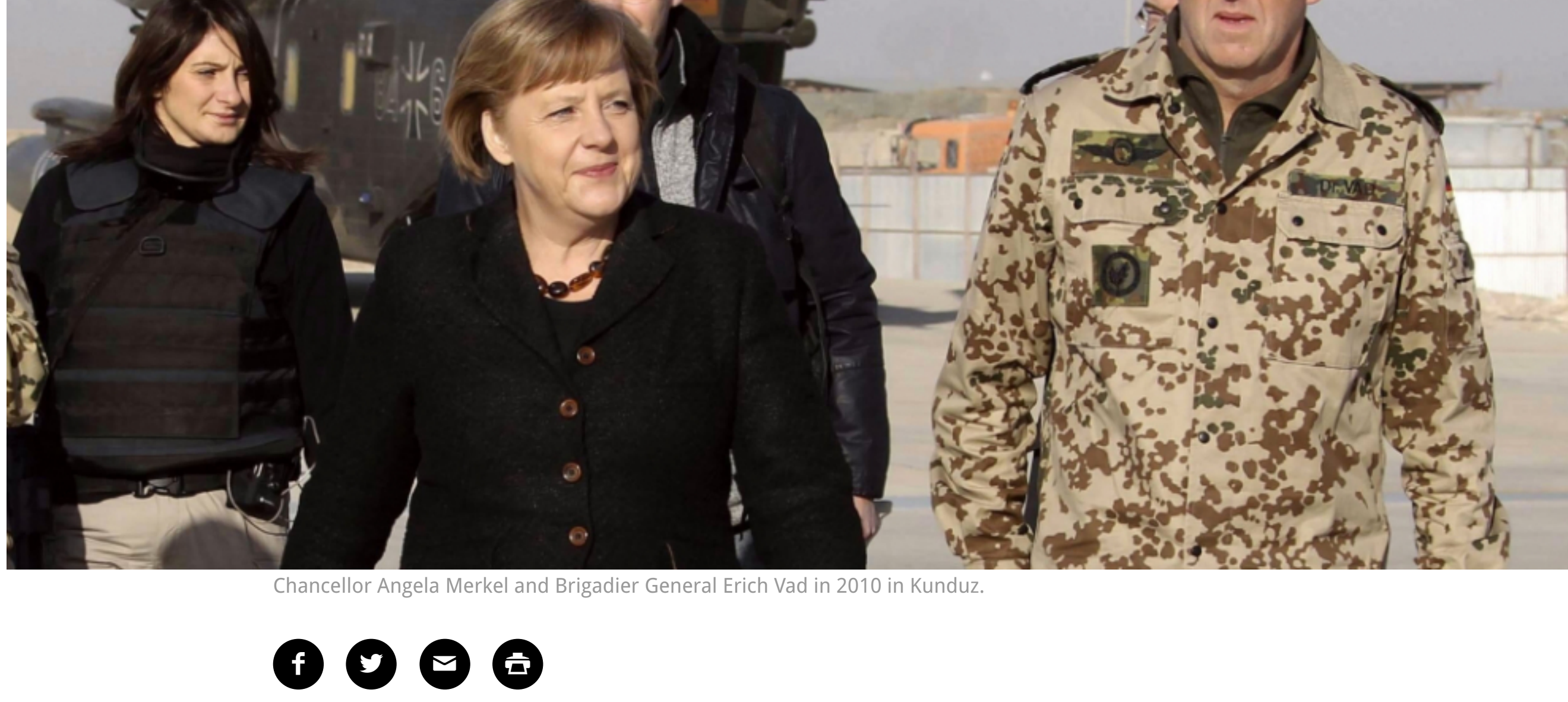


# ERICH VAD: WHAT ARE THE WAR GOALS?

Erich Vad is an ex-Brigade general. From 2006 to 2013, he was Chancellor Angela Merkel's military policy adviser. He is one of the rare voices who spoke out publicly against arms deliveries to Ukraine early on, without political strategy and diplomatic efforts. Even now, he is telling an uncomfortable truth.

12. January 2023  
by Annika Ross



Chancellor Angela Merkel and Brigadier General Erich Vad in 2010 in Kunduz.



