should contain appropriate development clauses, especially on the issue of implementing the EU mutual assistance obligation under Article 42, paragraph 7.
- After its war of aggression, Russia will probably continue to conduct the conflict across the entire hybrid spectrum but will probably be limited in its choice of military options due to its military ties and previous losses in Ukraine.

### **Impacts on selected neighbouring countries of Russia**

The outcome of Russia's war in Ukraine is still unclear at the moment. However, one thing is already clear: Belarusian ruler Alyaksandr Lukashenka is now inextricably

linked in a community of fate with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The union state of Russia-Belarus can probably be regarded as a fact in the future, provided that both remain in power. The formal implementation of the open questions will probably follow after the end of the war.

On 27 February 2022, a new constitution was also adopted, making the previously "nuclear-weapons-free" state a potential outpost for Russian nuclear weapons. The permanent stationing of Russian troops is now also possible. At the same time, Lukashenka can now rule until 2035 under constitutional law. President Putin's terms were also set to zero in the course of the Russian constitutional reform in 2020, which theoretically allows him to continue governing until 2036. The big unknown, however, remains how the losing war in Ukraine will affect Putin's strategies for staying in power.

Armenia has been reluctant to react but has been diplomatically supportive of Russia. Since its defeat in the second Karabakh war in 2020, it has been dependent on Moscow's security guarantees, which is present in Nagorno-Karabakh with "peacekeepers" and regularly mediates in the implementation of the Trilateral Declaration of 9 November 2020.

On 22 February 2022, Azerbaijan and Russia signed a "Declaration on Alliance Partnership Cooperation" in Moscow. Work on the extensive document was already started in 2021. From the Azerbaijani perspective, the "Moscow Declaration" should be seen as a counterweight to the good relations with Turkey. The fact that the Azerbaijani leadership allowed pro-Ukrainian rallies in its own country during the signing of the agreement with Moscow is further evidence of Baku's self-confident balancing between Moscow, Ankara and Kyiv.

Two "open" questions for Putin's threat perceptions remain in the region: Georgia

and Moldova. The ongoing conflicts with breakaway regions in both states are possible entry points for future Russian interference. Georgia has so far tried to balance the benefits of the EU's Eastern Partnership with good relations with Russia. Georgia's government, under the pro-Russia Georgian Dream party, initially reacted so cautiously to the war of aggression against Ukraine that Kyiv withdrew its ambassador from the country in protest. In the slipstream of Ukraine's EU accession application, Tbilisi now also applied for EU membership. The principle of comprehensive integration without an accession perspective of the Eastern Partnership Policy thus seems to have been abolished and would require a reassessment of the Neighbourhood Policy.

Moldova has declared a state of emergency in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It is a destination and transit country for refugees from Ukraine. President Maia Sandu is sticking to her EU course. However, the gas price crisis triggered by Gazprom, which has been ongoing since autumn 2021, is putting the country under pressure. Energy supplies, especially gas, from European countries will therefore become more important in the medium term. In the future, the European energy transition and decarbonisation should not forget Moldova in particular, but also the other countries in the European neighbourhood.

### **Impact on the Western Balkans**

The Western Balkans, still very fragile due to unresolved regional conflicts, have increasingly become the scene of geopolitical tensions between the EU respectively the USA and Russia since the 2010s. Moscow is trying to expand its influence on the Christian Orthodox population, especially in the Bosnian Herzegovinian entity Republika Srpska, in Serbia, Northern Macedonia and Montenegro. According to the assessment

of liberal democratic forces in the Western Balkans, Brussels and Washington, the Russian government is fuelling domestic conflicts in the Western Balkan states in order to prevent the success of the EU's consolidation policy and, more generally, the complete integration of this region into the West.

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine is also increasing geopolitical tensions in the Western Balkans and widening the gap between pro-Western and pro-Russian actors. The main focus in this regard is the multi-ethnic state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, on whose territory, as in Kosovo, international peacekeepers are stationed, and which is confronted with separatist aspirations of the Republika Srpska entity. The annual extension of the mandate of EUFOR ALTHEA, the EU's military mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, has so far been dependent on Moscow's approval in the UN Security Council. Further approval by Moscow to extend the mandate of EUFOR, which is temporarily being increased from 600 to 1,100 soldiers due to the unstable global and regional situation, is in question because of Brussels' comprehensive sanctions against Russia.

