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## Everything can change overnight – neighbourly relations, betrayal and trust

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores – perhaps slightly provocatively – what world history has taught us about how things can change dramatically overnight. We in Finland, along with the rest of Europe and even Russia, know this all too well. What are the mechanisms of betrayal and deception that plant the seeds of suspicion and mistrust, and what are their effects from a political and military perspective? How much room can there be left for trust and rational thinking, and is there ever any wisdom in a pre-emptive strike or a move to get even? How often do emotions and egos get in the way of looking for a peaceful solution? Are the intensities of war and peace efforts directly or inversely proportional? I will also briefly touch on the critical role of the air force in military campaigns.

### 1 Introduction: Lessons from the Winter War

Towards the end of the 1930s, my father's family lived in a flat on Runeberginkatu, on what was then the outskirts of Helsinki. Today's Runeberginkatu is a major street right in the heart of the city. My father had celebrated his 20th birthday in 1939, and his brother was a couple of years younger. On a perfectly ordinary day in November 1939, the sky above Helsinki suddenly filled with Soviet bombers. The Winter War had begun. My father, true to our family's notoriously fiery temperament, picked up a rifle and climbed on top of the building in which they lived, intending to shoot at the low-flying fighter aircraft. So low were the planes that he could actually make out the pilots' faces from his cover behind a chimney. Thankfully, before he pulled the trigger and started firing, a calm voice of reason piped up and flushed out the adrenaline rush. What made him give up his plan was the realisation that as a result of his righteous albeit perhaps only superficial heroism, the building – his and his family's home – would a moment later be in ruins. What good would such a show of bravery have done? The building survived and still stands today. Everything had changed overnight. Finland had refused to yield to the Soviet Union's territorial demands. From the Soviet perspective, the invasion was about self-preservation. What it really amounted to was an egregious violation

of international law. The scenario – at least according to the propaganda – is somewhat analogous with the inception of the special military operation in Ukraine.

The eruption of the Winter War and the Soviet Union's invasion are for many of us a stark example of just how unpredictable our neighbour can be. Although it has been more than eighty years since the start of the Winter War, and although there are only a few left among us who lived through it and who are still traumatised by their experiences, the war remains a bitter memory and its unfairness still grates on many. The national collective memory is forever scarred and wounded. The Soviet Union's interests presumably lay in protecting Leningrad – now Saint Petersburg – which sat within cannon range of the Finnish border. The Soviets wanted to expand their sphere of influence. It is unlikely that Finland as it was at the time posed any real threat to the city. As it turned out, the Soviets' fears over Leningrad's security proved more than justified only a couple of years after the start of the Winter War – albeit that the attack came not from Finland but from Germany. What happened in Leningrad during the German siege of the city is hard to read. Hundreds of thousands if not more than a million citizens died of starvation, illness and enemy bombardment. Conditions in the besieged city were indescribably horrific, and there are even stories of cannibalism. I would prefer not to know the details. For Russians, ignoring the horrors of the siege is not an option. It remains an open wound in the Russian collective memory. From the perspective of the West, the siege of Leningrad is only one of the many historic events of the Second World War along with the bombings of Hamburg and Dresden, the use of V-2 rockets, the Normandy landings, the Battle of the Bulge, the Guadalcanal campaign, the Battle of Iwo Jima and countless other scenarios; in fact, the siege of Leningrad rarely even gets a mention. During the Continuation War, Finnish army leaders decided – after careful consideration – not to aggressively pursue the capture of Leningrad. Had this not happened and had the whole of Leningrad been invaded and destroyed, would a separate peace treaty and the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance have been possible?

Despite its superior forces, the Soviet Union suffered defeat after defeat in the Winter War. The international community condemned the invasion, and the Soviet Union was expelled from the League of Nations. The moral support shown to Finland by the international community did not translate to actual assistance on the battlefields, however. France had promised to send troops, and the US had offered to supply their 'Peanut Special' – a fleet of their famously excellent Brewster fighter aircraft. The legend goes that the Finns paid one dollar for one hundred Brewsters in an auction that no one else attended. The Brewsters were Finland's first fighter aircraft that were specifically designed for the navy – the original ancestors of the Finnish Navy's current Hornet attack aircraft. The Brewsters did not make it to Finland before the Winter War ended. The Swedes, on the other hand, rushed to the aid of their neighbours and lent their support to Finland in many concrete ways. The airspace in Lapland was defended by Swedish volunteer pilots, as Finland had practically no air force of its own. The advance of the Red Army was halted on a number of fronts, including most famously at Suomussalmi. The legendary Battle of Raate Road is still taught as a case study in military schools around the world. Among those defeated on Raate Road was an entire division of Ukrainian soldiers. The Soviets' plan to capture the city of Oulu and effectively cut Finland in two was foiled: the Finns successfully held the creek-sized Kollaa River, which is considered to have been one of the most difficult locations to defend during the Winter War. This is painful history for everyone involved – not least the unsuccessful invaders.

