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## **Manfred SAPPER**

### **"Test Case Ukraine - Russia's War, the West and the Paths to Peace"**

In his introduction to the topic, Claude Pantaleoni, President of Ad Pacem, reminds us that exactly one year ago Russia attacked the neighbouring country of Ukraine with the aim of destroying this state in order to deprive the Ukrainians of any *raison d'être* as a people. Since then, Putin has been trying to justify his plan to his people with lies and falsifications of history. The European peace order is highly endangered. In order to explore Europe's weaknesses and strengths in this war situation and the possible scenarios for ending the war, the board of Ad Pacem has invited Mr. Sapper from the oldest Eastern European monthly magazine to give this lecture.

Mr Sapper studied Eastern European history and political science. Under his leadership, the journal "Osteuropa" has received several awards. The best known of these are the "Dialogpreis" of the German-Polish Association and the "Karl-Wilhelm-Fricke-Preis" of the Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung. An important concern of the interdisciplinary journal for Western Europeans is to make the various historical realities of Eastern Europeans better known.

After the welcome and introduction of the guest, Pantaleoni asks all present in the room to stand up for a minute of silence to remember the injured and dead to which the Russian war of aggression led in the first year.

### **Why arms deliveries to Ukraine?**

NATO General Jens Stoltenberg has been calling for more arms deliveries to Ukraine since the beginning of the war so that victory against Russia would be achieved on the battlefield. Hence the question to Sapper whether victory can only be achieved on the battlefield.

Sapper reminds us that for the European community of states and for the West in general, wars of aggression are prohibited altogether. This is regulated in the Charter of the United Nations and there is no doubt about it. However, Article 51 of this Charter stipulates that defensive wars are justified wars and that any state under attack has the right to hope for and receive the support of other states. When the Russian Federation attacked Ukraine on 24 February 2022, it was on the basis of this article that military support was organised, and without there being any war aim on the part of the Europeans, the USA or the British. It was the banal consideration that the attacked has the right to defend itself and to be supported when its freedom, self-determination and sovereignty are violated. To this day, however, with the arms deliveries, it is not clear what the objective is. There is a difference between the interests of Ukraine and the interests of the USA or European states. These interests can be seen in the small semantic differences of politicians in France, in Luxembourg, in Germany or in Poland: Ukraine must not lose this war or Russia must not win this war or

Russia must lose this war - these are three different keys or interpretations, while it is obvious that without military help from the West, Ukraine would have been destroyed since mid-March (2022), tens of thousands who belong to the political elite or would have resisted would have been killed, hundreds of thousands would have been deported or taken to filtration camps, as has been happening since the first war of aggression in eastern Ukraine in 2014. Where the Ukrainian army has withdrawn and peace has not come, crimes have been committed against the civilian population, as in Butsha, in Isyum and in other towns, in the north of Kyiv and in the north-east in the Kharkiv region, or in the areas where fighting has been going on since 2014. It should not be forgotten that the war is now in its ninth year and that during these years about 15,000 people have been killed in the Russian-occupied territories. This is the reason why the West, especially the British, the Americans and increasingly the members of NATO and the European Union are supplying weapons.

### **Learning from the first Russian occupation**

Sapper answers the question of why there are long delays in the delivery of weapons from Europe with the explanation that since the annexation of Crimea by the "little green men", who were in fact Russian special units of the GRU (= Russian military intelligence service), the British, US and Canadians have carried out a large-scale training programme to strengthen the fighting capacity of the Ukrainian army. This is because the Ukrainian army surrendered in Crimea and eastern Ukraine in 2014. With the British, North American and Canadian military trainers, communication channels and pathways have been established that have also enabled the rapid delivery of weapons from these countries since 24 February 2022. The leaders of these countries were also the first to understand that Ukraine desperately needs military support. It was not the political heavyweights of the European Union and the relatively strong European nuclear powers, France and England, who offered military assistance, but above all the small Baltic states (occupied in 1941), Slovakia and the Czech Republic (occupied in 1938) and Poland (victim of the Hitler-Stalin Pact in 1939), all of which had negative experiences with the Soviet Union when they lost their own sovereignty. It was only afterwards that a change of thinking slowly took place in the European Union. When Germany, which wanted to stay out of all combat zones, offered Ukraine 5,000 helmets at the beginning of the war, this was ridiculous in the eyes of the Eastern and Central Europeans, as they sided much more firmly with the attacked.