For the EU candidate country Serbia, it is becoming increasingly difficult in the context of Russian aggression against Ukraine to continue the EU integration process and at the same time hold on to Russia as an important political ally, especially with regard to the Serbian claim to Kosovo. In Prishtina/Priština, the Kosovar president warns Serbia not to follow Russia's example and - despite the presence of 3,700 soldiers of the peacekeeping force KFOR - to possibly use military means to push through its goals towards Kosovo. Geopolitical aspects also play an important role in the current political crisis in Montenegro, a NATO member and EU candidate country. Here, pro-Montenegrin and pro-Western parties are partly antagonistic to Serbian

nationalist and emphatically Putin-friendly parties.

### **Impact on Turkey and the Middle East**

The Russian attack on Ukraine irritates most states in the Middle East. A quick victory by Putin in the separatist Donbas would probably have been accepted without major comment, but the expansion of hostilities to the entire territory of Ukraine and the determined resistance of the Ukrainians forced the states to take a stand. In most cases, the parties to the conflict were advised to cease hostilities and begin negotiations. Typical of this attitude is that of Iran. While Tehran has called NATO and the US the real culprits for the situation in Ukraine, this is essentially propaganda. In reality, Iran's position is similar to the seemingly pro-Russian but essentially neutral Chinese position. Like China, Iran sees itself in a partnership with the Russians, not in an alliance. First of all, the Iranian elites see both Ukraine and Russia as reliable arms suppliers and economic partners that they do not want to lose, hence the desire for a quick, peaceful solution. The cautious statements from Tehran, however, reflect two other aspects of Iranian-Russian relations. First, Iran shares the painful experience of breakaway provinces sponsored by the Russians and, as a multi-ethnic state, is in principle critical of interventions in favour of separatist entities. On the other hand, Tehran is counting on Russian diplomacy in the Vienna nuclear negotiations. In Iran's view, these have no connection with the situation in Ukraine.

Turkey, like most states, was taken by surprise by the escalation of the Ukraine crisis. Russia is one of Ankara's most important economic partners and plays a critical role in the Syrian conflict, which is important for the Turks. However, realising that Putin will not win immediately, Ankara re-disposed and declared that Russia is waging a war of aggression. Ankara's relations with Kyiv are close, there are

economic ties. Ukraine was one of the first countries to buy Turkish Bayraktar drones and use them against the Russians. Turkey also complied with Kyiv's requests and, invoking the Treaty of Montreux, closed the Bosphorus straits to warships. With this step of solidarity, Erdoğan was able to forestall his country's impending isolation within the transatlantic alliance. In the Syrian theatre of war, this also means that the groups under Turkish influence also declared their support for Ukraine. This is also true of the Al-Nusra Front, which emphasised Russia's enmity against Muslims in view of Putin's Chechen fighters. This also allows Ankara to score cheap points against PKK-affiliated groups in Rojava, where some have openly spoken out in favour of Russian policies, thereby discrediting the entire Rojava project in the West. In the medium term, this is likely to increase Ankara's willingness to intervene in northern Syria. This is all the easier because Damascus, as a loyal vassal of Moscow, has unilaterally declared itself in favour of the Russian position.

The states of the Middle East have close economic and military ties with both sides of the current conflict. This applies above all to Egypt. Arms are purchased from the Russian Federation, and tourism is also geared towards guests from Russia. Agricultural goods (wheat, etc.) are imported from Ukraine. Egypt, as a close ally of the USA, is caught in a political and economic dilemma in this constellation.

Saudi Arabia closely coordinates its energy policy with Russia within the OPEC+ format. It is currently in a politically delicate position of heeding Europe's increasing demand for LNG products, while not losing its close ties to OPEC price policy. Riyadh had entered into a kind of "oil price war" with Russia as recently as 2020. It caused world market prices to plummet at the time by expanding production, which led to a massive budget problem in Moscow. In the energy sector, the mutual relationship is also currently considered tense.

