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"The policy of the USA has always been to prevent Germany and Russia from cooperating more closely"

Historical, political and economic background of the Ukraine war

Interview with Jacques Baud*

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Jacques Baud (picture zvg)

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He contributed to the introduction of the concept of intelligence in UN peace operations and headed the first integrated UN Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC) in Sudan (2005-06). He was head of the Peace Policy and Doctrine Division of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York (2009-11) and of the UN Expert Group on Security Sector Reform and the Rule of Law, worked in Nato and is the author of several books on intelligence, asymmetric warfare, terrorism and disinformation.

Zeitgeschehen im Fokus: Mr Baud, you know the region where there is war now. What conclusions have you drawn from the last few days, and how could it have come to this?

Jacques Baud: I know the region we are talking about quite well. I was with the FDFA [Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs] and on its behalf I was seconded to NATO for five years to lead the fight against the proliferation of small arms. I contributed to projects in Ukraine after 2014. In addition, I know Russia, NATO, Ukraine and the related environment very well due to my previous job in strategic intelligence. I speak Russian and have access to documents that few people in the West look at.

You are an expert on the situation in and around Ukraine. Your professional activity brought you to the current crisis region. How do you perceive what is happening?

It is crazy, we can even say there is a real hysteria. What strikes me, and what bothers me a lot, is that no one is asking the question why the Russians launched their operation. No one wants to advocate war, and certainly not me. But as the former head of "Policy and Doctrine" in the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York for two years, I always ask myself the question: How did we get to this point of starting a war?

What was your task there?

It was to understand how wars happen, what factors lead to peace, and what can be done to avoid casualties or how to prevent war. If you don't understand how war happens, then you can't find a solution. We are exactly in this situation. Every country is imposing its own sanctions against Russia, and we know very well that this is going nowhere. What particularly shocked me was the statement by the Minister of Economy in France that they want to destroy Russia's economy with the aim of making the Russian people suffer. Such a statement is outrageous.

Russia's goal of demilitarization and denazification

How do you assess the Russian offensive?

Attacking another State is against the principles of international law. But one should also consider the background of such a decision. First of all, it must be made clear that Putin is neither crazy nor has he lost touch with reality. He is a very methodical and systematic person, in other words, very Russian. I believe that he was aware of the consequences of his operation in Ukraine. He assessed – obviously rightly – that whether he carried out a "small" operation to protect the Donbas population or a "massive" operation in favour of the national interests of Russia and the Donbas population, the consequences would be the same. He then went for the maximum solution.

What do you see as his goal?

It is certainly not directed against the Ukrainian population. Putin has said that again and again. You can also see it in the facts. Russia is still supplying gas to Ukraine. The Russians have not stopped that. They have not shut down the internet. They haven't destroyed the electricity plants and the water supply. Of course, such services may have stopped in fighting areas. But you see a very different approach from the Americans, for example, in former Yugoslavia, Iraq or even Libya. When Western countries attacked them, they first destroyed the electricity and water supply and the entire infrastructure.

Why does the West act in this way?

The Western approach – it is also interesting to see this from the point of view of the operational doctrine – is based on the idea that if you destroy the infrastructure, the population will revolt against the unpopular dictator, and you will get rid of him that way. This was also the strategy during the Second World War, when German cities such as Cologne, Berlin, Hamburg, Dresden etc. were bombed. They targeted the civilian population directly so that there would be an uprising. The government loses its power through an uprising, and you have won the war without endangering your own troops. That is the theory.

What is the Russian approach?

It is completely different. They have clearly announced their goal. They want "demilitarisation" and "denazification". If you honestly follow the situation, that is exactly what they are doing. Of course, a war is a war, and regrettably there are always deaths in the process, but it is interesting to see what the numbers say. On Friday (4 March), the UN reported 265 Ukrainian civilians killed. In the evening, the Russian Defence Ministry put the number of dead soldiers at 498. This means that there are more victims among the Russian military than among the civilians on the Ukrainian side. If you now compare this with Iraq or Libya, then it is exactly the opposite with Western warfare.

