[https://gegen-kapital-und-nation.org/en/if-you-want-peace-prepare-for-war-russia-ukraine-nato-eu/]

“If you want peace, prepare for war” (Russia, Ukraine, NATO, EU)

This text is a translation of “Si vis pacem para bellum – Wer Frieden will rüste sich zum Krieg (Platon, Cicero, Russland, Ukraine, NATO, EU)” which was published on 21 February 2022.

This text was written before the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 23/24.02.22. Some points are therefore outdated: the Minsk Agreement no longer plays a role; the considerations in the text about Russia's options are outdated; Russia's current war objectives are not specifically included in the text. However, these can be explained as a consequence of Russia's demands against Ukraine and NATO, which are dealt with in the text. The text still explains the general reason for war and is therefore still recommended.

“If you talk, you don’t shoot”, says the German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock. You might feel reassured by that, since rarely have there been so many top-level meetings and video conferences between heads of state from all over the world as there were in Spring 2022. However, the connection between diplomacy and war is rather different from what the lords and ladies of war in charge keep claiming. Diplomatically, they tell each other what they want and define “red lines” which, if crossed, they are willing to wage war over.

This text is about the reasons why Russia, Ukraine and the NATO countries are gearing up for war. For this, we do not have to search for hidden interests working in secret behind the scenes, but we can rely entirely on the official announcements. They give us everything we need to understand their reasons. Of course, we have to distinguish between what the heads of state communicate to each other and what is addressed more to their own populations. That the opposing side lies, cheats, is the sole aggressor and thus simply “evil” is what everyone hears in their home propaganda. Yet, this tells us nothing about the war, except that our own state is “good” and cannot help but to “react” with preparations for or even acts of war, despite really not wanting to. For many, these are moral reasons to keep their fingers crossed for their own state, to demonise the other, to willingly accept the coming economic hardships or to offer themselves as cannon fodder.

This text deals only marginally with these justifications of war. Here we only ask you to suspend the question of who is good or bad for a few minutes and to simply ask: What is happening? Afterwards, you can return to questions of who you want to root for - spoiler, we recommend: Nobody.

What is Russia demanding, what is the “West” demanding?

The protagonists tell each other what they want from each other. These demands and the answers to them are listed here at the beginning, firstly to outline the scope of all that plays a role and secondly to make clear that none of these demands are new, they have been known for a long time. This is important to note because it explains that the potential reasons for war lie deeper than any concrete events in Spring 2022.

1. Russia demands
    - An end to NATO's eastward expansion. At least Ukraine must not become a NATO member; but this also covers Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Sweden and Finland.
    - Implementation of the Minsk Agreement, i.e. above all: direct negotiations with the separatists and the securing of autonomy statuses. The West must exert pressure on Ukraine to promote this.
    - Stop the armament of Ukraine by Western powers.
    - Stop arming other Eastern European NATO countries and holding NATO manoeuvres there.
    - In particular, a halt to stationing certain weapons systems in the Eastern European NATO countries – accompanied by the accusation that this undermines some treaties of the past.

This is summed up in the demand for security guarantees in Europe and for Russia. In addition, there are demands in matters of form:

- Direct negotiations with the US (instead of only with Germany or France).
- Direct negotiations with NATO instead of, for example, within the framework of the OECD.

1. What the West demands from Russia, or how the West reacts to these demands
    - No end to the “Open Door Policy”: If a state intends to apply or applies for NATO membership and NATO members agree, it gets the prospect of membership.
    - Russia should recognise the right of peoples to self-determination = withdrawal of Russian troops from Crimea, from Eastern Ukraine as well as from Georgia (from Russia's point of view: Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and Moldova (from Russia's point of view: Transnistria).

- Russia's manoeuvres near the Eastern European states must stop.
- In particular, a halt to the stationing of certain weapons systems on the borders with the Eastern European NATO states - accompanied by the accusation that this undermines some treaties of the past.

As already noted, none of these demands from Russia or NATO are new. The adversaries have been pestering each other with them for years. One thing may have changed in the present, though: The US, or rather the new president, is talking more directly to Putin and taking on the issue more – without hinting at a compromise.

All sides affirm that they do not want war. But threats are made in abundance.

