

The Security Times

SPECIAL EDITION OF THE GERMAN TIMES FOR THE 56TH MUNICH SECURITY CONFERENCE

FEBRUARY 2020

PUBLISHER: DETLEF PRINZ | EXECUTIVE EDITOR: THEO SOMMER

MUNICH, GERMANY



TRUMP AND XI: SHUTTERSTOCK/JIRAWATI, ADDITIONAL ARTWORK: TIMES MEDIA/JOHANNA TRAPP

36 pages covering who calls the shots and who gets benched on the world stage



LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

As long-time publisher of *The Security Times*, I'm honored to welcome you back to Munich for the MSC. This year's issue is perhaps our most vital yet.

Wolfgang Ischinger, CEO of the MSC, and Germany's Foreign Minister **Heiko Maas** kick off our commentary on pages 2 and 3 with their analyses of the upcoming foreign policy season.

On pages 4 and 5, Harvard scholars **Graham Allison** and **Joseph Nye** square off on the West's game plan vis-à-vis China: Shore up the defensive line or focus more on soft power?

Is Russia a formidable foe or should the US and Europe give-and-go with Moscow and tackle the world's toughest problems as one team? The international line-up of **Ian Bremmer**, **Dmitri Trenin** and **Sylvie Kauffmann** takes the floor on pages 12 and 13.

Is peace possible? *The Security Times* special teams examine the state of play in Ukraine, the Middle East, Libya, Yemen and Afghanistan on pages 17 to 21.

And finally, some crunch-time heroics by **Ivan Krastev** on the big league prospects of Europe (p. 29) and **Jessica T. Mathews** on the US defense budget (p. 31).

I hope you enjoy our paper, and may reading it enrich your debates on the pressing issues of our time.

Sincerely,

Detlef Prinz
Publisher

A global order in flux Western abdication

We must re-address arms control

Europe and the US have failed in Syria

BY THEO SOMMER

When the history of these times is written, it may well be that the headlines of the day – Iraq and the controversies it has aroused – will pale in comparison to other international upheavals of our period. The center of gravity of world affairs is moving to the Pacific, and almost all major actors on the international stage are defining new roles for themselves.

You may not believe it. This is not a current assessment, but a quote from a *Washington Post* article Henry Kissinger wrote back in 2004. If you add Iran to Iraq, it could have been written yesterday. Kissinger mentioned all the problems that bedevil us nowadays: the structural estrangement of America from Europe; European doubts about the reliability of the United States as a strategic partner; Russia's post-imperial trauma; China's emergence as a great power; and the break-up of the international system. The title of Kissinger's op-ed piece was "A World in Flux," and its central argument: "The global scene is more fluid than it has been for centuries."

In fact, we are witnessing the third dramatic geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic upheaval in the past five hundred years. The first was the rise of Europe around the year 1500; the second, beginning around 1900, turned the United States into the global superpower of the 20th century; the third is the shift of power and wealth to Asia, with China pushing assertively, even aggressively forward and striving to put its stamp on a world undergoing profound change.

The relentless ascent of China has grave political, economic and military ramifications. Equally disquieting, however, is the ideological aspect. Beijing offers all authoritarians in the world an alternative model to the democratic capitalism of the West – autocratic capitalism. The American-led multilateral system that stabilized global relations since 1945 is gradually being replaced by "one world, two systems" – one set of rules and norms for the liberal West, another for authoritarian China and its global devotees.

It is a sad story that US President Donald Trump has been actively undercutting the "liberal international order" the US called into being after the end of World War II. He is a sharp-elbowed nationalist and an unabashed protectionist. His foreign policy – anti-EU, skeptical of collective defense and centered not on the pursuit of broader interests but rather on "America First" – is erratic, to say the least. Trade deficits and a narrow focus on freeriding are his benchmarks, not consider-

ations of balance-of-power, fostering alliances and creating networks. America's segue from over-reach to retrenchment, from perennial interventions to retreat began before Trump, but his unilateralist braggadocio has turned an overdue adaptation into an instrument of disruption.

