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Joint Effort for Negotiations: China and the EU. Now is the time to negotiate. It is realistic to prepare for negotiations in the coming weeks!

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In the following I will give some reasons why international pressure and arguments should be directed towards bringing negotiations to a ceasefire in Ukraine as soon as possible and that this is possible.

1) There were already negotiations, in the early stages of the war in Ukraine, which almost led to the result

I will only point to the two chances at the beginning of this war that existed against all propaganda: the almost successful talks of Naftalie Bennett with Selenski and Putin and the talks in Istanbul mediated through Turkey. They were tragically missed for obvious reasons of great power rivalry of the United States against Russia (and against China).

Already on March 29, a near agreement had been reached in Istanbul between the negotiating delegations of Russia and Ukraine on a possible end to the war, according to which Ukraine would declare its neutrality, Russia's troops would withdraw, the status of Crimea would remain open for 15 years without military intervention, Luhansk and Donetsk would be granted extended autonomy from Ukraine, and a number of guarantor powers, including Russia, China, Israel, Great Britain and Germany would secure the cease-fire. To this end, Ukraine's proposals had been recognized by the Russian side in a treaty offer.

On April 10, Boris Johnson is in Kiev, issuing a de facto ban on the implementation of the late March compromise to the Kiev government on the basis of a March 24 NATO meeting in Brussels. Clearly, the West believed it could inflict a defeat on Russia. In April, U.S. Defence Secretary Austin declared that Russia would be stripped of its offensive capability.

Meanwhile, at the end of May, the U.S. President changed tactics and denied unlimited escalation as previously developed. Very accurately, Naftalie Bennett describes his attempt as then Israeli prime minister to reach an agreement and suggests that this was not what the United States wanted at any point.

2) Stalemate

There is no realistic chance for a successful spring offensive. A Ukrainian tank offensive can be a suicidal mission.

The military is clear on this: Former General Hans Lothar Domröse, who is close to the German CDU, sees the chances of a spring offensive in Ukraine at zero: it will only get bloody. U.S. Chief of Staff General Milley says he does not anticipate any further major changes in the current front lines. Basically, one has to assume a stalemate for at least 4-6 months with little change. So does veteran NATO General Harald Kujat. When asked how Ukraine intends to achieve its military goals, the sober and above all experienced former NATO General Harald Kujat answers that so far it cannot even defend itself adequately, let alone recapture Crimea or even eastern Ukraine: The Ukrainian military wants ten times as much as they get in these weeks: Ukrainian Chief of General Staff, General Salushnij:

"I need 300 battle tanks, 600 to 700 infantry fighting vehicles and 500 howitzers to push Russian troops back to the positions before the February 24 attack." However, it is questionable whether the Ukrainian armed forces even have a sufficient number of suitable soldiers left to deploy these weapon systems in view of the large losses of the last months.

In any case, General Salushnij's statement also explains why Western arms deliveries do not enable Ukraine to successfully succeed in the announced spring offensives. In addition, Russia could surpass the Western escalation at any time with one of its own. *"It should be taken into account that the Russian forces seem to intend to defend the captured territory and conquer the rest of the Donbas in order to consolidate the territories they have annexed. They have adapted their defensive positions well to the terrain and have heavily fortified them. Attacks on these positions require a large expenditure of forces and a willingness to accept significant losses. The withdrawal from the Kherson region has freed up approximately 22,000 combat-ready troops for offensives. In addition, more combat units are being deployed to the region as reinforcements."* (Harald Kujat)

There is literally no one who realistically expects such a spring offensive to succeed, except for a few militaries in Ukraine. In addition, when it comes to Crimea, the motivation of fighting Russian units could quickly become very high. Fighting in eastern Ukraine is now characterized by a bloody battle. Russian army units find themselves fighting for meters after weeks of house-to-house battles in Bakhmut and neighbouring towns. They are all the bloodier. Do both sides really want to increase the destruction of resources, and especially of people, to hundreds of thousands more in a 2nd year of bloody stalemate warfare? This makes no sense for either side on military, moral or ideological grounds. In December a Ukrainian Brigade has been decimated from 4600 soldiers to 1200 in four days.

The Ukrainian armed forces are depleted, the country is experiencing the 12th wave of mobilization, the average deployment time of Ukrainian soldiers in Bakhmut is dropping to four hours. The losses of the Russian side are even more devastating. It's a war in Stalemate similar to Verdun. At Verdun in 6 months in 1916 350.000 soldiers were killed and twice that number dropped out due to wounding. And for the Ukrainian troops it is obvious to save civilians and soldiers by evacuation from Bakhmut as far as it is still possible. CIA chief William Burns, in his recent secret meeting with Selenskyj in Kiev, spoke of a critical turning point in this war and a moment to seize. He foresees that with the Republican majority in Congress, past military and political support will not continue as it has, but will decline.

