

Trans-European Effects of the War in Ukraine

By Caecilia Johanna van Peski

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Our entire world is suffering from instability, and we are all suffering with it. In Ukraine, in the Russian Federation, in Israel and Palestine, in China, in Southeast Asia, on the African continent, in the Americas and also in Europe; we are all feeling the shifts in power that are causing the current instabilities.¹ I do not have a happier message to bring to you today, as I opt for *realpolitik* in an attempt to get to the core of the world's current challenges, what causes these challenges and how to build resolve. But I choose to remain optimistic too, for nothing ever stays the same, especially not in geopolitics and international relations.² Whilst being shuttled to Amsterdam International Airport to attend the Baker Institute International Symposium on the War in Ukraine here in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, U.S., the bus driver told me how in his opinion, all the world's current instabilities were to blame on the U.S. In his view, it seemed, the United States is at the very core of the real issue for the war between Russia and Ukraine. Whatever the level of truth engrained in the opinion of this gentleman, I do think that most of us are first and foremost trying to make sense out of the chaos we see in this world. Call it Gestalt, or call it Truth. It is not difficult to become aware of the fact that there are a lot of different opinions on what is happening in the here and now. Let me today, at the occasion of the Baker Institute International Symposium, try to bring clarity to some of the context. I will do so for the sake of finding common insights that can guide us to higher ground.

During the 2018-2019 academic semester, I visited Juniata College and the Baker Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies because I had been invited to serve as an academic fellow, the Baker's Institute "Partnerships for Peace" Chair. This was just before I was appointed Commander in the Royal Netherlands Navy. At the time, I had been working within the context of war and peace for over three

decades and had already seen my fair share of what war does to people, and to people's everyday life. Today, on the occasion of the Baker Institute International Symposium, I feel honored to meet up yet again with Juniata College's academic faculty and student body to engage in spirited and very timely debate regarding the causes for conflict, and – more importantly - the perspectives for peace.

Regarding the current conflict in Ukraine, I am noticing how it is predominantly masculine powers and traits that are ruling the game.³ In the war between Russia and Ukraine, a set of attributes, behaviors and roles is being applied that are partly socially constructed as well as influenced by cultural factors and biological factors but that do not seem to incorporate those values that we have been supporting in recent times. These masculine traits and values – contrary to (more) feminine traits and values – seem to be unable to bring sustainable resolution to the challenges of our time (alone). Standards of masculinity vary across different cultures and historical periods, but in the current war in Eastern Europe, the worst of what we thought we had left behind seems to have returned and grown stronger. We're seeing now – and I am applying some of the different perspectives that you can take to look at this war – how the geopolitical perspective, the strategic perspective, the political one, the historical one, the economic one, the social one, the one on human security, all seem to be influenced by that predominantly masculine take on things.⁴ I am referring to such values as the show of force, self-reliance (as opposed to community-based approach), the need for emotional control and power over others, the desire to win on the cost of the opponent, the idealization of physical strength and the addiction to autonomy. Yet the instances where our world has been able to transform war into peace all show that masculine values – as instruments of transformation from conflict to peace – are outdated and stale. Traditional masculinity lacks the depth and spirituality necessary to understand and embody the fullness of humanity in the modern world, and hence the power to bring forward peace by peaceful means. The current wartime climate in Europe – in the world – unfortunately provides an opportune environment to reinforce the values which are central to the hegemony of masculinity. In addition, the wartime front provides an open stage for effective public actions that prefer masculine values over feminine values. What we're seeing as a result is a very masculine war. Not a war of men (!) but a war of (unwanted and unproductive) masculine values. The only politicians who are seen meddling in the current story are those whose power is based on masculine values, whether it is Erdogan in Türkiye, Putin in Moscow, Biden in the U.S., or the current Chancellor of Germany. In a way we miss the approach by the former German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, who engaged in a more deliberative contact with Putin. Was it because they both were fluent in Russian? Putin had learned German during the years that he worked in Dresden, as a KGB agent, and Merkel, having grown up in the German Democratic Republic was used to studying Russian already in elementary school. Whatever the reason, there was a communicative connection between Germany and

the Russian Federation, one that now seems to have gotten lost, leaving little opportunity for track one and track two diplomacy.

For many years, we have been able to utilize such connections to better the situation that in the end we were running towards and turned so bad. The availability of highly sensitive, highly communicative and well-seasoned politicians aided to process of building strong and constructive connectivity between Europe and Russia. The last one that had that communicative and convincing power seems to have been Emmanuel Macron, President of France, and even that connection has now been broken. Macron is, as far as I can see, not visiting with Putin anymore. Others have taken a seat at the debating table, and their agendas too are based on masculine attributions. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of Türkiye, for example, holds an agenda of his own national interests in his relationship with Russia, giving little attention to the needs of the collective. China's President Xi Jinping, who time and again states he wants to engage in talks with Putin, is seen to base his communications and collaborations mainly on national – not global – interests too.