Does it contradict the way the West represents the situation?

Yes, our media claim that the Russians want to destroy everything, but that is obviously not true. I am also disturbed by the way our media portrays Putin suddenly deciding to attack and conquer Ukraine. The US warned for several months that there would be a surprise attack, but nothing happened. By the way, intelligence services and the Ukrainian leadership have repeatedly denied such American warnings. If you look carefully at the military reports and the preparations on the ground, you can see pretty clearly: Putin had no intention of attacking Ukraine until mid-February.

Why did that change? What has happened?

You have to know a few things first, otherwise you won't understand. On 24 March 2021, Ukrainian President *Zelensky* issued a Presidential decree to recapture Crimea. He then began to move the Ukrainian army south and southeast, towards the Donbas. So, for a year now, we have had a permanent build-up of the army on Ukraine's southern border. This explains why there were no Ukrainian troops on the Russian-Ukrainian border at the end of February. Zelensky has always claimed that the Russians will not attack Ukraine. The Ukrainian defence minister has also repeatedly confirmed this. Similarly, the head of the Ukrainian Security Council confirmed in December and in January that there were no signs of a Russian attack on Ukraine.

Was this a trick?

No, they said that several times, and I am sure that Putin, who also said that repeatedly, by the way, did not want to attack. Obviously, there was pressure from the US.

The US has little interest in Ukraine itself. At this point, they wanted to increase pressure on Germany to shut down Nord Stream II. They wanted Ukraine to provoke Russia and, if Russia reacted, Nord Stream II would be put on ice. Such a scenario was alluded to when Olaf Scholz visited Washington, and Scholz clearly did not want to go along with it. That is not just my opinion, there was also Americans who understood it that way: The target was Nord Stream II, and one must not forget that Nord Stream II was built at the request of the Germans. It is fundamentally a German project. Because Germany needs more gas to achieve its energy and climate goals.

"In a nuclear war, Europe will be the battlefield"

Why did the USA push for this?

Since the Second World War, it has always been US policy to prevent Germany and Russia or the USSR from working more closely together. This is despite the fact that the Germans have a historical

fear of the Russians. But these are the two biggest powers in Europe. Historically, there have always been economic relations between Germany and Russia. The USA has always tried to prevent that. One must not forget that in a nuclear war, Europe would be the battlefield. That means that in such a case the interests of Europe and the United States would not necessarily be the same. This explains why in the 1980s the Soviet Union supported pacifist movements in Germany. A closer relationship between Germany and Russia would render the American nuclear strategy useless.

The US has always criticised energy dependence?

It is ironic that the US criticises Germany's or Europe's energy dependence on Russia. Russia is the second largest supplier of oil to the US. The USA buys its oil mainly from Canada, then from Russia, followed by Mexico and Saudi Arabia. This means that the USA is dependent on Russia. This is also true for rocket engines, for example. That doesn't bother the USA. But it does bother the US that the Europeans are dependent on Russia.

During the Cold War, Russia, i.e. the Soviet Union, always honoured all gas contracts. The Russian way of thinking in this respect is very similar to the Swiss. Russia has a law-abiding mentality; it feels bound by the rules very much like Switzerland. It doesn't mean they don't have emotions, but when rules apply, you go by the rules. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union never made a connection between trade and politics. The dispute related to Ukraine is mainly political in this regard.

Brzezinski's theory that Ukraine is the key to dominating Asia also plays a role here?

Brzezinski was certainly a great thinker and still influences US strategic thinking. But I don't think this aspect is key to this particular crisis. Ukraine is certainly important. But the question of who dominates or controls Ukraine is not the main point here. The Russians are not aiming at controlling Ukraine. The problem of Ukraine for Russia, as for other countries, is a strategic one.

What does that mean?

In the whole discussion that is being held everywhere at the moment, crucial things are being ignored. Certainly, people are talking about nuclear weapons, but it's like in a movie. The reality is somewhat different. The Russians want a distance between NATO and Russia. The core element of NATO is US nuclear power. That is the essence of NATO. When I worked at NATO, *Jens Stoltenberg* – he was then my boss – used to say: "NATO is a nuclear power". Today, the US deploys missile systems in Poland and Romania, that include the MK-41 launcher systems.