In addition, the tactics of both sides around nuclear facilities in Ukraine are highly dangerous, just as the intense debates between the U.S. and Russian militaries over whether and how to use tactical nuclear weapons are threatening, if only because accidents and misperceptions loom as they did 40 years ago in the fall of 1983 and a good 60 years ago before Cuba.

If this assessment is somewhat correct, the serious military experts and military officers are right in assuming that offensives are simply futile at present with the tanks trickling in and the odd fighter jet.

No victory in sight

After a year, the Ukraine war is in a destructive war of stalemate with a total of 250.000 casualties on both sides without any prospect of victory.

Ukraine is suffering from the increasing destruction of critical infrastructure. There is no victory in sight for either party; for several months now, Russia and Ukraine have been engaged in a war of stalemate in eastern and southern Ukraine, with a slight change here or there: Ukraine is being supported with the help of Western weapons in such a way that so far there has been no victory for Russia, but just as little complete victory for Ukraine.

A victory over Russia, as it was thought for a long month last April by the leadership of the United States, includes the use of long-range weapons and fighter jets to establish on Russian territory the conditions for a victory in Ukraine.

This has been ruled out as a red line - including the risk of world war - by the US president since late May. There are - so far - no long-range weapons, no no-fly zone or deployment of US and NATO troops in Ukraine. But that would be the condition for a "victory" and would at the same time increase the danger of a nuclear escalation as well and thus an ultimate defeat.

(The radical nationalists around the deputy foreign minister and follower of Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera, Melnyk vainly want the German defence minister Pistorius to supply "battle tanks, fighter jets and warships" - and they need much more than that in order not to realistically risk the premature collapse of an offensive. They suggest NATO deployment, and with it, world war.)

According to an extensive interview I had with Harald Kujat, he assumes that the public debate, at least in Germany, is somewhat sub-complex. One cannot dub each individual weapon like Leopard, HIMARS, Abrams tanks as "game changer". In fact, already Karl von Clausewitz describes war as an extraordinarily complex event. Which is constantly changing and for which reason the fact that it has been a stalemate with hardly changed terrain gains for months is decisive assessment of the war.

3) Strengthen the Chinese initiative

It was a strategic mistake of the U.S. administration and the public reactions in the Federal Republic and in other Western European countries to repel the Chinese initiative with a public drumfire.

Under the conditions of an escalating war, the various initiatives to interrupt the war must be taken seriously and mutually taken up. These include the Chinese initiative, the offers from Brazil and from India, the ideas of Emmanuel Macron and of Turkey. So far, these have been relativized by hardliners like the US Secretary of State Blinken or by someone like the German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, or even blocked negligently and against a reasonable ethic of responsibility by saying it is not yet time to negotiate.

Joint effort of France, China, Brasil now

If this is true, it is an imperative of international politics and diplomacy to intensify the international efforts in a coordinated and concerted manner for the preparation of negotiations instead of a cold war agitation as the hardliners around Blinken and Annalena Baerbock have tried to do so far.

It is abundantly clear and evidenced that China is not interested in continuing this war, but in ending it as soon as possible because of the dangers and also for reasons China shares with the global South. The war is dangerous for the world economy, for the basic supply of food in this case association with grain and ultimately also for the urgent push for a sensible climate policy.

According to the Chinese proposal, the criteria include: respecting the sovereignty of all countries, turning away from the Cold War mentality, cessation of hostilities, resumption of peace talks (!), settlement of the humanitarian crisis, protection of

civilians and prisoners of war, security of nuclear power plants, reduction of strategic risks, facilitation of grain exports, ending unilateral sanctions, stabilization of industrial and supply chains, promotion of post-conflict reconstruction (source: CNN)(cited from *Frankfurter Rundschau* of 24. 2. 23) "*The sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries must be effectively upheld*" (as well as) the "*legitimate security interests of all countries taken seriously.*" According to the FR, China also calls for reducing the strategic risks of war: "*Nuclear weapons must not be used, and nuclear wars must not be fought.*" It also said the threat of using nuclear weapons should be rejected.

The foreign policy expert of the Shanghai International Studies University, HUANG JING 黄靖, recently explained China's very independent foreign policy line convincingly in Berlin: According to him, China is still concerned with stabilizing the international order and with multilateralism, not least with the Chinese interest in promoting rather than jeopardizing prosperous economic relations with important partners around the world. He explained that China adheres to a peaceful one-China policy and has not developed any interest in military adventures regarding Taiwan, although this has ever been invoked anew by the transatlantic lobby and has even led to attempts by the two Green ministers in the Scholz cabinet to demonize China. With regard to the planned but repeatedly postponed presentation of a national security strategy plus an extra China strategy, drafts of the foreign ministry and the economics ministry were leaked late last year, met with criticism and have since been conceded by the chancellor's office.

But most importantly, China itself has repeatedly spoken out in favour of negotiations since the beginning of the war, most recently presenting a position paper on the subject. Despite its common adversary, the United States, China is not interested in tying itself too closely to Russia's policies or even forming an alliance with Russia. This, however, offers opportunities for China to join the BRICS countries in pushing for containment and disruption of the war with Russia, as well as with Ukraine.

