

In view of the war in Ukraine and
around Ukraine

Initiative Part I

The Working Group
Common House Europe
C. F. v. Weizsäcker-Society
Knowledge and Responsibility e.V.

**Initiative Part I – To contain and overcome the war in Ukraine and over
Ukraine**

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To contain and overcome the war in Ukraine and over Ukraine

So that - and: If we get away again ...

Prologue

"War," in the words of Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, "is at least as old as advanced civilization. The oldest reports of the peoples are heroic songs and documents of victory, the ancient myths depict battles of the gods. The sufferings of war are ancient. The announcement of the Old Testament prophet, formulated in the language of the poetic parable, sounds like a utopian hope: The lion will lie down beside the lamb, and the swords will be reforged into plowshares."

Today, the situation is different. And if we follow v. Weizsäcker, it is "**fundamentally different from all previous ones.**" Today it **compels** to perceive the message of the parable as a this-worldly and permanent task. The reason lies in modern technology, "which can transform war into a total catastrophe." "In the past, not always the peoples, but still humanity survived the greatest wars that were technically possible at that time. War was a terrible institution, but a possible one. Possible it still is today, but not permanently survivable for it (humanity); it is necessary to overcome it as an institution."

Unique is the choice of words with which, only a few years after the Second World War, the Polish bishops addressed their German brothers in office: "**We grant forgiveness and ask forgiveness.**" Words that bear witness to a deep, knowing understanding: Mutual recriminations - even where they are or should be true - are not suitable for reconciliation, nor are they suitable for containing wars, and certainly not for that thousand-mile journey to overcome the institution of war as a recognized means of conflict resolution: "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone."

Time is pressing

War has returned to Europe, with the war over Ukraine for the second time after World War II. This war involves, with others, but still in a dominant way, the two great powers that possess about 90% of all nuclear weapons systems in the world.

In the Cuban Missile Crisis of **1962**, we still barely escaped, not entirely by accident. John F. Kennedy, President of the United States at the time, knew: "Above all, nuclear powers, while defending their own vital interests, must avert that confrontation which presents an adversary with a choice between humiliating retreat or nuclear war. Such a course in the nuclear age would only be evidence of the bankruptcy of our politics-or of a collective death wish for the world."

In the days of the Cold War, there was a pronounced awareness of the permanent danger of nuclear war. Today, this awareness seems to have largely faded, overlaid and overformed by global fields of tension and crisis such as the energy and world food crisis, demographic change and the overexploitation of natural resources, climate change, terrorism, migration.

But the danger of a nuclear war has not diminished because of this. On the contrary, it has been seriously aggravated by the constant further development of modern technology: by the further development of nuclear weapon systems themselves, by artificial intelligence and the algorithmization of decision-making processes, the development of chemical and biological weapons. Finally, by those defense systems through which the "balance of terror" threatens to lose its functionality. The new East-West conflict, which centers on the rivalry between the USA and China for the position of the "sole world power" (Zbigniew Brzezinski), is also associated with a new quality of the danger of nuclear war. With conflicts in the background in and around India (Kashmir), with further trouble spots such as those of the Middle East, Taiwan, the South China Sea and - last but not least - the likewise unresolved Kosovo issue in Europe.

The whole picture

Part of this is that the assured second-strike nuclear capability has presumably been essential in avoiding another "Great War" - **so far**. But this "balance of terror" is highly unstable. Not only because of the possible escalation of local conflicts at any time and the constant development of nuclear weapons systems and technologies. But also by their proliferation and by military doctrines that do not really exclude first use. Finally, by human error and human delusion.

This includes the fact that Ukraine, for all its independent goals, is ultimately also fighting for the geostrategic interests of the United States in its rivalry with the other two great powers, Russia and China. Ukraine will have to consider the extent to which this challenges or may challenge its own vital interests. - Europe, on the other hand, will have to consider whether it wants to risk the use of nuclear weapons on its territory to do so. Never before has mankind been so close to an Armageddon as today, has the thread of the nuclear sword of Damocles been so thin over our heads as today, has the awareness of the danger been so little present as today. **And the Cuban Missile Crisis teaches: one mistake is enough!**

This includes that war must not replace "political intercourse" (Carl v. Clausewitz). Today, this means that wars must no longer be waged under the conditions of modern technology. And if they are waged, they must be brought to an end in such a way that this end does not produce another Versailles, does not become the birthplace of follow-up wars. A failure of politics in this, its first task, would condemn all efforts for humanity, for "liberty, equality, fraternity" and for the preservation of creation to insignificance even after the fact.