Are these defensive weapons?

Of course, the US says they are purely defensive. You can indeed fire antiballistic missiles from these launchers. But you can also launch nuclear missiles with the same system. These ramps are a few minutes away from Moscow. If in a situation of heightened tension in Europe, the Russians detect, with satellite imagery or intelligence, activities around these launch pads indicating preparations for a launch, will they wait until nuclear missiles are possibly launched towards Moscow?

Probably not...

...of course not. They would immediately launch a pre-emptive strike. The whole situation escalated after the US withdrew from the ABM Treaty [Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty]. Under the ABM Treaty, they could not deploy such a system in Europe. The idea was precisely to maintain a certain reaction time in case of a confrontation. That was because mistakes could happen.

We had something like that during the Cold War. The greater the distance between nuclear missiles, the more time you have to react. If the missiles are deployed too close to the Russian territory, there is no time to react in case of an attack and you run the risk of getting into a full nuclear war much faster. This affects all neighbouring countries. The Russians realized this, that is why they created the Warsaw Pact.

The importance of nuclear weapons is growing

First there was NATO...

NATO was founded in 1949 and the Warsaw Pact only six years later. The reason for this was the rearmament of the FRG and its admission to NATO in 1955. If you look at the map of 1949, you can see a very large gap between the NATO nuclear power and the USSR. As NATO moved towards the Russian border by including Germany, Russia reacted by creating the Warsaw Pact. At that time, the Eastern European countries were already all communist and under tight control of their own communist parties. Almost worse than in the USSR itself. The USSR wanted to have a security belt around it, so it created the Warsaw Pact. It wanted to maintain a "glacis" so that it could wage a conventional war for as long as possible. That was the idea: to stay in conventional warfare as long as possible and avoid getting directly into the nuclear one.

Is that still the case today?

After the Cold War, nuclear strategy was somewhat forgotten. Security was no longer a question of nuclear weapons. The Iraq war, the Afghanistan war were wars with conventional weapons, and the nuclear dimension was somewhat away from sight. But the Russians have not forgotten that. They think very strategically. At the time, I visited the general staff Voroshilov Academy in Moscow. There you could see how people think. They think strategically, the way one should think in times of war.

Can you see that today?

You can see that very clearly today. Putin's people think strategically. The Russians have a strategic thinking, an operational thinking, and a tactical thinking. The Western countries, as we have seen in Afghanistan or Iraq, have no strategy. This is exactly the problem that the French have in Mali. Mali has now demanded that they leave the country, because the French are killing people without a strategy and without a strategic goal. With the Russians it is completely different, they think strategically. They have a goal. It is the same with Putin.

In our media it is reported again and again that Putin has brought nuclear weapons into play. Have you heard that too?

Yes, Vladimir Putin put his nuclear forces on Level 1 alert on 27 February. But that is only half of the story. On 11-12 February, the security conference was held in Munich. Zelensky was there. He indicated that he wanted to acquire nuclear weapons. This was interpreted as a potential threat, and the red light went on in the Kremlin. To understand this, we have to remind the Budapest Agreement of 1994. That was about destroying the nuclear missiles on the territory of the former Soviet republics, thus leaving only Russia as a nuclear power. Ukraine also handed over the nuclear weapons to Russia, and Russia assured the inviolability of its borders in return. When Crimea went back to Russia, in 2014, Ukraine said it would no longer abide by the 1994 agreement either.

Back to nuclear weapons. What did Putin really say?

If Zelensky wanted nuclear weapons back, that would certainly be unacceptable for Putin. If you have nuclear weapons right on the border, there is very little warning time. During the press conference after Macron's visit, and Putin made clear that if the distance between NATO and Russia was too small, this could inadvertently lead to complications. But the decisive element was at the start of the operation against Ukraine, when the French foreign minister threatened Putin by declaring that NATO was a nuclear power. Putin reacted to this by raising the alert level of his nuclear forces. Our media, of course, did not mention this. Putin is a realist; he is down-to-earth and purposeful.

