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The Russian Question, the German Question, and the Ukraine War

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For more than a century the world has been grappling with two highly destabilizing geopolitical problems: the **Russian Question** and the **German Question**. Both caused much destruction and misery and led to the violent realignment of the global order of the day.

The Russian Question has dominated world affairs effectively since the **Bolshevik revolution** in 1917, which brought the notorious **Lenin** and **Stalin** with their revolutionary communist zeal to power. In fact, the Russian Question started much earlier with Russian expansionism throughout much of the 19th century.

Similarly, the German Question did not start with **Hitler's rise to power** in 1933 but went back to German unification in 1871 and the German emperors' global and colonial ambitions. They could only be tempered temporarily by **Otto von Bismarck**, the country's first shrewd Chancellor. After Germany's "unconditional surrender" in May 1945 as a result of the wholesale destruction and defeat of the country in World War II, a solution to the German Question was painstakingly pursued and found.

Integrating Europe and Solving the German Question

It was the division of Germany into two separate states and the re-education of its population and, above all, the **integration** of the new Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) into the western concert of nations that helped to tame and then resolve the German Question. After all, the **isolating and sidelining** of Germany as a pariah in global affairs which happened after the end of World War I had not worked.

The **European integration process** brought the West Germans back from the cold. Within this framework Franco-German reconciliation was decisive. Over time the Germans once again became respected and successful members of the global community. Surprisingly, this was largely achieved within a mere decade of Hitler's suicide. The Germans in the east of the country, however, were only able to participate after unification in 1990.

Yet, we should not overlook the fact that the European integration process was only able to be implemented successfully after the **unprecedented global catastrophe of World War II** and the explosion of two American atomic bombs over Japan. A fledgling effort after the First World War failed to resolve Europe's internal struggles by means of integrating the continent.

To make the European integration process take off, a global catastrophe even more horrific than World War I was needed as a catalyst. Decisive was also the insight that the outbreak of yet another possibly nuclear third world war would most likely lead to the **wholesale annihilation** of much of European and global civilization.

Unlike the German Question, the world has been unable to solve the Russian Question throughout the last 200 years and thus a catastrophe similar to World War II but with increased deployment of nuclear weapons may yet occur. Instead, the war in Ukraine is continuing with no end in sight.

The Ukraine War

It is quite unlikely, however, that either Ukraine or Russia will be able to decide the war in their favor any time soon. A **negotiated compromise solution** does not appear to be on the horizon either. This brutal and ruthlessly pursued war may well continue beyond its second anniversary in February 2024. In fact, the war could well drag on into 2025.

It is entirely possible, as many analysts believe, that **Putin** wishes to prolong and continue pursuing his aggressive war until either European public opinion tires of the effort to prop up Ukraine financially and militarily or the November 2024 presidential election in the US brings a neo-isolationist new president into office.

From Moscow's point of view this is not an unreasonable strategy. **Public opinion within the EU** is increasingly divided regarding the further pursuit of a costly war. And in the US it is not just **Donald Trump** but several of the other contenders for the Republican presidential nomination who have declared that they would stop providing Kiev with weapons and financial aid. Instead they want to focus on domestic matters, such as the migration issue at the southern border between the US and Mexico.

On the current trajectory it thus seems that the **Russian Question is likely to dominate European and possibly global politics** for a long time to come.

Germany, it was reasoned after World War II, would always remain an important geopolitical and geo-economic power in the center of Europe and thus needed to be re-integrated. Russia, it is clear, will always **remain a hugely important geopolitical factor** in the East of the continent. Even if the Russian Federation were to split up, its successor states would remain of great geopolitical significance.

If the insights the allies arrived at toward the end of World War II regarding Germany are accepted, then Russia, with its highly educated population and its western oriented culture, **also needs to be integrated into the European concert of nations**. And we should not wait until the Ukraine war has further escalated and nuclear weapons have been used.

A simultaneous dual-track approach is needed

In fact, as far as I can see, there are only two real options to bring the war to an end within the next few months. A simultaneous dual-track approach is required:

1. A **serious and time-limited mediation effort** is necessary, combined with a strong economic carrot and stick approach by China and perhaps Turkey to convince Putin that he needs to agree to a formula for ending the war. As a minimum this will see him withdraw from all territory he has occupied since February 2022 in the short run. More long-term solutions need to be found for the Crimean peninsula and the territories in Donetsk and Luhansk that were occupied by Moscow prior to February 2022. UN overseen referenda could be considered for example, but of course holding a referendum would only make sense once the surviving pre-war population has been able to return to these areas.
2. If the above proves to be unrealistic (which is likely) western countries, including the US and Germany, **need to provide Ukraine with the weapons and aid they really need** to repulse the Russian aggressor and bring the war to an end that way. This would include US F-16 fighter planes and German Taurus missiles and much else. This needs to happen simultaneously with the above-mentioned

mediation efforts. Russia's decisive military defeat might perhaps prepare the ground for the replacement of the Putin regime with a much wiser government, as was the case in Germany in 1945/49. In combination with economic incentives this might also (perhaps) lay the ground for a reform of the Russian governmental system and give rise to Moscow's interest **in gradually joining the European integration process**. It worked for Germany in the 1950s – it might also work for Russia in the 21st century.

Perhaps this is all too optimistic and unrealistic – but **what other options do we have** to prevent the Ukraine war from getting even more out of control and causing even more destruction and death along with global turmoil, destitution and hunger?

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