

# Some Preliminary Thoughts on the Policy Implications of the Russian Aggression

**Fredrik Löjdquist**  
**2 March 2022**

Thursday 24 February 2022 is, and will be understood as, a watershed in European and global modern history. The full-scale military attack on and aggression against a neighbouring state of almost 45 million inhabitants by the world's leading nuclear weapon power – and a permanent member of the UN Security Council – is the most serious military action taken in Europe since the end of the Second World War. It also constitutes a further violation by Russia of the rules-based global order and the European Security Order that will have far-reaching consequences – political, security, humanitarian and economic – far beyond the borders of Ukraine for years, if not decades to come.

Putin's immediate target is to gain military and political control over Ukraine, but this action is also part of wider Russian goals, which have been clearly articulated, to establish a new European and global security order, and to push the US and NATO back militarily, which would make large parts of Central and Eastern Europe indefensible. Taken together, the aim is to make a permanent shift in the tectonic plates of the European and global security order. These goals are antagonistic, as are the means for pursuing them – military violence and hybrid threats.

Events since 24 February have not, and should not have, come as a surprise. Putin has clearly signalled his intentions and the western analytical and intelligence community has seen this coming for quite some time. We are now living in a new era and there is no turning back: there is no longer a status quo ante. The European Union, the West at large and the global democratic community now need a new strategic, long-term and coherent Russia policy ("containment 2.0"?), as well as a new strategy towards Ukraine and the other countries in Eastern Europe.

The West needs to project robustness, resolve, unity and strength in the short term. This will require a rethink of many of our previous assumptions. Any ambiguity on these points

will be destructive rather than constructive. As in all human relations, what is not said and done is equally important as what is being said and done. Given the Kremlin's intentions and capabilities, the problem that Russia poses is not one that can be resolved but one that needs to be managed – at least for as long as Putin remains in power.

In the longer run, it is difficult not to see this as the beginning of the end for Putin, who has lost legitimacy internationally and is losing it domestically, not least through repression. His performance in the past week also clearly shows that it is he alone who is making the final, and fatal, decisions; and raises questions about his sense of judgement, his analysis and the quality of the briefings he receives. Putin's behaviour will weaken Russia economically and politically. The EU and the rest of the West need to prepare mentally for a post-Putin era.

Below are some preliminary thoughts on the aspects and elements to consider in new policy strategies towards Russia and Eastern Europe in 12 points:

### **1. Accountability, international law and other commitments**

The Russian state and specific Russian individuals and entities are now even more than previously violating international law, including International Humanitarian Law, the principles and commitments of the European security order (both OSCE principles and commitments and Council of Europe conventions) and national legislation (in Ukraine and other states). These violations need to be carefully and systematically monitored and registered. The perpetrators need to be held accountable, both politically and legally, as soon as possible. All the tools of international law need to be activated, including the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

The possibility should be explored of establishing a special court or tribunal on Russian crimes against and in Ukraine. Impunity is not an option. This applies equally to aspects of Russia's external aggression and its internal repression, which has recently reached totalitarian levels. Antagonistic and illegal behaviour must be punished and come at a cost.

The mutually reinforcing link between internal repression and external aggression needs to be highlighted and the corresponding OSCE comprehensive concept of security defended. This is not the time to stay silent about Russia's internal repression. To do so would undermine the norms of the European and global security order.

A mechanism for calculating the costs of Russian aggression should be constructed, including for assessing future war reparations. Sanctions are an important part of holding Russia accountable.

### **2. Holistic whole of government approach**

Western governments, nationally and in international cooperation, must adopt a holistic, whole of government approach to the handling of various aspects of Russia policy to ensure coherence and harmonization. This will concern a large number of policy areas and government authorities (foreign and security policy, defence policy, international law, internal security, finance, trade and economics, anti-corruption, energy, intelligence and security services, migration, tax authorities, money laundering, total defence, arms control issues, resilience building, countering hybrid threats and cybersecurity, among others).