The Chinese are serious about their Chinese initiative for negotiations, if only from the number of meetings and agreements between China and India, Brazil, South Africa and even Australia, for example, but even more so from their economic and political interest in an end to the war. To be sure, it is not least for economic reasons that the war is being called into question, not only there but worldwide. Nevertheless, a considerable part of the American and German debate is still in favour of declaring China a powerful system rival and thus an economic and political enemy, and underlining this by provocative visits to Taiwan. The position is still strongly held - not least in conservative opinion papers such as the FAZ -

that China and Russia should be overrun with a policy of confrontation, without recognizing that by doing so one is not improving the conditions of the war and that one is overstretching one's own forces.

Xi Jinping held several days of talks with Russian President Putin in the last week of March 2023; as part of his negotiating proposal, he would declare a willingness for China to play a leading role in the reconstruction of Ukraine. If Putin responds positively, that would counter the assumption that Putin is unwilling to negotiate. Macron is expected to visit Beijing in April. There are reportedly contacts between Macron, Scholz, and Sunak; it may be that Sunak will make a push for negotiations at the NATO summit in July. It may make sense to coordinate the substance of the Chinese approach with Macron.

The Olaf Scholz government should be ready to decisively support such mediation attempts in Germany and throughout Europe. It should finally take up the initiative of Peter Brandt (*Frieden schaffen. Waffenstillstand und Sicherheit in Europa*) and others and use it to strengthen a position of the German government for negotiation. It is of importance when the European Socialdemocrats are opting for supporting negotiations, as its leader Mr. Stefan Löfven alluded to at the Copenhagen conference.)

(Additional remark on 6th of April 2023: During Macrons visit in China, he informed that also Joe Biden supports the initiative of China!)

Against the Logic of Confrontation

If it comes to the decision to offer negotiations, it would be negligent to prematurely **devalue them because they come from China**, because it comes from the "system rival" and the dispute over who is or remains the only world power overshadows everything else, including the question of war and peace in Ukraine. That would be short-sighted and therefore stupid, because it would dangerously overstretch the role of the West and the United States as the sole world power.

In any case, to dare a two-front war is not realistic and, moreover, prolongs the tensions, the wars and also the increasingly dangerous war in Ukraine. And in view of the dangerous tensions, this would be more than a relapse into the cold war.

The question of an end to the war is now to a considerable extent overlaid by new confrontational logics in international relations between the West on the one hand, Russia on the other, China on the third side and the countries of the global South.

Henry Kissinger even accuses Washington of a global lack of leadership. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, an unprecedented sable rattling between China and

Taiwan - a lack of visionary leadership on the part of the USA is also to blame for the tense geopolitical situation. Kissinger speaks of a "dangerous imbalance" in the world situation. "We have created questions and problems in part without any idea of how this will end or where it will lead." According to the former U.S. secretary of state, "the only thing you can do is try not to exacerbate tensions and create options, and there has to be some kind of goal for that."

But I do see an exacerbation of tensions in the hardliner positions of the current US Secretary of State and in part of the US Administration. In the National Security Strategy of October 10, 2022, US President declared that he is de facto declaring China a system rival; his goal is to outmaneuver China and to outcompete China in economic competition. This still shows the desire of the United States to be the only world power (Brzezinski) and not realizing or being fully aware that this claim is currently driving rather to aggravation and prolongation of the Ukrainian war. AND to aggravation of tensions between the United States, Europe and China on the other hand. With this logic of confrontation, Europe's political and security space is visibly shrinking and driving the individual powers apart, including Germany and France, with France trying in one way or another to still develop its own strategy alongside the United States.

The fact that the global South is so distanced from the West has its deep reasons above all in relation to the West's behaviour toward international institutions. In "*Why the Global South does not trust the West*," Andreas Zumach (in Blätter 3/23) describes how decisive America's cynicism and arrogance under Bush Jr. was when he illegally decided to wage a war of aggression on Iraq (together with Britain and others).

4) To end the war in Ukraine through negotiations. Seizing the opportunities instead of blocking them. Don't miss the opportunity

The point I have for the political class and the mainstream media here in Germany, here in Denmark and in Europe, is whether there is any willingness at all, certainly with civil courage and a willingness to take risks, to recognize the opportunities, to contribute to the de-escalation of this war and other tensions, in the sense of the great diplomats and politicians like **Olof Palme, Willy Brandt or Egon Bahr**, or to disregard, not to perceive or even to dogmatically block them by a narrowly drawn view. I cannot go into detail here about the missed opportunities of Gorbachev's overtures, even of the authoritarian brutal Putin in the first years of his rule, nor about NATO's fatal decision in Bucharest in spring 2008 on Ukraine and Georgia. Bush Junior's neoconservative foreign policy was a bellicose policy of humiliating not only the Arab world in the Iraq War, but also Russia at the NATO conference in Bucharest.

Time is running out.