Russia: “We don't want war, we don't need it at all”.

The Russian UN Ambassador is summarised as follows by the German newspaper *Handelsblatt* on 1 Feb 2022:

> “Russia does not want to start a war in Ukraine even if demands for security guarantees from NATO and the USA fail, according to its UN ambassador. ‘I can rule that out’, Russia's representative to the UN, Vasily Nebenzua, said in New York, according to the Interfax agency. Even if negotiations on security in Europe fail, there will be no Russian incursion into Ukraine, he said. Nebenzua had accused the USA at the UN meeting on Monday of trying to provoke a war in Europe. Russia sees itself threatened by US weapons and NATO and is therefore demanding security guarantees. At the same time, the leadership in Moscow does not rule out intervention in the conflict over eastern Ukraine should Kyiv attempt to take back the breakaway territories in the Donbas by force with a military operation. Russia could invade there, invoking its military doctrine to protect its citizens.”

The Russian UN ambassador states that its demands against NATO are not linked to a threat of war, only to insert a BUT at the end. With the military action on the part of Kyiv against the eastern provinces, Russia has certainly given itself a rather flexible reason for entering the war: For it is clear that the government in Kyiv aims to take back the breakaway republics and for this purpose is deploying its military and arming itself. It is a known fact that war is constantly being waged on the front lines inside Ukraine.

On this basis, Russia has indeed issued a threat of war. Russia can decide that Ukraine desires to take back the eastern provinces with military operations at any time: this is a question which it simply places within its decision-making jurisdiction. Russia could have established this as a fact several years ago and could just as easily establish it today as in a fortnight or a year.

By linking demands on NATO with this occasion for entering the war, which can be interpreted broadly, Russia is making it clear to the West: react to our demands, otherwise, we will take the liberty of decisively changing the situation in Ukraine not only indirectly via arms deliveries, but directly with Russian military power.

If Russia feels that there is too much military involvement on the part of Kyiv on the borders of the eastern provinces (or too little respect for its demands on the part of NATO), then Russia has several options: Increased armament aid for the eastern provinces, sending in mercenaries or even sending in its own soldiers. If Kyiv, in turn, were to use this as a reason for intensified military action, Russia could in turn wage war on western Ukraine (or militarily prevent the government in Kyiv from moving troops), not to annex all of Ukraine, but to finalise the de facto secession of the eastern provinces.

Alternatively: do nothing at all, end the mass manoeuvres around Ukraine, and then simply repeat them in three or six months. In this way, Russia keeps NATO on its toes, but can still make the transition at any time or simply speculate that its threats are escalating the differences of interest within NATO - more on this in a moment.

NATO: “does not seek confrontation”.

So NATO does not want a war either, but they do want to “defend” a lot, and that with a clear forward momentum. Here, however, the positions within NATO also diverge a little.

Nobody wants to attack Russia *now*. But the US, Poland and the Baltic states are working hard to rearm Eastern Europe, including the new NATO states so that at some point they can work their way out of a nuclear stalemate with Russia and make war against it realistically winnable through superior weapons systems and without immense collateral damage. All European states are working on this, but for some with the brakes somewhat engaged – more on this in a moment.

Ukraine is happy to be rearmed by its hoped-for NATO partners. The USA, Great Britain and the Baltic states are eager to comply. Other countries are more cautious – again, see below.

But NATO's position is clear: it will not directly intervene in support of Ukraine in the event of military action by Russia. If Ukraine should now become a bigger battlefield than it already is then only one thing is promised: tough economic sanctions against Russia up to the threat of the economic policy “atomic bomb”: exclusion from the SWIFT system, i.e. exclusion from the international payment system based in Brussels

through which all private bank transfers are made globally. Immediately, Russia would be excluded from almost all international trade.

Concerning economic sanctions, it is above all Europe itself that is addressed and then affected. In this respect, some states are somewhat hesitant, especially Germany with its Nord Stream 2 project. Much revolves around the disciplining of these NATO partners by the US, with its European junior partners cheering it on.

NATO is responding to Russia's demands to “stop arming Eastern Europe” with a united and demonstrative additional deployment of troops in these areas. Almost all powers are committed to this.