The State of Israel has clearly positioned itself on the side of Ukraine in the conflict. Prime Minister Naftali Bennet announced aid deliveries to Kyiv in this regard. The Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is himself of Jewish descent. For Israel, Jewish support is state doctrine, regardless of the political constellation.

A change in the defence policy of the Gulf Cooperation Council cannot be derived at present. The United Arab Emirates abstained from voting on the adoption of the UN-SR resolution condemning the attack on 27 February 2022. In addition to their involvement in energy policy, the Gulf states are mainly trying to maintain a politically neutral stance for the time being.

### **Impact on Africa**

In recent years, Russia has increased its engagement in Africa, challenging European, especially French, interests. One lever is mercenaries of the so-called Wagner Group, such as in the Central African Republic or Mali. African reactions to the conflict have been muted, with a few exceptions (e.g. Kenya), as Ukraine is not a foreign policy priority.

The focus of future European interest is shifting to those African states that can compensate for resources previously procured from Russia (e.g. Tanzania). In addition, large infrastructure projects suddenly seem to become profitable. For example, the Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline Project (TSGP) from Nigeria via Niger to Algeria (over 4,000 km) was restarted on 22 February 2022.

From a European perspective, International Crisis and Conflict Management (ICCM) will shift, at least argumentatively, from migration towards security/securing access to resources or cooperation to protect corresponding infrastructures. Projects that have not been realised so far for various reasons (too expensive, not

secure enough) will be reassessed under the given circumstances (see TSGP).

African states will - depending on their needs - choose their security policy orientation. The danger of proxy conflicts/wars will increase, whereby internal disputes will continue to dominate. Russia has the advantage of being able to act only in accordance with its interests, without regard to coups d'état, etc. (e.g. Guinea, Mali). African dependencies on Russia (e.g. wheat, weapons) are also likely to play a role. For the EU states, this means approaching African partners more actively in the future.

### **Impact on Afghanistan and Central Asia**

Russia will control its periphery even more, especially in Central Asia and Afghanistan, in order to be able to fight terrorism, Islamism and organised drug crime more effectively and to bind Central Asian countries even more to itself. This means, first, more Russian forces along the borders with Afghanistan (especially in Tajikistan) and, second, more intelligence presence in the region. Russia's position of not recognising the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, partly because of their links to international terrorism, is being consolidated.

New (negative) dynamics could arise in negotiations between the EU, China and Russia with the Taliban with regard to fighting terrorist groups (e.g. the so-called Islamic State in Khorasan Province) and compliance with international norms (e.g. human rights). Greater coordination of Russia and China with regard to investments and the fight against common threats in or from the Afghanistan region is to be expected. It will therefore be more difficult for the EU to implement or find partners for its new Global Gateway Strategy and regional political-diplomatic efforts in crisis management.

## **China and International Crisis and Conflict Management**

Shortly before the Russian offensive in Ukraine, the Russian-Chinese communiqué of 4 February 2022 proclaimed a “New Era” for the field of international relations. The declaration is to be seen as a joint statement to combat “Western hegemonism” in international institutions - especially the UN - and will have polarising consequences in the medium term. China and Russia present themselves in tandem as spokespersons for the “Global South” and call on it to unite in resistance. It is, therefore, to be expected that the European Union - and thus also Austria - will be confronted with a growing “anti-Western front line” in various international organisations during the coming years.

Moreover, in the case of Russia, China has for the first time declared the security interests of a strategic partner as its own “core interest”. Beijing’s position is that it is Moscow’s “legitimate core interest” to demand the halt of any NATO expansion. So far, “core interests” have been spoken of exclusively in relation to China’s own goals and the term has not been applied to other states.

It should be noted here that the definition of core interests in the context of possible bilateral or multilateral tensions and crises already excludes ex-ante to a large degree compromise solutions. Consequently, strategic partner countries can count on China’s full support at the UN level if their position has been assessed by Beijing as a legitimate “core interest”.

This represents a turnaround in the field of international conflict management insofar as Beijing is openly obvious dismantling the foreign policy dogma of “non-interference in internal affairs”. As a result, the closer circle of China’s strategic partner countries will feel strengthened and take a more offensive stance in future

bilateral or international confrontation scenarios.

