



THE WEST'S DEBACLE IN UKRAINE: A CONVERSATION WITH JACQUES BAUD

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Jacques Baud continues his analysis of the crisis in the Ukraine, this time focusing on the failures that are now facing the West in its confrontation with Russia. The only real winner in the West seems to be a revitalized NATO. Thomas Kaiser of [Zeitgeschehen im Fokus](#) leads the discussion.

Thomas Kaiser (TK): The May 19th [New York Times editorial](#) questioned the point of U.S. war strategy in Ukraine and questioned further involvement. How should this be understood?

Jacques Baud (JB): In the English-speaking world, the U.S. and European Union strategy is increasingly being questioned by military and intelligence officials. This trend is reinforced by U.S. domestic politics. Republicans and Democrats have a very similar view of Russia. The difference, however, lies in the effectiveness of the investments in support of Ukraine. Both share the goal of "regime change" in Russia; but Republicans have noted that the billions spent tend to backfire against the Western economy. In other words, they seem unable to achieve their intended goal while our economies and influence weaken.

TK: So, the Republicans don't really have a different position from the Democrats?

JB: In Europe, we tend to think of the Republicans and the Democrats as the political "right" and "left." That's not quite true. First of all, we have to remember that historically, until the beginning of the 20th century, the Republicans were "on the left" and the Democrats "on the right". Today, they differ not so much in their vision of the United States in the world as in how they want to achieve that vision. That's why you have Democrats who are more to the right than some Republicans and Republicans who are more to the left than some Democrats.

TK: What does this mean for the Ukraine crisis?

JB: The Ukraine crisis has been managed by a small minority of Democrats who hate Russia. They seem more interested in weakening Russia than strengthening the United States. Republicans see that not only this strategy against Russia does not work, but it leads to a loss of credibility of the United States. The upcoming midterm elections and the growing unpopularity of Joe Biden are fueling

criticism of U.S. strategy in Ukraine.

TK: Is this "rethinking" taking place only in the English-language media?

JB: In Europe, and in the French-language media in French-speaking Switzerland, France and Belgium, the rhetoric faithfully follows what the Ukrainian propaganda says. We are shown a fictitious reality that announces victory against Russia. The result is that we are not able to help Ukraine overcome its real problems.

TK: Do people in the EU really see it that way?

JB: Yes, there is a general anti-Russian mood there. People are more Catholic than the Pope. That was also the case with the oil embargo. The U.S. Treasury Secretary, Janet Yellen, advised the EU against an oil embargo. But the EU wanted to do it anyway, leading to skyrocketing oil prices. So, it is obvious that there is a certain dynamic in the EU related to the generation of the current political leadership. European leaders are very young, have no real experience, but are ideologically fixed. That is the reason why European leadership tends not to have a mature assessment of the situation.

TK: What are the consequences of this?

JB: In Europe, our understanding of the problem lags behind that of the USA. We are not able to discuss the situation calmly. In the French-language media, it is impossible to take an alternative view of the problems without being called "Putin's agent." This is not only an intellectual issue, but first and foremost a problem for Ukraine. By confirming the view proposed by Ukrainian propaganda, our media have pushed Ukraine towards a strategy that costs a huge number of lives and leads to the destruction of the country. Our media believes that this strategy is effective to weaken Vladimir Putin and that Ukrainians should continue on this path. However, the Americans seem to start realizing that this is a dead end, as Joe Biden stated that military aid to Ukraine is only to strengthen Ukraine's negotiating position.

TK: What is the view in the U.S.?

JB: In the United States, a distinction must be made between the government and the mainstream media on the one hand, and the military and intelligence professionals on the other. Among the latter, there is a growing sense that Ukraine will suffer more from Western strategy than from a war with Russia. This sounds like a paradox, but more and more intelligence people seem to recognize that. In French-speaking Switzerland—in my experience—people do not understand that. They follow the rhetoric of the American government. This is an intellectually limited, extremely primitive, extremely dogmatic and ultimately extremely brutal view towards the Ukrainians. It is, again, a view that is more Catholic than the Pope, because even the US military seems to understand that this approach will lead to failure.

TK: What does this mean in practical terms?

JB: Let us consider the situation in Mariupol. Our media seem to deplore that the fighters of the Azov Movement surrendered. They feel sorry for them. They would have preferred that they all died. This is extremely inhumane. But now it appears their fighting had no longer any impact on the situation. If you read the Swiss French media, they should have fought to the death, to the last man. These media would have done a "wonderful job" during the defense of Berlin in April 1945! By an irony of history, the two situations are very similar. The situation in Berlin at that time was completely hopeless, and among the last fighters of the Third Reich—the last defenders of the Führer—were French volunteers of the "Charlemagne" division!