### **"Never again war!" - not the same everywhere!**

Sapper answers the question of why it takes a year to deliver tanks to Ukraine with the fact that the historical memories and political cultures of the European countries are extremely different. What remains decisive is the question of what memory the war has in the political culture of each country to this day. Against the background of historical responsibility, the following applies to Germany today: Since it was decisively responsible for the First World War and also caused the Second World War, for Germans this has become the categorical imperative "Never again war!". In the collective memory of Germans today, war equals war of aggression. So they stay out of it.

Of course, it looks completely different from the perspective of Poland, which was invaded by Nazi Germany on 1 September 1939 and, what we Western Europeans usually don't know, by the Soviet Union on 17 September of the same year. The Poles suddenly found

themselves between the hammer and the anvil. This is best illustrated by Andrzej Wajda's film "Katyn", in which people are attacked from the west by the Wehrmacht and from the east by the Red Army. The Balts experienced a similar situation when they were caught between Hitler's and Stalin's troops, both of whom wanted to occupy their country. This explains why there is a different readiness in Germany, in France and in Spain to provide military assistance to Ukraine. Those who belonged to the Soviet sphere of power, those who experienced the loss of their own sovereignty there, immediately understood the Russian war of aggression. The countries that were occupied in Western Europe during the Second World War did not have the same fundamental problem as Germany in recognising, even eighty years later, the legitimacy of defensive war. At the time of this conference, a peace demonstration is taking place at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate with friends of Alice Schwarzer and Sahra Wagenknecht under the slogan "Never again arms deliveries". According to Sapper, these activists are in fact making Ukraine the perpetrator and Russia the victim, which is an outrageous reversal of reality. There could never be such a discussion in Poland.

### **Limited nuclear war**

One hears the claim in many European states that Ukraine is doomed in itself because the country is smaller and does not have the military potential of Russia. Small Ukraine (40 million inhabitants) can never defeat its big neighbour Russia (140 million inhabitants), which is 21 times bigger territorially. Ukraine is not a nuclear power like Russia. You cannot win a war against a nuclear power. This argumentation is "hollow" for Mr. Sapper and he wonders why the journalists who spread this argumentation do not think. After all, the decolonisation wars of the 20th century took place against nuclear powers: Algeria won against France, Vietnam won against the USA, the Soviet Union lost in Afghanistan against the Mujahedin. Historically, therefore, this argument is untenable.

Sapper does not know what is really going on in Putin's head. Sapper answers the question of when to use atomic bombs with the example of the USA, which dropped them on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan on 8 and 9 August 1945 to demonstrate power. Russia's nuclear strategy is to use nuclear weapons when the existence of the state is threatened. When this existential threat is the case, we do not know. Putin threatened to use nuclear weapons in 2022, when the Russian army's conventional weapons were in short supply. He tried to use the threat of nuclear weapons to stir up fear among Ukraine's supporters, for whom this deterrent works. However, this deterrence does not work on the states of Central and Eastern Europe that were part of the communist empire, because they know how the Russian intelligence agents and their military leadership think and that they want to get their way through intimidation. The likelihood of there being a use of nuclear weapons is relatively low in eastern Ukraine because the immediate collateral damage there would be severe, even for Russian border areas, with about 250 days of westerly winds a year. So this is where self-deterrence works.

To this day, there is an overriding functioning agreed deterrence between Americans and Russians that prevents nuclear mutual destruction capability. It is referred to by the abbreviation "MAD", which means "mutual assured destruction". At the moment, it would make no military sense for Russia to use the nuclear weapon. It would not benefit Russia at all. Sapper rates the probability of nuclear weapons use as very low. But the likelihood of Russia threatening it more and more will increase the more Russia is militarily pressed with

conventional weapons on the battlefield of the Ukrainian annexed territories of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhya, Kherson and Crimea.