## **2 From a non-aggression pact to blitzkrieg overnight**

Another dramatic European example of a surprise attack or an attempted surprise attack is the non-aggression pact between *Hitler* and *Stalin*. It turned out to be a ruse; the non-aggression pact was put aside and replaced by a massive attack overnight. The pact was only a smokescreen for Operation Barbarossa – Hitler's long-established plan to invade the Soviet Union. There are also some who claim that Stalin saw what Hitler was trying to do but said nothing – thereby playing a trick of his own. The objective of Operation Barbarossa was to destroy the Soviet Union and gain more 'living space' for Germans in accordance with the Nazis' ideological goal of *Lebensraum*. The initial high of the invasion quickly evaporated when Germany lost the Battle of Stalingrad – a defeat that is often regarded as the turning point of the war. The end result was the fall of Germany, the occupation of Berlin and the despicable acts that followed. No war trials were ever held for the crimes committed in the aftermath of the Battle of Berlin. It would probably take an all-destroying nuclear war for Moscow to suffer a similar fate, however. Many have tried to take Moscow – none have. Even *Prigozhin* only made it halfway there. Hitler's decision to go to war was a grave mistake. Berlin had been reduced to rubble, and the only choice left for Germany was to surrender unconditionally. It should have done so at least a couple of years earlier. The misguided blind faith of one man had destroyed an entire country. The Soviet Union is estimated to have lost around twenty million lives. A death toll of that magnitude is enough to touch every family and fundamentally change society. The Second World War, which the Russians call the Great Patriotic War, is forever etched in the nation's collective memory.

## **3 Chamberlain's famous 'peace for our time'**

British Prime Minister *Neville Chamberlain* also naïvely fell for Hitler's assurances of peace. What ultimately saved Great Britain from a German invasion was its air force and especially the legendary Spitfire fighter aircraft. Some sources claim that, with a rapidly growing shortage of Spitfires and pilots, the British air defence was at a breaking point and the possibility of surrender had been seriously discussed. The Luftwaffe's losses had been greater still, however, and Germany was forced to abandon the exhausting aerial campaign before the British air defence collapsed. Air forces have played a key role in many wars, but it is rare for air defence to be the decisive factor. The army usually has to step in for the bloodiest battles and lay the path to military victory. Britain – like Finland – avoided occupation. These two were the only European countries involved in the war that were spared.

## **4 The Japanese betrayal**

On 7 December 1941, representatives of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs swore to their American counterparts that they wanted to end hostilities and begin peace talks with the US. However, a surprise military attack was already under way. The Japanese Navy had sneaked its aircraft carriers within striking distance of the US naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. By the morning, the promises of peace had been replaced by a ferocious attack. The ruthless bombing campaign against the unsuspecting Pacific naval base began at 6 am. Japan's Nakajima B5N2 torpedo bombers and the legendary Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighter aircraft hammered down mercilessly on the Pacific fleet that was at anchor in Pearl Harbor – as well

as its crews. Practically everything was destroyed. Japan – America's neighbour from across the Pacific – had annihilated almost the entire Pacific fleet of the US Navy. Without it, the west coast of the US was left with very little naval defence. A single aircraft carrier that had been out at sea survived. After the attack, even an invasion by the Japanese army seemed a possibility to the Americans. However, the surprise served by the Japanese was not even half the battle. Challenging the Americans in this manner turned out to be a major miscalculation. Japan had demonstrated military prowess and treachery, but its arrogance backfired in a big way: the United States joined the war. Japan's luck ran out in 1945 with the Americans' undeniable show of strength in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The targets could perhaps have been chosen with more restraint. The heavily fortified Pacific islands would have been a more humane and forgivable target than civilian-inhabited cities. The impact would probably have been just as striking. Hundreds of thousands of people died in the bombings of the two cities, but the ending of the war in this way may have saved millions of lives, including around two million soldiers. Nuclear weapons had the final word. Japan surrendered unconditionally.

### **5 Surprise attack on the holy day of Yom Kippur**

It was the year 1973, and families in Israel were celebrating Yom Kippur. As they gathered in their homes to honour the Jewish holy day, their neighbours across the border had other plans: a massive and extremely well-planned surprise attack. The objective was to use the element of surprise and overpower the postage-stamp-sized state of Israel – an enemy created by the UN. After the first critical hours and days, the strength and skill of the Israeli army kicked in and began to change the course of the war. This attack, too, was proved to have been a catastrophic error of judgement. Total destruction of Israel had been close, however. The situation changed quickly after the deployment of the Israeli air force and the crippling of the enemy's air defence control systems. Once the tide had turned, perhaps the only thing that stopped the complete annihilation of the invaders' military forces was a roomful of cool heads. All it would have taken was the press of a button less than an arm's length away. That button was, thankfully, not pressed. Cool heads prevailed. The relationship between the neighbours has not exactly improved since the Yom Kippur War. On that occasion, however, stopping the attack was enough of a show of strength. Both sides learned a lesson.

### **6 Imperialism, excessive self-defence or a search for assurances?**

The same story was repeated in Ukraine in 2022. Russia swore that it had no plans to invade. Despite a number of alarming warning signs, Kyiv and the rest of Europe – perhaps even London – believed the assurances. The West was gullible and naïve. The 'special military operation' took practically everyone by surprise. Russia was probably hoping to emulate the Six-Day War – a debilitating blitz, lasting a week or two at most. The world was shocked and outraged, but soon ready for action. Russia came very close to capturing Kyiv and the Ukrainian president. It was the bravery and skill of a small group of soldiers that foiled the Kremlin's plans. A few had heeded the warnings at the final moment. Most were blinded by credulity

and hopefulness. The operation did not take six days; it now looks as though the war could go on for six years – if not longer.