At the end of a bruising decade, the rest of the West must contend not only with a fickle US president but also with a rising China, a resurgent Russia, ongoing cross-border terrorism, instability and chaos in the Middle East. Despite Trump's skepticism, the unwavering support of America's military establishment has empowered NATO to continue functioning smoothly, yet without a political strategy, let alone vision. French President Emmanuel Macron's shocking statement that the Alliance was suffering "brain-death" has caused NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg to begin a thorough review process. It is supposed to devise an up-to-date grand strategy for NATO to confront the new realities of the 21st century.

One central question is whether the danger of armed conflict is again on the rise. The realist's answer is: It will remain a threat, but an unlikely one. All powers will wish to avoid all-out war. They don't want to fight. Instead they will pursue disruptive strategies: hacking, meddling in each other's internal affairs and orchestrating disinformation campaigns. The danger, though, is that miscalculation and the logic of escalation will turn minor clashes into regional conflagrations. And transnational issues, especially climate change, mass migration and nuclear proliferation, may create quite novel security problems.

Looking at the international landscape, one cannot fail to notice a number of conundrums.

Conundrum number one: Trump has boosted US defense expenditures to unprecedented heights – \$738 billion in 2020. He increased the number of troops in Europe as well as in the Middle East. But basically he does not want to fight wars any more; he wants to bring the GIs home. His way of fighting is with economic leverage. He has weaponized the two dominant phenomena of our times – globalization and digitalization. He has exploited economic interdependence in his rivalry with China and in the confrontation with Iran, but also in his relationship with European and Asian allies. Simultaneously, he has pressed ahead with the securitization of microchips, semiconductors and software. The campaign against Huawei, also focusing on foes and friends alike, is the most egregious case in point.

BY KRISTIN HELBERG

After almost nine years of civil war, the crisis in and around Syria has not been resolved. Nonetheless, it is clear who the winners and losers in the conflict are. Among the winners are the Syrian regime, Russia, Iran and even Turkey, to a certain extent. These countries have always known what they wanted, have proven ready to do anything to get what they want, and have been able to adapt their strategies to the dynamics of the war. Among the losers are the United States and Europe, who championed the desires of Syrians citizens for a life of freedom and dignity but did so in a half-hearted manner and without any tangible plan.

As this gap between its words and deeds grew, the West gambled away its credibility. With its system of international agreements, moral principles and democratically legitimized institutions, the West proved capable neither of helping the Syrians nor of ending the war. The reality we must now face in the case of the Syrian conflict is that liberal democracy has failed, and autocracy has triumphed. This outcome is destined to have far-reaching consequences – for Syrians, the Middle East, Europe and the world.

Syrian president Bashar al-Assad remains in power and is set to regain control of the entire country in the coming months. In Idlib, he will do so by force of arms, and in the northeast, he will do so by means of a gradual takeover of Kurdish self-government. In other words, the current state of affairs in Syria is as it always was, only worse.

Assad's reign hinges on loyalty to the regime, which he secures through a system of clientelism and enforces by means of fear. This results in his two strongest pillars of support coming from wealthy businessmen and a far-reaching intelligence apparatus. Simply put, those who support the regime are rewarded, and those who reject it are punished.

The country's secret services are more powerful than ever. Local militias are involved in a variety of illicit activities, which include bribery, blackmail, theft and threatening or kidnapping citizens. In the years before the war, Syrians were subject to the despotism of the state alone; today, they are at the mercy of non-state and foreign actors as well.

Syria's pseudo-socialist, neo-capitalist economic system has engendered a symbiosis of entrepreneurs and regime representatives. More specifically, the liberalization driven by Assad paired with the war economy of the past few years has created a merger of wealth and political-power structures. Crony capitalists loyal to the regime benefit from the privatization of public property, from smuggling and from monopolies in the service sector. In other words, power and money are bound to each other in modern Syria. This fact should be borne in mind when it comes to handing out humanitarian aid and supporting reconstruction efforts there.