What prompted Putin to intervene militarily now?

On 24 March 2021, Zelensky issued a Presidential decree to reconquer Crimea by force. He started preparations to do so. Whether that was his real intention or just a political manoeuvre, we don't know. What we have seen, however, is that he has massively reinforced the Ukrainian army in the Donbas region and in the south towards Crimea. Of course, the Russians have noticed this. At the same time, NATO conducted large exercises between the Baltic and the Black Sea in April. This understandably

prompted the Russians to react. They held exercises in the southern military district to show the flag. Things calmed down after that, and in September Russia held long-planned "Zapad 21" exercises. These exercises are conducted every four years. At the end of the exercises, some troops remained near Belarus. These were units from the Eastern Military District. Most equipment left there was kept for a large manoeuvre planned with Belarus for early this year.

How did the West react to this?

Europe and especially the USA interpreted this as a reinforcement of the offensive capabilities against Ukraine. Independent military experts, but also the head of the Ukrainian Security Council, said that no preparations for war were underway at that point. The equipment left by Russia in October was clearly not meant for an offensive operation. However, so-called Western military experts, especially in France, immediately interpreted this as preparations for war and started designating Putin as a mad dictator. This is how the situation evolved from the end of October 2021 until early this year. How the US and Ukraine communicated on this issue was very contradictory. One warned about a planned offensive, while the other denied it. It was a permanent back and forth.

OSCE reports heavy shelling of Lugansk and Donetsk People's Republics by Ukraine in February

What happened in February?

At the end of January, the situation appears to evolve. It looks like the US talked to Zelensky, and slight changes could be observed. From early February on, the US talk about an imminent Russian attack and start spreading attack scenarios. *Antony Blinken*, at the UN Security Council, presents how the Russian attack would unfold according to US intelligence. This is reminiscent of the situation in 2002/2003 before the attack on Iraq. There, too, the picture was allegedly based on intelligence analysis. That was not true then either. At that time, the CIA was not convinced of the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. As a result, *Donald Rumsfeld* did not rely on the CIA, but on a small confidential group within the Department of Defence, which had been specially created to circumvent the CIA's analyses.

Where is the information coming from today?

In the context of Ukraine, Blinken did exactly the same thing. One can notice the total absence of the CIA and Western intelligence agencies in the entire discussion that preceded the Russian offensive. Everything Blinken told us came from a "Tiger Team" that he himself set up, within his department. These scenarios that were presented to us did not come from an intelligence analysis, but from self-

styled experts who invented a scenario with a political agenda. This is how the rumour that the Russians were about to attack was born. So, on February 16, *Joe Biden* said he knew the Russians were about to attack. But when asked how he knew this, he replied that the US had good intelligence capabilities, without mentioning the CIA or the Office of National Intelligence.

So, did anything happen on 16 February?

On that day, there was an extreme increase in ceasefire violations by the Ukrainian army along the ceasefire line, the so-called "contact line". There have always been violations over the past eight years, but from February 12, the increase is extreme, including explosions, especially in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions. We know this because it was reported by the OSCE mission in the Donbass. These reports can be read in the OSCE's "Daily reports".

What was the objective of the Ukrainian military?

This was certainly the initial phase of an offensive against the Donbass. When the artillery fire intensified, the authorities of both republics began to evacuate the civilian population to Russia. In an interview, Sergei Lavrov mentioned more than 100,000 refugees. In Russia, this was seen as an indication for an imminent large-scale operation.

What were the consequences?

This action of the Ukrainian army actually triggered everything. At that point, it was clear to Putin that Ukraine was going to conduct an offensive against the two republics. On February 15, the Russian parliament, the Duma, had adopted a resolution proposing the recognition of their independence. At first Putin did not react, but as the attacks intensified, he decided on February 21 to respond positively to the parliamentary request.