### **Is a NATO mission in Ukraine possible?**

To the question of whether a NATO deployment in Ukraine is conceivable, as it was in the war against Serbia, where it brought about an end to the war, Sapper answers with a clear no, because we are dealing with two completely different constellations. The Yugoslav war was a civil and dissolution war of a federation held together by the strong Serbian dominance of Titoism. Russia was not a party to the war then. Now, however, Russia is a direct party to the war. The Americans will support Ukraine only as strongly and as long as the US and Europe are not directly drawn into the war against Russia. NATO and Ukraine have different interests vis-à-vis Russia. Even if Ukraine does everything it can to get the West on its side militarily, economically and politically, this will never lead to NATO intervention there.

The Americans provide Ukraine with reconnaissance data, as in the sinking of the Russian cruiser Moskva in the Black Sea, where reconnaissance flights provided the Ukrainian military with the necessary data. The Americans know when a Russian commander-in-chief is going to enter the occupied territories, and they tell the Ukrainian military not to attack him. For the Russians know that this is only possible thanks to the mediation of American reconnaissance data. The Americans will not allow the war to escalate that far. When the American President Jo Biden showed up in Kiev with Selensky in the open street, Russians were informed of this beforehand so that they would not attack Kiev.

These communication channels continue and there will be no NATO deployment unless there is a (misguided) attack by Russia on NATO territory, as happened with a cruise missile on Polish territory in the autumn of 2022. According to Sapper, this incident has not been resolved to date. Officially, it is said that it was a crashed Ukrainian missile that shot down Russian cruise missiles.

During his visit to Ukraine, the American president clearly stated that an attack on Poland or the Baltic states, according to Article 5, would mean a military intervention by NATO. Not since the Cuban Missile Crisis sixty years ago has NATO found itself in a similarly grave situation.

### **Russia's blitzkrieg failed**

"Is Putin surrounded by generals and by an FSB that supports him one hundred per cent, or can we expect divisions in his circle of advisers in the future?" Sapper responds to this question by pointing out that the FSB's intelligence papers to Putin have produced a debacle. They assumed that with a blitzkrieg of three to four days, as in Georgia in 2008, the objectives would be achieved. They did not take into account the change in mentality of the Ukrainians and the change in military capability as a result of the past eight years of war. The Ukrainian army, following the Western model, has changed its warfare. They have decentralised and changed the structure of responsibility in the military field. As a result, the Ukrainian army, although far outnumbered, was able to wear down the Russian units with small, independently operating units when the Russian military columns entered the country from the north, east and south-east. No one had expected this. The Russians had assumed that their elite airborne troops (paratroopers) would land at Hostomel airport, north of Kiev,

from where they would shortly carry out a coup in Kiev to overthrow the Ukrainian regime and replace it with a Russia-friendly one. Russia's attack on Ukraine has so far cost the lives of tens of thousands of Russian soldiers. There are conflicts about this in the Russian elite leadership, which is usually considered closed in the West. There are conflicts between the intelligence officers who are responsible for the mistakes and those in charge of the troops whose soldiers are dying. After all, after ten weeks of war, Russia has lost more soldiers than the Soviet Union did after ten years in Afghanistan. These conflicts are objectively present. "We have to think of Putin as an arbitrator," says Sapper, because "he is not the dominant dictator who has everything under control, but different interest groups have their position and bring them into the political barter."

