

Swiss Institute for Global Affairs

## War in Ukraine and its Spillover Effects

The war in Ukraine is still, after more than one week, a sad reality. The direct consequences for the people in this region are devastating. The Swiss Institute for Global Affairs (SIGA) has analysed and compiled the geopolitical consequences and potential Spillover effects of the war in Ukraine:

### (1) Shift of Geopolitical Options:

- The sanctions against Russia, the destruction of the Ukrainian economy and the breaking apart of supply chains will have massive consequences in the Middle East, the Mediterranean region and Africa. The rise in prices and reduced availability of gas, oil, and food will create new dependencies. Geostrategically and regionally positioned countries such as China, Turkey, countries of the Middle East as well as Russia can exploit these realities.

**Spillover effect: geo-economic dynamics make new alliances possible.**

- The classic energy resources of the West have been recognised as an Achilles' heel. This allows Middle Eastern and African countries to reposition themselves in the area of **energy geopolitics**. Examples of this are the solidifying of Turkey's relations with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as well as the re-legitimisation of conventional energy sources.

**Spillover effect: The debate on new forms of nuclear energy will be of relevance in Europe in the medium term.**

- Food crises (especially due to shortages of grain and wheat) can heavily pressurise the regions around the Mediterranean Sea. Among others, namely Lebanon, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt are dependent on the breadbasket of Russia's and Ukraine's granaries. Alternative trading partners and countries are being sought. Nevertheless, China will still be able to obtain grain and wheat from Russia. With this, China can create new dependencies of third countries in the Mediterranean region and in Africa.

**Spillover effect: Food crises might precede new migratory movements: Furthermore, they have the potential to foster instability in countries such as Egypt, Libya, and Ethiopia**

- The **security architectures in the Mediterranean region, the Middle East and in Africa** are being put to the test. Who is for Russia and who is not is ambiguous. These ambiguities allow fundamental shifts in power-political furrows.

**Spillover effect: New forms of proxy wars may follow in Syria, Yemen and African regions.**

- The **Latin American security architecture** is gaining importance. Countries in Latin America like Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Nicaragua and Cuba had already strengthened their alliances with Russia before the war in Ukraine. Latin America can now benefit from the Western sanctions as an economic fallback region by allowing for companies to conduct operations on its continent, as operations in Russia are not viable anymore. This growing economic power of Latin America could become a new security risk for the USA - especially if China builds strategic partnerships with Latin America (cf. [China-Celac Joint Action Plan 2022-2024](#)).

**Spillover effect: If Latin America manages to profit from some of the economic losses of the Russian Federation, for example by companies relocating from Russia to Brazil, Latin American influence grows, which might challenge the U.S. if Latin America decides to form a strategic partnership with China.**

- **In sum, China will try to exploit the previous Spillover effects for its own geostrategic benefit and create dependencies at all levels and in the most diverse spheres. At the same time, China will rhetorically act as neutral and thus present itself as a mediator.**

It is to be feared that even in the short term, the war in Ukraine will have to be seen as major geostrategic probing, out of which authoritarian states may ultimately emerge stronger. Regions of Latin America, the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific region with China at the centre will emerge as new alternatives against Western powers and notions of democracy. It cannot be ruled out that, in the medium term, states in Europe will also embrace on this autocratic adventure, especially when its dependencies are too great and its resilience too weak. The geopolitical realities and options which Putin is creating are directed at the world, and not merely at Europe. It is crucial that Europe starts to include the term "strategy" in its vocabulary again.

## **(2) New realities are being created:**

- **The new mercenaryism:** Ukrainian President Wolodymyr Zelenskyy calls for an International Brigade with volunteers and civilian fighters from the West. With such calls, war is normalised and reinterpreted. New forms of mercenaryism, for example linked to crowdfunding, will in the medium term cause problems in Ukraine itself and in the countries of origin of the volunteers. **Organised crime, terrorism and hooliganism** could be strengthened thereby. In addition, questions regarding the international law of war arise if civilians from different countries intervene uncontrolled in the war. New dynamics and potentials for escalation open up.
- **"Denazification" - a rhetorical cudgel:** Putin has spoken of "denazification" from the very beginning. It was an argumentative element used to justify the incursion. In its consternation, the West has ignored these narrative details and, in the process, missed the fact that Putin's strategy in the medium term and in geopolitical terms could unfortunately have an effect in dimensions of which we are not yet aware of. The West should have addressed such controversial issues from the outset without hesitation, instead of dismissing them as propaganda. In relation to the international call for civilians to participate in the war against Russia, the focus was unfortunately on extreme right-wing environments. This will only reinforce Putin's narrative. It is a possible indication that there is more behind the current military interventions than what is being assumed.
- **NATO as an institution is being challenged:** The reactions of the West sometimes seem overhasty and show great perplexity and weak strategic preparation. Western states are supplying weapons that are, among other things, of poor quality and may arrive too late. The questionable support of volunteer fighters from European states and the USA can be considered symbolic gestures. At best, it can be seen as an overreaction, at worst, as a Spillover effect which will rebound on the West and unintentionally escalate the situation. The question arises as to how long NATO can continue the dual role of being officially absent and at the same time indirectly intervening through member countries (arms deliveries and voluntary combatants).

- **Attacking a nuclear power plant** is a military mean of power. The Russian armed forces are more than aware of the dangers of a reactor explosion. The attack on Zaporizhzhia has a symbolic meaning in the sense of "Russian armed forces can carry out highly precise attacks if they want to". The destruction of a training centre on the site of the nuclear power plant shows the precision with which Russia can attack targets with. The hysteria in the media in the West must therefore be critically questioned.
- **Information warfare** is in full swing. Unfortunately, however, it can be assumed that the Ukrainian and Western information sovereignty predominantly embraces the West and is very short-term oriented. Russia and other geopolitical actors communicate for longer-term information dominance and a global hegemony over definitions.
- The one-sided media focus on Kiev, President Zelenskyy and the social media campaigns may distract from other issues and regions that could be of highest geostrategic importance. For example, the coverage generously omits that Russia is gripping southern Ukraine, primarily in order to secure trade routes and, if necessary, resources.

We in Europe must be able to interpret and classify these new realities in terms of content and strategy and classify them. This is important today and tomorrow, if Europe is to be a credible and independent voice, facing the world and vis-à-vis the United States.

For more information on this, see:

- War in Ukraine and the Geostrategic Consequences (SIGA contribution).
- SIGA Dossier: War in Ukraine

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