It will be important to establish 360-degree situational awareness of Russian (antagonistic) actions ("connecting the dots"), strengthen resilience and develop and employ a toolbox of

countermeasures, thereby building a credible deterrence posture at the national level and in international cooperation. The resources devoted to these tasks must be substantially increased.

### **3. Russian domestic situation**

Russia policy needs to differentiate between the regime and the population/nation. A long-term vision should be formulated of how relations with a democratic, free and non-antagonistic Russia could develop.

Following the most recent regulations by Roskomnadzor prohibiting the spread of information about the “military operation” from non-official sources, there are no independent media outlets in Russia, and no objective reporting about Ukraine is possible in Russia. Free and professional Russian speaking media outlets, including on the internet and in exile, need to be supported and massively developed as a counterbalance to the propaganda, lies and disinformation spread by Russian state-controlled media. This should be feasible fairly soon. Support to civil society, wherever possible including those in exile, should be refined and developed.

A robust strategic communications strategy should be designed and implemented for a Russian-speaking audience. The EU’s East StratCom Task Force and its database on Kremlin disinformation, EUvsDisinfo, should be strengthened.

### **4. Humanitarian, cultural and societal issues**

Humanitarian issues will have to be addressed, including providing adequate support for refugees from Ukraine and internally displaced persons (IDPs) within the country.

A large proportion of the Western population is ill-equipped to understand and counter Russian propaganda and lies due to a lack of knowledge of history. Few grasp what the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact or the Yalta Conference were about, and many might be susceptible to Russian propaganda about Ukraine not being a proper country or nation. Educational systems should be strengthened, not least with regard to 20th century European (with pan-European, Eastern European and Central European perspectives) history, including its totalitarian past.

Putin’s lies in his speeches and articles, and the rest of Russian disinformation, propaganda and lies must be systematically dissected and rebutted. Russian writers, journalists, artists and scientists should be given sanctuary in the west, alongside those from Belarus and other countries suffering from Russian aggression.

This should apply not only to individuals from Russia, Belarus and a fully occupied Ukraine, but also to institutions. The idea of establishing a free Eastern European University (inspired by the Central European University) should be financed and implemented. Existing institutions in Ukraine that fall under Russian control could be rebuilt in exile, alongside a digital dimension.

### **5. Security**

The European and global security system has entered a whole new situation, with consequences for European and Transatlantic defence cooperation. The EU and NATO will have to find new ways to cooperate and interact. If they are not to become obsolete, this

fundamentally new security situation will have to be factored into the EU Strategic Compass and NATO's new Strategic Concept, as well as an ensuing EU-NATO declaration.

The de facto integration of Belarus into Russia, not least militarily, will have negative effects on the security of the Baltic Sea region. A continued Russian military presence in Belarus must be carefully monitored, with a view to adapting defensive measures for Poland, the Baltic states, the Baltic Sea region and beyond. The Black Sea region will also be negatively affected by Russia's aggression, and adequate measures to address this will need to be undertaken.

## **6. Economy and energy**

The West needs to strengthen its resilience against Russian blackmail, dependencies and the corrupting effects of illicit financing. New energy strategies must be developed in order to diminish dependencies on Russian energy. Clearly, the current Russian aggression will have far-reaching consequences for the European economy and its energy supplies.

## **7. New strategy for Eastern Europe**

In the medium to long term, a more robust and coordinated strategy should be developed on Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia (Eastern Partnership 2.0), and the vision of a Europe whole, free and at peace must be revitalized. Urgent measures will need to be undertaken to assist Ukraine – but also Georgia and Moldova – politically, economically, financially and with regard to security, through a coordinated approach on behalf of the European Commission and other EU bodies, the International Monetary Fund/World Bank, the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, as well as national institutions. The underlying principles should be support for sovereignty, territorial integrity, resilience and modernization (EU approximation). Among other things, mechanisms for political risk insurance should be developed.