For what kind of peace are all sides prepared to wage a war or, currently, prepared to let Ukraine wage one?

Both Russia and NATO are concerned with nothing less than the peace order in Europe. Both equate this with a “security architecture”. Peace can only be achieved if the military force mobilised by all sides is properly coordinated and correctly deployed. Here, what is “correct” is a matter of divergent positions based on national interests. There are considerable differences between Russia and NATO in principle, but also between the NATO countries themselves.

Quite a few recent wars have been legitimised by the West with human rights, along the lines that some people must be supported and defended against a dictator or an unjust regime. Against these wars, Russia has always upheld the right of peoples to self-determination (Yugoslavia, Syria). In the battle for legitimacy over the current peace order in Europe, NATO, on the other hand, highlights the peoples' right to self-determination when they demand of Russia that decisions by governments to join NATO must be respected.

Human rights or the right of peoples to self-determination are not empty formulas, they are indeed principles of the international world order. But international agreements are either respected by states or not. In the end, it depends on the economic and military power of the states involved whether one or the other principle is applied. In any case, the principles are suitable for displaying a war as good or bad.

Concerning the order in Europe, Russia does not necessarily go along with the peoples' right to self-determination. In places where an uprising, like the Maidan, deposed the old government, Russia does not recognise the new one. Secondly, it denies that a government can do whatever it wants in terms of security policy without taking Russia's security interests into account. It has used its military means to throw a spanner in the works of

NATO's peaceful eastward expansion in the case of Ukraine. In Moldova and Georgia, Russia has long supported provinces that rebel against a Western orientation.

To unpick the situation, it makes sense to start with the EU.

The EU and the peaceful enlargement towards the East.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union involved the creation of many new states and the detachment of old Eastern bloc states from old obligations. In the calculations of the various communist and other new parties, especially in Russia, the old interstate economic rules of the socialist countries (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance – CMEA) were regarded as dead weights for their new capitalist-oriented national awakening programmes. At the same time, the old economic interdependencies were speculated on in the way capitalist-oriented states are expected to: they are material for extracting advantages for the national economy, if need be at the expense of the other nation.

This and the conversion of the former planned economy to a capitalist one destroyed many national economies. Newly founded or released from old obligations, these states became cases for the IMF.

The EU states saw an opportunity here. Gradually, the following offer was made to the states in various waves of EU enlargement: Work towards becoming an EU member. To do this, you have to adopt all the rules of the EU that already exist as a complete package. This has the advantage that capital from the EU (if it wants to) will come to you. The price: you have to adopt the EU's free trade and product standard rules, which are incompatible with your old economic relations with your neighbours further east. Because those who are part of the EU's internal market are no longer allowed to make their own independent customs policies but must observe the tariffs set by the EU in regards to non-EU countries. Compromises are out of the question – that's “just” how the EU works.

If states agreed to this then this increased the pressure on their partners further east. These lost another piece of their national economy because their neighbour joined the EU and previous trade rules were terminated. This was a good basis for the EU's offer to these neighbours.

Joining the EU (or working towards it) is pretty much the same as joining NATO. This is another “advantage” that the EU can put on the table as an offer.

The free movement of workers, which beckons with EU membership, is an advantage for states that speculate on getting at least foreign currency (= world money such as Euros or Dollars) through the remittances to home, made by their nationals who become migrant workers. For many wage-dependent people, freedom of movement seems promising because they

have been made unemployed due to the conversion of the real-socialist planned economy to a free-market economy.

At least among parts of the population (especially students), the VISA-free movement in the EU and the enforcement of certain legal standards in terms of freedom of expression are understood to mean that “Go West” is a thing worth aspiring to. This is mentioned here because it plays a role in the “Maidan” uprisings.

Further east, the EU has certain problems with its process of peaceful conquest of Eastern Europe. In Ukraine, Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, there are notable proportions of the political elites and also parts of the population who are not easily convinced to simply join the EU. In the West, this is seen as “seesaw politics”. Even if a government that is described as “pro-Western” is in power, it cannot bring itself to decide on a pro-EU course without hesitation, because this is tantamount to breaking economic relations with Russia (as mentioned above, this is because of the EU's insistence to adopt all EU rules, which rules out any compromise). Often, the states benefit in particular from comparatively cheap oil and gas from Russia.