TK: What does the use of such volunteers mean?

JB: It is something quite remarkable, actually, because foreign volunteers go to combat not out of patriotic duty, but because of conviction, because of dogmatism—and this is exactly the same mentality as some of our media. A soldier who defends his country does not do so out of hatred for the enemy, but out of a sense of duty and respect for his community and his country. A volunteer who becomes politically involved, like the volunteers of the SS division "Charlemagne" in their time, follows a kind of vocation to fight. It is a different intellectual mechanism. The same thing can be observed in Ukraine. These volunteers of the Azov Movement, called "republicans" by some Swiss politicians, threatened to kill Zelensky for accepting the surrender of Mariupol. These volunteers are not fighting for Ukraine, but against Russia. This is the same mindset as that of the journalists in French-speaking Switzerland. They are just as vehemently against Putin as these volunteer fighters.

TK: What is the worldview behind this?

JB: Of course, this event upsets the narrative that Ukraine is defending itself heroically and that its determination is bringing about Russia's defeat. Little David (Ukraine) defends itself against Goliath (Russia) and succeeds. However, the reality is quite different. More and more soldiers of the Ukrainian regular army say that they do not want to fight anymore. They feel abandoned by their leadership. Moreover, the Russians have a reputation for treating their prisoners well. Those who still are eager to fight for Ukraine are the paramilitary volunteers. The myth of a victorious resistance was created; but today the Ukrainian military feels betrayed. That Ukraine is losing this war is, paradoxically, perhaps due in large part to the narrative spread by our media.

TK: The fact that reality is being misunderstood can also be seen in the case of NATO. Those responsible are only too happy to declare that NATO keeps the peace and guarantees freedom and security in Europe.

JB: These statements must be put into perspective. First of all, NATO is not a peace organization. NATO is fundamentally a nuclear-power organization, as NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said. That is the purpose of NATO—to put allies under the nuclear umbrella. NATO was founded in 1949, when there were only two nuclear powers—the U.S. and the USSR. At that time, an organization like NATO was justified. On both sides of the Iron Curtain, there were people who wanted war. That was the case under Stalin, but also in the United States.

TK: Some Western political leaders wanted to keep the war going?

JB: Yes, that was the reason why Winston Churchill did not want to disarm part of the German Wehrmacht that had surrendered. A war against the Soviet Union was expected. The idea of a nuclear umbrella can be justified under these circumstances. But with the end of the Cold War, when the Warsaw Pact dissolved, this justification faded.

TK: Can a military organization be completely eliminated?

JB: It is certainly necessary to have a collective security organization in Europe. There is no question that certain arrangements should be made for a common defense. This idea is relatively well accepted.

The problem lies more in the form of this organization and in the way the defense should be conceived.

TK: What should have happened with Russia?

JB: Since the early 1990s, the Russians had a conception of security in Europe that was inspired by the OSCE: security through cooperation, not confrontation. That's why the Russians were interested in joining NATO at that time. But the very concept of NATO, with a dominant power tied to the very nature of the organization itself, cannot integrate the Russian perspective. If you look at the current challenges in the world, the Russian vision can be seen as much more realistic than the Western vision.

TK: Why do you judge it that way?

JB: Humanity is facing multiple complex challenges. We forget that in 1967, NATO published the *Harmel Report* in which it reflected on its own future. This is now more than 50 years ago. This report was exemplary and extremely modern. In it, NATO outlined all the current and future challenges and laid down certain guidelines for the organization's development. It was forward-looking; and I see it as a model for what NATO could look like. In this report, the security concept was rethought. That is, you find there environmental and social problems that were integrated into the security concept. When I look at the problems we face worldwide, and also in Europe, in particular, the *Harmel Report* offers a lot of food for thought and ideas.

TK: What happened to this report, or its ideas?

JB: The Gulf War and then the Balkan War put us back into conventional thinking. Thus, NATO missed the chance to think in a new direction. Tanks, artillery, aircraft, etc. still define NATO's model of thinking. Not only was this model unsuitable for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but NATO did not really learn the right lessons from those wars. So, we have increased suffering and misery, without containing terrorism. This is a complete failure at the operational, strategic, intellectual, and human levels.

TK: What do you see as the cause of this obvious failure?

