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If Russia wins, one year on



Rainer Zitelmann

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Vladimir Putin's path to Los Angeles 2028 is being cleared as key vote last week goes the way of Russia and Belarus.

A year on from the publication of Carlo Masala's *If Russia Wins*, its warning about the West's complacency are more important than ever, says Rainer Zitelmann

One year ago, Carlo Masala, the renowned German professor of security and defence policy, completed his book "Wenn Russland gewinnt" ("If Russia Wins"). Unfortunately, the book, which is meant as a warning, is today more relevant than ever. In Germany, it reached number one on the bestseller list.

Masala does not sketch an apocalyptic vision of a Third World War, nor a scenario of a large-scale Russian attack on Europe. In his view, a Russian victory in the Ukraine war already exists if Russia is able to retain the territory it currently occupies. In his scenario, he assumed that a de facto dictated peace would allow Russia to keep 20 per cent of Ukraine. The West deceives itself into believing that the annexation would not be recognized under international law, while in Russia champagne corks are popping and victory is being celebrated – such is the scenario.

But does it stop there? Many people in the West today console themselves with the thought that a Russia weakened after the Ukraine war would hardly be willing or able to seek the next adventure and attack NATO. Masala's scenario is different: a few years after the end of the Ukraine war, Russia attacks the small city of Narva in Estonia, under the pretext of protecting Russians living there.

The attack is deliberately kept so “small” that, on the one hand, NATO territory is violated, while on the other hand politicians and public opinion in the United States and Western Europe ask themselves whether one really wants to risk a world war over a small city with 57,000 inhabitants.

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Masala's scenario: only the Eastern Europeans recognize the real risk involved if NATO does not respond effectively. But the United States and Western Europe back down. Despite all verbal assurances, after the end of the Ukraine war the Western Europeans failed to implement the necessary strengthening of military capabilities. “Nowhere can it be conveyed to the population that even more should be spent on defence and that savings must therefore be made in social spending, pensions, or care. Only in the Central and Eastern European countries as well as in the Baltic states does the perception of threat remain consistently high.”

Appeasement

Masala criticizes Western appeasement policy, which already had – and continues to have – such fatal consequences in the Ukraine war. The most effective tool of the Russians is repeatedly stoking fear of the use of nuclear weapons. “Every military aid delivery to Ukraine was made under the fear scenario of a possible nuclear escalation, always came too late in view of the military situation, and was always too little to put the

country in a position to successfully defend itself against Russia. The lesson Russia draws from these experiences is that nuclear threats work to deter the opposing side from taking certain measures."

Otherwise, Russia's success cannot be explained, because economically the country is much, much weaker than Europe, and its military capabilities are also – as the Ukraine war shows – far weaker than was assumed before the war began.

But Russia is counting on the weakness of the West – it has its apologists and allies among politicians on the far right and far left, who deliberately downplay the danger and skillfully appeal to people's fears with pseudo-pacifist slogans. Russia's strength lies in the fear and weakness of the West – this assessment by Masala is unfortunately highly topical.

In his scenario, Masala has the French president from the Rassemblement National say: "One has seen how the war-mongering countries not only almost ruined their own economies, but also unnecessarily dragged out this war – whose final outcome could already have been achieved a year and a half earlier – and thereby deprived thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of Ukrainians of the chance to still be alive today." This cynicism is reminiscent of someone who does not come to the aid of a drowning person, actively stirs up opposition to helping him – and then, after he has drowned, triumphantly and self-righteously says: "You see, I said it from the start, he was going to drown."

Masala's scenario is frighteningly realistic, precisely because it is not an apocalyptic doomsday scenario, but merely extrapolates what we have been able to observe since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine 12 years ago.

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