Was the invasion motivated by what Russia claims are genuine security interests, or were the demands just a smokescreen? The Russians had been calling on the West to address the 'threat' posed by Ukraine. The West and Ukraine, however, felt that the threat came from Russia. Was Russia trying to expand its sphere of influence, create a demilitarised zone, get security guarantees or rid the region of NATO? Its objectives have never been clearly communicated – at least not in the media – and it is unlikely that any negotiations have taken place. Even the suggestion was dismissed out of hand. Russia's demands had clear echoes of the old doctrine of 'spheres of influence' – and those echoes are disquieting. The message was clear: this is Ukraine's business and no one else's. However, the conflict between Ukraine and Russia cannot be solved without a multinational agreement, albeit that the solution must also be agreeable to Ukraine. Ukraine cannot ensure its national security alone. Mutual security guarantees, in one form or another, are likely to be needed – and fast. But if Russia just wanted to rebuild its empire, why announce its demands to the world and put everyone on notice? Perhaps a surprise attack without a public warning would have worked better.

## **7 Did Russia have a reason to worry?**

Could Russia's attack on Ukraine be considered a pre-emptive strike or an overreaction to a perceived threat? Was there actually a threat? The mainstream view is that the invasion was all about Russia's imperial aspirations. There was no known threat to Russia. Can NATO be a threat to Russia? The West does not think so. NATO is just a casual defence alliance. Was the invasion the result of paranoia among the Russian leadership? For a paranoid personality, even imaginary fears feel real. Crimea had already been invaded in a surprise attack. Had Ukraine's ramping up its military preparedness after the annexation of Crimea been a threat to Russia? The West saw this as a shrewd and justified reaction to the military humiliation and catastrophic loss that Ukraine had suffered in Crimea. Was Ukraine building the kind of attack capacity that could have become a genuine threat to Russia and that justified a pre-emptive strike in the form of a special military operation? Was Ukraine preparing to take back Crimea? The West gives no more credence to these claims than to the threat that Finland supposedly posed to the Soviet Union before the Winter War. However, Russia also has its share of first-hand experiences of how everything can change overnight. Could Russia's extremely cautious and ultra-nationalistic leadership let history repeat itself? How did the international community think the zealously patriotic leaders of a country wanting to bolster its superpower status would react to the pooh-poohing of their public demands? Shrug their shoulders and leave it at that?

The special military operation may have initially just been about forcing a change of government in Ukraine – although some believe that its objective was the total destruction of everything Ukrainian; after all, according to Russian propaganda, Ukraine is not even a country and there is no such nation as 'Ukrainians'. It has been difficult or even impossible for the West to comprehend how the invasion could have been about self-defence. Ukraine's progress as an independent country and the Orange Revolution have, of course, been very publicly supported by the EU, including in the form of a visit by Angela Merkel at the height of the revolution. The West cannot see how this could have amounted to a military threat, however,

unless there was some kind of a 'sphere of influence' that had to be protected. It now appears that there was. Russia has been very easily irritated in all the regions bordering NATO, just as China has been in respect of Taiwan. Visits to Taiwan by foreign dignitaries and especially American leaders tend to provoke military drills and demonstrations.

### **8 Israel's Six-Day War – was it self-defence?**

The Six-Day War began when Israel all of a sudden launched a series of what many have called pre-emptive strikes in 1967. Its Arab neighbours had mobilised their superior military forces into defensive lines along the Israeli border. The world waited with bated breath for the Arabs' apparently imminent attack on Israel. There was no peaceful resolution in sight. The French President *De Gaulle* had urged Israel to not engage in military action. Israel's military command nevertheless decided that attack was the best defence. The long history of the Jewish people had taught them the importance of self-preservation. The enemy's air forces were destroyed at their bases during the first hours of the war. Despite its dynamic and victorious performance, Israel stopped short of driving its tanks or troops deep into Egypt's territory or using its nuclear weapons against its neighbours. There was no repeat of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Israel's show of restraint and avoidance of unnecessary humiliation was not enough, however. The defeat was still too bitter a pill for Israel's neighbours to swallow; they decided to 'get even' by launching a surprise attack on the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur in 1973, which I have written about above. 'Getting even' is, of course, not strong enough a phrase to describe the total annihilation of Israel that the Yom Kippur attack sought to achieve.

President De Gaulle condemned Israel's actions in the Six-Day War in 1967 and sided France – which had previously supported Israel – with the Arabs instead. France began to sell sophisticated weapons technology to Arab countries. A friend had turned into an enemy overnight. The US presidential election in 2024 may well lead to a similar change in the Americans' attitude towards supporting Ukraine.

