



## Background and elements of the Ukraine war

**We are delighted to publish the interview with a real military expert, the Swiss Jacques Baud, first published in "Schweizer Standpunkte".**

*Peter Hanseler*

Sat 03 Jun 2023

### Foreword

Our blog always attributes about the war process and also about the [pitoyable reporting of the West](#). A few weeks ago we published the article "[Reliable sources for war reporting](#)" and showed how VoicefromRussia works.

Among other things, we mentioned Jacques Baud as an expert and reliable military analyst, one of the few in the West who is not hooked on propaganda.

## Who is Jacques Baud?

Jacques Baud studied international security and economics in Geneva. He is a Colonel in the General Staff of the Swiss Army and worked for the Swiss Strategic Intelligence Service. For several years, he performed various functions in Brussels and Ukraine on behalf of NATO. For UN peacekeeping, he was mainly deployed in African countries. He is the author of numerous books and articles on intelligence, asymmetric warfare, terrorism and disinformation. His current analyses of the Ukraine conflict, published in independent media, are widely read in Europe and beyond.

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**"This crisis shows us the weakness of our society"**

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## Introduction

(May 30, 2023) On the occasion of a trip to Strasbourg, Luxembourg and Brussels, two members of the editorial board of "Schweizer Standpunkt" had the following conversation with Swiss military analyst Jacques Baud. He expresses his views on the causes of the war, the current situation of Ukrainian and Russian troops, and the influence of the United States on events in the region. In a second part, questions of international trade relations and the loss of trust and credibility of Switzerland abroad are also discussed.

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**Swiss Viewpoint: Mr. Baud, how do you assess the situation today? Why are negotiations not taking place?**

Jacques Baud: We are in a strange phase. In the West, people think that Ukraine is winning and that's why there is no reason to negotiate.

Recently, François Hollande, the former French president, was lured into a [phone trap by Russian humorists](#). Pretending to be Petro Poroshenko, they got him to become confidential and declare that "as long as Ukraine wins, there is no reason to negotiate." Such is the general belief. The propaganda is so strong that people do not even realize that Ukraine cannot win.

So why negotiate, assuming that the Russians are in trouble, not the Ukrainians. As for the Russians, the deliberate refusal of Western countries to implement the Minsk agreements has led to losing all confidence in our sincerity.

# Minsk Agreements

*What happened to the Minsk agreements?*

Petro Poroshenko, Angela Merkel, François Hollande, and then Zelensky himself, have all said that they never intended to implement the Minsk agreements. What does this mean for the Russians? The self-proclaimed Donbass republics signed an agreement with Kiev in September 2014 (Minsk 1). Kiev did not abide by the agreement and a second agreement (Minsk 2) was signed in February 2015. Germany and France were the guarantors of the implementation of the agreement for Ukraine, and Russia was the guarantor for the republics of the Donbass. In addition, the other members of the UN Security Council (the United States, the United Kingdom, and China) were also responsible for its implementation, as the Minsk 2 agreement became Security Council Resolution 2202 (2015). Since that time, however, more than 10,000 Russian-speaking civilians have died in the Donbass.

The Russians have tried everything to ensure that these agreements are implemented, as they were meant to protect the Russian-speaking population. But no Western country has ever tried to enforce them. That's why the Russians say if we sign something and it's not honored, how are we supposed to have confidence.

## **What is the combat situation in Ukraine? What are Russia's goals?**

One gets the impression that things are not moving forward, for example in Bachmut. The rhetoric talks about Russia occupying Ukraine. But that is not the point. The goal of the Russians is to eliminate the military threat to the population of the Donbass. They materially destroyed the Ukrainian army in May/June 2022. Since then, Ukraine has been almost exclusively dependent on the West for its armament. Therefore, the Russians have understood that this is not enough and that it is necessary to destroy their human potential. This is exactly what is happening now.

