

<https://www.fr.de/kultur/gesellschaft/soziologe-wolfgang-streeck-die-amerikanermeinen-es-bitterernst-92108110.html>

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## **Sociologist Streeck in an interview: "The Americans are taking it very seriously "**

*Sociologist, Wolfgang Streeck on the necessity of the "Manifesto for Peace" [1] and the danger for Germany of being drawn into the war.*

### **About the person**

Wolfgang Streeck, born in 1946, was director of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies in Cologne until 2014. He is a member of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities and the British Academy, as well as an Honorary Fellow of the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics.

His book "Bought Time - The Adjourned Crisis of Democratic Capitalism" was nominated for the Leipzig Book Fair Prize in 2013. Streeck is a co-signatory of the "Manifesto for Peace" initiated by Sahra Wagenknecht and Alice Schwarzer.

**Mr. Streeck, you signed the [Manifesto for Peace](#), an initiative of Alice Schwarzer and Sahra Wagenknecht, which calls for a halt to arms deliveries to Ukraine and the opening of negotiations with Russia. Do you think the Russians are currently willing to negotiate?**

I don't know. What I do know is that the current Ukrainian government, with Mr. Melnyk as Deputy Foreign Minister, is avowedly not: or only after prior Russian capitulation. How this behaves on the Russian side would have to be found out, and especially whether strategically formulated public statements are meant as they sound. Diplomats, as we know, are trained and not badly paid to find common ground, even in seemingly hopeless conflicts, which outweighs the different interests that led to the war.

Incidentally, in the fall of 2021, [Russia](#) repeatedly asked the United States to negotiate a series of Russian memoranda on the [Ukraine conflict](#); this was rejected. Even after the war began, there were direct negotiations between Russia and [Ukraine](#), mediated, among others, by Israeli Prime Minister Bennett; these ended inconclusively - according to Bennett's statement, which he later half-retracted, as a result of American and British interventions on the Ukrainian side.



Gräber gefallener Soldaten in der Ukraine. © IMAGO/ZUMA Wire

Graves of fallen soldiers in the Ukraine

And finally, I refuse to imagine that a civilized country like Germany does not repeatedly try everything humanly possible to end a horrible war like the one in Ukraine (all wars are horrible) as quickly as possible. This is not about computer games, but about the killing and dying of real people - per day, if the estimates are correct, about a thousand, mostly young men, on both sides.

***Russia has repeatedly stressed that the territories it occupies must be accepted as Russian territory in an agreement, an unacceptable demand from Ukraine's point of view. How, nevertheless, should a compromise be reached?***

All those who are seriously concerned with the issue know basically what the outcome of this war will be: namely, something like the Minsk agreements - not dissimilar, by the way, to the political platform on which [Zelensky](#) was elected by a three-quarters majority of the Ukrainian people in 2019. That is, Crimea will remain with Russia (its final status will be decided at some point in the future), the Russian-speaking areas of Ukraine will receive a special status, with extensive autonomy, under international supervision, and Ukraine will remain neutral, i.e., approved, among other things, unlike the Russian-speaking areas of Ukraine.

The tragedy is that everyone knows that something like this will come out in the end, but no one knows how to make it come out now and not after several years of a bloody war of attrition. And the longer the war lasts, the more irreconcilable the warring parties become; we know that, too.

***The manifesto gives the impression that there are no talks. But there have been from the beginning, politicians like Scholz and Macron felt personally lied to by Putin. Who is to blame for the fact that negotiations have not been possible for so long, if not Putin?***

I was not there. But after Mrs. Merkel claimed that she and Hollande had only negotiated the Minsk agreements to buy Ukraine time to continue rearming, [Putin](#) could also feel lied to. However, I don't believe that these were sham negotiations on her part; talking her way out of her policies when they are no longer popular is part of the way she has been successful for sixteen years. Merkel and Sarkozy, Germany and France, were looking for a European way out of the looming Ukraine war (Normandy format), one without the United States, which was anything but happy about it.

The Merkel-Sarkozy initiative was similar to the refusal of Schröder and Chirac in 2003 to invade Iraq in the wake of the United States, with the result, you will recall, that in America the French Fries were renamed Freedom Fries, but only for a short time. Incidentally, in wars there is always lying, very rarely between the bosses, as John Mearsheimer has shown, but all the more so with regard to the populations, both one's own and that of the enemy. There is a bad reason for this: it is a matter of life and death, a war is not a confessional or a philosophical seminar. As soon as one is at war, it is no longer a matter of truth, but of "narratives": If it serves one's own victory, one must and may lie. This is another reason why wars must be avoided or ended as soon as possible: they are not only detrimental to life, but also to good morals.

***Many fear that a bad peace deal could further increase Russia's appetite for land. It would be a kind of Pyrrhic victory. Is this fear unjustified?***

So, any "peace deal" is a good one: it puts an end to butchery. In the present case, however, I would prefer to speak of a ceasefire, which can be used to think about how to get out of the mess. Also, a "peace deal," as you put it, as if it were a used car, is not a "victory" (except for reason), and certainly not a "Pyrrhic victory."