## Mr. Vad, what do you think about the delivery of the 40 martens to Ukraine just announced by Chancellor Scholz?

This is a military escalation, also in the perception of the Russians - even if the over 40-year-old marten is not a miracle weapon. We are on a slide. This could develop a momentum that we can no longer control. Of course, it was and is right to support Ukraine and of course Putin's attack does not comply with international law - but now the consequences must finally be considered!

## And what could be the consequences?

Do you want to be willing to negotiate with the deliveries of the tanks? Do you want to recapture Donbass or Crimea with it? Or do you even want to defeat Russia completely? There is no realistic end-state definition. And without a politically strategic overall concept, arms deliveries are pure militarism.

## What does that mean?

We have a military operational stalemate, which we cannot solve militarily. Incidentally, this is also the opinion of the American Chief of Staff Mark Milley. He said that Ukraine's military victory is not to be expected and that negotiations are the only possible way. Everything else means the senseless wear and tear of human lives.

## General Milley caused a lot of trouble with his statement in Washington and was also strongly criticized publicly.

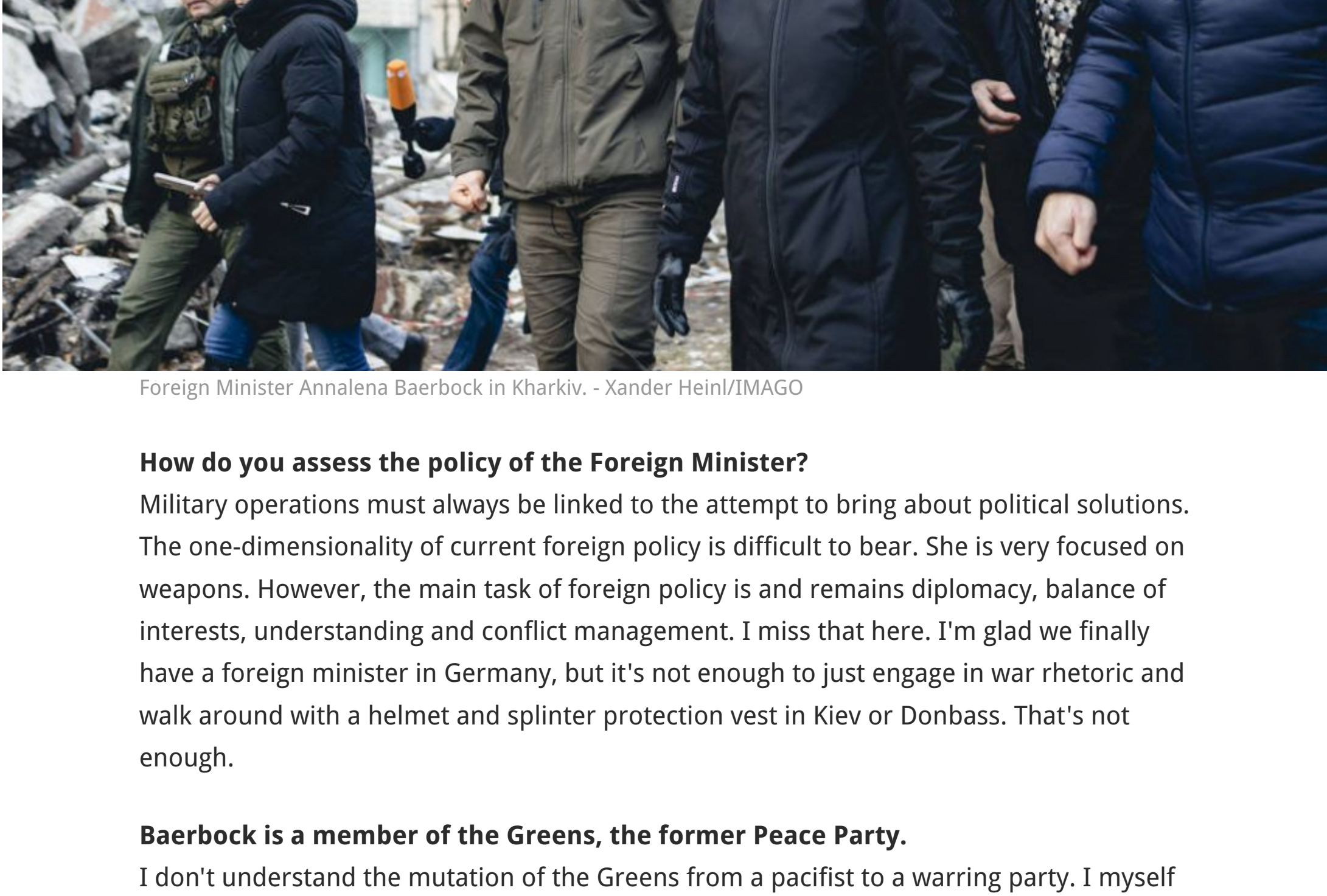
He has spoken an uncomfortable truth. A truth that, by the way, was hardly published in the German media. The interview with Milley from CNN did not appear anywhere, but he is the Chief of Staff of our Western leadership. What is being done in Ukraine is a war of wear and tear. One with now nearly 200,000 fallen and wounded soldiers on both sides, with 50,000 civilian deaths and millions of refugees. Milley has thus drawn a parallel to the First World War, which could not be more apt. In the First World War, the so-called 'blood mill of Verdun' alone, which was conceived as a battle of wear and tear, led to the deaths of almost one million young French and Germans. They didn't fall for anything at the time. The refusal of the warring parties to negotiate has thus led to millions of additional deaths. This strategy did not work militarily at the time - and will not do so today.