Sergey Surovikin said it clearly last October: "We are pursuing a different strategy. [...] We are not looking for a quick forward movement, we are sparing each of our soldiers and methodically '**crushing**' the **advancing enemy**." He uses the term "meat grinder." This brings us back to the two terms Putin uses, "demilitarization" and "denazification." They are the same goals over and over again. The goal of "denazification" was achieved on March 28, 2022.

Today, in the recently published secret documents, one can see what Ukraine has left at all. For example, in February 2022, the Ukrainians had about 850 T-64 main battle tanks; today they can use only 43 for their big counteroffensive. They certainly still have a few in reserve somewhere, but the vast majority have been destroyed by the Russians. So the Russians have already achieved their goal twice, and it is likely that they will soon achieve it a third time. It is the sad reality, although the exact opposite is said in the West.

People tell themselves that the Russians have lost many soldiers and that prolonging the war will quickly lead to instability in Russia. But again, the opposite is true. We assume that the Russians have lost between 100,000 and 200,000 dead. However, these figures are based on nothing. The exact numbers are not known because neither the Ukrainians nor the Russians communicate their losses.

However, there is a Russian opposition media, Mediazona, which, together with the BBC, elicits figures for the Russian dead, based on the obituaries in the newspapers. So this is a pro-Western media and certainly not controlled by the Russian government, which probably tends to overestimate the number of Russian dead. On this basis, however, one can assume that there are between 10,000 and 20,000 dead, but certainly not 100,000. In the West, however, people prefer to rely exclusively on Ukrainian propaganda. On December 31, the 100 000th dead Russian was proclaimed in Kiev and this was even projected on a building. On that very day, Mediazona's figures were 10,000. That is, 10 times less.

Hearing the other figures, for example, when in November Ursula von der Leyen in a speech spoke about the fact that hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians had died, Ukraine had vehemently complained. And this statement was immediately retracted. But, I think that the figure was already correct, but she should not have said that.

## **Propaganda as a basis for decision-making**

*Where did the Americans get their information?*

The secret documents recently published in the press give us valuable clues about the sources of American information. With regard to Ukrainian equipment, there is no mystery, as these figures are mostly published. Regarding the Russian potential deployed, the Americans have an intensive air reconnaissance activity, which allows them to have a good overview of the forces present.

But for the location of the troops in the field, for the tactical situation, for the losses or operations of the enemy forces, Americans and Westerners are practically blind. It is obvious that they have no intelligence capabilities of their own. Their only source of information is Ukraine. So everything is decided on the basis of propaganda. To me, this is the most interesting element in this conflict. It is said that the CIA is deeply involved in the conflict. That is true in terms of carrying out special sabotage and terrorist operations, but it is completely wrong in [terms of its analytical capabilities](#).

*How do you go about your analysis?*

My approach is not about my opinions or feelings. I want to draw the best possible picture based on what is available. For example, with the number of dead. It's about intelligence work. It's about getting the most factual picture possible. I listen to very little from others, and it doesn't matter at all whether it comes from the left or the right.

Take John J. Mearsheimer, for example, he attributes interesting and true things. He says that the Russians have been lied to from the beginning, etc. That's true. But then he has his own ideas of the conflict. These do not correspond to the historical reality of the conflict. You can agree with his conclusions, but if the way to get there is not the right way, we will not be able to solve the conflict.

For me, it is not about accusing or excusing anyone. It is about having the right picture to find the right solution. And that's why I said the Russians were lied to in the '90s. That is the background of the conflict and it contributes to the current situation, but it is not the reason why Russia intervened in Ukraine. That is important.

## **Without war aims, an endless war**

That is in the background, that is an element that makes communication more difficult. But the central reason is to protect the population in the Donbass. That's why Putin has so much support for protecting the Russian population there. It is about this point.

When it comes to negotiations, the Russians will certainly exploit their victory in the field to achieve their political goals. That's clear, that's basically Carl von Clausewitz's theory. But to achieve political goals, there are other methods. This was to be achieved through the Minsk agreements. That is the reason why the Russians insisted on this political solution. If this fails, they will use the conflict to

achieve the goal in a different way. That is why this logic, a typical consideration à la Clausewitz, which we in the West do not do. We have fought numerous wars for nothing, without clear objectives.

