

Ukrainian attack on global security

Ukraine's attack on modules of the Russian early warning system jeopardises our security

Interview with Leo Ensel*



Leo Ensel.
(Picture ma)

Leo Ensel, conflict researcher and journalist, is in favour of a "Copernican Revolution in security policy". "In the nuclear age, security is only possible together with, but never against the "enemy", he says. – The interview was conducted by Hans-Peter Waldrich.

Hans-Peter Waldrich: Mr Ensel, Ukraine attacked parts of the Russian nuclear missile early warning system with drones on 23 May in the North Caucasus in Armavir and on 26 May in Orenburg, Siberia. The radars are used to detect a possible nuclear first strike by NATO. You are a member of an initiative of computer scientists, AI specialists and political scientists who warn that such attacks could trigger a nuclear war. What is so dangerous about this?

Leo Ensel: First, although I am a member of the initiative launched by computer scientists against "accidental nuclear war",¹ I am not a computer scientist myself, but a conflict researcher. – However, you don't have to be a computer scientist to recognise the scope of the Ukrainian attacks on modules of the Russian missile defence system.

The global "security structure" – if you can even call it that – between the nuclear powers USA and Russia is still based on the "principle of assured second-strike capability", as it was during the first Cold War. In German: "Whoever shoots first, dies second!" If the Russian second-strike capability – for example through targeted attacks on modules of the Russian missile defence system, whose task it is to identify approaching US intercontinental ballistic missiles in good time – is eliminated or even just limited, Russia would be "blinded". It would therefore no

longer be able to react in time in the event of a crisis or emergency. (By the way: in the logic of mutual deterrence, it would be enough for Russia to "feel" blinded). This would eliminate the extremely shaky logic on which the "security" of our entire planet has been based for decades, and the probability that Russia would act irrationally in an acute "perceived crisis", possibly with nuclear weapons, would increase astronomically.

In this respect, the Ukrainian attack on the modules of the Russian missile defence system was also an attack on our, no: on global security! Incidentally, it is difficult to imagine that these attacks were carried out without consulting Ukraine's most important ally. Perhaps there was also an instruction ...

The objection is that we must prevent Putin from achieving lasting success against Ukraine, because otherwise there is a danger that he will soon push ahead with his dreams of great power status by attacking the Baltic states, for example. Isn't any attack on Russian military structures therefore justified as part of the Ukrainian defence strategy?

The modules of the Russian missile defence system ("Voronezh radar") were not used to attack Russian attack potentials, as was recently convincingly demonstrated once again,² but a system whose purpose is to identify a possible nuclear first strike by the USA or NATO in good time. This system plays no role at all in the current Russian war against Ukraine, but attacks on it – see above – damage the entire global security!

Regarding your first comment, which is one, no: the background melody in an endless loop in the current media coverage: That Putin allegedly wants to attack Poland or the Baltic states next after a victory over Ukraine; that Russian tanks will end up rolling through the Brandenburg Gate again the day after tomorrow, is a completely made-up claim by Western propagandists whose aim is to prolong the war in Ukraine – which must be ended as quickly as possible by diplomatic means – ad infinitum and to draw the USA, NATO

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and the EU ever deeper into the war. Whereby the war *aims* remain completely nebulous. According to various calculations, NATO's military expenditure is between 15 and 20 times that of Russia. In total, NATO has 3.6 times as many soldiers under arms. In terms of heavy conventional weapons, NATO is almost far superior. In contrast, Russia would most probably not even be able to "swallow" the whole of Ukraine, let alone "digest" it. After all, parts of the nationalist *Ukrainian Insurgent Army* (UPA) waged a stubborn partisan war against the Soviet occupiers in western Ukraine until the early 1950s.

But one more thing about your comment that "any attack on Russian military structures" is "justified". All actors have a responsibility to ensure that this war *does not spread even further*: to a European, and ultimately even a Third World War, which sooner or later would be fought with thermonuclear bombs and could mean the end of humanity, indeed of all life on this planet! For this reason, *Joe Biden* has refused to equip Ukraine with weapons systems capable of attacking Russian territory in depth since the beginning of the war.

But this red line is being increasingly softened, which in turn means nothing other than that we are getting closer to the thermonuclear abyss every minute ... There are risks that *must not* be taken!

I come back to the fact that the initiative to which you belong warns against nuclear war by mistake. For example, what kind of oversights could lead to a nuclear conflict purely by accident?

To better understand the current situation, let's take a look back to the time of the first Cold War, which was already dangerous enough. Back then, we were essentially dealing with two players who kept each other in check with the threat of possible total nuclear annihilation. Even in this era, there were repeated "critical incidents" where the world was on the brink of nuclear war. I recall the Cuban Missile Crisis, which was resolved just in time thanks primarily to the prudent diplomacy of the then heads of state *John F. Kennedy* and *Nikita Khrushchev* – both of whom, incidentally, bypassed their respective military and intelligence services.

