

## **Interview with Wolfgang Streeck on Iran and Its Consequences**

**Mr. Streeck, financial markets are in turmoil and concerns in national economies are growing in light of the Israeli-American war against Iran. Does this remind you of the 1970s and the oil price shock of that time?**

Not very much. Back then, everything was still relatively manageable: a producers' cartel in the Middle East. Today, the United States, thanks to fracking, is energy self-sufficient and can afford any kind of madness, including the systematic destruction of energy infrastructure not only in Iran but in all Gulf states—and, as an added bonus, of Iranian society as a whole. At that time, by contrast, Nixon and Kissinger were preparing a rapprochement with China, and in Germany the social-liberal government under Brandt/Scheel had been pursuing a new policy of détente since 1969, which led to the end of the Eastern bloc two decades later.

**Could the war against Iran turn out to be Trump's biggest mistake of his presidency? Clearly, he has underestimated the escalation potential of a war.**

They all do—Americans anyway; they don't need Trump for that. See Biden in Ukraine; but Europeans too, who in 2022 allowed themselves to be convinced by the US and Great Britain that the Ukraine war would be over after a few months (the Russians, incidentally, thought something similar). Today the EU has taken over the war from the US and insists that it must continue, even though the Americans have lost interest and the Russians have, by and large, already won the war. Why? Presumably because they do not want to admit that they “underestimated its escalation potential,” as you put it—or because they expect technological and economic gains as well as greater internal cohesion from a war that others are fighting on their behalf. That will not work, but hope dies later than the Ukrainians, who, according to von der Leyen, are “dying for our values.”

**Some suspect that Trump could use the war to manipulate the elections in November in some way. Could domestic political considerations have encouraged him to go to war?**

That is possible: wars are also fought to consolidate one's own camp and neutralize the opposition as traitors. But the war against Iran is not popular in the US. There, the prevailing assumption is that Trump was talked into the war by Israel and the Israel lobby, with the promise that the matter—the Iran issue—would be resolved in a few days. What Netanyahu may have on Trump as compromising material, one does not know, of course. One thing must definitely be taken into account—something often overlooked in Germany: that the US is, in principle, unbeatable on its own continent, between two oceans and with only two neighboring states, one to the north and one to the south, both of which it fully controls. That is why it can afford anything in foreign and military policy, any nonsense, such as the Vietnam War or the invasion of Iraq: completely pointless, just because—and if it goes wrong, they simply go home, where even the most victorious victor cannot follow them. This also explains why the US routinely maintains old hostilities toward states that have somehow been recalcitrant—Cuba, Iran, Afghanistan—for decades. No matter how often their crusades fail, they have nothing to repair, nothing to make amends for, nothing to learn. In January, Trump called for an increase in the defense budget for 2027 to \$1.5 trillion, an increase of over 50 percent compared to 2026, with the highest military budget in human history (\$900 billion); I assume this is how he intends to prevent military leadership from asking why they should bomb Iran back to the Stone Age—the country has done nothing to the US and never could.

**Many suspect personal motives behind Netanyahu's decision to go to war—more specifically, that he is trying to save himself from corruption charges through ongoing**

**wars.**

Or to secure his reelection. Yes, that is possible. On the other hand, one should not overestimate the personal element. The destruction of Iran is a long-cherished and widely shared Israeli ambition. Israel wants to remain the only nuclear power in “West Asia” (as the Iranians call it). If the US were ever to withdraw from its alliance with Israel, Israel would not hesitate, if push came to shove, to use its nuclear forces. What else would all that money be for? (Not least since the submarines equipped with nuclear delivery systems are a gift from the Federal Republic of Germany.) I cannot rule out that Trump is participating in the attack on Iran also because his intelligence services or Netanyahu himself have informed him that Israel would not hesitate, in an emergency, to deploy its nuclear-armed missiles, bomber aircraft, and ships.

**That now becomes very speculative. It is primarily Putin who threatens the use of nuclear weapons in the Ukraine war, not Israel. Why would Israel expose itself to a dangerous nuclear escalation logic?**

It is strategically sensible to be prepared for anything when one’s own existence is at stake. Unlike Russia and the other nuclear powers, Israel has no nuclear doctrine; but anyone who understands the matter knows that precisely this is its nuclear doctrine.

