The European Union in the Age of Trump 2.0

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EDITORIAL

2025 - The Beginning of Geopolitical Developments Marked by Various Shocks and Surprises

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„Discipline is choosing between what you want now and what you want most."

Abraham Lincoln

As we enter a new year of uncertainty generated by the changing world order, slow economic growth will remain the world's most persistent challenge, affecting both developed and developing countries and, implicitly, contributing to the changing world order. Internationally, the economies of the United States (US), the European Union (EU) and Japan are expected to grow by less than 3% per year, while major emerging economies such as Brazil, Argentina and South Africa are also expected to grow slowly over the next decade. Given the unprecedented and unpredictable emphasis on multipolarism, we can see that while the global GDP has increased to $110 trillion, progress remains unevenly distributed, threatening to significantly erode living standards across societies. Moreover, the developments affecting global economies could collapse growth and investment, triggering political, social and security instability at regional and global levels.

As a result, in 2025, now more than ever, governments and business leaders must change their working habits and action models to cope with the upcoming period in the development of our world so they can best sail through an age defined by uncertainties, geopolitical fissures, divisive domestic and foreign policies, disruption of

Source: https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/columns/a-dark-future-of-geopolitical-fragmentation? gallery_image=undefined#big

technological developments, and increasing risks, generated by the subjective and inefficient use of artificial intelligence, uneven demographic trends, increasing natural resource scarcity, rising government debts, and inefficient fiscal policies. The effects of artificial intelligence and other advanced technologies on societies and economies are only just beginning to be understood. Unfortunately, there are good reasons to assume that the decentralized nature of global technological innovation – which has been essential for increasing jobs and aspirations in different important fields – may be coming to an end.

Domestically, Europe appears to be the most affected by developments and fragile situations in various

areas, struggling to cope with the consequences of a first open geopolitical front in Ukraine. Given previous developments, Europe will face a multitude of challenges in 2025, generated by uncertainties and fragmentation in the political field and economic weakening, which by intersecting with the geopolitical tensions facing all mankind will accentuate the volatile landscape created at regional and global levels. France is facing internal turmoil, which limits its capacity for leadership on the international stage. Germany is approaching a crucial electoral process, leaving its government scene in an unstable state. The United Kingdom is facing a tired society, most likely due to the effects of leaving the EU. Across the continent, unity is elusive, as states remain divided on interests and confronting critical issues, from economic and social levels to defense and, implicitly, security, especially in the field of energy resources and migration. As a result, we can say that, economically, Europe is vulnerable, because stagnation, inflation and uncertainty of access to necessary energy resources have affected its resilience, reducing its capacity to address simultaneous crises efficiently and effectively. All these weaknesses are aggravated by an unpredictable international environment, the first open geopolitical front, the war in Ukraine, contributing to confronting Europe with a trilemma: increasing involvement risks accentuating the deep deterioration of relations with Russia to the point of possible confrontation; the manifestation of a divergent attitude among member states and different engagement in support of Ukraine could encourage Russian aggression; and a prolonged non-involvement in resolving and ending the war in Ukraine will lead to increased instability in most European states. In such a precarious situation, the division of Europe could become the greatest liability of all its states. Failure to act collectively risks trapping the continent as a geopolitical pawn in the strategies of other state and non-state actors. However, to navigate this turbulent year, Europe must overcome its internal divisions and project a unified front, harnessing its collective strength to address these cascading threats. Without decisive action, Europe could face a defining year of fragmentation, instability, and significant regional and global influence.