### **9 Is there a peaceful way out?**

Whether Russia's security concerns were real or imaginary or perhaps just a formal excuse for its aggression will probably never be known. On the other hand, since the Russian leadership has very publicly declared those concerns to have been the reason for Russia's actions, offering security guarantees to both sides could now pave the way to a peace treaty regardless of how tangible or real those guarantees were. Ukraine, of course, needs guarantees that are absolutely cast in concrete. Russia is likely to settle for a promise of non-aggression and the elimination of any existing security threats. This would allow Russia to withdraw having achieved its stated objective.

Even if this were to succeed, there is still the extremely contentious issue of war crimes and reparations to address. It is unrealistic to think that such complex questions could be settled comprehensively and in detail in the peace treaty. Usually, in these kinds of situations, a special body is set up to resolve the remaining issues over several years or decades. The fate of the assets seized from Russia and Russian citizens, and the nationalisation of foreign businesses' assets in Russia, are matters that will take a long time to unravel but something that must be done sooner or later. The outcome is unlikely to satisfy everyone. Some believe that justice

will only be served with a quick, final catch-all answer to all the questions. That outcome is not realistic, regardless of when and how the war ends. Weighed up against the prolongation of the conflict and the losses, suffering and damage it is causing, even a disappointing peace treaty may be a better and more sensible option. This would allow the long and costly rebuilding process to begin and lives to be resumed.

## **10 Who should make the first move?**

The biggest hurdle could well be the complete communication breakdown between the two sides. Any reasonable offer of negotiation made by either Russia or Ukraine would probably be interpreted as an act of desperation in the face of a looming defeat. The first move is unlikely to come from either of the warring sides. The accusations keep getting more and more outrageous. Is negotiation even possible anymore? There are some big egos at play, and no one is budging. The Turkish President *Erdoğan* is currently the only go-between who could potentially get through to both sides. China is keeping its cards close to its chest. The big Western countries are probably not in a position, or at least not willing, to start a dialogue of any kind. The West's practically unanimous view is that a military victory is needed to end the conflict. Any suggestions of some other solution are quickly labelled as treachery and siding with Russia. Apart from the pipe dream of Russia's unilateral retreat, a decisive military victory appears to be the only way out of the war. Is that a realistic assessment of the situation – or have we been blinkered by all the suffering, all the wrongs and all the misery that we have seen and experienced? Bringing the Russian military to its knees without destroying all life on the planet in the process sounds like a utopian happy ending. The current leaders of both Russia and Ukraine are so firmly locked in their extreme positions that neither can make the first move towards peace without losing face. The Ukrainian government is point-blank refusing any compromise with Russia's current leadership – there is simply no trust. This is naturally understandable, but equally there should be some other foundation for a peaceful coexistence than the promises of the Russian government or the personal feelings of the two leaders. Unless both sides check their attitudes and someone makes the first move, the situation will continue to escalate – perhaps to a point of no-return.

Believing that peace can be built on promises alone is primitive. Trust must be founded on strength and concrete security guarantees. There is no reason why the first move could not come from a third party, albeit that the West maintains that Ukraine alone is the master of its fate. However, everything that the Ukrainian government has done so far seems to have fuelled the fighting and accelerated the devastation. Ukraine firmly believes that Russia is a threat to Europe and the whole world. Is there anyone who can break the impasse? Peace would be a blessing for both the Ukrainians and the Russians. The way in which it is achieved cannot please everyone. However, any peace would surely be better than the continuation and further escalation of the war.

Is it time to take a deep breath and look at the situation from a rational point of view? That rational perspective could come from a third party, such as Switzerland, Austria or China. Even Finland – now that we are a member of NATO – could potentially be a voice of reason, even though Russian propaganda is now portraying us as an enemy, and it is difficult to keep a cool head amidst all the suspicions and mistrust. There may well be evil in the world, but is the evil that has been unmasked absolute? We in Finland have first-hand experience of the

bitter-sweet nature of peace. There is no such thing as a perfect peace treaty – but there can be total devastation. Should not the equation be more balanced? Why should there not be the same amount of effort put into achieving peace than is put into wreaking havoc? The bloodier the war, surely the more effort should be put into ending it. There seems to be no such balance. Is it emotions – hatred, vengeance and bitterness over perceived wrongs – that drive the desire for an absolute military victory? From a military perspective, having two evenly matched sides is never the goal, but that is often what ends up happening. Each side keeps trying to outdo the other. This is exactly what happened in Vietnam. The stakes got higher and higher every year, while the solution slipped further and further away. The Hawks were calling for a rapid and ruthless conclusion of the war from the start. Thankfully theirs was not the loudest voice. We are lucky that Hiroshima has such a long shadow. The Americans alone lost 43 lives every day on average in Vietnam. The Vietnamese probably lost many times more. The American retreat – albeit chaotic – was the right decision in the end. The combined death toll of the two sides of the war in Ukraine is likely to have already surpassed that of Vietnam – and there is no end in sight.