Whereas from the Russian perspective the time had obviously come for a unilateral reshaping of the world order considering its own progressive decline (economically, demographically, ...) and the misjudged weakness of the West, China is still benefiting from the status quo of the capitalist-dominated world order.

### **Implications for peace operations**

National and alliance defence will become more relevant for EU states as a result of the war in Ukraine and will be endowed with new financial resources. European contributions to peace operations or EU/GSDP military deployments will nevertheless continue to be necessary.

As a consequence of the war in Ukraine, individual member states could be tasked with conducting peace operations on behalf of the EU. The unanimity principle that has prevailed in CSDP up to now would recede into the background in favour of greater flexibility.

For the Austrian Armed Forces, this means that new financial resources will flow more strongly into agendas of Comprehensive National Defence and into contributions to the possible EU Rapid Reaction Force. Peacekeeping or EU missions in Africa and the Western Balkans could meet with growing resistance due to an increasing Russian presence and disinformation campaigns. This is also linked to an increased threat potential for missions. Moreover, after the experiences in Afghanistan and Ukraine, the question is not whether but how best to negotiate with problematic regimes in order to ensure the protection of the local population and prevent negative repercussions for Europe.

## **The Future of Multilateralism, the OSCE and the UN**

The fact that multilateralism is in a deep crisis is nothing new. In recent years, with an increasing geopolitical competition between the great powers, the political will to collectively solve problems has steadily declined. With Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, however, this negative dynamic has now reached Europe in full force on the one hand, and on the other hand, also demonstrated the complete incapacity of international organisations based on collective action.

The Charter of the United Nations signed in San Francisco in 1945, in particular the ban of use of force according to Article 2, paragraph 4, is being unscrupulously negated by a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Diplomatic appeals at the global and regional level are going unheeded. It is clear that all attempts at conflict prevention and peaceful conflict resolution are ineffective if there is no political will to do so.

The largest regional security organisation under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, the OSCE, has temporarily evacuated the staff of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine launched in 2014. Objective observations of the situation on the ground are thus marginalised. The mission's annually renewable mandate ends on 31 March 2022. In view of the disregard for the principles laid down in the preamble to the mandate - compliance with the UN Charter as well as the Helsinki Final Act - the mandate has lost its basis. Moreover, any consensus among all 57 participating states has been completely ruled out.

With an unexpected resolve, and despite global economic and social interconnectedness, multilateral ties are being cut, and Russia's legitimacy in the UN Security Council is being called into question. A return to the old order is currently not in sight.

## **Conclusions**

- Russia's attack on Ukraine challenges established paradigms of international security. The future of the UN system, but also of the OSCE, will probably be redefined in the tension between Western interests and values and the Russian-Chinese challenge to "Western hegemonism".
- Europe's strategic autonomy is to be strengthened through the development of European capabilities for territorial defence and strategic deterrence. The current unity of the West cannot be taken for granted in the future.
- A European defence capability can only be achieved jointly, based on burden-sharing, and with the simultaneous development and expansion of appropriate defence industrial capacities.
- Military national defence is increasingly becoming the focus of planning in Austria and the other EU states. Concepts of overall and territorial defence or of comprehensive security provision, which cover all dimensions of security, will gain in importance as well as security strategies will have to be fundamentally rewritten.
- Russia's attack on Ukraine could lead to the increased proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to protect against a war of aggression.
- The breakaway regions in Georgia and Moldova remain entry points for possible future interventions and new escalations of the ongoing conflicts on the part of Moscow. Putin's goal remains to prevent NATO or EU expansion in his neighbourhood.
- An even stronger shift away from constructive behaviour in international

relations can also be expected from Russia in the Western Balkans, for example, which could exacerbate the region's unresolved problems.

- New options are also emerging for Turkey in Syria as the Assad regime and also the Rojava project have discredited themselves in the West with their pro-Russian positions.
- In the states of the Near and Middle East, the economic consequences (e.g. more expensive/absent imports of wheat) will also have an impact in the medium term. At the same time, the Gulf states benefit from the EU's energy policy reorientation and high oil prices.
- The reorientation of European energy interests is increasingly moving Africa into the EU's focus. African states will - depending on their needs - (re)choose their security policy orientation. For the states of the EU, this means approaching African partners more actively in the future.

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