

INTERVIEW: Alexander Rahr

# The Truth About the War Danger Between the U.S.-NATO and Russia

*This is the edited transcript of an interview conducted February 17, 2022 by Harley Schlanger with Alexander Rahr. Mr. Rahr is an historian, a business consultant, and research director of the German-Russian Forum. He's written extensively on Russian-German relations, on Russian history, and he's often interviewed in the German media. Among other affiliations, he's a member of the Valdai Discussion Club, a Moscow-based think tank and discussion forum. A full video of the interview is available [here](#).*

**Harley Schlanger:** Hello! Welcome to our program, Alexander Rahr.

**Rahr:** Thank you, Harley, for inviting me.

**Schlanger:** Today, February 17, we're one day past the date that Western intelligence said Russia would invade Ukraine. That there was no invasion makes this another shining moment, for many from Western intelligence. But the situation between Russia and NATO remains tense. There have been some promising diplomatic initiatives, but the anti-Russian narratives continue, the ongoing military exercises, the buildup of troops in Europe, and so on. Where do you think things stand now?

## The Military-Security Situation in Europe

**Rahr:** It's a very difficult and very dangerous situation, in which we are now. We are not in a war. I must say, I don't believe that either Russia will invade, or there will be serious provocations against Russia, from the Ukrainian, from the Western side. I think there will be no fighting on the battlefield. [While Rahr's hope that war could be avoided has proven wrong, his overall assessment is a welcome departure from the psychological warfare presented as "analysis" in the western mainstream media. —editor] But I think the asymmetric war, the propaganda and information war, will intensify and this is where we are now in the 21st century. The victory will belong to those forces who are able to convince other societies, other countries, that



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they have the truth, and if they succeed in destroying the image of the opponent, they also become victors. This is the situation now.

So far, Russia has, of course, in my view, the better arguments than the Western side, because the Western side is on the defensive, and simply, in many ways, lies—that “Russia will invade, Russia will invade, and if Russia does invade, then we will cut off Russia from the West, economically and financially.”

The Russian point is actually not aggressive; in my point of view, it's very simple. Russia is not threatening the West. Russia is simply saying, “We don't want to have NATO further moving to our borders. Please understand us: We feel encircled by NATO, and we propose that we go back to that kind of agreement, which we signed together—Moscow and Brussels, 1997, when Yeltsin was still President of Russia.”

On the broader military and security situation in Europe: According to the document signed in '97, no military infrastructure, neither of Russia nor of NATO, should in any way be installed in Eastern Europe; or, for example, at the borders between Russia and Ukraine. Russia hopes to convince the West to return to that point of view, to this agreement, because then we might stop talking about wars. We are talking about maybe new possibilities to understand each other, and at the end, to start building a common space, a common security space from Lisbon to Vladivostok—in-

cluding, if maybe the United States, from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

But on the basis of the OSCE (the Organization of Cooperation and Security in Europe), which has been so far forgotten! The OSCE has existed since 1975; according to the Russian argument, this organization should become a second security pillar for the architecture of Europe, next to NATO. OSCE should come back, and become even more important, because Russia and Ukraine, other countries, are members of this OSCE structure. They are not members of NATO. And inside the OSCE, can be discussed more broadly and more democratically and pluralistically, all issues of European security, because we are all the same, we are all mutually interested in that.

### **A New European Security Architecture**

**Schlanger:** Let me come back to a couple of points you made, which I think are important for people to understand. About President Putin's insistence on signing legally binding documents, which would be security guarantees for Russia: Many officials in the West, and media especially, say that this is just an excuse for an invasion of Ukraine, to expand the so-called Russian Empire. Why do you think Putin is sticking to his demands for these security guarantees? And how important is it for Russia to build a new security architecture? Maybe a Helsinki 2?

**Rahr:** Let me dwell briefly on the Western narrative, the Western view, because it's also important to see not only the Russian, but the Western view.

The Western view says, "We should build a strong Europe in the trans-Atlantic world in a trans-Atlantic framework, with Ukraine, with Georgia, but without Russia, because Russia is not allied to us, because of Russia's different mentality, because of Russia's different history, because of Russia's different norms and values."