### **11 Is it possible to rebuild trust after all that has happened?**

Is Russia just trying to reinstate its old Soviet or imperial sphere of influence? The imperialism of the Soviet Union was motivated by ideological faith in communism. Is it the same with Russia? Is Russia just looking to restore its former glory? Is it even possible to distinguish between security interests and imperialism within Russia's historical context – since both lead to similar consequences? The recent actions of the Belarusian leadership have clear echoes of the East German uprising, the Hungarian Revolution and the invasion of Czechoslovakia during the Soviet era. Were the security interests claimed by Russia just a smokescreen and an excuse to get involved? Would a compromise that guaranteed the security of both sides have been possible after all? Speculating about past events is pointless, but history could show us the way to a peaceful outcome. Europe has now started to wonder whether the special military operation could have happened – and whether it could happen – somewhere else instead of Ukraine? Will there be more? Is it even possible to start building trust now, or is that naïvety, a pipe dream or wishful thinking? Is the damage irreparable? Are Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the other military interventions and aggressive use of force by Russia that preceded it proof that Russia's strategic objective is to grow its territory to its historical dimensions – or even beyond? That is what we are being told. The Kremlin says no. But who would trust them now? What the war in Ukraine – and other surprise attacks – have taught us is that everything can change overnight. Momentous events do not happen in isolation; they pass through a sieve of a nation's history and collective psyche and the subjective experiences and visions of its potentially autocratic leadership.

### **12 How many lives are being destroyed on a daily basis?**

How many Ukrainian and Russian lives per square kilometre will be lost before reason prevails? Homes, families and entire communities are being destroyed. The averages of the Vietnam War were surpassed long ago. Both sides are adamant that they will not budge. Is the objective to devastate the whole of Ukraine and the entire nation? In modern warfare, it is



possible to destroy the very conditions for life even with modest success on the battlefields. Spheres of influence have little significance when escaping total devastation would require an 'Iron Dome' of unrealistic proportions. The creation of one sphere of influence can lead to the need of another, to protect the original sphere of influence. Modern weapons have the capacity to destroy cities and their populations in a matter of minutes from hundreds of kilometres away. As easy as it can be to destroy civilian infrastructure, overcoming a country's army and military strength can be considerably more difficult, making it impossible to actually invade. And what is there to gain from invading a totally devastated country? Genocide or ethnic cleansing? The rest of the world cannot sit idly by. If these kinds of outcomes cannot be avoided by military means, another way must be found. The continuation of war can lead to the annihilation of an entire nation. Is this really a black-and-white choice? The solution devised during the Cold War was a 'balance of terror'. Is the current war just fuelled by two leaders' paranoid imaginings of power and fear? Or are the issues that a peace treaty would have to address so complex that no one wants to go near them? Should Finland try to act as a go-between and see if a compromise could be found between Ukraine and Russia? We at least have first-hand experience.

### **13 The burden of history**

The burden of history weighs heavy on Ukraine's shoulders. Millions of Ukrainians were deliberately starved to death under Stalin in the 1900s. This was followed by Nazi occupation – and then a return to the Soviet Union. The current Russian special military operation is perhaps even more brutal than the invasions that came before. In the light of this history, the Ukrainians' 'suicidal' attitude is understandable. The Ukrainians are approaching the fight as if there were only two extreme outcomes: independence or destruction. Having the will to fight is not enough on its own, however. Winning also takes strength. And strength comes from skill and equipment. Invading Ukraine was not as easy for the Russians as invading Crimea. But Ukraine still does not have the skill and equipment needed to beat the invaders. The shortage of F-16 fighter aircraft, in particular, has been highlighted in this context. The F-16 Fighting Falcon is a medium-range interceptor, developed more than 50 years ago. With recent electronic upgrades, the fourth and 4.5th-generation versions are a marvel of engineering and still coveted by many air forces around the world. (A fleet of F-16s was also offered to the Finnish air force, but the government opted for the twin-engine F-18 Hornet, which requires a shorter runway.) Having fighter jets is step one; step two is learning to fly them. And pilot training takes time. Ukraine's fleet of F-16s could ultimately play a critical role in the war – similar to the role played by the extremely effective and disciplined Detachment Kuhlmei and its Stuka dive bombers in halting the Soviet Union's Karelian offensive in 1944. According to my uncle, who was there, the Finnish Infantry Regiment 25 was stuck in what appeared to be a hopeless stalling battle, when Detachment Kuhlmei came to their aid and stopped the enemy in its tracks. Air supremacy is a huge advantage, but a war still cannot be won without boots on the ground. The bloodiest battles have to be fought by the army.

*Should not the intensity of peace efforts be directly – not inversely – proportional to the intensity of war?*

However unjustified an attack and however brutal the invaders' actions, should these actions not be met – as well as with a determined military response – with an even greater effort to restore peace? Should not the intensity of peace efforts be directly proportional to the intensity of war? The peace efforts in the current war appear to be inversely proportional to the war efforts. The war flags are flying high, but where are the insignia of peace? No one will be waving a white flag in this war. Have the fighting talk and propaganda made emotions run so high that there is no room for cool heads on either side? Perhaps it is the historical burden on Ukraine's shoulders and the nation's collective memory, coupled with the scorn felt and shown by Russia for decades, that is ruling out all other options. The Ukrainians should be allowed to decide their own destiny. Unfortunately, they simply do not have the capability. They have the will and determination to fight, but they rely on others for the equipment and skill to win the war. It is up to the Ukrainians to decide whether to pursue peace – but if they wish to continue fighting, they need military help from the outside. And is that help really helping and leading to anything good?