On the other hand, growth projections for Brazil, Russia, India, and China (the founding members of the BRICS) indicate that they will collectively match the G-7's original share of global GDP by 2040–2050. China is poised to have a greater impact on the world over the next 20 years than any other country. If current trends persist, by 2025 China could have the world's second-largest economy and be a leading military power. It could also be the world's largest importer of natural resources and the world's largest polluter. India is also likely to continue to enjoy relatively rapid economic growth and strive to build a multipolar world in which New Delhi is one of the poles. China and India need to decide to what extent they are willing and able to play increasingly large global roles and how they will relate to each other. Russia has the potential to be a regional and global power by 2025, especially if it invests in human capital, expands and diversifies its economy, and integrates with global markets, with the possibility that by 2025 Russia could boast a GDP close to that of Great Britain and France. However, it cannot be ruled out that, on the other hand, Russia could also experience a significant decline and a sharp fall if it fails to follow the steps mentioned and oil and gas prices remain in the range of 50-70 dollars per barrel. In the context of global developments, it can be predicted that no other country will rise to China and India's levels, and none will match their individual global influence. However, we expect to see the growth of political and economic power of other countries, such as Indonesia, Iran, and Turkey. Many other countries will lag behind economically. Sub-Saharan Africa will remain the region most vulnerable to economic disruptions, population stress, civil strife, and political instability. Despite the increase in global demand for commodities for which Sub-Saharan Africa will be a major supplier, local populations are unlikely to experience significant economic gains. Windfall profits from sustained increases in commodity prices could further entrench corrupt or otherwise ill-equipped governments in several regions, diminishing the prospects for democratic and market-based reforms. While many of the large countries in Latin America will have become middle-income powers by 2025, others, especially those like Venezuela and Bolivia, which have embraced populist policies for a long time, will lag behind—and some, like Haiti, could become poorer and less governable. Overall, Latin America will continue to lag behind Asia and other fast-growing areas in terms of economic competitiveness.

To put it differently, we cannot fail to see that a second geopolitical front has opened in the Middle East. Tensions involving states such as Syria, Lebanon, Iran and Israel, but also organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah risk triggering a wider conflict, with ripple effects that threaten the security and cohesion of the entire world. The fact that interests and commitments from various states take place and interact in the geopolitical hotspots of the Middle East and Eastern Europe makes these two regions two theaters of strategic operations. The major trend towards a greater redistribution of authority and power that has been taking place for some time is likely to accelerate due to the emergence of new regional and global players and some shocks and surprises, the only questions being: When and how will such a transition to a new world order take place? Will it be swift or smooth?

EUROPE

The European Union in the Age of Trump 2.0

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The year 2024 has marked a shift in the global evolution of events. There were several elections during which a majority of governing forces suffered defeat or a significant loss of votes. The main political dispute seems to involve globalist forces against sovereigntist groups. The election of Donald Trump for a second term as US president is a testimony of the sovereigntist tide engulfing the world. The same trend is visible in the ascent of extreme left and extreme right in France, extreme right in the Netherlands and Austria, pro-Russian forces in Slovakia, the blocking stalemate in Bulgaria, the election of a nationalist president in North Macedonia, the collapse of the governing coalition in Germany or the crisis of the governing party in Japan. At the same time, the members of BRICS are attempting to galvanize a change of the global order in their favour, by reducing the influence of the West (including the EU) in the world. This trend is visible especially in areas such as West Africa, where pro-Russian military juntas took over power in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and the pro-Western regime in Senegal was ousted, but also in Latin America, where China is increasing its economic influence, such as in Brazil, Peru and Uruguay.

Source: https://eml.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/
File:President_Trump_at_Davos_%2849419286943%29.jpg

Meanwhile, the European Union witnessed new elections for the European Parliament, which seemed to endorse once again a coalition of centre-right (EPP), centre-left (S&D) and centrist (Renew) forces, but with significant opposition from conservatives (ECR – partially) and sovereigntist (Patriots for Europe, ESN) and a diminished left (Greens, the Left). In its moderation, the EU seems to go against the tide, even if similar trends are visible within its member states. In its actions, the EU is now at crosshairs with a new Trump administration in what concerns free trade, human rights (including immigration), climate change, and opposition to Russia in Ukraine. But the EU is also facing increased competition from China in the field of electric vehicles, which determined a sort of tit-for-tat in imposing taxes on various goods.