I think this is not quite substantive and does not justify the split between the West and Russia, but nevertheless, this is a narrative of the West. And what the West also doesn't want to accept is that Russia is the biggest country in Europe, on the European continent, from the size of its population, from the size of its territory; it has all the necessary resources—not only gas and oil, but many, many other things for its existence, for its prosperity, which Western economies really severely need. Russia wants to belong to Europe, but not as a member of NATO or the European Union.

The Russian position is that you can have your zone of influence: "You have already created the zone of influence, dear colleagues of the West, by enhancing NATO and the European Union. What we want is to build on the European soil, on the European territory, our own security arrangements, and have, for example, the Eurasian Union as partner, maybe strategic partner, of you, of the European Union or NATO, with the same rights on deciding the future of the European architecture."

The West is denying Russia the right to have its own zone of influence or its own organizations in Europe, because from the Western point of view, these organizations only serve the secret aim of Russia to reinstall itself as an empire on the European continent—which I think is not true. The Russians do not want to have the old empire back. It's not possible to get it back. They can't pay for this. They don't have the means to establish a former empire. But what they want to have is a secure role, as one of the decision-making countries, within the concert of other European states. I think this is legitimate.

But the problem is, Harley, that these two completely different aims and understandings of European security are now crashing against each other. The West is denying Russia its right to have a say, or an institutional influence on Europe, and Russia says, "We will not accept the NATO structures of Western influence. It's further encircling us Russians, moving toward territories we regard, not as ours, as they say, but as territories, which belonged formerly to Russia, and for cultural reasons, in many ways, are also very closely connected to Russia—I mean, Eastern Ukraine, Belarus, and that's all."

### **The Efficacy of Diplomacy**

**Schlanger:** What you're talking about, in terms of the Western view is, in a sense, the post-Cold War, unipolar world where everyone is supposed to respond to the Anglo-American, or U.S.-NATO policy. Now there's an interesting paradox here, which is that Germany does seem to be in the middle of this. I'd like to turn to the German situation, because we just had a very significant visit by Chancellor Olaf Scholz to Moscow, to meet with Putin; this was following France's President Emmanuel Macron. Just initially, what's your assessment of the Scholz-Putin meeting?

**Rahr:** Let's be very realistic, Harley. Let me start by saying, very shortly, that we just were discussing the



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German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (left) with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Moscow, Feb. 15, 2022.

Russian concept of Europe, with the possibility of Russia building institutions, and the Western view. But the Western view on Europe is also twofold. Or I would say, there is a split inside the West, of how to see the concept of a future Europe. What do I mean?

Let's look at what the American and British think tanks, the media, and politicians are demanding and saying: They want this unipolar world, which you just mentioned. That is true, but they want a Europe which is part of a trans-Atlantic world. This forces the Anglo-Saxons to have countries like Ukraine, the Baltic states as buffer states against hostile Russia—from their point of view. I understand this view, as in the interest of the United States and Great Britain, to have Germany controlled, next to France and other allies in Europe. And this is a Europe which, yes, it's mainly a Europe, which belongs, in my view, in the 20th century, not in the 21st century. But this is, in the minds of many old Cold Warriors, who today design the policy in London, in Washington, and in certain other cities of the West.

But there is a different view, that of Germany and France, and also the German leadership and the French leadership who always stress that they are trans-Atlanticists, and they obey the consensus which exists inside the trans-Atlantic world; and they obey also the leadership of the United States, in many ways, because it's also good for European security. You know all that. But at the same time, the German and the French elite, wish to develop a concept of a common European space from Lisbon to Vladivostok, in which countries like Russia, the Central Asian states, Belarus, and Ukraine—countries which are not members of NATO and probably will never become members of NATO

or the European Union—will also have a stable place in a joint common European house.

This is important to understand because this means that Germany, till the end, will always stress a common line for a trans-Atlantic world. It will, nevertheless—we have seen this over decades—try at the end to mend fences also with Russia. A German political slogan—it's not only a slogan; I think it's also a kind of mentality of the German class towards Russia—says that we cannot build a Europe against or without Russia.