We in the West have no idea what we want to achieve with Ukraine. If we wanted their happiness and prosperity, we would have pushed for the implementation of the Minsk agreements. We didn't do that - we pushed them to prepare for war.

We are not pursuing constructive goals. You see that in the wars in Afghanistan, Libya, etc., those are all wars without objectives. That's why afterwards you have trouble finding a peace, a way out. If you have a war goal, for example, to occupy Paris and then you reach Paris. Then it is finished, then you have achieved your goal and you are satisfied. But if you don't know what your goal is, then it becomes endless.

The Soviets had one goal in Afghanistan: to establish a government. This lasted two years after they left - until the Americans overthrew it along with the jihadists. Twenty-five years later, the Western coalition in Afghanistan had no objective: the government they installed collapsed within 48 hours of their departure.

This is precisely the problem of the Americans and Europeans in Afghanistan, as in Iraq. They have withdrawn from Iraq, but what have they actually accomplished? They don't even know themselves. They fought, but to what end? They destroyed the country, but that was not a goal.

## **Endless wars breed terrorists**

They say they did it to have oil. But they didn't. The oil companies that are in Iraq today are not American companies. That means it wasn't a target. If you don't have a target, you can never win. That's the reason Mali doesn't want any more French in the country. They are waging wars without strategy and without clear objectives: They simply kill people, including innocent civilians (and sometimes they torture them). The result is that for every person killed, ten new resistance fighters are created. This is endless.

That's why Africans rightly say why are they even here if they don't know what they are trying to accomplish. Today's military (including in Switzerland) are no longer strategists, but (often bad) tacticians. This is evident in Ukraine, where the military was trained by the West: It cannot keep up with the Russians in terms of operational art. This is an additional problem for us.



# The Intermarium, a Foreign Policy Goal of Poland

*What are the Poles' goals in the Ukraine conflict?*

That is very interesting. You touched on this question, these divisions that are standing by, described in Seymour Hersh's article on corruption in Ukraine. In the 1920s, Jozef Pilsudski had a project. This is the so-called Intermarium [between the seas].

That's an idea that comes from the former 17th century principality of Poland and Lithuania. Today, it would be about uniting the countries between the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea into one community. These are the three seas. Pilsudski wanted to restore that. And about 15 years ago, in the early 2000s, Poland redefined the recreation of the intermarium as a foreign policy goal.<sup>8</sup>

In January, an agreement for cooperation between Lithuania, [Poland and Ukraine was signed](#). This corresponds to the first Lublin Triangle, which dates back to the past. It is an alliance that could be one of the first elements of this intermarium that Poland wants to achieve.

## Visegrad-Gruppe mit eigener Kampfgruppe

The Visegrad Group with Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia also plays a role here. This is an element of the intermarium. For this purpose, a Visegrad Battle Group was formed, [which is not subordinate to NATO](#). There is. It is not known exactly what Poland is aiming at with it. But interestingly, it was said recently in England and in Germany that in two years (2025) Poland will have the second largest army in Europe.

There is an idea of forming an independent intermarium, a small Europe within Europe, together with Poland. Of course, the Poles want to chair this group.

At the moment it is difficult to distinguish what is rhetoric and what is reality. There are certainly rhetorical elements, there are certainly real things, for example, what has been set in Poland's foreign policy goals. I did not invent that. That is, they are serious considerations.

Every now and then voices are raised, such as that of Emmanuel Macron, who calls for a "European defense army." That's pure rhetoric; they're just words. Whether it's the same for the Poles, I'm not sure, because there are certain concrete elements,

like the combat force and the new treaties. It's hard to predict in what way these pieces of the puzzle will eventually come together, but it could be a different Europe than the one we have in mind.