JB: The very concept of war was not adapted to the realities. NATO is a regional security and defense

organization. It was designed in 1949 for a war in Europe with nuclear weapons, tanks, artillery, etc. In Afghanistan, however, there were no nuclear weapons, tanks, or fighter-bombers. That was a very different kind of war. But NATO did not identify the problem.

TK: Why did NATO not grasp the situation correctly?

JB: To make it simple, let's say that a war in Europe is a technical challenge. A war in Afghanistan, on the other hand, is a societal challenge. NATO has not understood this essential difference. I mentioned the war in Afghanistan because NATO was engaged there as an organization. In Iraq, it is better to talk about "NATO countries." But the fact remains that they did not understand that they were waging totally different types of war. Western armies are not prepared for it and have a dogmatic understanding of war.

TK: What does this mean for NATO?

JB: The alliance has remained at the 1949 level, of course with more modern weapons; but the logic has remained the same. We see this also in the Ukraine crisis. NATO is certainly not involved in the fighting, but it is providing support through training, advice and reconnaissance. Ukraine's weaknesses are therefore NATO's weaknesses: they wage a war at tactical level, while the Russians are fighting at operational level. Ukraine was in the same operational conundrum in 2014. The Ukrainian army was poorly advised. Since then, NATO has trained more and more Ukrainian instructors who are making the same mistakes today as they did eight years ago. We see that NATO's conception of war is inadequate and does not follow developments in world's societies. War is thought of as it was in the First World War. It is seen as a balance of power.

TK: What should happen here?

JB: I think that NATO should dissolve itself to be reborn in a different form. I think we need a collective security organization in Europe that is independent of the United States. But it needs to be tailored to modern security challenges and be able to deal with them cooperatively.

TK: I would like to come back to the OSCE. You said that Russia favors this model. Wouldn't that be an alternative to NATO?

JB: Yes, of course. By the way, this was a proposal of the last president of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev. He was inspired by an idea of former French President Charles de Gaulle—a Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals. Gorbachev called it "the common European house." Even today, it is a truism—the best way to avoid war is to have good relations with your neighbors. It sounds banal, but it is so.

TK: Why don't states manage to do that?

JB: There are several reasons. The first is the U.S. "obsession" since the 1970s with preventing closer cooperation between Europe and Russia. The Russian idea of a "common European house" would be a rapprochement between Russia and Europe that the U.S. does not want. This has focused particularly on Germany. Germany is the largest economic power in Europe, has historically been a strong military power, and has had a special relationship with the Soviet Union. The U.S. has always been afraid of having a large Europe as a competitor.

The second reason is that the former Eastern bloc countries that are now part of the EU and NATO have no intention of getting closer to Russia. Their reasons are historical, cultural and political. But they are also a culture of intransigence that has been observed since the 1920s and continues to be seen in their domestic policies.

TK: In what respect?

JB: For example, in the supply of gas from Siberia. The U.S. arguments against "Nord Stream 2" are not new. Germany has been receiving gas from Siberia since the 1960s and 1970s. Even then, the U.S. feared that closer cooperation between the FRG and the USSR would have an impact on Germany's determination to remain in NATO. Therefore, they did everything they could to sabotage the gas pipelines.

TK: Yes, I can still remember that. There were articles in *Der Spiegel* and other German newspapers reporting cruel working conditions for workers in Siberia, etc. It was the prevailing mood like we find again today.

JB: In 1982 Ronald Reagan signed a Presidential Executive Order authorizing the CIA to sabotage the

["Brotherhood" gas pipeline](#) between Urengoy (Siberia) and Uzhhorod (Ukraine). The pipeline was sabotaged but quickly repaired by the Soviets. Yes, that was the same rhetoric as today. It is tragic, but we are still in the same intellectual dynamic.

TK: This shows that tangible U.S. interests are at stake here, and this will influence the whole development in Europe.

JB: Yes, the idea of a common European house, as formulated by Gorbachev and favored by the Russians, is inconceivable to the United States. For this reason, Russia has always had a certain respect for the [OSCE](#). After the end of the Cold War, this model could have been expanded to build security through cooperation rather than confrontation. This could have been a viable model. But NATO lacked the intellectual flexibility to rethink itself. NATO remained incapable of formulating genuine strategic thinking. NATO's output is intellectually extremely weak.

TK: So, would Switzerland's rapprochement with NATO definitely be a step backwards into the Cold War?