We have to try to build a common Europe, for all the 21st Century and the 22nd Century, *together* with Russia. And this is a clear difference to what you hear in London or Washington about the future of Europe.

### A Common European Space

**Schlanger:** Well, Alexander, what you just described perfectly, what you call the 20th-century view is the extension of old British geopolitics, imperial geopolitics into the 21st century, the idea that there can never be allowed a Eurasian integration that would incorporate parts of Europe. This goes back to Halford Mackinder, as you know. What you're pointing to is very important because it seems as though the mood in Germany is not for war. I just wonder what you think. Is there support for Germany to play a mediating role, as neither with the Anglo-Americans nor necessarily with Russia, but to help create this unified space?

**Rahr:** In my view, this is one of the priorities of German politics—to try to develop this concept of a common European space. I remember that we were the Europeans, not only Germany, I mean also Italians, France, the Benelux countries, Spain. We were very close 20 years ago, developing the concept of a common European space. Brussels and Moscow organized many summits, annual summits on this issue. Four different spaces had already been institutionalized as one space for security, one for culture, one for economy, one for information and media cooperation: All that had already been established.

What happened then? Numerous new conflicts, which led basically to the development of the re-emer-



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*French President Emmanuel Macron (right) with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Moscow, Feb. 7, 2022.*

gence of the old or a new Cold War. Who was behind that? I don't know, but I guess, as you said, the United States, from its geopolitical interests, is not so much in favor of a close cooperation between Berlin, Paris and Moscow. It was seen during the Iraq War of 2002-2003, when Paris and Berlin, together with Moscow, opposed the British-American war in Iraq—seriously opposed it. And that already led alarms to ring in the United States, where the American leadership, the student said, “Well, these old Europeans want a different Europe, than we want.”

The American side then stuck much closer to the new Europeans, to the new countries which entered NATO and the European Union, in the beginning of the 21st century: Poland, Czechia, the Baltic states, Romania, Bulgaria. These became the true allies of the United States. The problem with these countries was that they had already their animosities, their problems with Russia due to the common history under communism, where they felt they had been deprived of their freedom, their orientation toward the West, which they had, probably also in the last century, but they couldn't do all that because they were under communist rule.

But that would pass. The world has changed. Nevertheless, for the elites in many of these East European countries, these ghosts of communism still exist, and are reflected in their policy, their attitude towards Moscow, a very hostile attitude towards Moscow. And these countries established a kind of policy within the West, which then led to more alienation towards Russia. Because they told the Germans and the French, “We know who the Russians are. The Russians are not partners, they are enemies.”

And so due to NATO expansion, due to the fact that new member states from the former Warsaw Pact

countries, with a very negative view of Russia, entered NATO and the European Union, these two organizations, NATO and the European Union, which were in the '90s, in the beginning of the century, *friendly* with Russia, became more and more also opponents of Russia; and Russia, of course, became an opponent to the West. That led to numerous new conflicts, which at the end, led to the historical split between the West and Russia, in which we live today. I think this conflict will be very difficult to solve.

In the West are forces which would like to change the situation, to correct the security architecture of Europe. Many in the German establishment and the French establishment are not only dreaming but talking about this, seriously talking about this, making proposals—not offering a capitulation of Ukraine or something like that, but simply a new understanding with Russia: “We can freely talk about this. We can build Europe on the basis of the OSCE,” as I said before.

Then, France and Germany could say that their veto against NATO membership of Ukraine, which is still on the table since 2008—since the summit of NATO in Bucharest in 2008 with then-American President George W. Bush who wanted to get these countries overnight into NATO. And his two most important allies in the West, Paris and Berlin said, “No! We don't want that! Because this will destroy our relationship with Russia. And this will possibly lead to a war with Russia. We don't want that.” So, the Germans and the French still stick to this position. They want NATO; they maybe want Ukraine closer to the European Union. But they don't want to have Ukraine as a member of NATO, because they understand that this immediately will lead to permanent conflicts and maybe even to military actions with a nuclear power like Russia. Nobody wants that.