The whole picture includes **not giving** Russia "the choice of a humiliating withdrawal or nuclear war". Contrary to a strong stream of published opinions, the Common House of Europe **does not need Ukraine alone, but Russia as well**. Otherwise, Europe will remain, in Hubert Seipel's words, "where we already stood after World War I - in the trenches." Under the nuclear sword of Damocles, the whole picture necessarily includes paving the way for a peace of understanding that contains the war over Ukraine in the perspective of the security interests of Ukraine **and** Russia, finally overcomes the war within the framework of international law in a peace of reconciliation, and - in a comprehensive pan-European security architecture - also resolves the question of "guilt and atonement".

Paths in danger

By 2015, Mikhail Gorbachev was already urgently warning, "We stand at a crossroads in the relationship between America and Russia. The trust we have so painstakingly built is at stake." Today, that trust **is** gambled away, largely, with the consequence of a "cultural system where there is no longer right and wrong for man and history." (Maurice Merleau-Ponty) And that is precisely where we are today, caught in the crossfire of traditional and new social media, of information and disinformation, in the coercive detention of instrumentalized history, after all.

In order for us to get away once again, the working group is promoting an **initiative**,

- which first and foremost, in the short term, makes **confidence-building measures** its concern, in order to revive the leading element of jointly applied reason - **that** mutual trust which, in its deep bonds, as distinct from intellectual truth-telling, is the prerequisite **and** basis for the viable success of any negotiations and agreements - be it in the form of an understanding not fixed in writing, or in the form of explicitly formulated treaties, in agreements such as the CSCE Helsinki Final Act of 1975 or the NATO-Russia Founding Act for the Improvement of Cooperation between the NATO States and Russia - the viability of which in turn develops and helps to shape the deep bonds of mutual trust.
- which in the medium term, following Henry Kissinger, takes care to modernize the "Westphalian system" and adapt it to the "new realities". That system that spread the "seminal event" of the Peace of Westphalia as a new concept of international order throughout the world. "The genius" of the Westphalian system rested, in Kissinger's words, "on the fact that its provisions were directed at procedural rather than substantive issues." Thus, each state recognized as a "subject of international law" could - according to the idea at least - preserve

its own culture, politics, religion, and internal structures and be protected by the system against outside interference.

The adaptation to new realities - such as those of modern technology, the return of the struggle for territorial zones of influence, finally in the mission of universally felt values - today, in a time so fundamentally different from **all** previous ones, necessitates a balancing act: **neither** to lose the genius of the Westphalian system, nor, on the other hand and in contrast to universally felt values, the compass of **universally valid** values. As far as Europe is concerned, the politics that produced the Charter of Paris with the opportunity for a "peace and security order from Vancouver to Vladivostok" and led to the reunification of Germany sets a pattern here, as it were.

- which in the long run follows the admonition to eliminate the institution of war. This calls for a "world domestic politics" which, however, by no means and certainly not necessarily leads to "the golden age", as v. Weizsäcker repeatedly points out: "Not the elimination of conflicts, the elimination of a certain kind of their discharge is the inevitable peace of the technical world" - not free of the fear that such a "world peace could", in "the shape of an inescapable dictatorship", for example, "very well become one of the darkest epochs of human history".

Epilog

War - involving two nuclear powers - has returned to Europe and with it the danger that modern technology will turn the war over Ukraine into a total disaster. It is still true: "No security without America", but it is also true: "No security without Russia". And if we get away with it again, then the same will apply: "No security without China" as well.¹

None of the structural reasons that lead to wars has really been overcome. After Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Carl Friedrich v. Weizsäcker spent a researcher's life never tiring of reminding us: "It is not the elimination of conflicts, but the elimination of a certain way of carrying them out that is the inevitable peace of the technical world.

Today, it is Henry Kissinger's turn to remind us of this as well: "The Westphalian system was drafted by some two hundred delegates, none of whom went down in the annals of history as an outstanding figure. ... They overcame obstacles because they were united by the devastating experience of the Thirty Years' War and the determination to prevent the repetition of such a catastrophe. In our time, threatened by an even more ominous future, we must do what is necessary **before** we are overwhelmed by events." And to do so "at a time when a possible outcome cannot yet be foreseen."

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1) "This Ukraine crisis we're in right now is just the warm-up." Said Admiral Charles Richard at the annual Submarine League 2022 symposium, then commander of U.S. Strategic Command. "The big crisis is yet to come." We will be "tested in ways we have not been tested in a long time. ... As I assess the level of our deterrence against China, our ship is sinking, slowly, but it's sinking."