## Goals of right-wing extremist groups in Ukraine

It is interesting to examine the goals of those who support Volodymyr Zelensky in Ukraine. They are not only fanatical, but they also have a doctrine. Our media try to deny their existence, because many Europeans would withdraw their support for Ukraine if they knew its content.

These movements are generally against the European Union and prefer the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) (to which Switzerland also belongs). They have realized that the Ukrainian economy is not ready to compete with other EU countries. On very many demonstrations of the population the EU flag is crossed out with a cross.

On the other hand, they also have in mind participation in the [Intermarium proposed by Poland](#). Their idea of Europe is not that of sharing and integration, which some in the EU have, but a Europe governed by nations, which even goes against the very principles of the EU. It is the "idea of nation" (the N united with an I) that can be seen on the emblem of the AZOV movement and that is claimed by various far-right groups in Ukraine and elsewhere. For this reason, they support the Intermarium. When they say that they are for Europe, [they do not mean the European Union or the Europe as we can imagine it](#). It is the Europe as Hitler imagined it. That's the difference. And that is clearly stated in the doctrine.

## Dangerous dynamics

That is, we are in a dynamic that I think is very dangerous.

And we and the Americans are supporting that. Of course, it's very interesting for the Americans if Europe is barely functioning. That is, they don't want Europe to not function at all, but they don't want it to be too strong. This is the so-called Wolfowitz Doctrine.

You can read it all, word for word. They don't want a strong Europe. Europe is supposed to work, people have to be quiet and work normally, but nothing more. Europe is under surveillance. That's why we have all these moods that you feel in



Europe, especially in the east of Europe. This is supported by the Americans because it reduces Europe's capacities.

## **EU net beneficiaries with strong influence in NATO**

It is interesting to see on the map how the money flows in the EU are and who are the recipients. On one side we have Germany, France, Italy, these are the net payers and all the Eastern European countries are the net recipients. And those are exactly the ones who want to have their own Europe. This is a strange dynamic. You can see that the influence of these recipients in Europe is enormous.

I have personally noticed that in NATO. This is a policy that the Americans are eager to support. In other words, these states have more weight than Germany and France, which were in NATO from the beginning but were critical of America and didn't want to support a lot of things. That is why the Americans favor these Eastern European states.

## **Aggressive, combative forces**

That is the current situation. There is actually a tendency that I think is dangerous for Europe. There are aggressive forces that are ready to fight. The Poles and these Baltic countries are not only belligerent, but they hate the Russians. This does not go back to communism. The hatred is much older. These are very conservative countries, conservative in the bad sense of the word.

These are countries that still admire the Third Reich. There are ceremonies, for example, of former veterans. If these are lived together with genuine democratic, open opinions, I have nothing against it; if former fighters and soldiers from the Third Reich want to preserve their memories. But it becomes a problem when everything goes in one direction and is no longer open to other perspectives. This is what happens and this leads to polarization. That's exactly what you can observe today, and that's where I see a certain danger.

*What are the connections to Canada?*

On the one hand, there is Christya Freeland, Canada's vice president. Her grandfather was a Nazi collaborator. Thousands of Ukrainians emigrated to Canada in 1945/46 because they could no longer stay in Ukraine because of the Soviet Union. They were members of the former 1st Galicia Division of the SS. These people have since died and they received statues in Canada as former old fighters.

This is largely unknown in Europe. These are monuments with [swastikas that caused offence and led to big problems](#). Christya Freeland worked to ensure that these statues were allowed to remain standing.

## Traces elsewhere as well

Ursula von der Leyen's grandfather was also a Nazi and Victoria Nuland is also from Ukraine. Anthony Blinken's great-grandfather was also Ukrainian. However, I do not believe that these people are Nazis today. But the irrationality and emotionality with which the Ukraine conflict is being conducted seems to show that these leaders were raised in a spirit of hatred and revenge. Some have this rejection or revenge attitude toward the Russians, others toward the Soviets. It's a mixture. There is a convergence against Russia. There is this unhealthy relationship. I call it a little bit the revanche of the children or grandchildren. These positions are strange.

