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“By joining NATO, Sweden and Finland increase the risk of becoming involved in a nuclear conflict” Interview with Jacques Baud*

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Imperialism, State Repression, Strategy, WarAmericas, Finland, Russia, Sweden, Ukraine, United States Interview Jacques Baud, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Zeitgeschehen im Fokus: You have worked for NATO and know the mechanisms of this organization very well. What does “NATO enlargement” mean in the current situation?

Jacques Baud: In fact, despite the emphatic statements, the situation has not really changed. First of all, it must be understood that the announcement of the candidacies of Sweden and Finland is essentially political. The Madrid Summit merely accepted the candidacies of these two countries. I recall that according to Article 10 of the Washington Treaty, it is NATO that invites new members, not the new members that decide to join the Alliance. NATO needed a “small success”. The forces it has funded and trained for eight years in Ukraine are failing against Russia. The problem is not the determination of the Ukrainian soldiers, who are certainly brave, but the inability of the military staffs to fight a war in a European tactical-operational environment. As a result, the Ukrainian military failure is therefore essentially also the failure of NATO. Added to this are the Western sanctions which tend to backfire on our economies. Thus creating a situation that has already impacted the governments of Bulgaria, Estonia, the UK, France, the Netherlands... and it is probably not over.

ZiF: How long will it be before the two states are definitely accepted into NATO?

JB: We will have to wait for the next NATO summit in 2023. Then the allies will decide whether to accept or not the actual membership of Sweden and Finland. But I expect that it will be done according to plan.

ZiF: What is the role of Turkey, which wanted to prevent membership?

JB: First of all, Turkey is not trying to “prevent” the membership of Sweden and Finland, but to preserve its own national interests. Secondly, it should be

remembered that the admission of new member countries can only be done with the unanimity of the allies. In other words, every vote counts. Turkey is a staunch ally of the Alliance, which is not afraid to assert its national interests. I have worked a lot with the Turks during my time at NATO. One can agree or disagree with their policies, but one must recognize that they are probably the most consistent and honest members of the Alliance in asserting their interests.

ZiF: Can you give a specific example?

JB: Yes, when the United States wanted to launch its war in Iraq, Turkey opposed it because it felt that it would have an impact on the situation of the Kurds and thus on its own national security. But the Americans did not listen. Today, Turkey is arguing for its national security. Sweden and Finland have always been very supportive of the Kurds and have taken in many refugees, including members of the PKK, the Kurdish Workers' Party, which is considered as a terrorist movement in many countries. In fact, even the European Union considers the PKK a terrorist organization.¹ For Turkey, it is a matter of national security. It was therefore quite predictable that Turkey would ask for its own security interests in exchange for its voice. What is true for the Nordic countries is also true for Turkey.

ZiF: Why did Turkey withdraw its veto for the time being?

JB: First of all, it was to be expected that Turkey would not use its de facto veto right. The stakes are too high for NATO. It was clear that Turkey would be pressured to accept the candidacy of the two countries. Turkey is already subject to sanctions by the United States for having "dared" to buy Russian anti-aircraft missiles. It should be noted that the United States automatically applies sanctions to all countries that buy Russian military equipment. This is the CAATSA Act.² This is why Turkey was taken out of the F-35 fighter program and no longer receives spare parts for its F-16 fighters. So it was easy to trade the lifting of sanctions for its approval. But this also shows that Western unity is achieved through the threat of sanctions!

ZiF: In the Western media, the future membership of the two states to NATO is being celebrated as a great increase in security and military clout. Is this assessment correct?

JB: No, it will not be a radical change. First of all, you have to know that in the early 1960s, Sweden wanted to have nuclear weapons. The United States, on the other hand, wanted to keep its monopoly over these weapons. In order to convince Sweden to give up, the United States offered to provide its nuclear umbrella protection in case of aggression. In other words, since the 1960s, Sweden had the same nuclear protection as NATO members, without the same obligations in case of conflict. So Sweden has not significantly improved its security.

ZiF: And what advantage does NATO have?

JB: For NATO, Sweden's membership provides the advantage of having full control over the Baltic Sea passages to the Atlantic Ocean. But this is a very relative gain. For it is Denmark that really occupies a key position, and the military collaboration between Denmark and Sweden, especially for maritime control, works well. It should be remembered that Sweden claimed for years that it was the target of clandestine Russian submarine warfare. As a result, there was intense cooperation in anti-submarine warfare around the Baltic Sea, in order to identify secret Russian weapons. But they never found anything: in fact, it was herring flatulence, which produced the same sound signal as submarines!...

ZiF: Even if this does little for either side, it does have an outward effect.

JB: The membership of Sweden and Finland is certainly a political signal. NATO obviously sees it as a success. But the reality is more nuanced. For the two Nordic countries, I don't think it is an improvement of their situation. They have the same advantages as before, but with additional constraints. But here too we have to be careful. It is unlikely that the United States would use its nuclear weapons on Russian territory just to protect Helsinki or Stockholm: this would create a direct threat from Russia against Washington or New York. Instead, they would more likely use theater weapons against attacking forces on Swedish or Finnish territory. In other words, by joining NATO, these two countries have increased the risk of being caught in a nuclear conflict.

ZiF: Don't the two countries also have to make concessions?

JB: On the diplomatic front, Sweden and Finland have to expect a loss of the credibility they enjoyed thanks to their neutral or non-aligned status, especially in the non-European world.

In terms of their foreign and humanitarian policy, the price demanded by Turkey is very high, since it means no less than giving up their policy towards the Kurds. We do not know if they will fulfill their commitment to Turkey, but it is likely that they will have to do so, as this is an issue that Turkey perceives as existential.