What is certain is that the next period will see a growing competition at world level between the main

actors (US, China, other BRICS countries) for maximizing their share in the new multipolar world. The EU is still a significant international actor, but its position is challenged by a more selfish US and the new rising powers. As a defender of the old status-quo in international affairs, the EU must now find its place in the new emerging world order, both by using its main assets and developing new ones. The manner in which it will answer to the current challenges are going to shape its role in the world for the next decades.

EU in International Affairs

During past decades, the EU has profiled itself as a defender of its main values of freedom, democracy, human rights and free trade at world level. The main tools at its disposal were financial means (especially development aid – the EU is the main source for such investments at world level), fostered by its most influential member states in the economic field (G7 members such as Germany, France, Italy and UK; the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, Sweden, Spain), economic agreements (free trade and association regimes with regions such as the Andean Community, Central America, Maghreb, Western Balkans, and countries such as Canada, Egypt, Georgia, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Mexico, Moldova, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, Ukraine, UK, Vietnam and some other Caribbean and Pacific countries, small European countries) and peace-keeping missions (Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Central African Republic, Chad, DR Congo, Georgia, Guinea Bissau, Indonesia, Iraq, Kosovo, Libya, Moldova, North Macedonia, Sudan and South Sudan), with the help of its most powerful members in the military and diplomatic field (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, UK, but also Poland and Romania). Also, lately, the EU has been a staunch supporter of fighting climate change in a multilateral format, especially after the signing of the Paris Accords in 2016. At the same, the EU has been quick in condemning violations of human rights and liberties in countries with oppressive regimes such as Belarus, China (treatment of Tibetan and Uygur minorities), Myanmar (genocide over the Rohingya minority), Syria (military repression), Venezuela (election fraud) or Yemen (Islamic fundamentalism).

Beside the humanitarian emphasis of EU international actions, there is also the interest of its member states in fostering economic relations with several regions of the world, each of them providing raw materials (oil, gas, iron ore, diamonds, rare metals and others) for EU member states' economies. This type of interest has often been seen by some in the Global South as a continuation of the colonial type of relation between European nations and their former colonies (this mainly concerns France, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Belgium and, to some extent, Germany and Italy), by which Europeans are taking profit from the resources of others. However, this claim does not stand, from an economical point of view, taking into account that EU is offering those countries a fair price for those resources (based on the free market). The EU does affect its partners around the world, by demanding a fair treatment of workers, women, children and respect for human rights as conditions for opening its market to those countries' products. Thus, the main aim is to create conditions for European values to spread around the world as shared values with its main partners. However, in what concerns democracy and the rule of law, the EU approach has been rather mixed, with recent agreements neglecting authoritarian or military regimes in some parts of the world in order (for example, Egypt, Qatar, Tunisia) to gain other advantages, often of an economic nature.

If we are talking about the military strength, though, the EU has been often described as "an economic giant and a military worm"[1]. Some of its member states have important military forces (France, Germany, Spain, Italy and, to some extent, Poland, Romania and Sweden), including nuclear weapons and spatial technology capabilities (France), but EU's military strength has been significantly crippled since the UK left the Union, following the 2016 Brexit. The most important element, however, is that most of EU security has been lately insured through NATO, as most of EU member states are also NATO members (presently, only Austria, Cyprus, Ireland and Malta are non-NATO members). That translated into a high emphasis on the prowess of the US military force, manifested through a close cooperation in the technological field and, mainly, through the deployment of US troops on the territory of EU member states (within important military bases). Thus, EU members of NATO have always relied on their alliance with the US to provide for their security on the continent. However, Donald Trump's approach concerning NATO has changed this pattern, as early as his first mandate. Although the alliance remained in place, the transactional manner of the former and future US president to deal with the allies determined an increase in EU military spending around 2% of GDP in the case of each nation. The main issue raised by Trump's approach is the enforcement of Article 5 by US forces only if the allies contribute, which tramples under foot all international law adopted since 1945. In this context, the EU is likely to have a security issue once Trump's second mandate begins.

