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## ONE YEAR OF WAR IN UKRAINE

### WHY WESTERN POLICY TOWARDS RUSSIA HAS NOT CHANGED ENOUGH

*It has been a year since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Within that time, the West has not been able to agree on whether it sees itself as a party to the conflict, whether it views the war as Putin's or Russia's, and what kind of goals it is ultimately pursuing. This lack of clarity undermines Western policy towards Russia.*

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has become a watershed for Western security and defence policy. The West realized, if belatedly, that it was not enough to call Russian actions “unacceptable”. From then on, it had to stand behind its words and behave accordingly.

Now, a year later, Russia is heading for an unenviable future. Its export markets in Europe have been lost. Its access to new technologies and sources of foreign capital will remain limited. Its soft power in the world in general, and in the post-Soviet space in particular, is eroding. And even its conventional military might has been called into doubt.

Clarity is lacking as far as any other issues are concerned,

however. No one can credibly predict when and on what conditions the war will end. While Russia's own future is gloomy, its ability to continue raining death and destruction upon its neighbours is still significant.

There are many explanations as to why this is the case. The size of the country, the internal effectiveness of Vladimir Putin's political regime and its propaganda machinery, the threat of nuclear weapons, and Russia's links to Asia and the Global South all play a part, among other factors. But the lack of consensus in the Western approach to the war in Ukraine deserves special attention.

To start with, the West is deeply split on the issue of whether it is

– and should view itself as – directly politically involved in the confrontation. In fact, there are four different ‘Wests’ when it comes to this question. The first West is prioritizing economic interests and its own profit. Besides openly corrupt figures who have been on Russian companies' (read: the Kremlin's) payroll, there are many others who were willing to ignore Russia's annexation of Crimea and the warfare in Donbas since 2014, either because they wanted to see the Nord Stream 2 pipeline built and cheap Russian gas flow to Europe, or were otherwise after Russian money.

The second West is pacifist. Its adherents believe that they are taking the moral high ground in choosing peace over war, even,

if necessary, at the expense of Ukraine’s territorial integrity. They fail to understand that if Ukraine is defeated, war might arrive on their own doorstep next. Deplorably, they are often ready to spread the Kremlin’s narrative that Russia “was provoked” into invading Ukraine.

The third is actually the ‘non-West’ within the Western ranks, represented primarily by Turkey and Hungary. Ankara and Budapest argue that their policies are driven by their respective national interests. Even if there is any validity to this claim, it only emphasizes the absence of the value component, which should normally remain at the core of the Western course. What these three Wests have in common is that none of them want to be in conflict with Russia.

Only the fourth West acts from a position of principle and maintains that aggression should be punished. But whether this latter group is numerically or electorally stronger – in Germany above all – is an open question at best. Judging by Berlin’s “go slow” approach to delivering weapons to Ukraine, this may well be a minority view.

Another fundamental question that the West has not yet been able to answer concerns who should be held responsible for the war. This is crucial, as the ensuing policy choices in this respect are diametrically opposed. If this is Putin’s war, then those Russian citizens who emigrate, dodge mobilization and refuse to pay tax to their country should be welcomed and encouraged by the West, not just tolerated. If this is Russia’s war, visa issuance should be discontinued altogether and the list of personal sanctions against representatives of the Russian elite should be massively extended, refusing exemptions above all for former prominent regime functionaries or oligarchs, now residing in the West. If this is Putin’s war, then engagement with the next Russian government is something that needs to be given serious consideration. If this is Russia’s war, on the other hand, a policy of containment will be the only option.

What is most disconcerting is the West’s unwillingness or inability to state – and ostensibly envisage – its own goals in the conflict with any clarity. Does it only intend to help

Ukraine restore control over its borders, returning them to their pre-24 February 2022 state? Or restore all constitutional borders, including Crimea? Or is the goal to ensure that Russia, whatever government it might have, would not be able to conduct a revanchist policy, and that a new security order, including Ukraine’s NATO membership, would be established in the region for that purpose? Or, going one step further, will and should the West’s policy be based on the premise that without a regime change in Russia, any attempt to guarantee European peace and security would be futile?

Regrettably, a year since the beginning of the invasion, and despite having made a major contribution to Ukraine’s military effort and economic survival, the West is no closer to providing an unambiguous response to these questions. It would be unrealistic to expect that the much-needed consensus will emerge soon. Yet without a consensus, the Western policy is bound to remain unconsolidated and less efficient than it would need to be in order to succeed. /