ZiF: We are reading less and less about Ukraine's "military successes" in the mainstream media. Did these ever exist or was the whole thing pure propaganda?

JB: Our media are slowly beginning to portray a more nuanced reality than they have done since February. The irony of this is that by never questioning the Ukrainian government's narrative and by simply relaying its propaganda, our media have contributed significantly to the overconfidence that led to its defeat.

As I have said from the beginning, our media bears a tremendous responsibility for the course of the war and the Ukrainian defeat.

ZiF: What do you mean?

JB: Our media never tried to help Ukraine, but to fight Russia. Don't forget that a Norwegian researcher revealed that a journalist described as a "Swiss-French conspiracy theorist" working with some mainstream media that "blacklisted" me in Switzerland,³ inspired Norwegian mass-murderer Anders Breivik, who is celebrated as a hero by most right-wing militant groups in Ukraine.

ZiF: Why is the war dragging on for so long, and why is Ukraine making no attempt to reach a negotiated settlement with Russia?

JB: The West and the Ukrainian far-right extremists are literally preventing Zelensky from reaching an agreement with Russia. This is what Boris Johnson went to tell Zelensky in Kiev on April 9: "If you negotiate with Russia we will stop delivering arms to you!"

ZiF: Can we tell from the Russians' actions what the ultimate goal of this operation is supposed to be?

JB: No, we do not know. But it is important to understand that Russia's objectives are not quantitative, but qualitative in nature. In other words, it is not about gaining territory, but about destroying the threat against the Russian-speaking populations of Donbass and Crimea. Being a bit cynical, one could say that the Russians do not need to advance to achieve their goals, but only need to let the Ukrainian military come to them. According to Ukrainian officials, Ukraine is losing 1,000 men a day (killed, wounded, prisoners or deserters). The British have started a training program for new soldiers and promise to train 10'000 men in 120 days. In other words, they will train in 120 days what Ukraine loses in ten days. We are not helping Ukraine: we are pushing it towards disaster.

ZiF: "Der Spiegel" writes, "Putin's soldiers are committing the most serious war crimes." Do you know more details about this, or does this belong in the realm of propaganda?

JB: I don't know, because making accusations is not enough, you have to prove them. As Ignazio Cassis, the Swiss Minister of Foreign Affairs, said: "These are not war crimes until a Court of Law rules so". In the absence of multi-party, international and impartial investigations, these accusations are unsubstantiated. Having said that, it is very likely that Russian military personnel committed war crimes. It happens in all wars and is almost inevitable. Only the Western armies do not seem to commit such crimes. For two reasons: because they do not prosecute their own soldiers and because slaughtering an Arab

family is not considered a crime. You can see for yourself that Julian Assange has served more time in prison than the perpetrators of the war crimes he exposed! This tells you everything about the so-called “values” we defend!

ZiF: When you read the Western media, you inevitably get the feeling that only the Russians are committing war crimes.

JB: The problem is that our media NEVER mention Ukrainian war crimes. As a matter of fact, we mention Russian war crimes, while in Eastern Ukraine the Russians are often welcomed as liberators. But that too, we do not want to say: the German journalist Alina Lipp, who is on the ground in the Donbass, has been condemned by the German justice for having dared to say it! Claiming that Ukraine is a democratic country that does not commit war crimes is just a way to legitimize our blind support for the war against Russia.

ZiF: On July 4th-5th , in Lugano was the so-called reconstruction conference. President Cassis wanted to use it to put himself in the limelight. The media response seems to have been rather limited. What is the point of such a conference?

JB: I think the idea of such a conference is good. The problem is that it is totally premature. How to seriously mobilize donors to fund Ukraine’s reconstruction means nothing until we have a clear picture of the final state of affairs. Will Western countries fund the reconstruction of Mariupol? Russia has already started to rebuild the cities damaged by the war. In Mariupol, schools have reopened since May and the Russians have already started to rebuild the destroyed residential buildings. Russia has restored banking services as well as telephone services. This is certainly in the realm of propaganda, but for the inhabitants it is a concrete result.

ZiF: How is such a conference compatible with Switzerland’s neutrality?

JB: As a matter of principle, I think that by organizing such a conference, Switzerland plays its role. The problem here is that in this particular case, this conference is essentially partisan and its real purpose is propaganda.



ZiF: Are there countries that are currently trying to find a negotiated solution to the Ukraine conflict, or is only the logic of weapons speaking?


JB: This is probably what all Ukrainians are asking themselves. But do not forget that in May 2019, Volodymyr Zelensky was threatened with death by his own neo-Nazi partners if he concluded peace with Russia. By the way, our media and our leaders also say that we should not negotiate with Vladimir Putin. So...

ZiF: Mr. Baud, thank you very much for the interview.

***Jacques Baud** holds a master's degree in Econometrics and a postgraduate degree in International Security from the Graduate Institute of International Relations in Geneva and was a Colonel in the Swiss Army. He worked for the Swiss Strategic Intelligence Service and was an advisor on the security of refugee camps in Eastern Zaire during the Rwandan war (UNHCR – Zaire/Congo, 1995-1996). He worked for the DPKO (Department of Peacekeeping Operations) of the United Nations in New York (1997-99), founded the International Centre for Humanitarian Demining in Geneva (CIGHD) and the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA). He contributed to the introduction of the concept of intelligence in UN peace operations and headed the first integrated UN Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC) in Sudan (2005-06). He was head of the Peace Policy and Doctrine Division of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York (2009-11) and of the UN Expert Group on Security Sector Reform and the Rule of Law, worked in Nato and is the author of several books on intelligence, asymmetric warfare, terrorism and disinformation.

Notes:

1.  eur-lex.europa.eu
2.  congress.gov

3.  www.qub.ac.uk