

***Professor Patomaki, as soon as war broke out in Ukraine with the Russian decision to invade the country, you immediately declared the risks of a rapid escalation of the conflict on a large scale. What are the reasons and consequences of this war?***

This war is a moment in a long process that started in the 1990s when the Soviet Union disintegrated. Many of the factors that have led to the war originate in the 1990s, concerning for example Russia's economic development and European security arrangements. The neoliberal shock therapy of the early 1990s was especially devastating in its effects and among other things, it led to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small number of people who have come to be known as the oligarchs. In addition, the separation of Ukraine and Russia did not go particularly well as it involved manifold disputes, though the 1994 Budapest memorandum was able to resolve some of the issues, at least temporarily. Moreover, NATO expansion was a very contentious issue already during the Boris Yeltsin era. The chaotic 1990s paved the way for a counter-movement to Western neoliberalism. In the late 1990s, most Russian experts, politicians, and ideologues I interviewed and knew wanted a strong and, if necessary, authoritarian leader managing some form of state capitalism. They got what they wanted. Putin was able to stabilise economic developments, also by striking a deal with the oligarchs. Further turning points included the so-called Colour Revolutions – especially the Orange Revolution in Ukraine – and the US-British invasion of Iraq in 2003. By 2007-8, Russia and the expanding NATO were at loggerheads. Also, the EU has played a role in this conflict that turned violent in Ukraine in 2013-14. However, even in 2021, a major war could have been avoided by implementing the Minsk II agreement and by committing Ukraine to non-alignment.

The consequences of the war are far-reaching independently of which scenario will be realised. For Russia, the war is counterproductive in so many ways and may spell turbulence, strife and even civil war within the country, while it will also make Russia turn increasingly toward Asia. The West broadly considered has taken a very strong stand and positioned itself in an utterly antagonistic relationship with Russia. The sanctions against Russia are unprecedented in terms of their scale. The military support to Ukraine and the weaponisation of economic interdependence can have very significant unintended consequences, including escalating the conflict even further. At the end of the spectrum lies the possibility of an all-out nuclear war.

Even if that did not happen now or in the next couple of years, all this is a part of a process in which the world is increasingly divided into two major camps. Although from the perspective of China, India and many countries in the global south, Russia's invasion of Ukraine violates international law, the historical arrogance of the West and the enlargement of NATO are part of the problem. Governments representing at least half of humanity also believe that Russia's legitimate security interests have not been taken into account. Many recall the unilateral wars waged by the West, for example in the Middle East. Many parts of the world are not afraid of Russia but see that it is in their interest to cooperate with Russia.

***You are among the most critical voices regarding a possible access of Finland to the Atlantic Alliance. Can you explain the reasons for this opposition?***

If it is the case that Ukraine's non-alignment and the implementation of the Minsk agreement would have been enough to prevent the current large-scale war, Finland's NATO membership is a mistake. Finland is hardly more secure in a world where great conflict continues to escalate, even toward a nuclear war. The problem is not only that Finland's NATO membership threatens to further expand the NATO-Russia conflict, which may of course have direct consequences for Finland itself; the problem is also that Finland's NATO membership is part of a process in which the world is increasingly divided into two camps.

The current processes resemble those that led to the First World War. For decades, we have seen regressive developments that in effect have been taking us toward something that could be characterised as late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century style dynamics, at times resembling also the dynamics of the 1930s. The problem is how to get back to the future and solve the global problems of 21st-century global governance from climate change to much more adequate and democratic governance of the world economy. A non-military EU-Finland could be proactive in these matters. In fact, what the world would need is a new non-aligned movement or some such, to counter the tendencies that are now dividing the world.

***There is a strong polarization in Finland on the possible choice of abandoning the country's historical neutrality in favor of NATO membership. How do you feel about the debate in your country that some politicians have described as "toxic"?***

It is indeed toxic. Finland is a case in point regarding worldwide regressive developments. As people are following every detail of what is happening in the war through media from the Ukrainian, Western and human points of view (in contrast, the war in Iraq was mostly represented from the viewpoint of attackers), the majority of Finns seem to see the war in Ukraine as a direct threat: "This is a remake of the 1939-40 Winter War and the same could happen here". Bigger guns are needed to protect Finland, and that is why Finland must join NATO. Fear is a strong motivation and the idea is sort of understandable, but based on fear or anger, it is difficult to think rationally. Moreover, what we are seeing are forms of Russophobia and hatred that we have not seen since the 1930s. The prevailing climate of opinion has gone so far as to see any form of critique or analysis in terms of historical causation as "Putinism" or as the actions of "Russian agents". Such an atmosphere is also conducive to encouraging both censorship and violence.

At the turn of the 1930s, the far-right in Finland resorted to a practice called "muilutus", which is a combination of abduction and assault, referring to a forcible transport of persons behind the national border into the Soviet Union. While typically targeted against the Left, in 1930 they abducted also the first president of Finland, K.J. Ståhlberg, a liberal politician who spoke against right-wing political violence. The idea of "muilutus" seems to be re-emerging in 2022. During the last few weeks, I have received messages and seen many comments on social media where people say I should go to Russia for good. What could be a better example of the current climate of opinion and its toxicity?

***The Marin government presented a report last week asking the Finnish parliament for a quick discussion leading to a request to join NATO. What is your opinion of that report and the road map defined by the government?***

The "Government report on changes in the security environment" published on 13 April is flawed for reasons that I have outlined in my previous answers. It is one-sided and short-sighted. It does not see historical processes – not to speak of political economy – but only a separate event, the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Moreover, the report only considers that event from the point of view of an immediate military threat against the Finnish national security and the potential effects of "the changed security situation" on the national economy, resilience, security of supply, internal security, cyber security, hybrid influence activities and critical infrastructure. Trust in Russia has collapsed more or less totally and thus deterrence and technical countermeasures are seen as the only option in dealing with the situation. The response is to

militarise Finland and to cooperate militarily with other countries. The bottom line is that “NATO is the only common defense organization in the foreseeable future”. Overall, this is a reactionary report.

***The Finnish parliament seems, by an overwhelming majority, to follow Prime Minister Marin. Even among several deputies of the left alliance. Do you think this will be the immediately future?***

Whether rational or not, Finland seems likely to send a membership application to NATO within the next few weeks. Traditionally, the Left Alliance has been strongly opposed to NATO membership but is now divided. Only a few Left Alliance MPs are likely to vote against the proposal of Marin’s government (the Left Alliance is part of the government coalition). I hasten to add that the government decided already in December 2021 to buy 64 F-35 combat aircraft from the US at the price of at least 10 billion euros, while within the government, the Left Alliance is struggling to get a few extra tens of millions euros to a particular social purpose (10 million is 1/1000 of 10 billion). In the 1990s, the GDP share of military expenditure could have been as low as 1.1%, but is now close to 2% (the NATO norm). The Director of the Finnish Institute of International Affairs is proposing that the GDP share should lie somewhere between 3-4%.

The Left Alliance is a moderate and culturally very liberal social democratic party that has focussed on domestic affairs, especially on social security, health, education and identity politics (for example LGBTQ issues), and to a degree also on national economic policy. The party is very strongly in favour of active climate policy, but possible measures and political differences are seen primarily in national terms. All this is fine but also rather limited. Foreign and security policy has been largely left to other parties. The EU lies in the background and the future of Union is not really discussed. For example, the Left Alliance has tacitly approved the idea that Finland is part of the “frugal four” in the EU. The lack of European and global vision explains why the party seems now so weak on the issue of NATO membership.