

We need mediators

Geopolitical tensions require credible mediators.



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World order in disrepair

When one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council invades one of its neighbouring countries, then the international order is thrown off balance — for state sovereignty, territorial integrity and a rejection of the idea of the changing borders by force lie at its core. The Security Council, originally created to prevent or resolve violent conflicts, becomes a mere spectator incapable of action.

Will other countries now feel emboldened to pursue their political goals by military means? In times of increasing regional and global competition, the temptation could increase if Russia's aggression leads to success.

A few points of emphasis:

Shocks enhance Europe's resilience

With the launch of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a shockwave went through Europe. The EU member states adopted nine far-reaching sanctions packages and began to reduce their extreme dependence on Russian oil and gas. Aid to Ukraine has reached unimaginable proportions, and even the EU integration of the Western Balkan states is gaining new momentum. Even when it comes to security and defence, there is a new desire to invest and assume responsibility.

The EU has so far proved to be more resilient and determined than could have been predicted. The Covid-19 pandemic, supply chain disruptions, multiple dependencies and now also war are cementing the realisation that such enormous challenges can only be tackled together. They are an eye-opener to the multiple failures and misjudgements that followed the end of the Cold War in 1989. There is a new desire for strategic autonomy and increased resilience. In terms of defence policy, however, the EU is rapidly reaching its limits; its dependence on the US has become clearer than ever. Nevertheless, Europe has gained the will to act, though there remains a lack of leadership, which should come from individual states, above all Germany and France.

Middle East in anxious anticipation

In Israel government with radical right-wing participation does not bode well. With the country's new leadership, the two-state solution is quickly becoming a dead letter. Palestinian protests, the first terrorist attacks and a ruthless intervention by Israeli security

forces are likely only the first harbingers of an escalation whose end is not in sight.

In Iran, on the other hand, the regime is taking strong action against civilian protests and trying to suppress a nationwide uprising. At the same time, it is stepping up cooperation with Russia to counter international sanctions, which are hitting both countries harder and harder. Moscow is counting on Iranian arms deliveries, while Tehran expects support for its nuclear ambitions. With the Iran nuclear deal on the brink of collapse, the nightmare scenario of a "Shiite nuclear bomb" is starting to take shape. This would especially put its regional rival Saudi Arabia on the spot.

Türkiye is determined to "ensure its own security" through further military operations in northern Syria and northern Iraq. This is exacerbating tensions with the US and destroying any basis for talks with the Kurdish ethnic group in the domestic political arena. Signs of a Turkish rapprochement with Syria's ruler Assad currently bring more questions than relief. It also borders on a miracle that Lebanon, which is in a state of economic and political ruin, has not yet collapsed. Iraq is going through a difficult phase of political consolidation as it strives to free itself from foreign influences, especially Iran.

The signs in the region are thus stormy. Tensions and instabilities abound, while there is a lack of moderating forces to balance the situation.

Russia performs "strategic offside"

Moscow is doing everything it can to win the war against Ukraine. Yet it is still unclear what exactly is meant by this. Is it the conquest of the rest of the Donbas, the conquest of additional territories or the overthrow of the government in Kyiv? Unfortunately, this pushes the possibility of negotiations even further into the background, and a prolonged war lasting months, perhaps even years, is to be expected. Russia is economically and militarily in a position to do so.

The Kremlin is thus cutting itself off from the Western world. It will lose income from oil and gas exports, investors and access to high technology; for now, the domestic consequences are not foreseeable. In terms of foreign policy, the Kremlin is becoming increasingly isolated, as many countries oppose Russia's aggression. Moscow's strategic partner China may be able to exert a balancing influence, but it primarily pursues its own interests. Even in the

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Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Moscow is losing prestige and influence. Still, no relenting or course correction should be expected; Russia is heading for an overall strategic impasse.

Consequently, the relationship between Europe and Russia will remain poisoned for years to come. And each additional day of war will require more time for a rapprochement. Therefore, the war must be ended as quickly as possible and trust-building measures found.

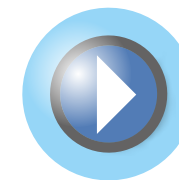
China executes a balancing act

The rising China is vehemently pursuing its supremacy in East and Southeast Asia. In doing so, it insists on annexing Taiwan and snubs neighbours such as the Philippines, Japan and Vietnam with its territorial claims. Domestically, however, Beijing must first come out of its self-imposed Covid-19 isolation, revive its economy and dispel emerging doubts among the population about the infallibility of its political leadership. After all, internal stability is highly dependent on the functioning of the social contract. According to this, the state ensures the modest prosperity of its citizens; in return, society submits uncritically to the political system. However, the rigorous restrictions and subsequent protests in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic have raised doubts about the future acceptability of this pact. Should domestic tensions increase, it would not come as a surprise if Beijing were to try to divert attention from this by means of foreign policy manoeuvres, such as an attack on Taiwan.

US strengthens its influence

Under the leadership of the US, resistance against China's actions is growing stronger and stronger. Even Japan, which imposed strict military restraint on itself after 1945, has doubled its defence budget and will invest tens of billions of dollars in its missile defence. Tokyo feels challenged not only by China but also by the dispute with Russia over the southern Kuril Islands and the North Korean missile threat.

The US is primarily concerned with putting its global competitor China in its place and maintaining its own supremacy in the Indo-Pacific. South Korea, Vietnam, the Philippines and other Asia-Pacific countries, on the other hand, seek to maintain their security and independence, which requires a delicate balancing act between the superpowers China and the US. A war over Taiwan or even a blockade of the



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island by sea and air would overturn the current status quo — with fatal consequences for the entire global economy and world peace.

A closer look at the Indo-Pacific brings India into play. India, soon to be the world's most populous country, is joining forces with the US to counter China's ambitions, but without allowing itself to be usurped by Washington.

Thus, in the geopolitical centre of gravity, the Indo-Pacific, the signs are increasingly pointing towards a storm. Prudence and restraint on the part of the US and China, but also credible and universally acceptable mediation efforts, are urgently needed. Some see the EU as a potential candidate for this, but this seems unrealistic in view of the problems facing Europe. Perhaps prominent figures, such as former UN secretaries-general or heads of state, should get involved, however.

Defusing crises

A look at the northern hemisphere shows that tensions are increasing in many places and could also erupt militarily. Many signs point towards a storm, from a loss of trust to an arms race. It is therefore all the more important to look for mediation possibilities, de-escalation measures, conflict containment or conflict resolution. For it is important to "think not only of war but above all of the future". ●

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