## You have also been attacked for the demand for negotiations.

Yes, as did the Inspector General of the Bundeswehr, General Eberhard Zorn, who, like me, warned against overestimating the regionally limited offensives of Ukrainians in the summer months. Military experts - who know what is going on under the secret services, what it looks like on the ground and what war really means - are largely excluded from the discourse. They do not fit into media opinion formation. We are largely experiencing a synchronisation of the media like I have never experienced before in the Federal Republic. This is pure opinion-making. And not on behalf of the state, as is known from totalitarian regimes, but out of pure self-empowerment.

## They are attacked by the media on a broad front, from BILD to FAZ and Spiegel, and thus also the 500,000 people who signed the Open Letter to the Chancellor initiated by Alice Schwarzer.

That's how it is. Fortunately, Alice Schwarzer has her own independent medium to be able to open this discourse at all. This probably wouldn't have worked in the leading media. The majority of the population has been against further arms deliveries for a long time and also according to the [current survey](#). However, none of this is reported. There is largely no longer a fair open discourse on the Ukraine war, and I find that very disturbing. This shows me how right Helmut Schmidt was. He said in a conversation with Chancellor Merkel: Germany is and remains a vulnerable nation.



Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock in Kharkiv. - Xander Heini/IMAGO

## How do you assess the policy of the Foreign Minister?

Military operations must always be linked to the attempt to bring about political solutions. The one-dimensionality of current foreign policy is difficult to bear. She is very focused on weapons. However, the main task of foreign policy is and remains diplomacy, balance of interests, understanding and conflict management. I miss that here. I'm glad we finally have a foreign minister in Germany, but it's not enough to just engage in war rhetoric and walk around with a helmet and splinter protection vest in Kiev or Donbass. That's not enough.

## Baerbock is a member of the Greens, the former Peace Party.

I don't understand the mutation of the Greens from a pacifist to a warring party. I myself don't know of any Green who would have done military service at all. Anton Hofreiter is for me the best example of this double standards. Antje Vollmer, on the other hand, whom I would count among the 'original' Greens, calls a spade a spade. And the fact that a single party has so much political influence that it can maneuver us into war is very worrying.

## If Chancellor Scholz had taken over you from his predecessor and you were still the Chancellor's military adviser, what would you have advised him in February 2022?

I would have advised him to support Ukraine militarily, but dosed and prudently to avoid side effects in a warring party. And I would have advised him to influence our most important political ally, the USA. Because the key to a solution to the war lies in Washington and Moscow. I liked the Chancellor's course in recent months. But the Greens, the FDP and the bourgeois opposition - flanked by largely unanimous media accompanying music - exert such pressure that the Chancellor can hardly absorb it anymore.