While entire regions of Syria remain in ruin, the Syrian pound continues to lose value and UN figures show more than 80 percent of Syrians living in poverty, the Assad regime continues to focus exclusively on its followers and supporters in an effort to further secure its power. In the case of Aleppo, UN funds are not directed

toward the most devastated residential areas in the east of the city, which used to be administered by opposition forces; instead, the money is flowing to areas populated by those loyal to the

regime. In the south of Damascus, in an area marked by the ruins of bombed-out middle-class and working-class neighborhoods, the city administration is building luxury resorts rather than social housing. Former residents are being expropriated and/or compensated at ridiculously low costs by the government.

This kind of activity is immune to outside influence because the behavior itself guarantees the survival of Syria's rulers. After decades of being under the regime's thumb, society, state institutions and the private sector form a close-knit network of interdependencies. Any real concessions – such as depriving the secret services of power and ushering in freedom of expression, freedom of the press and an independent judiciary – would result in a system failure that would threaten the survival of the rulers in Damascus. By its very nature, the Syrian regime itself is incapable of instituting effective reforms.

This is an important insight for foreign actors seeking an effective approach to negotiations with Damascus. Since 2012, the US and Europe have tried to achieve a "credible political transition" in Syria that includes a transfer of power, a transitional government, a new constitution and demo-

continued on page 10

continued on page 8

BY KATJA GLOGER

Let's face it: Germany and Europe may one day be thankful for Donald Trump. After all, his destructive and cynical unpredictability is finally forcing them to sufficiently appreciate their responsibility for foreign and security policy in an ever more fragile world.

Six years ago, German President Joachim Gauck attempted to give direction to his country's security policy. The Federal Republic must "be ready to do more to guarantee the security that others have provided it with for decades," he warned. When it comes to deploying Bundeswehr troops, "Germany should not say 'no' on principle. Nor should it say 'yes' unthinkingly." Yet Gauck called for more intervention, "earlier, more decisive and more substantial."

A new global order is emerging, a perilous process that can be compared to tectonic shifts in the Earth's crust. This includes the retreat of the US from its role as the world's chief super power. Weary from all its wars, America is no longer prepared to bear the burden of acting alone as the "world's policeman." Trump's "America First" is not the cause, but rather the expression of this development.

In the days of crisis following the targeted US drone strike that killed Iranian General Qasim Soleimani, Trump's message to Europe was clear: The problem of the Middle East would henceforth fall largely into the hands of the Europeans. NATO must take more responsibility in the region. As a country enjoying newfound energy independence, America will no longer rely on oil from the Middle East. "These historic accomplishments changed our strategic priorities," the US president announced in early January. And because the country's new priorities include contending with its Far East strategic rival, China, Europe is losing its importance to the US.

Meanwhile, other "sovereign powers," notably China and Russia, are filling the geopolitical void caused by the end of the Pax Americana. They are marching in as the authoritarian avantgarde of a "conservative internationalism," as it's referred to in Moscow. In the new global order defined by them alone, rival great powers strengthen their military power and weaponize their influence and their veto in the UN Security Council. They broker fragile alliances based on the law of might, with little regard for democratic principles, the rule of law or human rights.

Europe and particularly Germany are in danger of becoming a plaything in this development. Although the upheaval could

hardly be greater and the challenges hardly more daunting, German and European foreign and security policy seems almost dispirited.

Maintaining the status quo, however, is no longer an option. An alliance of multilateralists must be based on more than just consolation and reassurance. The Germans must at last engage in an earnest debate on security and defense. For decades, the commercially prosperous Federal Republic profited tremendously from the rules-based – if never perfect – liberal world order guaranteed by the US. Especially in Europe, this system fostered democracy, the rule of law and the proliferation of human rights. Comfortable and showing a penchant for moral superiority in its strategic position of self-restraint, Germany savored its post-reunification peace dividends, including a free ticket to further prosperity through its role as an export nation *ne plus ultra*. In this scenario, the country's values-based foreign policy very rarely stood in the way of its economic interests.

Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea pulled Germany out of its comfort zone. Russian President Vladimir Putin's eventual renunciation of the European security architecture formulated in the 1990 Paris Charter was a shock to the West – a reaction that had been underestimated by Moscow. All the while, China's global ambitions solidified the Middle Kingdom in its position as the world's second largest economic power. And then came Trump, who simply scoffs at the liberal world order, if he even knows what it is.

Germany is obligated to formulate answers – as sober as they are bold – to fundamental questions concerning its role and responsibility in a new world order. "Europe needs to carve out its own geopolitical role" reasoned Angela Merkel in the *Financial Times*, while the EU's new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, has expressed that Europe must learn the "language of power." Taking on greater responsibility is not tantamount to conceding to Trump. Put another way, it's sensible to be prepared for conflict.

Security policy proposals like that of German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, who argues for engagement in northern Syria, could provide a piece of the puzzle. But proposals thrown into the wind like confetti – with no recognizable strategy and without consultation – are counterproductive.

German foreign and security policy is always European policy; it considers the interests of other European countries to be as important as its own. Grounded in its inextinguishable guilt and responsibility for the greatest tragedy in twentieth-century Europe, the two fundamental principles of German foreign policy remain unchanged: "Never again" and "Never alone." However, Germany's self-evaluation as Europe's model citizens sometimes approaches a denial of reality.

Many countries in Europe regard the country more as an egotistical profiteer prone to double moral standards than as Europeans in solidarity with their neighbors. This conflict in perception was most recently on display in the debate over the Nord

Stream 2 gas pipeline. As spelled out in the EU's Energy Union, "solidarity and trust" were to be the critical ingredients for achieving EU climate protection goals as well as for minimizing the EU's dependence on Russia through a diversification of its energy supply. Berlin is happy enough to act as Europe's overlord, say its critics, but if its own economic interests were at stake, then Germany would pursue realpolitik under the banner of "Germany First."

And in the US, it's not just Trump who disparages the Germans as freeloaders who shirk their commitments to the 2-percent goal while brokering deals with Putin worth billions of euros; recent sanctions on companies working on Nord Stream 2 were passed by a large bipartisan majority in Congress.

French President Emmanuel Macron is impatiently urging "European sovereignty"; the addressee of his demands is Berlin. Macron believes the EU needs more engagement – in Mali, perhaps – and less cheap and timid self-restraint. Macron paints a picture of a multipolar world in

which the EU remains marginalized and ineffectual as the last bastion of democratic values and freedoms.

Europe urgently needs strategic autonomy, and so does Germany. This includes the capability not only to formulate, but also to implement foreign and security policy goals. Economic might and the power of innovation are critical, but so is hardware: Europe must become stronger militarily, combining national sovereignties at the military level and intermeshing with NATO. Europe will have to organize its own defense more independently while Germany must pay more for defense on a permanent basis.

European sovereignty – and with it the recognition of a truly equal partnership with the US – could flourish by way of the European Intervention Initiative proclaimed three years ago by Macron. By now, 14 European countries have signed on to the project that also includes non-EU-member European states. Yet it does not constitute an intervention force; it is rather a sort of coalition of the willing-to-project-power. It is hoped that cooperation will give rise to a strategic culture of joint action that could, in the distant future, facilitate joint European military operations, perhaps to address humanitarian crises. It deserves to be given a chance, above all by the hesitant Germans.

And what will become of NATO, which has been so successful over its 70 years? "To preserve NATO," posits former German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, "the EU must act as if the Alliance were already gone." While neither "obsolete" nor "brain-dead," NATO is in deep crisis. Europe's security remains dependent on the nuclear umbrella held aloft by the US. Berlin's clear obligation to rapidly meet the 2-percent goal would promote unity within NATO more than would perhaps any "expert group," such as the one proposed by German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas.