But above all, I remember the numerous accidents and false alarms in which the world came within a hair's breadth of a nuclear disaster. The best known of these is the *false alarm at the*

*Russian missile defence centre*³ near Moscow on 26 September 1983, when the world probably only escaped a third world war thanks to the courageous and prudent actions of the officer in charge, Russian Lieutenant Colonel *Stanislav Petrov*. (Nine months before his death, I visited Petrov in his prefabricated flat in Fryazino near Moscow *and thanked him*.)⁴ *Leon Wieseltier's* well-known observation is relevant: nuclear deterrence is "probably the only political concept that fails completely if it is only 99.9 per cent successful".

Today, we are once again in a new, even more dangerous Cold War: we no longer live in a bipolar world, but in a multipolar one – whether the USA likes it or not! The number of nuclear powers has now grown to a total of nine, and the trend is rising. At the same time, the delivery systems for nuclear warheads are becoming increasingly accurate and difficult to locate. Carrier systems that do not describe ballistic trajectories, such as cruise missiles or hypersonic missiles, can practically no longer be eliminated on approach. The closer these systems get to enemy territory, the shorter the warning times become. In addition, the line between nuclear weapons and so-called "conventional weapons" is becoming increasingly blurred. It is not possible to tell from approaching carrier systems whether they are "conventional" or nuclear. With the development of comparatively "small" nuclear warheads, the temptation to use nuclear weapons is growing. And the military always acts according to the worst-case principle, which makes this worst-case scenario even more likely in the sense of a self-fulfilling prophecy ...

In a nutshell: the amount of information to be processed is constantly increasing, while the warning time tends towards zero. In this situation, more and more partial decisions must be outsourced to so-called artificial intelligence, which in turn is prone to error. *Nothing less is looming on the horizon than the ghostly vision of artificial intelligence, i.e. automatons, deciding the fate of our entire planet!* Idyllic times, when a man like Petrov still had around eight minutes to decide as a flesh-and-blood human being.

It all sounds as if the security of a single country such as Germany is closely linked to the security of all other countries. Doesn't that mean that in the Ukraine war, too, we must always consider the

impact of its defence on the rest of the world? Is it therefore expedient to encourage Ukraine to adopt ever more offensive behaviour towards Russia?

As already indicated, in a situation that could escalate into a Third World War at any time, all players have a duty to prevent precisely this! Which ultimately can only mean ending this war as quickly as possible and which, incidentally, would also be the only way to save the battered Ukraine, which is currently being defended to death, i.e. bled dry – the average age of the fighting men is now 43 – and in which more and more areas are being made uninhabitable for years, even decades, with Western weapons such as mines, uranium and cluster munitions.

Basically, if one of the fighting parties definitely feels backed into a corner – which is already de facto the case in Ukraine – then the probability of irrational behaviour increases dramatically. (I place the current Ukrainian attacks on modules of the Russian missile defence system precisely in this logic). In the – less likely – event that Russia found itself in this situation, this country would certainly prove to the world that it is a nuclear power...! (There are already voices of influential political advisors there who unabashedly promote so-called “pre-emptive nuclear retaliatory strikes”).⁵ The longer the war lasts, the more radicalised all actors will become and the risks for the entire planet will increase immeasurably.

The relevant actors seem to have forgotten this. Yet men like *Willy Brandt*, *Olof Palme* and *Mikhail Gorbachev* had already put it in a nutshell decades ago: *In the nuclear age, security is only possible together with, but never against, the “enemy”*. In this sense, everyone – whether we like it or not – is now a “security partner”. It is high time to think and act according to this principle of “common security” again! *Mikhail Gorbachev* called this “new thinking”.

But isn't security possible through good technology? After all, we now also have artificial intelligence which, together with surveillance from space, for example, can at least currently guarantee security much better than a few years ago.



Olof Palme, Bruno Kreisky and Willy Brandt at a press conference in 1975. They were key advocates of a security architecture. (Picture © picture alliance / Heinz Wieseler)

As mentioned above, the same applies to technology: no amount of sophisticated technology or artificial intelligence will be able to save us, because the deepest root of the entire malaise lies not in a lack of or imperfect technology, but in the *abysmal mistrust that all rival geopolitical players harbour towards each other!* So we really do need a “Copernican Revolution in thought and action” in which all relevant military and political players – over and above all antagonisms and enmities – once again come round to a policy of “new thinking”: Diplomacy, negotiations, a policy of de-escalation and the gradual reconstruction of trust towards a new European security order based on the principles of the “Charter of Paris” of November 1990, whose central sentence was: *“Security is indivisible, and the security of each participating state is inseparable from that of all others.”*

Mr Ensel, thank you for this interview.

Source: <https://globalbridge.ch/der-ukrainische-angriff-auf-die-globale-sicherheit/>, 29 May 2024

(Translation Swiss-Standpoint)

¹ <https://atomkrieg-aus-versehen.de/>

² <https://www.telepolis.de/features/Ukrainische-Streitkraefte-greifen-wohl-erneut-russisches-Atomraketen-Fruehwarnsystem-an-9733169.html>

³ <https://www.telepolis.de/features/Stanislaw-Petrow-und-das-Geheimnis-des-roten-Knopfs-3381498.html>

⁴ <https://www.telepolis.de/features/Der-einsame-Tod-des-Mannes-der-die-Welt-gerettet-hat-7096489.html>

⁵ <https://free21.org/die-waffen-gottes-nutzen/>