That brings us to the topic of dialogue. Dialogue is so important, and I was asked to speak about the connection between dialogue and opportunities for peace in the context of the current conflict. For all nations it remains of utter importance to persevere in creating opportunities for dialogue with countries they are at odds with, in war, countries such as the Russian Federation. Such doors to dialogue typically have been there in the past, especially from within the European Union and further Eastern European countries, for to us and them, Russia is our neighbor.⁵ One of the effects of this conflict now is that all those ties of dialogue are being broken where those lines are what is so badly needed for building a better, a peaceful future. Because there will be a future again after the conflict in Ukraine, now is the time to invest in visualizing that future. Unfortunately, my very bleak prediction is that we will have decades upon decades and generations upon generations before we can come to terms with what has happened in and around Ukraine in the times we are living in. This is the cause for the horrible traumatic event – seventy-eight years after the end of World War II – of war being back in the heart of Europe. Those ties that can facilitate dialogue have been broken – so they have to be mended again.⁶ Within the European Union, we used to have a very thriving educational exchange program that functioned as a great door opener to members of a younger generation. I'm sure many students present today have heard of it as well. Erasmus Mundus is its name, and it gave European students the opportunity to study alongside one another, including with Russian students. Shoulder-to-shoulder they would engage in academic work, as such providing students with the opportunity to learn from one another's perspectives and incorporate new concepts and ideas. Such academic exchanges came to an abrupt halt in February this year. Russian students are no longer invited to study in Europe. This comes at a time when the exposure to ideas other than the ones of one's own nation is of utter importance.

Right now, no one from Europe is opting for vacation, holidays, or a city trip to Russia either. Numbers were already low in the past, but have now dwindled down to point zero. In the past, you couldn't find very many people who had been to Moscow for a city trip. It would have been hard to find these people based – at least partly – on unfamiliarity with the culture and region, as well as the strictness, rigidity, lack of transparency, and slowness of the Russian visa regime. But now, of course, nobody is going. There are not even flights. The only way now to travel to Moscow is to go to Istanbul and take a Turkish Airlines flight to Moscow. Of course, you can still venture to Russia from China too. Also, there is a daily bus line from Helsinki to St. Petersburg. But with those means of transportation being your only options, the choices travelers have are limited. Hence, exchange from the west towards the east has become very low.

Academic, cultural, and social communication has stopped. Russian artists who were working in the Netherlands, like painters, sculptors and ballet dancers, all have either returned to Russia, or have applied for extension of temporary residency and even political asylum. Academic research programs that include Russian researchers have been postponed or aborted, or are much delayed in time due to the work now having being carried out via Zoom. There was a fear of strategic and/or sensitive information getting stolen, for example, from the technological field, the latter being highly developed in a country like the Netherlands. Information and Communication Technology is an integral part of technological developments worldwide. The top sector high-tech is thus a key enabler for many other sectors, such as energy, chemistry, life sciences and agriculture and food production. This top sector makes a vital contribution to solving social issues in the fields of health, mobility, energy, security and climate, but is also fragile in terms of hybrid and cyber-attacks. That is why in many instances, academics have been dismissed from research programs and sent back to Russia. In short, everything which I mentioned so far is affecting the interconnectedness between the Russian Federation and Europe, and at every level and every stage. I am now only mentioning those aspects that have a short- to mid-term effect, aspects that we will need for the near future. What will be the long-term effects, in years, even decades, from now?

The more dangerous one for the present time, of course, is what is called in politico-military terms, the threat stemming from hybrid warfare, and subversive effects. Once (corrective) communications come to a halt, space is opened more freely towards such adverse effects. Hybrid warfare entails a mix of conventional as well as unconventional instruments of power and tools of subversion. These tools are fused in a paired manner to exploit the vulnerabilities of an opponent and aim at achieving multiplied effects. The objective is to inflict damage on an opposing party or state in a manner that offers the largest effect but often limited visibility as to what the origins or causes of the effect were. In the war in Ukraine, we are able to distinguish two distinct characteristics of hybrid warfare.⁷

For one, the division between what is part of war time, and what is part of peace time has become less clear. This means that it has become harder to identify the war threshold and as a result, war and the activity of war becomes slippery as it becomes difficult to define war and respond as a result of the definition that has become blurry. As an action of war, it then becomes more profitable and often also far easier to sponsor disinformation in collaboration with non-state actors than it is to drive tanks into another country's territory or to propel drones into the opponent's airspace. At the end of the day, the costs and risks are markedly less, but the damage is very real.