## And what if the leopard is also delivered?

Then the question arises again what should happen to the deliveries of the tanks at all. Martens and leopards are not enough to take over Crimea or Donbass. In eastern Ukraine, in the Bachmut area, the Russians are clearly on the rise. You will probably have completely conquered the Donbass shortly. One only has to remember the numerical superiority of the Russians towards Ukraine. Russia can mobilize up to two million reservists. The West can send 100 martens and 100 leopards, they do not change the overall military situation. And the all-important question is how to endure such a conflict with a belligerent nuclear power - mind you the strongest nuclear power in the world! - without going into a Third World War. And that's exactly what doesn't go into the minds of politicians and journalists here in Germany!

## The argument is that Putin does not want to negotiate and that he must be put in his place so that he does not continue to rage in Europe.

It is true that you have to signal to the Russians: So far and no further! Such a war of aggression must not set a precedent. It is therefore right that NATO increases its military presence in the East and that Germany participates here. But the fact that Putin does not want to negotiate is implausible. Both Russians and Ukrainians were ready to reach a peace agreement at the beginning of the war at the end of March, beginning of April 2022. Nothing came of it. Finally, the grain agreement was also fully negotiated by the Russians and Ukrainians during the war with the involvement of the United Nations.

## Now dying continues.

You can continue to wear out the Russians, which in turn means hundreds of thousands of deaths, but on both sides. And it means the further destruction of Ukraine. What remains of this country? It is leveled to the ground. Ultimately, this is no longer an option for Ukraine. The key to resolving the conflict does not lie in Kiev, nor is it in Berlin, Brussels or Paris, it is in Washington and Moscow. It is ridiculous to say that Ukraine has to decide that.

## With this interpretation, one quickly becomes a conspiracy theorist in Germany...

I am a convinced transatlantic myself. I honestly tell you that if in doubt, I would rather live under an American hegemony than under a Russian or Chinese one. This war was initially only a domestic political conflict of Ukraine. It already started in 2014, between the Russian-speaking ethnic groups and the Ukrainians themselves. So it was a civil war. Now, after the invasion of Russia, it has become an intergovernmental war between Ukraine and Russia. It is also a struggle for Ukraine's independence and its territorial integrity. That's all right. But it's not the whole truth. It is also a proxy war between the USA and Russia, and this is about very concrete geopolitical interests in the Black Sea region.

## They would be there?

The Black Sea region is as important to the Russians and their Black Sea fleet as the Caribbean or the region around Panama for the USA. As important as the South China Sea and Taiwan for China. As important as Turkey's protection zone, which they have established against the Kurds in violation of international law. Against this background and for strategic reasons, the Russians cannot get out of it either. Apart from the fact that in a referendum in Crimea, the population would certainly choose Russia.

## So how is this supposed to continue?

If the Russians were forced to massive Western intervention to withdraw from the Black Sea region, they would certainly resort to nuclear weapons before they leave the world stage. I find the belief naive that a nuclear strike by Russia would never happen. According to the motto, 'They're just bluffing'.

## But what could be the solution?

People in the region, i.e. Donbass and Crimea, should simply be asked to whom they want to belong. Ukraine's territorial integrity would have to be restored, with certain Western guarantees. And the Russians also need such a security guarantee. So no NATO membership for Ukraine. Since the Bucharest Summit in 2008, it has been clear that this is the red line of the Russians.