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[1] *Mark Leonard, "Europe for itself", 24 July 2018, in https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_europe_for_itself/, accessed on 8 December 2024*

EU's strong point is, therefore, still its soft power, which consists of its diplomacy, its societal model, but most of all its financial and economic means. Nevertheless, even at diplomatic level, the EU as a mediator is not as frequent as it used to be, mainly due to the perception of the rest of the world that EU and US (and also Israel, for the Middle East countries) are part of the same western world which they consider obsolete or even an undesired presence. That leaves us with the economy and the European social model.

EU and the Global Economy

The European Union's existence has, from the very beginning, been based on its economic successful model, able to generate prosperity in order to prevent any sort of conflict among European countries. In terms of numbers, the EU currently has the second nominal (19,403 billion USD) and per capita (62,600 USD) GDP in the world (after the United States) and the third PPS GDP in world (after China and the US), covering approximately 15.2% of the world economy[2]. Its internal market, including a population of about 440 million people, is one of the most important in the world, both in terms of consumption and production. Its products from all sectors are well-known and desired at international level, mostly because of their high quality and originality. Most of its member states are countries with a high human development index, included in the category of advanced economies.

Nevertheless, lately and especially following the Covid 19 epidemic crisis, the EU economy has been lagging behind emerging economies of the world (Asian tigers or BRICS countries), with growth rates which are increasingly approaching stagnation and even recession (for example Germany)[3]. One of the main issues concerning economic growth is related to the Russian invasion in Ukraine and the stance most EU countries adopted after that dramatic event. Mainly, the EU's attempt of decreasing its dependence on Russian gas has determined an increase of spending for identifying and importing new fuel resources (both fossil and renewables), while at the same time helping the embattled Ukrainian associate to economically survive Russian aggression. This effort, coming after a difficult period of struggling against a pandemic wave, was a little too much for the economies of EU member states and for EU finances, which had to deal with an increasing budget deficit. At the same time, the EU initiative of adopting a Green Deal, envisaged to help recovery after the epidemic crisis and fight climate change, seemed to backfire when confronted with a competing Chinese thrive for a green economy, benefiting from cheaper labour force and higher state subsidies. The attempt to financially compensate European car producers, for example, for redirecting investments towards building electric vehicles (EV) was wrecked by the EU internal market being flooded with cheaper Chinese models[4], making the sales of expensive EU vehicles more difficult.

Thus, the EU economy is currently confronted with competition on two fronts. On one front, keeping economic sanctions against Russia (together with the US and the UK) for its military invasion in Ukraine, leaves the EU economy without cheaper fuels necessary for its development, while requiring additional resources for Ukraine's survival. On the other hand, adopting new import taxes for Chinese EVs and, potentially, other economic products from China, is going to bring the EU-China relations to the stage of a trade war, which can only harm the two sides and especially the Europeans. EU attempts to compensate for these losses with trade agreements concerning other important regional markets in the world, such as the Mercosur, ASEAN, Canada, India or Japan, are important, but they cannot make up for all the previously mentioned losses. Moreover, they could even exacerbate some of EU's internal issues, as we will further see.