NATO is in need of a hard reality check. Just next door is the Middle East, ablaze with conflict; further east lies the strategic challenge of China; and then there are the authoritarian developments within the NATO member states of Hungary, Poland and Turkey. A fruitful debate over potential sanctions is urgent; after all, an alliance based on shared values can tolerate only so much realpolitik and cynicism.

KATJA GLOGER

is a journalist and writer specializing in Russian history and politics. Her latest book, *Fremde Freunde* (Estranged friends), covers the long history of German-Russian relations.

Continued from page 1

A global order in flux

LEGAL NOTICE

Publisher: Detlef Prinz

Executive Editor: Theo Sommer

Editor-in-Chief: Peter H. Koepf
redaktion@times-media.de

Senior Editor: Lutz Lichtenberger

English Language Editor: Jonathan Lutes

Art Director: Paul M. Kern

Layout: Johanna Trapp, Gordon Martin

Senior Advisor: Oliver Rolofs

Publishing House
Times Media GmbH
Tempelhofer Ufer 23-24
10963 Berlin
+49 30 21505-400Printed by
Hurrlyet A.S., An der Brücke 20-22
65456 Mörfelden Walldorf, GermanyThe German Times is a registered
trademark of Times Media GmbH.

www.the-security-times.com

ISSN 2191-6462

Press deadline: Feb. 7, 2020

Conundrum number two: Last year, Russia conducted one of the largest military exercises in the Far East. This spring, NATO is going to stage Defender 2020, the largest US military training maneuver since the 1990s. About 37,000 GIs are scheduled to take part, including an entire division of 20,000 soldiers specially deployed to Europe. For months, they will rumble through Germany to the border of Russia in Poland and the Baltic republics. The point is to prove that rapid deployment can enhance deterrence. Without a doubt, the Russians will respond with another massive Zapad exercise along their western border. Both, however, must know that tank battles are obsolete. No future war will see engagements like the Battle of Kursk, which involved

6,000 tanks, 4,000 aircraft and two million troops. Drones and cyber warfare have drastically changed the realities of war. Defender 2020 and Zapad are primarily psychological demonstrations, not simulations of warfare in times ahead.

The third conundrum relates to Europe. Many feel that it must step forward as America steps back. Trump has been making noises to this effect. German politicians vow to take on greater international responsibility. Ursula von der Leyen, the new president of the European Commission, and Josep Borrell, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, argue that Europe must "learn to speak the language of power." Several conservative pundits hint at increased military

engagement of the Europeans in the Middle East, while some left-of-center gurus think the military should be employed to enforce human rights in authoritarian countries.

But let's face the facts. Realism would strongly advise us not to militarize Europe's foreign policy. For one thing, the EU simply does not have the military capabilities to take on huge missions in its near abroad. Moreover, the US record is rather discouraging. It teaches us that wars are costly – on Operation Iraqi Freedom alone, the US spent \$730 billion between 2003 and 2010. The wars last far longer than advertised; the war in Afghanistan – the longest in American history – has dragged on for nearly twenty years. Pretty soon, the US will have been tied down in Iraq for just as long. And

rarely do military interventions have the intended outcome; usually they create new unforeseen and more complex problems (see Kosovo or, more recently, Libya). It taxes conventional wisdom to assume that Europe's much weaker forces could succeed where America's military behemoth has failed.

It is a deep and sincere wish that the Trump administration might moderate its transactional "America First" approach and once again strengthen the traditional pillars of US policy – standing by its allies, supporting free trade and upholding rules-based global institutions. It could do worse than heed Henry Kissinger's recent statement: "The most urgent question is whether the Atlantic nations will operate with some sense of common purpose,

and hence strategy, on the larger issue of world order. Or whether, in the course of adjusting to changing circumstances and redefining roles, they pursue above all their national or regional interests."

Sixteen years ago, in his 2004 *Washington Post* op-ed, the grandmaster of realpolitik formulated a truism that is a valid and relevant today as it was then: "American power is a fact of life, but the art of diplomacy is to translate power into consensus." US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo should have this adage printed, framed and placed on his desk.

THEO SOMMER

is executive editor of
The Security Times