## And what do you think Germany can do?

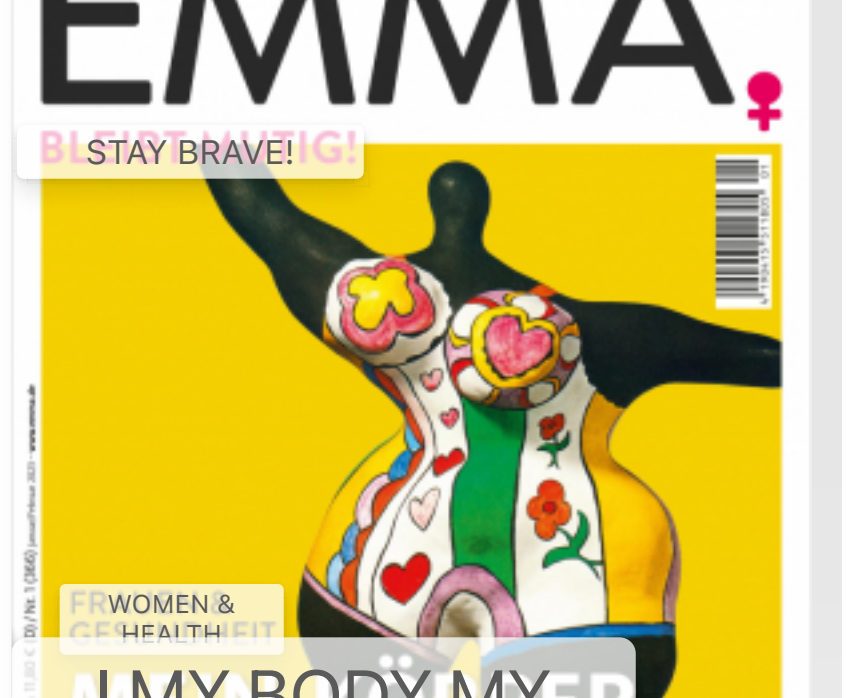
We must dose our military support in such a way that we do not slip into a Third World War. None of those who went to war with great enthusiasm in 1914 thought afterwards that this was right. If the goal is an independent Ukraine, one must also ask oneself in the future what a European order should look like with the involvement of Russia. Russia will not simply disappear from the map. We must avoid driving the Russians into the arms of the Chinese, and thus shifting the multipolar order to our disadvantage. We also need Russia as the leadership of a multi-ethnic state in order to avoid flaring fighting and wars. And honestly, I don't see Ukraine becoming a member of the EU and certainly not a member of NATO. We have a high level of corruption and the rule of oligarchs in Ukraine as well as in Russia. What we rightly denounce in Turkey - in terms of the rule of law, we also have the problem in Ukraine.

## What do you think, Mr. Vad, what can we expect in 2023?

A broader front for peace must be built up in Washington. And this senseless actionism in German politics must finally come to an end. Otherwise we will wake up one morning and be in the middle of World War III.

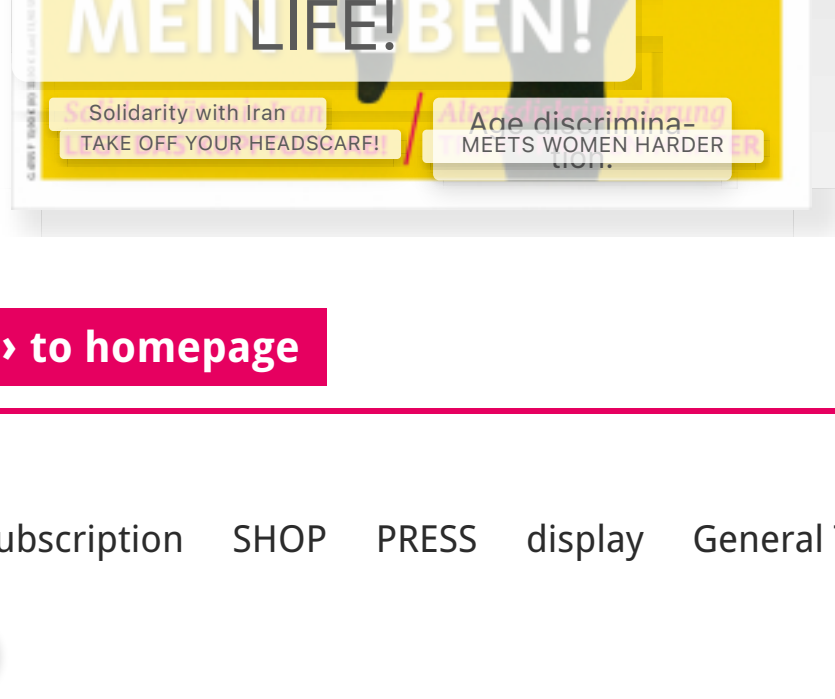


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