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May Germany Initiate A New Global Policy?

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Before our eyes clearly stands the danger of a double catastrophe: The world economy is at the point of plunging flat-out into a Depression; simultaneously there threatens—from a “horizontal” spreading-out against additional nations, of military operations in West Asia and the Middle East, which is right now being vigorously discussed among certain Anglo-American circles—a dynamic which soon will no longer be controlled by anyone, and which could end in a Third World War.

The long-developing systemic collapse of the world financial system has entered its end-phase: the Argentine default; the increasing consequences this threatens to have for American and Spanish banks, and thereby the rest [of the world's banks]; similar developments which are showing themselves in Poland, Turkey, and other so-called emerging markets; the debt crisis in the United States; the depression in Japan—the list of Achilles' heels could be continued; the system is irreversibly at its end.

At the same time the military operation in Afghanistan, after three weeks of bombardment, has led nowhere, according to its military expectations, but in humanitarian terms, to a potential holocaust of 7.5 million human beings. Its spread to Iraq, Syria, Sudan, for example, or by the proxy of a military strike by Israel against its neighbors, could have incalculable consequences. The destabilization of the Musharraf government in Pakistan, with potential conflict between the two nuclear powers, India and Pakistan, would be an acute danger, along with the destabilization of the

moderate governments of that region, and the sinking of Central Asia into tumult and chaos. The result would perhaps be a longer religious war—or as the former CIA chief [James] Woolsey says, at least a 100-years war: exactly the “War of Civilizations” long propagandized by Samuel Huntington.

Either of these two processes alone, taken by itself, can lead to chaos; but should both of them erupt unhindered, the plunge of mankind into a new dark age would be certain.

The German Predicament

The question we must put to ourselves, here in Berlin, is this: Can Germany, in light of this predicament, and the complex existing strategic situation, take a significant political initiative?

It is urgent that we in Germany overcome the already almost genetically conditioned prohibition of [our] thinking, which follows roughly this chain of argument: “Germany is only an intermediate power; we have twice opposed America in world wars and lost; we don't want to pass that way again; therefore, ‘unconditional solidarity with America’; and thus, send the Bundeswehr [Army] into West Asia and the Middle East!” Unconditional solidarity with what? With depression, war, and chaos? How is this paradox to be solved?

To begin with, Germany has—despite the frequently incomprehensible behavior of its governments—a steadily increasing esteem and authority among the nations of Eurasia and those of the Southern Hemisphere; and many hoped that after its unification, it would pursue a policy more in its own interests—in vain, as we know. Yet in this dramatic and highly dangerous world situation, Germany can contribute the lessons of its own history to the solution of the two most important questions: namely, how depression and war are to be overcome.

From every standpoint, the fundamentals of the world economy, leaving aside a few exceptions such as China, are today in a worse state than in the Depression of the 1930s. Nevertheless, the same methods remain valid in overcoming them. The positive example of Franklin D. Roosevelt is known. Less known, but thereby just as momentous for its having been neglected, is the Lautenbach Plan.

The Lautenbach Plan

On Sept. 16-17, 1931, a secret conference of the Friedrich List Society took place, in which the chief of the Reichsbank at that time, Dr. Hans Luther, and 30 other leading authorities in economics, finance, and politics participated. The primary presentation was made by Dr. Wilhelm Lautenbach, an important economist and official of the Ministry of Economics. In his memorandum, Lautenbach set forth why, under the simultaneous conditions of depression and breakdown of the financial system, normal market mechanisms no longer work (thus, exactly as it is today); thus also, why tax reductions and austerity measures against spending, only accelerate unem-

ployment and the fall of production.

There can be only one way out of this downward spiral: If the state, through the stimulus financing of infrastructure and projects that unleash and expand idle productive capacities, brings the economy as a whole into a recovery. If this involves projects which are in the interest of the general welfare, which should [have been] invested in anyway, even if the economy were going well, then the tax revenues will thereafter be greater—because of the general stimulating effect—than the [cost of the] original credit-financing.