In the context of the Trump's administration intention of promoting a protectionist policy concerning world trade, the EU could face additional problems at world level. As a traditional promoter of world trade and economic globalization, the EU has always encouraged multilateral cooperation for negotiating mutually advantageous deals with various countries and regional associations. This has for a long time represented the engine of EU's development, taking profit of resources from all over the world to fuel its economic growth. But Trump's intention of over-taxing all imports in order to ensure higher profit for US economy is likely to generate reciprocity all over the world and not only in relation to US products. This general trend of protectionism, that could also affect EU-China relations, is in fact a wave opposing the globalization trend predominating in world economic affairs after the Second World War. It could generate broader economic trade wars, with a negative impact for all parties involved, or it

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[2]*European Commission, "EU represented 15.2% of world's GDP in 2021", 30 May 2024, in https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240530-2, accessed on 15 December 2024; International Monetary Fund, "World Economic Outlook Database", October 2024,*

[3]*Piero Cingari, "Germany's economic struggles deepen: A back-to-back recession looms", 9 October 2024, in https://www.euronews.com/business/2024/10/09/germanys-economic-struggles-deepen-a-back-to-back-recession-looms, accessed on 15 December 2024*

[4]*Reuters, "EU's von der Leyen: China must be stopped from flooding EV market", May 8, 2024, in https://www.reuters.com/business/autos-transportation/eus-von-der-leyen-china-must-be-stopped-flooding-ev-market-2024-05-08/, accessed on 15 December 2024*

could lead to the emergence of opposite economic blocs, such as BRICS, which could challenge US economic supremacy. Under such circumstances, the EU could be torn between its traditional tilt towards good economic relations with the US and the need to find ways of surviving in a world of competing economic blocs.

However, the European Union has an important asset that could become essential for its future success: the Internal Market. No other economic regional alliance in the world has such a comprehensive tool to counter adverse effects on the global market. The EU internal market is fostered by the freedom of movement principle, embodied in the Schengen Area, and by the monetary union, synthesized in the Euro currency, which is increasingly competitive even at world level, as a potential alternative for the USD. These advantages could become helpful for the EU in the event of a new economic crisis. Nevertheless, they could become useless if the EU does not manage to achieve the degree of coordination necessary for operationalizing them. This situation could occur in the event that EU and its member states were not able to solve their internal issues.

Internal Issues

The prosperity of the EU was insured with the decisive help of a qualified and sufficient labour force. This was provided by the significant demographic booms in most of its current member states after the end of the Second World War. But gradually, the European population entered a process of aging, as families became smaller, birth rates dramatically decreased and life expectancy at birth increased. The resulting labour force deficits were filled with migrants (both European and non-European) which were allowed to work on a temporary basis or even settle permanently on the territories of EU member states. Migrant workers were heavily attracted by the prosperity characterizing the European social model, translated into stable well-paid jobs, high standard health services, access to education, comfortable homes, decent retirement and affordable holidays all over the world. Member states encouraged this trend, as migrants often accepted lower payment than local workers and accepted to work in fields which were less attractive to the locals (agriculture, sanitation, elderly care etc.). In time, new migrant communities became a reality of European urban landscape, fostering the EU motto "*Unity in diversity*". The development replicated, to some extent, the American model of the *melting pot*.

However, the model worked only as long as EU economy prospered and future perspectives were bright. Following a series of negative events, the perception within EU member states changed. The economic and financial crisis of 2008-2009 led to a decrease of EU economic growth and an increase of unemployment rates, especially among youth. The 2011 Arab Spring and especially the Libyan and Syrian civil wars contributed to an unprecedented level of refugees coming towards EU member states, creating the so called "migrant crisis" of 2015-2016 (to some extent encouraged by opposing international actors). This latter event gave the final push to the UK's Brexit referendum of 2016, which saw the first member state leaving the Union and, thus, dealing a serious blow to the whole European project. The already mentioned Covid 19 epidemic crisis of 2020-2021 led to previously unimaginable measures of isolation and prevention within EU societies that contributed to a conflicting state between vaccine partisans and opponents. Not least, the Russian invasion in Ukraine shattered the idyllic view of a Europe without borders or enemies, bringing back memories of harmful military confrontations from the past. All these contributed to a spectacular rise of sympathy for nationalist, extremist and populist parties within the ranks of EU citizens. Such political forces emerged as significant (France, Germany, Spain, Romania, Bulgaria, Portugal, Sweden) or even governing parties in some member states (Austria, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia).