Causes of right-wing extremism in Ukraine

Why did Putin take this step?

In this situation, he had little choice but to do so, because the Russian population would not have understood if he had done nothing to protect the Russian-speaking population of Donbass. For Putin, it was clear that whether he reacted and intervened just to help the republics or to invade Ukraine, the West would react in any case with massive sanctions. As a result, in a first step, he recognized the independence of the two republics. Then, on the same day, he concluded friendship and cooperation treaties with each of the two republics. From then on, he could invoke Article 51 of the United Nations

Charter, allowing him to intervene to assist the two republics in the framework of collective defence and self-defence. He thus created the legal basis for its military intervention.

But he did not only help the republics, he attacked the whole Ukraine?

Putin had two options: first, simply to help the Russian-speaking Donbass against the Ukrainian military offensive; second, to conduct a deeper attack into Ukraine to neutralize its military capabilities. He also took into account that, whatever he would do, sanctions would rain down. This is why he has clearly opted for the maximum variant; it must be however noted that Putin has never said he wants to take over Ukraine. His objectives are clear: demilitarization and denazification.

What is the background to these objectives?

The demilitarization is understandable, as Ukraine had gathered its entire army in the south, between Donbass and Crimea. A quick operation would allow it to encircle these troops. This is what happened, and a large part of the Ukrainian army is currently surrounded in a large cauldron in the Donbass region, between Slavyansk, Kramatorsk and Severodonetsk. The Russians have surrounded it and are in the process of neutralizing it. Remains the so-called denazification. When the Russians say this, it is not just an empty phrase. To compensate for the unreliability of the Ukrainian army, powerful paramilitary forces have been developed since 2014, including, for example, the famous Azov regiment. But there are many more. There are a huge number of such groups that are under Ukrainian command but not exclusively composed of Ukrainians. The Azov regiment, for example, comprises 19 nationalities, including French, even Swiss, etc. It is a real foreign legion. In total, these extreme right-wing groups have about 100,000 fighters, according to Reuters.

Why are there so many paramilitary organizations?

In 2015/2016, I was in Ukraine with NATO. Ukraine had a big problem, they were running out of soldiers, because the Ukrainian army had a lot of fatalities due to non-combat actions. They had many deaths due to suicides and alcohol problems. They were having a hard time finding recruits. I was asked to help because of my experience with the UN. So, I went to Ukraine several times. The main point was that the army had no credibility among the population and none within the military either. That is why Ukraine has increasingly encouraged and developed paramilitary forces. They are fanatics driven by right-wing extremism.

Where does right-wing extremism come from?

Its origins date back to the 1930s. After the years of extreme famine, which went down in history as the Holodomor, a resistance to Soviet power emerged. To finance the modernization of the USSR, Stalin

had confiscated the harvests, causing unprecedented famines. The NKVD, the forerunner of the KGB (that was at the same time the Ministry of Interior and the Security establishment), implemented this policy. The NKVD was organized on a territorial basis and in Ukraine there were many Jews in the higher command positions. As a result, everything got a little mixed up: hatred of Communists, hatred of Russians and hatred of Jews. The first extreme right-wing groups date from this time, and they still exist. During World War II, the Germans needed these groups, such as Stepan Bandera's OUN, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, and others to fight in the Soviet rear areas. At that time, the Third Reich forces were seen as liberators, such as the 2nd SS armoured division, "Das Reich", which had liberated Kharkov from the Soviets in 1943, and which is still celebrated in Ukraine today. The geographical epicentre of this extreme right-wing resistance was in Lvov, today Lviv, in Galicia. This region even had its "own" 14th Panzer Grenadier Division SS "Galizien", an SS division composed entirely of Ukrainians.

The OUN was formed during the Second World War and survived the Soviet period?