With Iraq, we don't have this problem at all. We don't have ministers who are from Iraq. But with Ukraine, we have this constellation of elements that have a historical origin. I am not saying that they are dominant elements, but they are constantly present in the background.

## Ukraine an independent country only since 1991

When Putin says that Ukraine was artificially created by the Soviet Union, it is true. Ukraine has been an independent country only since 1991. That is only 30 years. Before that it did not exist. Today Poland wants to have a part, Bulgaria wants to have a part, even in Hungary people say parts of Ukraine belong to us. The same is true for Romania and Moldova. Moldova was a part of Romania. All this is an artificial creation of the Soviets, of Stalin. It is a simplification to say that the Russians are against Ukraine. It is much more complex. It is precisely these elements that are not only state-bound, but also cultural.



"I-N", the "Idea of the Nation" is the insignia of the Azov Regiment. It is the reverse emblem of the 2nd SS Panzer Division "The Reich", which "liberated" Kharkov in 1943. But the background is the idea of the pure-blood nation and the "idea of the nation" is the idea of the superiority of the race.

The nation must be pure. Therefore, no Russians should be in Ukraine; they do not belong to the "Ukrainian nation." This is the position of the right-wing extremists, supported by our media, who support Zelensky. This is the logic of the "idea of the nation", it is about the issue of purity. Purity is an element that always appears in Ukrainian nationalist discourse.

Based on this racist idea, the new masters in Kiev decided in 2014 to wipe out the Russian-speaking minority in Ukraine. For this reason, on July 1, 2021, Ukraine adopted a law granting [different rights to Russians and Ukrainians in Ukraine](#). Therefore, our media did not report on the victims in the Donbass or on the measures taken against ethnic minorities. This was the reason for the Russian intervention.

## **"De-dollarization" of global trade relations?**

*Now a change of subject: What is your assessment of the current discussion of a possible far-reaching "de-dollarization" of global trade relations?*

I see this as a trend. This is certainly a consequence of the sanctions imposed on Russia, which scare many economic players.

The dollar remains and will remain the most important currency for trade for some years to come. However, it is a threat to the U.S. economy. The problem is this: If your economy depends on the dollar, it is vulnerable to U.S. sanctions. Many non-Western countries in the world have recognized the irrationality of our political leadership in the West and are therefore trying to reduce their vulnerability to the dollar and the euro.

Many countries no longer have confidence in the West. Switzerland is also affected by this. Last year, about 130 billion was withdrawn from Credit Suisse. It was particularly countries from the Middle East.

## **Swiss sanctions against Russia as a signal**

They said to themselves, if Switzerland imposes so many sanctions and also confiscates our funds, then we have to withdraw the money quickly. That is the reason. They are afraid. They don't want to have dollars in reserve. They've seen what the sanctions have done to a big power, it could happen to them any day. It's the same with Saudi Arabia. Biden has said America wants Saudi Arabia to become a pariah state. That's why the move away from the dollar.

## **Saudi Arabia and Iran hold talks**

You have noticed that the West acts exclusively according to its own interests. More precisely, the U.S. acts according to its interests and the Europeans are not in a position to resist and are forced to go along. This has been seen, for example, with Germany and the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

Since last year, the West has been discussing what to do with the frozen Russian money. Should we keep the money to finance the war in Ukraine, etc.? This situation has, of course, worried other players who might be subject to similar sanctions. Those who had money in our banks have withdrawn their money.

*Is Switzerland in trouble now?*

No, there is probably no reason to worry, but we have not improved our situation. For me, that is already a weakening of Switzerland's position.

*What is the situation of Germany and the West in general?*

Germany has to bear an additional consequence because of its energy situation. I think the West had believed and hoped that Russia would collapse immediately after the imposition of massive sanctions. That's what French Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire had said. However, this did not happen. So the West has felt the indirect effects of these sanctions.