Russia, however, has no economic development path to offer to these states either, so the governments always manoeuvre back and forth between Russia and the EU in their national interest.

In this mixed situation, so-called “popular uprisings” occurred, which the West recognised as justified, supported with infrastructure and, as soon as in power, with money and finally with arms supplies.

Here, Russia has intervened militarily several times. It has militarily supported those parts of the country that positioned themselves more pro-Russian. In the case of Belarus, Russia supports the government.

Every EU enlargement has been an economic drain on Russia's interests. More and more states have been broken out of its customary economic and trade relations. This is reason enough for Russia to reject the EU's eastward enlargement. However, an even stronger reason for rejection is the linkage of EU=NATO.

By providing military support to certain regions of states, Russia has thus made the following clear:

The “peaceful” conquest of Eastern Europe, which was contrary to Russia's interests, was based, on the one hand, on the economic superiority of the EU and its powerful national economies. The EU states were able to jointly make economic offers to and create hardships for other states which the former Eastern bloc states simply could not refuse, while Russia could hardly offer anything in return except cheap gas and oil.

On the other hand, the EU and the eastern EU candidates could only afford to be insolent towards Russia because and as long as the competition of weapons did not come into play. Binding entire states to the EU with the

help of economic offers and blackmail has always been based on Russia's respect for the freedom of a neighbouring state to do what it wants.

This is the one basis of peace and the security architecture that the EU, in particular, wants in Europe. Only in this way can the EU unfold its “soft power” forcefully.

Russia

With Georgia, Moldova, eastern Ukraine and finally with the annexation of Crimea, Russia has shown the EU what its path of conquest was based on: peaceful progress can only be made if the opponent puts up with impertinence because it refrains from compensating for its economic inferiority with military superiority.

For a while, Russia just looked on plaintively, but then, with Putin in power, it changed its strategy. Russia does not have an alternative economic bloc concept with which it could bind Eastern Europe to itself again. But Russia has a trump card due to its Soviet history[1] and derives a claim from it: A country - such as Ukraine - must not consolidate its own security at the expense of the interests of another state - i.e. Russia.

This principle is the Russian peace order and security architecture for Europe, which is diametrically opposed to the European and NATO order. Russia has a realistic assessment of who to talk to about it: the US.

USA

On the one hand, the US pursues an economic policy concept similar to that of the EU, only on a global scale: based on its economic potency (especially as the issuer of the world money US Dollar), it makes offers to the world of states and manoeuvres them into predicaments so that they adopt free trade rules (institutionalised in the World Trade Organisation). Free trade, the US was sure, would create good growth conditions for US capital in the world and thus always produce US superiority in global competition.

Where sovereign states shunned any dialogue on the economic use of their territory on principle grounds (this is what the former Eastern bloc did), the US threatened or went to war to force a change in the *reason of state* there. Thus the following equation has become the reason of state for the US: To enforce rules in the world of states that ensure the superiority of US capital, we must at the same time be the militarily superior power.[2]

In this respect, after the disappearance of the former Eastern bloc, there was a completely different view on the European EU enlargement efforts: They are good because they help to weaken a major disruptive factor: the military world power Russia, the currently only country that still has so much military capacity that a war against it could not be won without immense collateral damage.

Side note on the different policies of US presidents

Obama called Russia a “regional power”. This, of course, was not a true statement but expressed a claim of what should be the right status for Russia; a status the US should bring about.

Trump took a different view. For him, the EU, and Germany in particular, was an opponent because they would not reproduce the economic superiority of the US without difficulty, but would undermine it. Germany, he said, was shamelessly exploiting the rules that the US had set for itself. Militarily, too, Germany would contribute nothing. Thus, he took the following line: Let Europe deal with its own land grabbing to the east. No more US taxes will be wasted on this. They are needed above all in the fight against China. This line is now adopted by US Republicans.

Of course, US military capabilities have also been significantly developed under Trump's rule, and so Biden can immediately put the old line on Russia back on the agenda: “NATO remains firmly committed to the fundamental principles and agreements underpinning European Security.”[3]

USA and EU

The EU needs NATO for its programme of conquest, and this essentially means it needs the US. For its programme of undisputed military superiority, the US needs EU enlargement as a means of weakening Russia. This identity of interests results in joint appearance and action.