After the Second World War, the enemy was the Soviet Union. The USSR had not succeeded in completely eliminating these anti-Soviet movements during the war. The United States, France, and Great Britain realized that the OUN could be useful and supported it to fight against the USSR with sabotage and weapons. Until the early 1960s, Ukrainian insurgents were supported by the Western through clandestine operations such as Aerodynamic, Valuable, Minos, Capacho and others. Since that time, Ukraine has maintained a close relationship with the West and NATO. Today, it is the weakness of the Ukrainian army that has led to the use of fanatical troops. I think that the term neo-Nazis is not entirely accurate. They have very similar ideas, they carry their symbols, they are violent and anti-Semitic, but they are not really guided by a doctrine or a political project.

After 2014, two agreements were agreed to pacify the situation in Ukraine. What is the significance of the agreements in the context of the current dispute?

Yes, this is important to understand, because the non-compliance with these two agreements basically led to today's war. Since 2014, there was supposedly a solution to the conflict, the Minsk agreements. By September 2014, it was clear that the Ukrainian military was unable to manage the conflict, even though it was advised by NATO. It was regularly failing. That is why it had to commit to the Minsk I agreements in September 2014. This was an agreement between the Ukrainian government and representatives of the two self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Lugansk, with European and Russian guarantors.

Duplicity of the EU and the USA

How did the foundation of these two republics come about?

To understand, we need to go back in history a little. In autumn 2013, the EU wanted to conclude a trade and economic agreement with Ukraine. The EU was offering Ukraine a guarantee of development with subsidies, with exports and imports, etc. The Ukrainian authorities wanted to conclude the deal. But this was not without causing problems, because Ukrainian industry and agriculture were oriented towards Russia in terms of quality and products. For instance, Ukrainians were developing engines for Russian aircraft, not for European or American aircraft. So, the general orientation of the industry was towards the East, not the West. In terms of quality, Ukraine could hardly compete with the European market. Therefore, the authorities wanted to cooperate with the EU while maintaining economic relations with Russia.

Would that have been possible?

For its part, Russia had no problem with Ukraine's plans. But it also wanted to maintain its economic relations with Ukraine. Therefore, it proposed to establish a tripartite working group to work out two agreements: one between Ukraine and the EU and the other between Ukraine and Russia. The objective was to cover the interests of all parties. But it was the European Union, through Barroso, that asked Ukraine to choose between Russia and the EU. Ukraine then asked for time to think about solutions and demanded a pause in the whole process. After that, the EU and the US did not play fair.

Why?

The Western press headlined: "Russia pressures Ukraine to prevent the treaty with the EU". This was not true. This was not the case. The Ukrainian government continued to show interest in the treaty with the EU, but simply wanted more time to think and consider solutions to this complex situation. But the European media did not say so. The next days, right-wing extremists from the west of the country appeared on the Maidan in Kiev. Everything that happened there with the approval and support of the West is truly terrible. But to detail everything here would be beyond our scope.

What happened after Yanukovych, the democratically elected president, was overthrown?

The new provisional government – that emerged from the nationalist extreme right coup – immediately, as its first official act, changed the law on official languages in Ukraine. This shows that the coup had nothing to do with democracy but was the product of ultra-nationalists who organized the uprising. This legal change triggered a storm in the Russian-speaking regions. Large demonstrations were organized in all cities of the Russian-speaking south, in Odessa, Mariupol, Donetsk, Lugansk, Crimea, etc. The Ukrainian authorities reacted in a very massive and brutal way, calling in the military. Autonomous republics were briefly proclaimed in Odessa, Kharkov, Dnepropetrovsk, Lugansk and Donetsk. They

were fought with extreme brutality and two remained eventually: Donetsk and Lugansk, which proclaimed themselves autonomous republics.

How did they legitimize their status?

They held referendums in May 2014, to have autonomy, and that is very, very important. If you look at our media in the last few months, they only talk about “separatists”. But this has been a total lie for eight years: they always talked about separatists, but this is false, because the referendum mentioned very clearly an autonomy within Ukraine. These republics wanted some sort of Swiss solution, so to speak. After the people accepted autonomy, the authorities asked for recognition of the republics by Russia, but Putin's government refused.

Crimea's struggle for independence

Isn't the development in Crimea also related to this?