NATO

*NATO Secretary General, Lord George Robertson (left) with President George Bush at a bilateral summit in Prague, Czech Republic, Nov. 20, 2002.*

### A European Energy Alliance

**Schlanger:** Now, just to stick with this question of geopolitics for a moment: As you know, Lyndon La-Rouche has always said that since the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the United States has increasingly functioned as a dumb giant on a British leash, and U.S. policy and London policy have generally been in concert. The British, of course, think that it's American brawn and British brains. But one question the concept of British brains when you look at what a mess the United Kingdom is.

Here's the other question that comes from this: Right now, besides the problems that Scholz has with the Greens in his cabinet—the Greens have become a pro-war party—is pressure from NATO. There's increasing pressure around the Nord Stream 2. It's obviously in the interests of Germany to have the Nord Stream 2 open and functioning, but the United States and the British argue that Nord Stream 2 would be giving Putin a tool to blackmail Europe. What do you think about this? How important is Nord Stream 2 for Germany and for Scholz?

**Rahr:** The whole energy alliance is very important for Germany, from the economic, from the commercial, and from the political point of view. I will talk about Nord Stream 2 in a second, but the whole energy alliance, the whole infrastructure

which exists, including the pipeline through Ukraine to the West, including, all these contracts which have been signed, they exist for 50 years. What was the real sense behind them? Germany wanted to bind Russia together with the European economy, and to bind, of course, the German business with Russian business.

If you have this intertwined, if you have interdependencies between these two blocs, the European-EU bloc and Russia-Eurasian bloc, then war is excluded! Because people will make money, will want to support each other, and will want to have more cooperation, not less. And there is a goal to, maybe, build more out of this energy alliance.

So, it is in the interest of Germany and the interest of the Europeans to have more infrastructure projects between Russia or Asia and the European Union, for many different reasons. First of all, the European Union cannot explore gas on its own soil anymore. In past decades, it was possible; now there are simply no gas reserves in Europe. So, we need to import 90% of the gas we need from outside the European Union, from outside sources, and the infrastructure with Russia is there! There are pipelines through Ukraine, through Belarus and Poland, under the Baltic Sea, Nord Stream 1, Nord Stream 2, and the Turkish Stream.

That all fits into the whole framework, which we



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*A view of the Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline terminal in Lubmin, Germany in 2011.*

need, in order to be energy secure in Europe. This is a logic. These are commercial and economic projects, and we need this. But there are certain countries—for example, Poland—in the European Union, which has said openly that they do not want to have anything to do with Russia, because Russia is an enemy of the West. They question the whole German narrative that we need more cooperation with Russia, to build in Europe a peaceful society.

The Poles have a different view. Some other countries have a different view. The United States brings the argument that the Germans are naïve: They are allowing Russia to earn a lot of money on the European soil, and this money is being spent for the military buildup in Russia. Well, the military buildup of Russia is smaller than the buildup of the United States or of NATO on the whole. So, this is not the argument.

The real argument is that the United States wants to sell to Europe their own liquefied gas, which it has in great volume. And I think that this is also legitimate. The United States should try to conquer the market in a civilized way and develop the same kind of commercial ties with the European Union, as the Russians have for decades—but in a fair kind of arrangement, in a fair kind of competition, and not by sanctions, not by trying to kill the opponent, physically, the Russians, so that they will be out of Europe. This, I think, is very unfair. It's geopolitics, which is very dangerous, and it will lead to nothing.

We need to commercialize the issue, to understand one very important thing: That due to the fact that we, in Germany, in the European Union—and also the United States, but this is an American problem—I'm talking about Europe, we all want to have a green economy, in 15, 20, at least in 20 years, a full green economy, without the dirty energy, like oil, gas and coal. We want to become objectively climate neutral, and free from all this gas in the atmosphere.

So, we desperately need to establish good relations with Russia, because we will be stopping the buying of coal, stopping the buying of oil, and we don't want anything to do with atomic energy. Before we get the energy from the Sun, from solar energy, from batteries or from wind energy and so on, that will take a lot of time—years, maybe decades to come.