### **Possible end to the war**

"Every morning, Putin's day begins with reading three dossiers. The first, from the FSB, provides information on the general situation in the world. The second is from the Foreign Intelligence Service about developments in other countries and the third is the Federal Protective Service (a department of the intelligence service), which does nothing but control the Russian elites. This is where, for example, the conflicts between the Wagner troops and the army or between the Chechen fighters (Kadirovsky) and the army are dealt with. Sapper sees a possible end to the war precisely at this level where a split can occur, namely when the costs and sacrifices for this war are no longer borne by the elites. If the fear of Putin becomes less important than the fear of too high war costs, Russian elites could advocate an end to it. Here, according to Sapper, Putin's authoritarian regime stability will (have to) prove itself in the coming weeks and months. From this he concludes that Ukraine should be militarised over this winter of 2023 in such a way that it is not completely destroyed and reduced to rubble by the next Russian offensive. It must be the case, on the other hand, that the cost to the Russian elites becomes so high that continuing the war makes no sense to them and it becomes more sensible to end it. This is a realistic prospect.

An audience member in the room claims that this war is not in the interest of Ukraine, Russia or the West. It is in the interest of other groups. He asks Sapper, whom he calls a demagogue for downplaying Wagenknecht's and Schwarzer's manifesto, why this war is not being prevented.

### **Revisionism in Imperial Russia**

Sapper retorts by quoting Albert Einstein and Bertrand Russell, who were already aware that National Socialism could not be fought by a fundamentally pacifist attitude. The military support of Poland and the military liberation of Europe from National Socialist rule was right and just.

Behind Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine are not the interests of the arms industry and imperial America, but it is Russia's imperial thinking that does not accept Ukraine's independence and self-responsibility. This war is neither in the interest of Ukraine, nor in the interest of the Russian people or the Europeans. But it is in the interest of the Russian regime, which has systematically destroyed any form of civil society autonomy since 2011/2012 with Putin's return to the presidency. This has undermined media pluralism in Russia and taken away any *raison d'être* for human rights activists, non-governmental organisations, and journalists who received financial support from abroad. Memorial, a

major Russian human rights organisation, has been banned and stripped of its property. An authoritarian, aggressive, revisionist regime has emerged in Russia. This is the development since Putin said in 2005 that the dissolution of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century and that he would do everything step by step to push back this dissolution. In Putin's perception, the Russian empire includes the heartland of Ukraine, as well as Belarus, which the Orthodox Patriarch Cyril calls Holy Rus. When in 1938 it was decided in the Munich Treaty to break up Czechoslovakia, no one took it seriously. In 1939, the Nazis invaded Poland and then the other countries of Europe. Thus, since 1938, revisionism has again been topical in Europe.

Sapper criticises Sahra Wagenknecht's and Alice Schwarzer's manifesto because it does not state that on 24 February 2022 Russia invaded Ukraine, and the perpetrators of the murders and devastation are not named. Not a single word is said in favour of ending Russian arms supplies to the Russian army fighting in Ukraine, while the Ukrainian president is accused of demanding weapons from the West to defend his country. Instead of Scholz, the call of this manifesto should have Putin as its addressee.

### **Budapest Treaty 1994**

In the late phase of the Soviet Union, American representatives in Kiev argued before the Verkhovna Rada that Ukraine should remain part of Russia, and they were against the country's independence. In 1994, America joined all Western states in advocating that the nuclear powers Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan should hand over their nuclear weapons to Russia or to America so that they would be destroyed. That year, the Americans signed the Budapest Treaty with the Russians, the British and Ukraine, guaranteeing Ukraine's territorial integrity if it surrendered its nuclear weapons. But the Russians destroyed this territorial integrity of Ukraine in 2014 without the British and Americans doing anything. Today, this gives these guarantors of the Budapest Treaty the legitimacy to supply Ukraine with weapons to restore its territorial integrity. After the Budapest Treaty, the Americans largely withdrew from Europe and it corresponds to "old thinking", according to Sapper, that the Americans have an interest in Europe. Their interest is primarily in the Southeast Pacific conflict situation, where China is expanding its power. Obama has even called Russia an "unimportant regional power". From a European perspective, the fixation on the US has been important from the 1970s to the 1990s. But the fixation on the US to explain Russia's war against Ukraine is empirically untenable. It does not apply politically, but it may help to clarify the question of who is to blame. Even the German arms companies are not powerful enough to prod Putin to invade Ukraine to increase their sales orders.

