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**The West needs more Antiwesternism**  
**By Jörg Lau**

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Currently I have the feeling that our perception of the world here in the West could use a strong dose of Antiwesternism, as an antidote for a pervasive self-righteousness in the midst of crisis.

Why do I find it such a joke when I hear that NATO is the most successful alliance in history (as Defence Minister de Maizière expressed in TIME last week, and as repeated by each speaker at the NATO Summit in Chicago)?

It surely is true, if one thinks of the Cold War and its conquest, that the eastward expansion of the alliance promoted the unification of Europe? Yes, yes, but the problem is the present, current context of this claim. Against the forces of the dictator Gaddafi, the Alliance barely avoided bankruptcy. If the Americans had not pushed the precision munitions, the matter would have ended painfully.

In Afghanistan, meanwhile, the sprint to the exit has started. The Dutch and French have had enough and are withdrawing before the agreed deadlines. Last week, German diplomats tried to smooth over that fact by pointing out that the French were no longer so important, and that they were concerned about possible complications in the province without an early transition.

Really? Even the departure at the end of 2014 was due to western needs, not to progress made in training the Afghan security forces (who repeatedly fire on their partners and trainers).

After 11 September NATO was believed to have resolved its post-Soviet identity crisis. The new enemy of the international jihadist terrorism, which was taking root in failing states like Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen, made the question of meaning obsolete. But NATO has not been compatible to the fight against terrorism. From beginning to end, there was controversy about the mandates and the commitment of each partner, as expressed in the American joke, ISAF, which stands for "I Saw Americans Fighting". And even if it had taken place under unified Allied auspices, the great project of Afghanistan would also have failed. For years now I have witnessed in German party briefings a permanent reduction of expectations for nation building. Perhaps rightly so: we now expect nothing more than stability (if

democracy and human rights cannot be achieved), the absence of too-blatant human rights violations (which may force a re-intervention) and the absence of aggressive terrorist attacks (as we welcome the integration of Taliban into the government under the headline of "national reconciliation").

NATO will have to ask itself, whether this 12-year war was necessary, or if it could have achieved the desired results in the fight against terrorism without resorting to the use of airstrikes, drone war and special operations.

The truth is that NATO is exhausted and tired, and even more unclear of their *raison d'être* than after the fall of communism. What they deem to be the truth of their alliance expresses itself not in the religious summit communiqué, but in their military budget, and the decline continues. That is not necessarily bad: we have no enemies who can fight with the means that NATO has.

But it lacks the courage to say so. Instead, it is investing in a missile defense that will protect us starting from 2020 from missiles from Iran and North Korea.

It seems to me a little weird. Two of the world's most despised and isolated states, two states that have no future, have inspired us to undertake a military-technical large-scale project of stellar proportions? Are we sure that these two countries will continue in their present form of government through to the year 2020? Has it just been shown that North Korea missile carries a silhouette target on his military parades, and should we fear the North Korean intercontinental ballistic missiles in 2020? I find it difficult to believe that we should.

Iran is at the brink of economic collapse due to the new sanctions. The country has no development perspective outside of the sale of its gas reserves, and a huge youth population puts pressure on its economic and political development. The regime is ideologically drained by three decades of Islamist terror and domination rightfully hated by its own people, and in the region are Sunni Islamist-democratic alternatives ranging from Turkey to Tunisia. Syria has almost lost its last friend in the region, Turkey has already been lost in the dispute over Syria - and we are making preparations against Iranian missiles? I am not convinced.

I can sympathise with the reasoning that the Russians necessitate the keeping of our missile shield, even if it does not seem plausible that it can offer protection against the huge Russian arsenal, as the Russians suggest themselves. What do we need it for, after all? So that NATO has a new project?

If despite the cost of 12 years, thousands of lives and billions of euros, the alliance is still going strong, then this is probably due to what the Singaporean diplomat and political scientist Kishore Mahbubani called "western groupthink". Mahbubani is one of the few who challenge Western thinking of self-affirmation. We should listen more to those voices instead of giving ourselves a pat on the shoulder.

Daniel Barenboim is also such a voice. When I interviewed him in late February with a colleague, he said a sentence that has stayed with me: "Do you think perhaps that China in two or three decades will also go to the same lengths for Israel as the United States has gone today?" That was said in the context that the chances are dwindling for a two-state solution when the settlements and the occupation policies just go on and on. Not only will the demise of a generation of Palestinian leaders willing to compromise complicate matters for Israel, but also the changing international environment. For emerging economies like China, India and Brazil have more say in international fora, the situation of Israel is probably less optimistic.

Mahbubani wrote about these changes, caused by the crisis of the West and the rise of the rest, and their impact on perceptions, a month ago a column in the Financial Times, which left a deep impression on me: "The West must work to understand a new world order".

Through three examples, he illustrates western self-delusion. It was wrong, he writes, that the West is in conflict with Iran, presenting itself as the good guy operating against evil. Western groupthink suggests that the West is operating openly and honestly, while Iran is advancing falsely and deceitfully. But it is still not clear why the West has turned down the deal which Turkey and Brazil mediated (about nuclear enrichment in foreign countries). Just so that it can offer a similar deal in the current negotiations? Military action against Iran due to the failure of negotiations would be a disaster for the West that will herald a new era of hatred and mistrust - as seen in 1953 in the West-inspired coup against Mossadegh, from which the relationship still has not recovered. A significant part of the world knows the distrust that arises from this intervention, a kind of sinful neocolonial Western policy after World War II. It does not see the West as a knight in shining armour without sympathising with the Islamist regime in Tehran.

The second case is North Korea after the handover of power to his son. There, under great pomp and ceremony a rocket was fired, which was allegedly carrying a satellite into space. There was an ignominious failure, the missile fell from the sky and was extinguished in the ocean. The West responded to this challenge with the announcement of

tougher sanctions on again the already isolated country. What went unspoken, Mahbubani writes, was the amazing fact that the regime had, for the first time, publicly admitted mistakes on state television, just after the crash. The divine dynasty had admitted its fallibility - a big step towards normalization. In the West, no one noticed.

Third case: Myanmar. The West boasts of having forced the regime to its knees through sanctions. Western leaders to travel to Myanmar in order to be photographed with Aung San Suu Kyi. Mahbubani says that this story is nice, but wrong. Not the Western sanctions policy (alone), but above all the commitment of the ASEAN countries has changed the situation. Economic and political opening in Myanmar has been made possible through thousands of meetings of the regime with ASEAN countries. The generals came around when they found how backward their country had become. ASEAN encouraged them to change. The Western media, writes Mahbubani, ignored this part of the reality:

"A self-serving western narrative just cannot understand the complex new world that is emerging –and progressing, while the west languishes."

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