We forget that Crimea was independent, even before Ukraine became independent. In January 1991, while the Soviet Union still existed, Crimea held a referendum to be managed from Moscow and not from Kiev. It thus became an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Ukraine did not get its own independence referendum until six months later in August 1991. At that point, Crimea did not consider itself a part of Ukraine. But Ukraine did not accept this. Between 1991 and 2014, it was a constant struggle between the two entities. Crimea had its own constitution with its own authorities. In 1995, encouraged by the Budapest Memorandum, Ukraine overthrew the Crimean government with special forces and abrogated its constitution. But this is never mentioned, as it would shed a completely different light on the current development.

What did the people of Crimea want?

As a matter of fact, Crimeans considered themselves as independent. From 1995, Crimea was governed by decrees from Kiev. This was in complete contradiction with the 1991 referendum and explains why Crimea held a new referendum in 2014, after the new ultra-nationalist government came to power in Ukraine after the illegal coup. Its result was very similar to the one 30 years earlier. After the referendum, Crimea asked to join the Russian Federation. It was not Russia that conquered Crimea, it was the people who authorized their authorities to ask Russia to take them in. There was also a treaty of friendship between Russia and Ukraine in 1997, in which Ukraine guaranteed the cultural diversity of minorities in the country. When the Russian language was banned as an official language in February 2014, it was a violation of this treaty.

Now it becomes clear that those who don't know all this, run the risk of misjudging the situation.

Back to the Minsk Agreements. In addition to Ukraine and the autonomous republics, there were guarantors, Germany and France on the Ukrainian side and Russia on the side of the self-proclaimed republics. They played this role within the framework of the OSCE. The EU was not involved, it was merely an OSCE matter. Immediately after the Minsk I Agreements, Ukraine launched an anti-terrorist operation against the two autonomist republics. The Ukrainian government completely ignored the agreement it had just signed to carry out this operation. The Ukrainian army suffered another total defeat in Debaltsevo. It was a debacle.

Did this also take place with the support of NATO?

Yes, and one wonders what the NATO military advisors did because the rebels' armed forces totally defeated the Ukrainian army.

This led to a second agreement, Minsk II, signed in February 2015, which was the basis for a UN Security Council resolution. This agreement was therefore binding under international law and had to be implemented.

Has this also been monitored by the UN?

No, nobody cared, and apart from Russia, nobody demanded compliance with the Minsk II agreement. Suddenly, there was only talk of the Normandy format. But this is totally meaningless. This "format" was born during the celebration of D-Day in June 2014. Former protagonists of the war, Allied heads of state were invited, as well as Germany, Ukraine and representatives of other states. In the Normandy format, only the heads of state were represented, the autonomous republics are obviously not present. Ukraine does not want to talk with the representatives of Lugansk and Donetsk. But if you read the Minsk agreements, there should have been a consultation between the Ukrainian government and the republics so that the Ukrainian constitution could be modified. So it was an internal Ukrainian process, but that is not what the Ukrainian government wanted.

But the Ukrainians have also signed the agreement...

... yes, but Ukraine always wanted to blame Russia for their domestic problem. The Ukrainians claimed that Russia had attacked Ukraine and that was the origin of the problems. But it was clear, it was a domestic problem. Since 2014, OSCE monitors have never seen Russian military units. Both Agreements are very clear and precise: the solution must be found within Ukraine. It is a question of obtaining a certain autonomy within the country, and only Ukraine could solve this issue. It had nothing to do with Russia.

For that, we need the stipulated adjustment of the constitution.

Yes, exactly, but it has not been done. Ukraine has not taken any step in that regard. The members of the UN Security Council have not committed themselves to this either, on the contrary. The situation has not improved at all.

How did Russia behave?

Russia's position has always remained the same. It wanted the Minsk Agreements to be implemented. It never changed its position for eight years. During these eight years, there have been various border violations, artillery shelling, etc., but Russia has never put the fulfilling of agreements into question.

How did Ukraine proceed?