When asked by a guest in the room why it is the Americans and not Europe who have strongly supported Ukraine with arms, how long this support will last and when Europe will take full responsibility for supporting Ukraine, Sapper says that Putin's war has so far achieved the opposite of what he wanted to achieve. He has brought "brain-dead NATO" (Emmanuel Macron) or "obsolete NATO" (Donald Trump) back to Europe, revived it, united the European Union with its multiple conflicts, and got neutral countries like Finland and Sweden to knock on NATO's door. For the first time since 1945, Europeans also have a strong territorial war, something they could not have imagined. Just as today a war between France and Germany is no longer imaginable, until recently it was thought that this applied to the whole European area. It may be that this war will lead to a refounding of the self-image of

the European Union and NATO and that Europeans will realise that freedom and self-determination cannot be taken for granted by Russia. The assumption that the US will permanently support Ukraine militarily is wrong. If Trump had been president in this situation, Ukraine would already have been destroyed. The war would have come to a relatively quick end as a blitzkrieg. The idea of the OSCE or a rules-based international order has also been destroyed. The understanding of the European Union and the basic principles of what we learned from the Second World War ("Never again shall states invade other states; never again shall territories be illegally annexed; never again shall borders be moved by force") has been destroyed with this war. This is the reason why a radical pacifist, ethicist stance on the Ukraine war is wrong. It does not allow for a responsible solution on how to deal with Putin's war of aggression. Putin is a revisionist and is pursuing aggressive and bellicose goals that have been underestimated by Europeans until this war of aggression.

### **Powerless United Nations (UN)**

Why do we have to wait for China to come up with a peace plan and why can't the United Nations do it? To this Sapper replies that this organisation of the world community was subject to a birth defect from the beginning. The victors and nuclear powers of the Second World War all have a veto, which allows Russia to use its veto power in a peace plan. The representatives of the world community have twice since the beginning of the war tried to build up "pressure" for an end to the war with resolutions. Twice, an overwhelming majority voted in favour of ending the war. In the end, 141 states supported the resolution that Russia withdraw its troops from Ukraine. Only seven sided with Russia, with 35 abstentions. Although a majority of states in the United Nations area voted for the withdrawal of Russian troops, this does not yet result in a peace plan. However, this remains without consequences because of Russia's veto power. There is no prospect of a peace plan coming from a third party. So far, it looks like only those who started the war can end it. Putin can end the war immediately. Only then can there be peace negotiations if both warring parties come to the realisation that continuing the war is worse than an immediate ceasefire and a negotiation on the status quo. Ukraine is not ready for this because 100,000 people have been killed and it is asking itself what they actually died for. Putin is not prepared one iota to move away from denazifying Ukraine, demilitarising it, overthrowing the regime and ceding the four annexed territories as a non-negotiable part of the Russian Federation. These two positions are mutually exclusive for any peace negotiations. As long as this is the case, there will be no peace. The Chinese have no interest in ending the war, despite their twelve-point peace plan, because the Americans are distracted by arms and money shipments to Ukraine from the Pacific, where China is extending its power against Taiwan. Incidentally, two things are mutually exclusive in this Chinese plan: China recalls territorial integrity, only to add at the same time that the legitimate interests of neighbouring states must be taken into account.

### **NATO's eastward enlargement**

Behind Russia's justification for war is a defensive stance, opposing NATO's eastward expansion and American imperialism, according to Putin's announcement just before the February 2022 war of aggression. He wants to fight fascism in Ukraine, as well as the genocide of ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine. This is the legitimacy he proclaims to the

Russian people for the special military operation to take place in Ukraine. To this Putin adds the foreign policy dimension that the Americans and the entire West, with NATO's eastward expansion, are to blame for Russia's military intervention because they threaten Russian security. There is currently a radicalisation of this position on Putin's part. Thus, he claims that Russia is in a fight against Western Satanism. This is exactly the thinking of the Russian Orthodox Patriarch Cyril. Thus, Putin ideologically-politically justifies this defensive war internally, which for him is a special military operation.