#### **14 Living next door to a powerful country**

Having a powerful neighbour makes for an unpredictable existence – and can be fateful. Finland's entire history has been a fight for survival; not just on the battlefields but also against the elements. Centuries of conflict, hatred and warring between Sweden–Finland and Russia ended in a temporary lull during the Grand Duchy of Finland. Finland had its own currency, its own laws, its own language and its own legislative assembly – all important ingredients of independence. The tranquillity was shattered with the introduction of the Russification policy, which led to years of oppression, military clashes and ultimately Finland's becoming an independent country. Germany became an important ally. After a couple of internally and externally turbulent decades as an independent country, Soviet bombers appeared in the skies above Helsinki in November 1939. Sweden contributed to our defence during the Winter War, and Germany lent a hand during the Continuation War. The Continuation War was Finland's attempt to get even. As the war went on, the Finnish government agreed – albeit after voting on the matter – to hand over Jewish refugees and prisoners of war to Germany. By the end of the Continuation War, Finland relied on Germany not only for military assistance but also for food. The road to peace opened up when the attention of mainland Europe turned to the Race to Berlin. One of the stipulations of the peace treaty was that the Germans would be driven out of Finland's territory by force. Friends became enemies overnight. The Lapland War that followed was successful in expelling the Germans but devastated Lapland in the process. Ingrian and Estonian refugees were deported to the Soviet Union. Huge war reparations had to be paid and war-responsibility trials conducted. The losses of the Winter War were not recouped. The terms of the peace treaty were not what Finland wanted, but they were worth it to end the conflict.

#### **15 From enemies to a mutually beneficial friendship**

The ending of the Continuation War brought with it a desire for de-escalation, a new-found fear of the Soviet Union and, on the other hand, almost a race between Finnish leaders to appease the Soviets and even to pursue some form of integration. Was the process of 'Finlandi-

sation' a necessary evil or, like West Germany saw it, just cowardice? Was the Soviet Union trying peaceful means to achieve what it had been unable to do by force? That could well have been the case. Either way, trade and bilateral relations flourished. Finland made many concessions. Perhaps those sacrifices were necessary for survival, but that did not make them feel any less unfair. Finland had its own defence forces.

The majority of Finns just wanted – and still want – 'peaceful coexistence', as the relationship was termed in the liturgy of de-escalation. Friendship and good relations with the Soviet Union were highly sought-after merits. They often ensured political and commercial success. We have the perfect neighbour to our west. If only we could have a similar relationship with the Bear to the east. Are we now approaching the other extreme? In the media, the spirit of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance that was hailed under President *Kekkonen* appears to have been replaced by almost a competition to be more critical and suspicious of Russia. There is even a campaign offering people a chance to have their personal messages to Russia written on ammunition used by the Ukrainian armed forces. What on earth is going on? The cycle of escalation seems never-ending. Trade has practically ceased. The competition now is over who can be nastier and more venomous. Apart from perhaps scoring a few cheap points from populist voters, what good is that doing? The majority of Finns still just want a quiet life and peaceful neighbourly relations. Unfortunately, peace talks are simply not in vogue at the moment.

#### *The world is suddenly full of 'Russia experts'*

Since the special military operation in Ukraine began, the media have been flooded with analyses by politicians, historians, military personnel and all manner of experts. Not one of them piped up to warn us about the war beforehand. Russia's history is rife with imperialistic aspirations on the one hand and measures aimed at creating and maintaining a sphere of influence on the other. Ukraine has always sat in the middle of the critical geographical area. Russia's aggression stems from the nation's past experiences and extreme patriotism. *Napoleon's* failed invasion and especially Hitler's Operation Barbarossa have left indelible scars on the Russian collective psyche. No analysis should underplay this historical burden and the nation's memories. Finns, too, still bear both physical and psychological scars from the last wars.

The pro-peace statements given by the current Russian leaders years ago are now seen as cover stories, aimed at disguising their true intentions. Is that what they always were? It was believed that constructive cooperation and economic interdependencies would tame the Russian Bear. Under *Putin*, Russia moved ever closer to the European and Western economic community. The possibilities and benefits of economic liberation painted an evocative picture of a prosperous future, which was only occasionally shattered by Russia's unpredictable actions. Some of the world's biggest multinational corporations withdrew from the Russian market due to the country's disorderly politics. Investment and business depend on a stable and predictable operating environment, which Russia was not able to provide. Many stayed, however, and are now paying for their decision. Believing in the better nature of the Bear was a mistake.

Did European arrogance and military and economic supremacy leave enough room for a genuine dialogue with Russia and its leaders? Europeans' belief in the superiority of European

values has been set in stone ever since the Second World War. However, those values stem from a history of bloody wars, cruelty and the Holocaust; it was Europeans who were still murdering people in their millions with industrial precision less than a century ago. The way in which Europeans have treated their colonies and dependencies is no better than what we are now seeing and experiencing in Ukraine. Now is not the time to compromise on democracy and European values but touting them or expecting others to uphold European standards must not lead to haughtiness or callous critique. Our history does not afford us such vacuous hypocrisy. Showing humility – as well as a genuine willingness to help – could well elicit a better response. Preaching, no matter how well intentioned, is not the answer. That we know for a fact. What works for one may not work for another. *'Pull, Don't Push!'* is the motto of one very successful business. There will always be something wrong and someone in distress somewhere in the world. Instead of criticising, we need to listen and do what we can, when we can, to help. No one is perfect. The clichéd slogan 'What can we do for you?' would also make a great catchphrase for European politics. Being a force for good in today's world requires both moral and military strength.