As for the core of your question, I don't think anyone seriously fears that a Russian army that was not even able, and is now less able than ever, will conquer Kiev (750 kilometers from Moscow)! Incidentally, in the negotiations between the United States and Russia after the end of the Soviet Union, under Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin, it was made clear again and again from the Russian side that Ukraine would be a *casus belli*, not Czechoslovakia, not Romania, not even the Baltic states, as much as the Russians did not want to see them in the Western alliance. Everyone knew that Ukraine was one state too many in the rounding out of NATO after the end of the Soviet Union.

***The argument is put forward that Ukraine cannot defeat a nuclear power - while Vietnam and also Afghanistan have shown that it can be done.***

The comparison is skewed in the most ridiculous way imaginable. The USA is located on a huge island continent and is therefore unassailable by conventional means. If they lose land wars anywhere in the world, as they do more or less all the time, they can retreat to their continent, where no one can follow them. They have lost a war, but not their country or their state.

It is different in Russia. The victory against Russia, which the current Ukrainian government envisions, but probably also the German foreign minister, with Putin as a prisoner, which then ends before a Hague tribunal, requires an invasion of the Ukrainian army in Moscow, together with their allies needed for this, whoever would join the front of the belligerent powers, perhaps Poland, perhaps "Europe", perhaps Germany under a Chancellor Baerbock, just as these Soviet troops invaded Berlin in 1945.

If such an invasion were to materialize, Russia would resort to its nuclear battlefield weapons. What would happen then is written in the stars, but it would certainly not be a "victory for Ukraine".

***Some believe that the US virtually engineered the Russian invasion a year ago. The U.S. benefits with its energy industry; journalist Seymour Hersh stated that the Americans blew up the Nord Stream pipelines. How do you assess the role of the USA in the conflict with Russia?***

This is a long story that has spanned three decades; the 1990s are documented in detail in M. E. Sarotte's book, "Not One Inch". The USA certainly did not want the invasion; just as certainly as it risked it. That said, I would like to know if there is anyone, to use commissary jargon, who does not put on their pants with a pinch, who does not believe that the pipeline was blown up by the US military on Biden's orders. The role of the USA, as by far the largest military power in the world, was central from the beginning. By the way, to return to the subject of negotiations, it will be the USA, and no one else, who will negotiate, if at all, with Russia on an end to the war. "We" - Germany, but also France and the EU - will have nothing to negotiate, just as little as in the fall of 2021 or in the two Bennett negotiations.

***Putin always cited what he saw as the threat of Ukraine's membership in NATO. But according to Western politicians, this was never on the agenda after 2008. How do you assess the role of the West as a contributor to the war?***

After 2008, after Russia's NATO membership failed because of Merkel and Sarkozy, the United States, led largely by Vice President Biden in his role as Obama's Ukraine envoy (2009-2017) and Victoria Nuland in the State Department ("Fuck the EU"), focused on admitting Ukraine to NATO as a de facto substitute for formal membership. From then on, Ukraine was for years the country with the highest annual growth in defence spending, sponsored by the United States. In 2020, NATO declared that it had achieved the "interoperability" it had long sought with Ukraine, i.e. the mutual coordination of military and command structures that is obligatory for NATO members.

***In your book, you recently referred to the Franco-German conflict. Do you see this as a confirmation of the centrifugal forces within the EU?***

To my horror, I have recently seen this confirmed more and more often. Europe is incapable of acting if Germany and France do not act together as they did in 2003 and 2008. France does not dare to come out of the woodwork on the Russian question as long as Germany does not join in; Germany does not dare to come out of the woodwork as long as France cannot offer it a substitute for its nuclear assurance from the USA.

Negotiations have been going on in the background for years, but they are leading nowhere. The extent to which Germany is under US curatorship is shown by the silent acceptance of the pipeline blow-ups, but not only that. Germany is, after Okinawa, the area of the world with the largest American troop contingent — 35,000, if I am informed correctly — and a gigantic military infrastructure that coordinates, among other things, all operations of the American military and the CIA in the Middle East. This infrastructure includes an unknown number of nuclear warheads which, if necessary, can be dropped on American orders by German Tornados on targets specified by the United States ("nuclear sharing" is the name of the game). I repeat: these are not computer games, this is real large-scale killing and dying.

***Do you fear an escalation of the war to an international war?***

It is already an international war. You mean, could Germany be drawn into the war? Well, yes. Fierce efforts from all sides in this direction have been underway for a long time, and if the Russians march forward again on the battlefields of Ukraine, they will increase. For the USA, it would be ideal to join Great Britain in conscripting Germany as the local commander of a long territorial war of attrition. The pro-Ukraine rhetoric of the German Greens is already preparing for this. They describe the war in such Manichean tones that one understands less and less why one can want not to be a war party. If Putin is what he is claimed to be, can we leave the Ukrainians to die alone in the fight for their final victory, which would supposedly be ours as well?