### **Why no war tribunal?**

When asked why it is impossible to set up a war tribunal to try the perpetrators of this war, Sapper answers that it is extremely complicated to initiate a prosecution under international law. Neither Russia nor Ukraine has signed the Rome Statute that makes such a prosecution possible. The Hague War Tribunal cannot investigate this case either. Ukraine submits to this jurisdiction by saying that the war of aggression was directed against the Ukrainian state and that the war crimes took place on its territory. However, a special tribunal is currently being worked on because Ukraine has collected an incredible amount of evidence documenting Russian war crimes. It is doing it as an investigative agency and through non-governmental organisations, which have recorded tens of thousands of cases so far. This war is completely different from other wars because everyone is recording what is happening with their smartphones. The horror of Butsha was thus recorded first and foremost by a man who watched, hidden in a barn, as the paratroopers from Pskov tied up civilians and shot them one by one in the street. He then immediately handed over these recordings to the Ukrainian criminal investigation authority. With this material, Ukraine has so far tried to prosecute individual perpetrators who committed war crimes. So far, it is rather young criminals (aged just over twenty) of the Russian soldiery who have been convicted. But the big fish, the presidents, who enjoy immunity, cannot be approached. Unless a criminal order were to come from a state. In principle, any state can do this according to the criminal world principle, but the Federal Prosecutor's Office in Germany shies away from this because it believes that this is only a symbolic act. Only if, for example, the regime in Russia were to collapse would it be possible to arrest Putin, Shoigu, Patrushev (head of the Security Council of the Russian Federation) and the other main Russian perpetrators of the war. As long as there is war, prosecution is not possible. A trial along the lines of the Nuremberg model or as in the case of the Yugoslavia tribunal in which Milosevic, Mladic and others were indicted is not politically feasible at the moment.

### **Continuation of the war of attrition**

There is a possibility that this war will become a war of attrition and will be so until its end. There is no hope that the war will stop with a halt to Western weapons. Indeed, the facts speak against it, because it has been established that torture, deportations and crimes against humanity are taking place in the territories occupied by Russia. The writings of Aseiv, a journalist who spent a long time in a concentration camp in eastern Ukraine, prove this. There has been no more war, but the crimes against the civilian population have continued. Stopping the supply of weapons leads to the abandonment, the fall of Ukraine. This does not mean that the revisionist course of the Putin regime has ended. There is the fear that in the next step the Moldavians, the Georgians or the Baltic states will be attacked by Russia.

## **New European peace order with Russia not in sight**

After the Second World War, the West protected itself from the USSR with the Iron Curtain. In 1991, the Iron Curtain was dismantled and trade relations with Russia were expanded. What relations will Europe have with Russia after the war? Sapper does not know the answer to this question. However, he points out that in the future, Ukraine will base its entire policy on the security of the state vis-à-vis Russia. It will no longer have confidence in Russian politicians, no matter what they say. This is because Russia has been trying to destabilise and occupy Ukraine since 2004. Russia is not prepared to recognise the validity of state borders. This was not the case with the USSR, which was interested in the status quo. If Ukraine loses the war, it will disappear as a state and millions more people will leave the country. If Ukraine wins the war, the absolute priority in the country will clearly be security interests. Everything else will be subordinate to it. Russia will remain as a revanchist power if it loses this war. Europe's common path with Russia is over. It will take several decades before trust-building in Europe with Russia will be possible again. How are Ukrainians supposed to trust a single Russian politician? They have been lied to time and again for twenty years: with the attempted poisoning of the president in 2004, the interference in the Maidan uprising, the occupation of Crimea, the start of the war in eastern Ukraine, etc. It will take at least a generation before a new peace order, including Russia, will be possible. Sapper concludes his lecture with the fear that in the future the conflict situation will be determined by authoritarian dictatorships like Russia and China on the one hand and liberal democratic states on the other. It is not a pleasant perspective, but it is the more realistic one.