Ukraine's neighbouring countries, not least Poland but also Turkey, will need to be supported to handle the humanitarian and security spillover effects of Russia's aggression. The current crisis could offer opportunities for a new dynamic between the EU and Turkey.

## **8. Nuclear issues**

Putin's and other Russian leaders' allusions to threats of nuclear weapon use in recent years, which have just been repeated, are highly irresponsible. Russia's violation of the Budapest Memorandum has consequences for international trust in security assurances and thus for non-proliferation efforts. The closed Chernobyl nuclear power plant is now controlled by the Russian military. The Zaporizhia nuclear power plant, Europe's largest, is in close proximity to battle zones in south-eastern Ukraine.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine therefore involves a number of nuclear issues that need our full attention, and that of the international organizations and conventions surrounding various aspects of nuclear power and weapons.

## **9. Diplomatic efforts and negotiations**

Inevitably, diplomatic channels with Russia will need to be kept open. Any diplomatic and political contacts will need to be carefully coordinated and thought-through, however, and undertaken from a position of strength and not as a demandeur.

The criteria for any diplomatic initiative should be based on accountability and restoring respect for international law, and the principles and commitments of the European security order, including the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris. The mistakes of the Minsk agreements should be carefully analysed, evaluated and understood. Short-term diplomatic efforts driven by “realism” and political expediency must not compromise important principles of international law and the European security order (such as sovereignty, territorial integrity and the right to self-defence). Any “moral hazard” in security policy must be avoided.

Any potential new and illegitimate leadership in Ukraine must not be recognized but sanctioned. Aggression must not be allowed to bear any fruit.

## **10. Lessons learned**

Russia's current massive violations of international law and the European security order were long in the making and should not have come as a surprise. Even so, necessary measures to deter this and to strengthen the resilience of Ukraine and the West were not undertaken. This is a failure of Western policymaking and policy shaping, and of the policy analytical communities. Soul searching, self-critical analysis and learning lessons would be appropriate. A white book by a panel of eminent persons/senior statespeople could be one way to address this.

## **11. The international system and the global arena**

Russia's antagonistic behaviour will have far-reaching consequences for the international system. A coherent approach to addressing this should be developed in international organizations such as the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the United Nations.

The strong Western approach is a good start but not sufficient. The global discourse on Russia must be proactively addressed. A strategy for approaching the G77/Non-Aligned Movement states should be developed, which addresses issues such as sovereignty, territorial integrity and de-colonization (see e.g. the speech by Kenya's UN ambassador in New York). The Russia-China dynamic needs to be better understood and addressed.

## **12. Belarus**

Belarus has for all practical purposes been fully integrated into Russia, including militarily, in recent months. The Russian armed attack on Ukraine is coming partially from Belarus territory. Any possible participation by the Belarus Armed Forces in the armed attack on Ukraine should be carefully monitored and condemned. Belarus needs to be held accountable for its violations of international law and the European security order, including human rights violations.

2 March 2022



## **Fredrik Löjdquist**

Director at the Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies (SCEEUS).

### **About SCEEUS**

The Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies (SCEEUS) at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI) is an independent Centre, funded by the Swedish Government, established in 2021. The Centre conducts policy relevant analysis on Russia and Eastern Europe and serves as a platform and meeting place for national and international discussions and exchanges on Russia and Eastern Europe. Any views expressed in this publication are those of the author.

©2021 Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies

Language editing: Andrew Mash

### **Previous SCEEUS Publications:**

**Russia's "Soft Annexation" of Belarus During its Invasion of Ukraine, by Jakob Hedenskog**

*SCEEUS Commentary, 25 February 2022*

**Liquidation of a "Foreign Agent": The Historical Significance of the Dissolution of Memorial, by Igor Torbakov**

*SCEEUS Report No. 1, 2022*