**Once again, the European Union cuts a weak figure, if one had expected more resistance against Trump. Only the Spanish prime minister is speaking plainly. Why is the EU so weak when it matters?**

The EU is not a state and never will be one. Nor does it matter here; no one listens to it. As for its member states, their preconditions differ radically. France has close ties to Lebanon and traditionally overestimates itself as its protector. Spain has long-standing, particularly cultural, ties to the Muslim world. Germany has its well-known special relationship with Israel and an Israeli “right to exist,” the definition of which it leaves to Israel, both in terms of territorial scope and the internal order of the Israeli state. Before Israel resorts to its nuclear weapons, it would undoubtedly call on Germany, in the name of German “reason of state,” for military support; no other EU member state, except possibly the Netherlands, would be willing to do so.

**I cannot follow the claim that Israel would resort to nuclear weapons. Israel behaves just as rationally as other nuclear powers.**

That means it reserves the right, like the other nuclear powers, to use its nuclear weapons if necessary. What else would it have them for?

**Support is also being actively sought. The German Chancellor Friedrich Merz first expressed understanding for the attack, then said it was not “our war.” Is he following in the footsteps of one of his predecessors, Gerhard Schröder?**

That depends on how one interprets those footsteps. Schröder refused, together with Chirac, to join Bush II in invading Iraq. Overall, however, he—and the Federal Republic under his and Fischer’s leadership—provided all kinds of support, especially in the so-called “War on Terror,” when Steinmeier, as head of the Federal Chancellery, had to approve the use of the Ramstein airbase, if I recall correctly, for every single flight, including those used to supply the Guantanamo detention facility with prisoners. Merkel, too, sometimes with Sarkozy, sometimes with Hollande, repeatedly tried to stay out of individual American operations—see Syria, see Ukraine (Minsk I, Minsk II, together with Steinmeier).

### **Are there further examples?**

One may also recall Westerwelle, who in 2011, as foreign minister, abstained in the UN Security Council when it came to legalizing the disastrous American intervention in Libya. In Germany, within the framework of NATO, 40,000 American soldiers are stationed, along with numerous nuclear-capable bombers and their corresponding nuclear weapons, and in Wiesbaden there is the command center of US forces for all operations in the Middle East, including the current bombing of Iran. Not a word of objection from Merz; broadly speaking, therefore, in the footsteps of Schröder—and Merkel—but future historians will have to determine exactly how.

### **Shouldn't Merz oppose Trump and Netanyahu more forcefully? After all, experts fear the worst energy crisis of all time.**

He should, he should. Especially since this is no longer really about an energy crisis, “experts” notwithstanding. We are talking about a global conflagration; one is tempted to say: if necessary, we will simply buy that bit of oil from the Russians after all. We can only speculate about what Trump and Netanyahu will do next. What we do know is that whatever they decide, they will not listen to a German chancellor—because it is certain that in the end, he will go along with it, no matter what.

### **The world is at war, even though there are no opposing blocs as in the two world wars. Is this already a third world war?**

All wars are different. In the First World War, the feudal empires collapsed; in the Second World War, it was about defeating two regional great powers, Germany and Japan, which wanted to subjugate their “spheres of influence.” The result was a divided world with two victorious powers, the US and the USSR, each with its empire—one expansive, the other constrained by itself and its rival (“containment”) until it dissolved surprisingly peacefully at the end of the 20th century. What followed were more than three decades of a unipolar world order in which not a day passed without its central power waging war somewhere in the world. This was called “stability.” Today we see the disintegration of the superpower, which cannot decide between retreat and resistance, with a tendency toward resistance.

### **What would a third world war look like under these circumstances?**

The US would very soon attack China in an attempt to halt its previously unstoppable rise. (According to current American security doctrine, there must be no power on earth equal to the US.) To this end, they would, among other things, exert pressure on Russia from Western Europe—or have NATO do so—first to prevent it from assisting China, and second to force China to divert resources to support Russia. Japan and NATO Europe, Germany in particular, would be induced to join on the side of the US. Israel would seize the opportunity to irreparably destroy the states and peoples in its vicinity; even now, the Iran war cannot last long enough for Israel, because in its shadow the annexation and ethnic cleansing of Gaza, the West Bank, and southern Lebanon can continue unnoticed. Everything else lies, with Clausewitz, in the fog of the expanding battlefield.