If you listen to what Oleksey Arestovich said in March 2019 and read the U.S. strategy to destabilize Russia written at the same time, it becomes clear that the U.S. wanted this war. The others simply followed subserviently, using Ukraine not for the interests of Ukraine itself, but for their own interests.

The idea was to make Russia collapse in order to create the conditions for a change of power by a discontented population. This did not happen because our decision-making elements were not sufficiently updated. The result was that we got rid of a cheap source of energy for no reason. I remind you that Europe is not dependent on Russia, but on energy. European leaders merely heeded the demand of Donald Trump, who did not want Nord Stream 2 to be completed.

## **Situation of Russia**

Russia works - even very well - because its economy was very well prepared. It can certainly survive independently of the West. After the experience of 2014, Russians expected that this would happen at some point. It is one of the least indebted countries, and now they have even less debt. Russia and China are countries that have hardly any debt. And what weakens a country? The debt.

*Can we speak of a war between NATO and Russia?*

This statement is inaccurate. NATO as an organization does not have a decision-making capability independent of the USA. Therefore, it is not NATO that is the problem, but the USA. Obviously, it is a war in Ukraine between the USA and Russia. The others (Nato countries, Sweden, Finland, etc.) are just "useful idiots" as Lenin would say. The problem is that no country in Europe has made a correct analysis of this war since 2014. They are paying the price and will continue to pay it.

## Switzerland without independent analytical capabilities

This is confirmed, for example, by the situation report "Security Switzerland 2022" of the Federal Intelligence Service of June 2022.<sup>16</sup> The assessment of the war shows that they have understood nothing at all. Zero. Their analysis of the situation is simply based on Ukrainian propaganda. And it is things like this that scare me because they show that we have no independent analytical skills.

You can very well support Ukraine, or Russia, or other countries, but the fact that we are not able to assess the problem properly, I find that very disturbing. It shows how you can run into a problem when you have not understood anything. It is like a child.

*Is it possible to save Switzerland's neutrality if the assessment of neutrality takes place on similar ground?*

Neutrality is a complex problem.

A foreign policy is determined on the basis of national interests. That is unilateral. But neutrality is not unilateral. There is the problem. Neutrality works on the basis of trust. It has to be credible. Neutrality is not unilateral, it is multilateral.

By the way, Swiss neutrality was guaranteed and determined by the great powers in 1815. That is why this neutrality became so robust. If other countries do not recognize that we are neutral, then there is nothing we can do. You can't ask Iran, for example, to have confidence in us. Once neutrality or trust, and especially credibility, is gone, you can't restore it unilaterally through short-term policies. It takes time to restore trust.

## Overcome your own prejudices

*Why is our situation assessment not independent?*

It's like terrorism. When assessing a situation, the most difficult thing is to overcome one's own prejudices. That is the biggest problem we have. We cannot get rid of our prejudices. Today it is the Russians who are the bad guys anyway, back then it was the Soviets. There is talk of dictatorship. However, when I look at what is happening in France at the moment, one can wonder what the word "dictatorship" really means.



This crisis is important because it shows us that it is not only a problem between Ukraine and Russia, but also the weakness of our society. If shutting down a Twitter account is considered normal in our country - but when others don't - then we have a very limited understanding of democracy.

But this is not new. I'm not in any party, but here in Switzerland you can see that some are barely allowed to speak. Democracy is above all the ability to put forward the best arguments.

If someone is forbidden to speak, it means that I don't have enough arguments. That is no longer democracy. This crisis clearly shows that and that is our weakness.

I remind you of the quote attributed (probably incorrectly) to Voltaire: "I do not agree with you, but I will fight to the death for you to be able to say it."

Unfortunately, we are no longer at that point. We are being directed by very young top politicians with no life experience and no culture, who are so narcissistic that for them democracy means thinking like them.

*Mr. Baud, thank you very much for your interesting comments and your commitment.*

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(Brüssel, 18. April 2023/DS+UC)

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