***Aren't Biden and Scholz two politicians who fear precisely this danger of escalation, which is the reason for the manifesto, and who base their policies on it?***

For me, there has been far too much judgment in the whole matter for a long time. Since his time as Obama's Ukraine envoy, Biden has had Ukraine on his radar as a means of exerting pressure against Russia. Great powers are like that. After his army had to flee Afghanistan, the escalation around Ukraine may have been convenient for him to shut down his domestic critics; I suspect that the refusal in the fall of 2021 to negotiate with Russia also had to do with not wanting to show "weakness" after Afghanistan.

Today, his problem is to keep the "escalation," as you call it, under control in such a way that the Ukraine war will bind Russia militarily and ruin it economically for years, while at the same time holding NATO together under American leadership in the fear of its master in such a way that it cannot refuse out-of-area missions in Asia, also, but not only, in the form of an economic boycott of China. The "player" here is Biden or the American Congress, not Scholz. As far as Scholz is concerned, one can only hope that he will manage to somehow weasel Germany out of this future; the prospects for this are not good, at least as long as the Greens are in government. The Americans, you can be sure, are bitterly serious. Ukraine and Europe are only the prelude.

***What do you think will happen next?***

Actually, this question is not so difficult to answer. I see two paths, one negotiated between the USA and Russia, with [China](#) in the background, the other unilaterally dictated by the USA

to the Western alliance. As far as [a negotiated solution is concerned, China](#) would prohibit Russia, which is now dependent on it, from defending itself with nuclear weapons in an extreme emergency, while the USA would have to commit not to let such an extreme emergency occur. This would mean that the Ukraine would have to give up its current war aims (reconquest of Crimea, Putin in court in The Hague) more or less silently. In substance, this would amount to a kind of Minsk-style peace agreement. This would be a serious disappointment for the radical faction of the Ukrainian national movement, which, with the support of the USA and Great Britain, began sometime around 2014 to end the rather compromising course of their country and its oligarchs.

### ***What would be the alternative?***

Alternatively, the USA would reject negotiations under Chinese mediation and leave it to Germany to ensure that Ukraine can remain in the war business despite its unrealizable war aims. Germany would then, in a sense, take over the consortium leadership in Europe within NATO for the long years of a war of attrition, as it is already doing with the tanks, with all the consequences including, if things go too well for Russia, a gradually building direct war participation, for instance at the head of a "European army".

In any case, Moscow could not be conquered in any other way, not even in a "narrative". At the same time, the USA would turn to the preparation of a Far Eastern war against China, for instance over Taiwan. For the peoples of Europe, including the Ukraine, this would be a single, huge, protracted catastrophe. We can only hope that a Chinese-mediated negotiated solution will save Germany from having to reconquer Crimea for Ukraine alongside the current Ukrainian government, which always includes Bandera fan Melnyk. We have already been told that not only fighter planes would be needed for this, but also — at first, but certainly not last — fragmentation and incendiary bombs.

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### **Reference**

1. Manifesto for Peace <https://www.change.org/p/manifest-für-frieden?redirect=false>

### **Translation:**

Today is the 352nd day of war in Ukraine (10.2.2023). Over 200,000 soldiers and 50,000 civilians have been killed so far. Women have been raped, children frightened, an entire nation traumatized. If the fighting continues like this, Ukraine will soon be a depopulated, destroyed country. And many people throughout Europe are also afraid of an expansion of the war. They fear for their future and that of their children.

The Ukrainian people, brutally invaded by Russia, need our solidarity. But what would be solidarity now? How much longer should fighting and dying continue on the battlefield of Ukraine? And what is now, one year later, actually the goal of this war? The German foreign minister recently spoke of "us" waging a "war against Russia." Seriously?

President Zelensky makes no secret of his goal. After the promised tanks, he is now demanding fighter jets, long-range missiles and warships - to defeat Russia across the board? The German chancellor still assures that he does not want to send fighter jets or "ground troops." But how many "red lines" have already been crossed in recent months? It is to be feared that Putin will launch a maximum counterattack at the latest in the event of an attack on Crimea. Are we then heading inexorably down a slippery slope toward world war and nuclear war? It would not be the first major war that has started this way. But it might be the last.

Ukraine can win individual battles - supported by the West. But it cannot win a war against the world's largest nuclear power. That's what the U.S.'s top military man, General Milley, says. He speaks of a stalemate in which neither side can win militarily and the war can only be ended at the negotiating table. Then why not now? Immediately.

Negotiating does not mean surrendering. Negotiating means making compromises, on both sides. With the goal of preventing further hundreds of thousands of deaths and worse. That's what we think too, that's what half of the German population thinks. It is time to listen to us!

We citizens of Germany cannot directly influence America and Russia or our European neighbours. But we can and must hold our government and the Chancellor to account and remind him of his oath: "To avert harm from the German people."

We call on the Chancellor to stop the escalation of arms deliveries. Now! He should lead a strong alliance for a ceasefire and for peace negotiations on the German as well as on the European level. Now! Because every lost day costs up to 1,000 more lives - and brings us closer to a 3rd world war.

**Alice Schwarzer and Sahra Wagenknecht**