### **16 Russian patriotic pride and erosion of democracy**

Did the Russian leader – a patriotic and passionate defender of the Russian language and people – feel that he was being shunned by other great leaders and not given the respect he wanted? Did he feel left out and that he had been denied the level of influence he craved? Is this what made him so extreme in his policies? Russia spent the decades following the fall of the Soviet Union upgrading its military capabilities to a new level. Some saw parallels with German rearmament in the 1930s, but there did not – at least according to European media – appear to be any particular cause for concern. For most, Russia's rebuilding its decrepit military seemed like a reasonable and prudent move. Was Russia in fact making preparations for war? There were many who criticised Russia's political shift away from democracy and waxed moralistic about the rapid crumbling of Russian democracy and the return of Soviet totalitarianism. Even these 'experts' generally missed the rising military threat. Democracies eroding and shifting towards totalitarianism is a dangerous phenomenon, and there is rarely a peaceful, non-violent route back. This is sadly just a fact. Was what is now happening with Russia the result of a change of direction or the original plan? One Finnish presidential hopeful who had previously spoken out against Russophobia was among the first to realise his naïvety when Russia launched its military campaign in Georgia. Many of us were happier just ignoring what was going on – the conflict was far away and 'not that serious'. However, the time of peace and respect for existing borders had already come to an end.

Some believe that humiliation and a sense of inferiority breed nationalist extremism. This is what happened in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s. Russia is especially bitter over Kosovo. The Kremlin felt that the interests of Russia and Russian-speaking people were not taken into account and that the resolution was nothing more than a unilateral edict sprinkled with military intimidation. The outcome of the Kosovo War still irks Moscow. Russia also felt threatened by the EU's role in Ukraine's Orange Revolution. There was less and less bridge building. The Minsk agreements were meant to be followed up, but never were. There were, of course, obvious reasons for this. Hopes of harmony were squashed, and the paths of Russia and Europe began to diverge. Europe had believed that economic interdependencies and the bless-

ings of trade would keep the Bear sated. They did not. Instead of a bond, the same economic interdependencies that were intended to promote peace and prosperity were turned into a ferocious weapon. Europe had, of course, been warned. But did anyone listen? Did Ukraine? The gulf created by disagreements and distrust widened and took on a paranoid dimension. The breakdown of relations culminated – albeit only cosmetically – in the EU's calling Russia a kleptocracy. In the grand scheme of events, this insult was actually rather mild.

## **17 What happens next?**

The gruelling war is currently limited to Ukraine's territory. Unless the battles spill over to Russia, the Kremlin has enough arsenal to keep the war going for years and years. Ukraine is getting destroyed more every day, and it has already lost its mojo. The country is completely dependent on military, economic and humanitarian aid from other countries – and will ultimately need a rebuilding programme similar to the Marshall Plan. For how long can this go on? Is the West really prepared to keep supporting the increasingly uncompromising Ukrainian leadership indefinitely? After all, that is the official line. Not everyone agrees, however.

If we start from the premise that ending the conflict is a better option than prolonged war, what are the conditions for achieving peace and what are the obstacles that must be overcome? The focus should be on the future and a rational approach. Emotions must be put on the back burner, even if they cannot be completely switched off. The relentless war is only adding fuel to the emotional fire. The healing process will be a long one and requires an atmosphere of peace and trust. The leaders' egos also have to be taken out of the equation. It sometimes seems as though both are just in a rush to add their names to the historical gallery of great men and superheroes. Human weaknesses are rarely informed by sense or reason. There is a long list of world leaders whose views were so set in stone that nothing could have been done to prevent the devastation that ensued. This is what happened to Nazi Germany towards the end of the Second World War, when military defeat was already unavoidable. It took a cyanide capsule and a bullet to stop its leader.

It is up to the Ukrainians to decide their destiny. That must not, however, prevent others from looking for a compromise and a way out of the conflict. The first hurdle could be the language. Despite linguistic similarities, Russian and Ukrainian are – especially from an emotional perspective – two distinct languages. Bilingualism or multilingualism is hardly an obstacle to peaceful coexistence. We in Finland know it, the Canadians know it and there are also dozens of different languages spoken in Russia. Only a fraction of Italians speak Italian as Dante intended. The way you speak in France reveals your level of education.

The black-and-white nature of the concept and doctrine of sovereignty often gets in the way of rational approaches. It may well be one of the most destructive doctrines in international law and the whole of human history. The doctrine of sovereignty – along with the norm of non-intervention – has enabled, and is still enabling, some of the darkest moments and ages of humankind. The doctrine of sovereignty gives legitimacy to these injustices and oppression. Instead, the focus and criteria should be based around human rights and the bona fide efforts of those in power to promote human rights – as naïve as that may sound. Would it really matter which system of government was followed as long as human rights were respected? In the business world, a genuine political will to create conditions that promote human

rights would be called 'best endeavours'. Only power that is used to take all the steps that are prudent in the circumstances is legitimate.