The second defining characteristic of hybrid warfare relates to ambiguity and attribution. Hybrid attacks are generally marked by high levels of vagueness. Such obscurity is created intentionally and enlarged by the hybrid actors in order to cover who launched the action in the first place. By exploiting the threshold that divides war time from peace time, the hybrid actor makes it difficult for the state that is targeted to develop sound, strategic and sufficient (in terms of adequacy) policy and strategic responses.⁸

All these aspects of making societies unstable that are anything besides open warfare, like shooting at each other, or dropping bombs, and everything else we are seeing to take place in and close to Ukraine at the moment. Our politics, European politics, and European national politics are being influenced by external parties (as well as from within the Union!). Not only by the Russian Federation, but by further external parties as well. Computer systems have been hacked and shut down for a few hours, or sometimes for two or three days. It has happened to our (digital) banking system, and it has also happened to our railroad system in the Netherlands. The latter halted the transportation of money, and of people and of goods, with far reaching effects. In Fall 2022, the Netherlands was faced with a full day where commuters could not make use of the trains because the computer system running the trains was hit by a cyber-attack and subsequently melted down. Perhaps for most people affected, the overall loss was to be overseen. The real damage, however, was done by influencing the minds of people. Employees can cope with missing a day at work, students can overcome missing a lecture in college – even wedding guests will be able to accept that they could not make it to the ceremony because the train stopped running. What is more concerning is that citizens lose trust in their own government when they can't count on public services, like transportation to their place of work. As a result of such instances, people eventually lose trust in their own society, their own community, and their national politics.⁹ Just think about how far-reaching the effects would be if one day – or multiple days – those public services that a society provides would cease to operate, like when ATMs would stop functioning, energy supply came to a halt, and the internet stopped being available? These types of events have an utterly devastating effect on the psychology of peoples, are affecting the levels of resilience of individuals, families, worker's units and societies at large, and hence are potentially destabilizing nations.

Those who have visited Europe recently will recognize what I am about to describe: a post-24 February 2022 Europe where most towns, villages and cities have to think of ways how to deal with the influx of (relatively) large numbers of Ukrainian displaced persons. They are mothers and their children, mainly, but also grandparents and other dependents too. Ten months into the war we are seeing how over 80 percent of the newcomer Ukrainian women are participating in life in their host country, the Netherlands, through engagement in work and other activities.¹⁰ This is a good thing in terms of their integration, and perhaps also in terms of mitigation of their trauma and grief, when those who are negatively impacted are offered a way to distract their minds and build on something new. My personal belief is that a large number of Ukrainians residing in the European Union since the onset of the war in Ukraine will look into possibilities to stay within the EU for (many) more years to come now it has become clear that it will take many years before the international community can start thinking of rebuilding Ukraine. And once the rebuilding of Ukraine has commenced, it will still take many years before Ukraine is able to offer its residents truly prosperous, stable, secure and fair opportunities for development, since war has the tendency to set back time tremendously. At the other hand, I do wish to believe in the resilience of the Ukrainian peoples, and their strength to bounce back swiftly and completely once arms are silenced and war has come to a halt.

And so, we now have to think of a way how to integrate Ukrainian citizens into our societies in such a way that offers best possible outcomes for both parties concerned (a win-win situation). After the global COVID pandemic (2019 onwards), Europe has fallen short of labor power. Fast and full absorption of Ukrainian displaced persons into the European labor market can therefore be of benefit to both. Let us together build on work schemes that make it easy for Ukrainians to enter the European labor market.

What about the coming winter months? The challenge that is coming as soon as winter's cold sets in, is that with the European security situation being jeopardized as it is, demand for energy supplies will be very high and so the energy prices (with North Stream Pipeline in the Baltic Sea remaining non-functional due to severe, man-inflicted damage). What, I ask, will the response of European politicians be vis-à-vis this wintry dilemma? And what will Russian troops be doing over the winter months, from what location, and for how long? What about the upcoming cold spree around the Black Sea, in what way will it affect those living in coastal cities like Odessa, Mykolaiv, Kherson and Mariupol? Will winter force belligerent parties into hibernation, instead of planning their next move? I would not bet my bottom dollar on such a relatively silent scenario. More likely will be that Russia's troops will use the winter season to prepare for a next offense in spring – or even during the deep of winter when roads turn hard under the fixating frost temperatures. I am sad to say, but my expectation is that it is going to be a hard and cold winter for many.

Biography of C.J. (Caecilia Johanna) van Peski, MSc Ma PgD (The Netherlands, 1970)

Caecilia Johanna van Peski holds an MSc Degree in Educational and Cultural Psychology from Tilburg University, The Netherlands, and an MA Degree in Civil-Military Interaction from the Helmut-Schmidt-University, University of the German Bundeswehr, in Hamburg. Based on her work for the European Union in Georgia and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) in Ukraine's Donbass, Caecilia van Peski has amassed extensive experience and expertise in cross-border issues, including Borderization. In recent years, she completed a Postgraduate Degree in Integrated Border Management at the OSCE Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Caecilia van Peski is a Commander in the Royal Netherlands Navy, a military veteran (NATO Resolute Support Mission Afghanistan, 2020-2021) and an authority in the field of Security & Defence, Civil-Military Cooperation, Democratization & Elections and Rule of Law & Equity. She previously worked for (inter)governmental, national and multilateral organizations, including the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the United Nations (DPKO, UNDP), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union (EEAS), the European Commission (EIDHR), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR) and DCAF-ISSAT Geneva Centre for Security Sector Reform. As of the 1st of January, 2022, Caecilia van Peski is appointed Chairperson of the DEU/NLD MILITARY MOBILITY OFFICE located at the Wilhelmsburg Barracks in Ulm, Southern Germany.

NOTES

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