**U.S. President Donald Trump this week issued a Twitter threat to Russia and hinted that America would soon attack Syria. But even if Assad does deserve punishment for again using chemical weapons, the urge to intervene should be resisted.**

All too often, Donald Trump has rejected reason. All too often, the U.S. president has taken the path diametrically opposed to prudence. And he did so again this week, responding to Russian threats with a drastic threat of his own. "Get ready Russia," he tweeted on Wednesday in a 223-character threat of war. And a chilling one at that, because it sounded almost as though he were talking about a new video game: "Nice and new and 'smart!'" he wrote. Let's play!

Some hope that Trump's unpredictability might be by design, to serve the purpose of confounding America's adversaries and putting them on the defensive. But that is nonsense, the futile attempt to make sense of the chaos at the top echelons of a superpower -- because it would be so reassuring if it were possible to do so. But there is no all-encompassing coherence behind the willingness to escalate. There is merely a craving for destruction and ruin. Who would know that better than us Germans?

So much has changed in the one year since Trump bombarded Syrian military positions in response to the chemical weapons attack on Khan Sheikhoun, an assault German Chancellor Angela Merkel called "understandable." Since then, almost all voices of restraint have disappeared from the White House, almost all the moderates have either been fired or have left of their own accord. The American president is now surrounded by warmongers, scandals and defeat: the Russia investigation, the

And something else is different this time around as well: Trump has allies. France, perhaps Britain, Saudi Arabia and Israel stand at his side -- in opposition to the Syria-Russia-Iran alliance.

The stakes, in other words, are much higher. At the same time, though, the West no longer has any influence on the outcome of the Syrian war and virtually no influence on what happens to the country after the guns have finally fallen silent. Just a few days ago, Trump announced the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria. There is no strategy for the Middle East, neither in Washington nor in Europe. The options available to the West have been reduced to this one single alternative: sending a message. That, though, isn't a plan; it isn't something that deserves to be called politics.

Indeed, Trump's threats are even beneficial to Putin -- domestically, of course, but they also serve to improve Russia's standing in the West. Putin has a fine nose for the sensitivities of Western societies. Suddenly, Moscow looks like the voice of reason.

Germany will not take part in a military operation in Syria, and that is the correct decision. After years in which Angela Merkel's government has repeatedly spoken of Germany's growing responsibility in the world, the EU's largest and most powerful member state once again finds itself in a place it no longer wanted to be: on the sidelines.