Power and the closely related concept of sovereignty almost invariably – barring a few isolated exceptions such as India – have their origins in the use or threat of overwhelming violence. Overwhelming violence is also needed to keep and maintain power. This usually involves monopolising violence and instruments of violence – whether between nations or individuals. There are countries that give their citizens a constitutional right to bear arms, and this right is seen as a guarantee for the preservation of democracy and the safety of individuals. The list of examples is almost endless. Countries that were created by violence and that are maintained by violence have had their sovereignty and status in the eyes of international law recognised regardless of whether human rights are in any way factored into their legal system or internal governance. Fear remains the most powerful weapon – for good or evil – that the world has ever known.

Shared sovereignty with elements designed to protect minorities can be one way to achieve peace. The Grand Duchy of Finland was one example; Austria could be considered another. A similar solution would not be impossible in Ukraine. The eastern and western parts of the country would have their own arrangements, and perhaps also Crimea. Security guarantees would provide a framework within which rebuilding could begin. The system would have to be dynamic so that any issues that remain or arise later can be dealt with and resolved flexibly. For a peace treaty to be acceptable to Ukraine, it must provide not only for security guarantees and human rights but also for at least a gradual withdrawal of Russian forces from the occupied regions. Solid security guarantees are a must for Ukraine. As much as we might not see the need to give security guarantees to Russia, this can surely be arranged to remove this particular concern – whether real, fictional or a product of paranoia – from the rhetoric and achieve lasting peace.

The Åland Islands are a good example of how a territorial dispute can be resolved in a mutually satisfactory way while giving the local population autonomy and equal rights. The demilitarisation of the islands – although probably originally a necessity – has turned out to be a benefit. The arrangement has not led to rising tensions or left a bitter taste in anyone's mouth – quite the opposite. Sometimes demilitarisation is necessary to eliminate suspicion and distrust. Even Finlandisation was not – despite certain neo-populist claims – a doctrine of shameful spinelessness or treasonous power grabbing but a policy that ensured peace and helped to build trust and prosperity.

## **18 Ukraine's objectives**

The Ukrainian President has repeatedly declared that the war will not end until the whole of Ukraine, including Crimea, has been freed from Russian occupation. His objective is justified and almost heroic, but extremely difficult to achieve. How long would it realistically take to reach this goal, and does Ukraine have the necessary military competence and resources? Is this goal in the best interests of the Ukrainian people? If the Ukrainian leadership insists on maintaining its uncompromising stance, could an outside party be brought in to look for a solution that satisfies both sides?

Practically all the fighting so far has taken place on Ukraine's territory. Russia is ravaging the country. Ukraine's own forces are adding to the destruction with their efforts to regain

lost territory. There is unlikely to be a white flag. Millions of Ukrainians have already fled the country. Only some are planning to return. The fighting is getting more and more intense. The country and its natural life-support systems are being destroyed. What are the Ukrainian leadership's options? Is an absolute military victory even possible? Would it not make more sense to settle for a compromise – even a bitter one – if it means that the country and its people keep their freedom, Russia withdraws its troops and rebuilding can begin?

What if refusing to settle would mean no more military assistance? Russia is unlikely to run out of steam. The huge country has almost endless resources and could easily keep fighting its less powerful neighbour for decades to come. Will the Ukrainians' legendary fighting spirit ultimately destroy everything they were fighting for? Is that really the only option, the smartest choice, the best way? Should we not be looking for a solution that would also satisfy Russia and allow it to retreat without losing face? Should not proactive efforts be made to find out what that could be? If war remains the only way to resolve the conflict, the Ukrainian leadership and the country's heroic army may well end up defending the deserted pile of rubble that Ukraine is rapidly becoming for years – or at least for as long as they have outside help. Is this a mega version of a Pyrrhic victory in the making?

## **19 Conclusions**

A government's role is to ensure a country's external and internal security and the rights of its citizens. When it comes to international relations, only power and composure ultimately matter. It takes military strength to protect and maintain that which is good. That must not be compromised. Everything can change overnight. We in Finland know it, Russia knows it – and now Ukraine knows it too. In a country in crisis, the collective psyche and the powerful emotions that it evokes can lead to blindness and rash decisions. These obstacles can perhaps only be overcome with the help of an impartial mediator.

My personal wish list has long included a policy that would see some of our military being trained not just to fight but also to help in catastrophes abroad on a rapid-response basis. These forces could look for survivors, provide medical assistance, maintain order and security, coordinate the work of humanitarian aid organisations and run logistics in the disaster zone. This could be our 'what we can do for you'. Global demand for such a service far exceeds current supply. Despite everything, I remain hopeful and perhaps naïvely optimistic. There must be room for hope and optimism in the world. On the other hand, we Finns can do whatever we set our minds to do.

We need to stand firmly with Ukraine – and we are. But we should not forget about the pursuit of peace either. Is it really not possible to end the conflict without persisting with the war? As well as providing military support, should it not be just as, if not more, important to look for a way to peace? Are we going to wait until we see the Ukrainian leaders still stubbornly keeping up their defence long after the country has been reduced to a pile of rubble? The cost of such heroism could well become the bloodiest lesson in world history.