In principle, however, the EU was always intended as a means for the member states (especially the central powers Germany and France) to emancipate themselves from the US in the long term. In this respect, there is currently an unpleasant side for Germany and France: as soon as EU enlargement involves military issues against Russia, the ability to act lies entirely with the US. The US then sets the pace - this was noticeable with Trump and is now noticeable with Biden.

Beneath the joint project – no compromises with Russia on the EU's eastward enlargement – lurks the inconvenience: control over the escalation with Russia is not in European hands at all.

This contradiction of the EU project then gives rise to the relative disagreements in the NATO alliance:

- Macron says that Russia's security interests can also be understood. At the same time, France is the largest arms supplier to Ukraine and never tires of emphasising that Europe (under French leadership) must become militarily independent from the USA.

- Germany does not want to supply “offensive weapons” to Ukraine and would prefer to keep Nord Stream 2 out of the threatened economic sanctions. The EU is the central power base for Germany as a global economic power. However, Germany does not like the fact that the USA

and France are pushing to secure the EU militarily in their own way because then the claim to leadership does not lie with Germany.

- The US already warned last year of an imminent Russian invasion on the occasion of a Russian manoeuvre on the border of Ukraine. Currently (January/February 2022) there is a constant barrage of immediate war warnings. French and German politicians consider this to be “exaggerated”, but gradually the position is being adopted.

- Every geopolitical question of superiority and subordination branches out further. When the US is interfering more, Poland and the Baltic states see an opportunity to make it clear to Germany and France: Within the EU, you want to be leading powers, but we do not recognise that in principle.

- Britain has longstanding ties with the US, more than Germany and France. This position has always been an attempt to change the question of hegemony in Europe more in favour of the UK. With Brexit, the UK is following this strategy more forcefully and is acting as an instigator against Russia.

Now what?

Russia, Germany and the USA are states that derive their power from their national economies. To improve these and to use foreign countries for this purpose, they enter into international treaties at the expense of the interests of other states. Therefore, these treaties (and corresponding alliances) have to be secured militarily. These clashes of interests rise to the level of competition of arms, which in turn implies that the military alliances have to be secured by force. This is the general reason for the escalating war situation in Ukraine. It is a proxy theatre for rights in the world that the states claim for themselves and want to have recognised by the adversaries. Here, the opponents do not differ from each other, and partisanship is completely out of place. On the other hand, there is a lot to be said against societies whose mode of production requires attempting the subordination of foreign states.

For the German liberal audience, which currently is particularly loud when it comes to agitation against Russia and partisanship for the German point of view, we would like to stress once more:

A German government (regardless of the coalition) that boasts that the German economy is once again the world champion somewhere or is to become one, has or is striving for technological leadership, plans with entire world regions as raw material suppliers for the new hydrogen strategy, wants to place the Euro as world money – such a government knows that it can only achieve this against China and the USA with the EU. The universally esteemed former Chancellor Merkel declared:

> “If the Euro fails, Europe fails (…) I say that we would be damaged in the medium and long term. We would be damaged in the sense

> that we would no longer be a relevant factor in the world (…). Although we are already becoming a smaller and smaller part of the world, we will no longer have the significance that we can assert ourselves with what is important to us. That is why the idea of a united Europe is of such great importance.” (Speech by Merkel at the ceremony marking the 70th anniversary of the CDU, 29 June 2015)

Merkel wants Germany to remain a relevant factor in the world, i.e. a world power. For her, this is only possible with the EU. That's the only way Germany can assert itself. That is exactly how the current government sees it, too. It knows that Germany can only achieve the EU with NATO. This nationalist project is, of course, fighting for “peace and freedom”, what else? Global peace for the freedom of the German state to assert its interests, including the freedom of the German economy to make the world its market. This project includes war in one way or another.

1 It is basically a contradiction that an economically weak country, of all things, is the world's number two military power.

2 On free trade as a means of economically superior states and on the need for military protection of such rules, see: “What is Imperialism?”

3 NATO and US response to Russia; accessed 13. Feb 2022.