In the meantime, our clear energy target is gas in



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*In Beijing, Russian President Vladimir Putin and China's President Xi Jinping declare the basis of their partnership in a Joint Russia-China Statement, February 4, 2022.*

order to feed our economy. This gas will come from Russia, from Norway, maybe from Qatar, from the United States, but it should all be developed here in the civilized way. Nord Stream 2 is important, especially now, because it provides the new necessary assets and amounts of gas which Europe needs more and more for its prosperity, for getting out of this COVID crisis in which we are still in, in order to develop the European economies.

### **The Rise of Russia and China**

**Schlanger:** I'd like your thoughts on the outcome of the February 4 Putin-Xi Jinping summit. Many of the war-hawks are extremely agitated about it. They're talking about this as a tectonic shift. While there are others who are more thoughtful and less ideological, who are saying, "This is good. It's the end of the post-Cold War unipolar era." What do you think?

**Rahr:** I think that we don't have the right and the good strategies in the West. We had them a couple of years ago, and I remember when I was working for Radio Free Europe in the '80s, we had brilliant analysts—people who were so well informed about geopolitics—historians, who understood the world. Right now, the problem of our think tanks, is in our mindset, here in the West, that we are only focused on human rights and on liberal values. This is not enough to understand the world. We have to understand the interests which are ruling the world. In this sense, we have to invest more time, more knowledge in analyzing the in-

terests of a country like Russia, of China, of India, of the Arabic world—if they have, of course, interests; but they will have interests very soon, if they become more united, and so on and so on.

Europeans are becoming also more selfish in developing their own interests, different to those United States. We see this clearly over the past years. So, I would appeal to our think-tank communities, to our intellectuals, to just accept one important thing: That Russia and China have interests, which they will fight for in the future.

These two countries, Russia and China, were weak 20 years ago. Now they are very strong. They are players in a multipolar world, and we cannot stop them, not by force, not by conviction. Whatever we do, they are there, and we have to find arrangements, how to rebuild, correct the world order, in the sense that everybody will be happy. I think it is possible to unite and not to quarrel all the time.

Russian diplomacy, I tell you, is not being seen in the West. But it is nevertheless true, that Russians have understood that the main drivers for the world economy are not coming from Europe anymore. They are in Asia. So, Russia is oriented more and more towards

Asia, not only China, but also India, Vietnam, South Korea. It's building its relations with Asia, because it understands that it, Russia, has to become part of the Asian future, of the Asian success story.

Asia will economically overcome Europe in the next 10, 20 years. China will be as strong as the United States. This is fact, not invention: This will happen. The more we try to understand that our solutions for cooperation should become peaceful and that we should do things in dialogue, and not in confrontation, the better for the world, the better for the world society, and the better for the global system.

**Schlanger:** Alexander, I'd like to thank you for this discussion. It has been very provocative. I think our viewers and our readers will be very shocked in some ways to see the coherence of what you just presented because they're so used to the narratives coming from the think tanks, as you say, which are all tied to the corporate cartels, the military-industrial complex.

Thanks again for joining us, and I hope we can have another discussion like this sometime soon.

**Rahr:** Thank you, Harley. I enjoyed it.

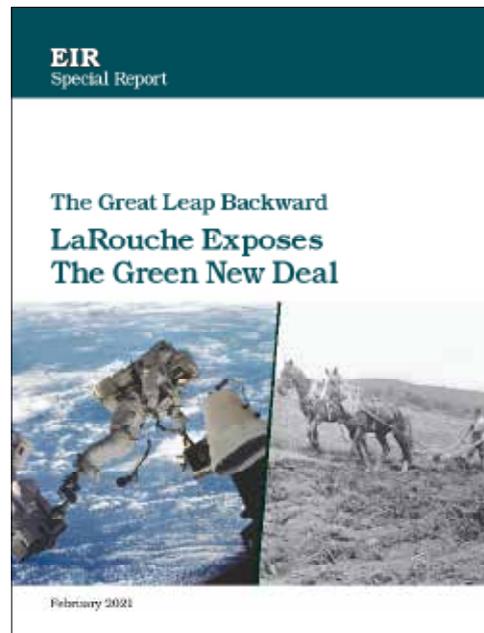
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