JB: No, not really, since we were never in NATO. Besides, a 2017 US Army study found that the USSR did not attack Europe because it never intended to. So, our security does not depend on NATO, but on our ability to have good relations with our neighbors. In fact, I believe that NATO membership would put our security at risk. That applies equally to Finland and Sweden.

TK: Can you explain that in more detail?

JB: There are two reasons. First, as a member, Switzerland could be involved in operations that are not necessarily related to its own national interests. In the fight against terrorism, for example, NATO does not have the doctrinal capacity to address this issue effectively. If we were to engage alongside NATO, we would only attract terrorism to ourselves. That's what happened with Germany, for example. Besides, it is not very satisfying intellectually to be involved in defeats. Secondly, our neutrality; and I am talking here about Swiss neutrality, which, unlike other countries, like Belgium, has been confirmed and internationally recognized by the major European powers. This recognition has successfully protected us over the last two centuries.

TK: Even from attacks by Nazi Germany?

JB: The Third Reich had planned at least three operations against Switzerland, but Germany never had the opportunity to implement them. That said, we have to remember that this planning was done because Switzerland had not behaved according to its neutrality policy.

TK: In what respect?

JB: One must not forget that the headquarters of the OSS in Europe, under the direction of Alan Dulles, had been in Bern since 1942.

The OSS was the predecessor organization of the CIA. Swiss intelligence worked with the OSS and the British services to support resistance networks against the Nazis in Germany, in France and northern Italy. In addition, members of the 2nd Polish Infantry Division interned in Switzerland were clandestinely trained with the help of the Swiss Army to fight with the Resistance in France. Obviously, the neutrality policy was only a façade.

TK: What were the consequences?

JB: I certainly don't want to criticize Switzerland's involvement, especially because part of my family fought in the French Resistance. On the other hand, if we take a step back, we must acknowledge that Switzerland was not entirely neutral. And this had its price, because the Nazis knew about these activities. For this reason, Switzerland had to make concessions to the German Reich. The reasons for these concessions were never really explained to the Swiss people, but in 1995-1999 they were widely criticized in Switzerland.

TK: What conclusions can we draw from this?

JB: If neutrality is applied consistently, it also has a protective function. On the other hand, the protection that NATO would offer Switzerland is very limited. If an enemy were to reach the Swiss border in the event of a conventional conflict, this would mean that NATO already had an existential problem. In such a situation, Swiss neutrality would de facto fall. In case of a nuclear conflict, the USA

would never bomb Moscow in order to liberate Bern. Anyone who believes this is a fantasist.

TK: What about the new applicant countries?

JB: The same applies to Helsinki and Stockholm. Anyone who believes that the USA would put Los Angeles, New York or Washington in danger is absolutely not of this world. The U.S. would attack Russia with nuclear weapons only in an extreme situation. In fact, the U.S. would do anything to keep a possible nuclear exchange on European soil. So, membership in NATO only has the effect of increasing the likelihood of being hit directly by tactical-operational nuclear weapons. The idea of improving Swiss national security through a rapprochement with NATO is one of incredible naiveté.

TK: The military chief strategist of the Swiss Department of Defense, [Pälvi Pulli](#), openly pleads for closer ties to NATO. All this stems from the mood that has been created in recent years and months that Putin is pursuing an imperialist policy and wants to expand the country further and, in the end, even attack Switzerland. Surely this is nonsense?

JB: I know Mrs. Pälvi Pulli. She is an intelligent person. But she is making the mistake that people in the West make and that results from the disinformation spread by our media. We depart from the idea that Russia wants to conquer Europe and that Vladimir Putin is an irrational person. This is wrong. We know from Ukrainian and Western sources that the Russian decision had its origin in the planned Ukrainian offensive against the Donbas. So, Vladimir Putin's decision was perfectly rational, even if one can argue whether it was the best one. It is also clear that the Russians have tried to resolve all this diplomatically. This includes other sets of issues, such as nuclear weapons in Ukraine, joining NATO, etc.

Clearly, the West has not even tried to implement the Minsk agreements, or to solve the other problems politically. Russia perceives these problems as existential. It was ready to negotiate. Since the beginning of the Russian offensive, Zelensky was also ready to negotiate. He was prevented from doing so by the U.S. and the U.K., as well as by the far-right elements of the Ukrainian security apparatus, which is very strongly supported by our media. I don't think NATO is playing a stabilizing role in this crisis. On the contrary.

TK: Mr. Baud, thank you for the interview.

We are grateful to [Zeitgeschehen im Fokus](#) for their gracious cooperation in making the English-version of this interview.