Ukraine enacted a law in early July last year. It was a law that gives different rights to citizens based on their ethnicity. It is very reminiscent of the Nuremberg racial laws of 1935. Only true Ukrainians have full rights, while all others have only limited rights. Just after this, Putin wrote an article in which he explained the historical genesis of Ukraine. He criticized the fact that a distinction could be made between ethnic Ukrainians and Russians, etc. He wrote his article in response to this law. But in Europe this was interpreted as the fact that he did not recognize Ukraine as a state, and that his article sought to justify a possible annexation of Ukraine. In the West, people believe this, while no one knows why Putin wrote this article or what is its actual substance. It is obvious that in the West the aim was to give as negative an image of Putin as possible. I have read the article; it makes perfect sense.

Wouldn't the Russians have expected him to comment on it?

Of course, there are so many Russians in Ukraine. He had to do something. It would not have been right towards the people (but also from the point of view of international law, with the responsibility to protect) to accept this in silence. All these little details are absolutely part of it, otherwise we don't understand what is going on. This is the only way to put Putin's behaviour into perspective, and to see that the war has been increasingly provoked. I can't say whether Putin is good or bad. But the judgment we make of him in the West is clearly based on false elements.

Switzerland leaves the status of neutrality

What do you think of Switzerland's reaction last weekend?

This is a disaster. Russia has drawn up a list of 48 "unfriendly states", and you realize that Switzerland is also on it. This is truly an epochal change, but one for which Switzerland itself is responsible.

Switzerland has always been "the man in the middle". We have facilitated the dialogue with all states and have had the courage to stand in the middle. There is hysteria regarding sanctions. Russia is very

well prepared for this situation, it will suffer, but it is prepared to withstand their impact. However, the principle of sanctions is totally wrong. Today, sanctions have replaced diplomacy. We have seen this with Venezuela, with Cuba, with Iraq, with Iran, etc. These states have done nothing but having a policy that does not please the USA. That is their mistake. When I see that disabled athletes have been suspended from the Para-Olympic Games, words are missing. It is totally inappropriate. It affects individual people, it's just perverse. It is as mean as when the French Minister of Foreign Affairs says that the Russian people must suffer from sanctions. Whoever says this has no honour in my eyes. There is nothing positive about starting a war but reacting like this is simply shameful.

How do you see it, that people are taking to the streets against the war in Ukraine?

I ask myself: what makes the war against Ukraine worse than the war against Iraq, Yemen, Syria or Libya? In these cases, we know that there were no sanctions against the aggressor, the United States, or those who supply weapons used against civilian populations. Who is demonstrating for Yemen? Who demonstrated for Libya, who demonstrated for Afghanistan? We don't know why the United States was in Afghanistan. I know from intelligence sources that there was never any clear indication that Afghanistan or Osama bin Laden were involved in the 9/11 attacks, but we went to war in Afghanistan anyway.

Why?

On September 12, 2001, just after the terrorist attacks, the United States wanted to retaliate and decided to bomb Afghanistan. The Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force said that there were not enough targets in Afghanistan. To which the Secretary of Defence replied, "If we don't have enough targets in Afghanistan, then we will bomb Iraq". I didn't make that up, there are sources, documents and people who were there. This is the reality, but we are being swayed to the "right" side by propaganda and manipulation.

If I may summarize this interview, your answers have clearly shown that the West has long been throwing oil on the fire and provoking Russia. However, these provocations are rarely reported in our media, but Putin's answers are given only partially or in a distorted way in order to maintain as much as possible the image of a warmonger and a monster.

My grandfather was French, he was a soldier in the First World War and often told me about it. And I have to say that the hysteria, the manipulation and the thoughtless behaviour of Western politicians remind me a lot of 1914 today, and that worries me a lot. When I see how our neutral country is no longer able to take a position independent of the EU and the USA, I am ashamed. We need to have a

clear head and know the facts behind all these events. This is the only way Switzerland can pursue a reasonable peace policy.

Mr. Baud, thank you for the interview.

Interview Thomas Kaiser

(Translation "Zeitgeschehen im Fokus")

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