The Lautenbach Plan was not realized then, in time. [Economics Minister] Hjalmar Schacht later certainly made use of aspects of the Lautenbach Plan. It is one of the tragic moments of German history, that the pathway out [of the Depression] proposed by Lautenbach was not taken in time. Had that happened, the economic crisis would have been overcome, and with it the unemployment and [social] conditions which made possible Hitler's seizure of power. The Second World War would not have taken place. That is the first lesson Germany has to contribute, as to how war can be prevented before it is begun.

The Peace of Westphalia

The second question is, how a wrongful war can be brought to an end. Already, the situation in West Asia and the Middle East is a living Hell; relations between the Israelis, and the Palestinians and other Arabs, are characterized by enmity or hatred. In the case of a spread of the military action beyond Afghanistan—which, in reality, would be prolonged into a War of Civilizations lasting years, indeed, perhaps lasting 100 years—the result would be the death of millions, if not billions of human beings, and the brutalization and slide into barbarism of the survivors. Everything which we regard as the accomplishments of Christian European culture, and also of Islam, would be destroyed.

In Europe, we have experienced what ruin was caused by the Thirty Years religious war, from 1618 to 1648. When, after four years of negotiations, the conclusion of the Peace of Westphalia was finally achieved, a Treaty was formulated, which comprehensively set forth, for the first time, the idea of an association of states resting upon national sovereignty. The entirety of the international rights of peoples, as this has been developed through the UN Charter, is built on these principles. They are also the sole way in which groups, made enemies by religious and ideological questions, can find peace.

Article I of the text of the Treaty demands, that the relations of previously hostile parties be placed on the basis of a “general, permanent peace” and a “truer and more honest friendship,” and “be honestly and seriously held and nurtured in such a manner that each party [must] promote the benefit, honor, and advantage of the other.” Thus it is demanded, in so many words, that the relation be founded not upon hatred, but upon *agapē*.

Article II reads—and I quote it here, because it is not generally known:

“On both sides, all should be forever forgotten and forgiven—what has happened in terms of hostility from the beginning of the unrest, no matter how or where, from one side or the other—so that neither because of that, nor for any other reason or pretext, should anyone commit, or allow to happen, any hostility, unfriendliness, difficulty, or obstacle in respect to persons, their status, goods, or security itself, or through others, secretly or openly, directly or indirectly, under the pretense of the authority of the law, or by way of violence within the Kingdom, or anywhere outside of it, and any earlier contradictory treaties should not stand against this. Rather, each and every one [of these things], from one side and the other, both before and during the war, whether insults, violent acts, hostilities, damages, or injuries, inflicted with words, writings, or actions, and without any regard to persons or causes, should be completely put aside; so that everything which one side could demand from another on such account be buried in everlasting oblivion.”

Without this approach, neither will the conflict in West Asia and the Middle East be solved, nor that of any one of the other crisis regions of the world, in which wars have alternately smoldered or raged for a century. If we cannot make this concept our own today, in the face of the threatening worldwide conflagration, then nothing, absolutely nothing of our civilization will be saved.

Besides *agapē* in foreign relations and the principle of permanent forgiveness as the pre-requisite of peace, the Peace of Westphalia brought about still another decisive innovation: namely, the role of the state in the economic reconstruction after the devastation; and thereby began a tradition which, with Leibniz's concept of *physical economy*, became the basis of all successful periods of economic development since.

Therefore, war avoidance can be seen in a pure, theoretical economic form, as it was applied in the Lautenbach Plan; and in securing the peace after a wrongful war, as occurred in the period following the Peace of Westphalia through state-directed economic assistance; [and] just the same as in Germany, in the Reconstruction phase after the Second World War.

I believe that Germany has the right and the duty to place the experience from the Thirty Years War and the Second World War on the agenda, within the authoritative body of the international community of nations.

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