On the other hand, the comfort of high living standards has brought significant changes to the European traditional lifestyle. The traditional family ceased to be the basic cell of society and was replaced by the individual, under the influence of predominant liberal ideologies. Thus, single-parent families became a growing reality within European countries. Primacy of the individual also contributed to improved women's rights, thus balancing male-dominated traditional societies (a trend especially visible in the Nordic countries). At the same time, though, birth rates plummeted and population of most European countries began to decrease (in Central and Eastern Europe this trend was also supported by growing immigration towards Western Europe in search of better jobs). The resulting labour shortages were filled with non-European migrant workers. All this process was noticed and criticized by right wing forces in the EU member states, which are currently on the rise.

The economic prosperity of the EU was also based on competitive industrial and agricultural sectors of the economy. However, the pollution generated (also) by EU industry led to climate changes that affected daily lives, by unusually high temperatures, frequent droughts and devastating floods and hurricanes. This

also had a negative impact on agricultural crops, which led to bankruptcy of most EU small farmers. Agricultural crops were increasingly based on the use of pesticides and genetically-modified organisms (GMOs). Nevertheless, the quality of food generated by the use of such products had a negative impact over the health of EU citizens, among which the rate of deadly diseases (including chancer) surged. EU institutions tried to take measures against such negative trends, but their actions were seen as directed against citizens. For example, the adoption of the Green Deal was perceived by workers in the car industry (mainly in Germany and Italy) as a measure which would cut jobs in the field (as a result of decreasing demand) and leave them unemployed. Similarly, the conclusion of a free trade agreement between EU and Mercosur was perceived by farmers from France, Spain and Poland as a measure which would flood EU single market with cheap South American food products, while their own would remain unsold. The same was true about measures taken to support Ukraine's agriculture, perceived negatively by farmers in Poland and Romania. The solution, for these people would be the to close EU from international trade and become self-sufficient. It is a measure also supported by right wing forces, inspired by similar policies advocated by former and future US president Donald Trump.

Not in the least, there is a growing divide among EU member states concerning the allocation of EU funds. Mainly, some member states which are net contributors to the EU budget (France, Germany, but also the so-called "Frugal Four" – Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden[5]) are increasingly discontent about the current situation and demand a review of the cohesion policy, either by lowering their contributions or by advocating for much stricter spending limits, which the other member states (especially Greece) usually identify as "austerity measures". The net beneficiaries, led by countries such as Spain or Poland, are supporting a preservation of the status-quo in this field, together with smaller and newer member states, mostly gathered in the "Friends of Cohesion" group (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Croatia, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain)[6]. Disputes among the two groups are getting lively during the EU budget adoption process at the level of the European Parliament and the European Council.

Future Perspectives

The re-election of Donald Trump as US President for a second non-consecutive term has been the climax of a year 2024 marked by general change in the world, brought about elections (most of all) or violent conflict. This change has caught the EU rather off-guard, even if the last decade was no short of "unpleasant surprises" for the Europeans. As supporters of the Western-led liberal democratic status-quo at international level, the EU was expecting a recovery of this trend, especially after the Covid-19 crisis and the Biden administration's mandate in Washington. However, the world seems to go into another direction lately, a fact noticed and embraced by BRICS countries and even by some Western citizens. It is questionable at present if this trend would lead the world to a better situation, or what the impact over Western countries (EU included) would be. After all, the protectionist policies envisioned by the Trump administration to "make America great again" are only the off-springs of similar policies which brought about the Second World War. They fail to comprehend that what made America great in the recent past was precisely the free trade based on the Bretton Woods institutional setting, which is nowadays denied. Instead, what is certain is that a new world order is dawning and its main pillars are the US and China (another beneficiary of free trade), together with the G20 economic powers.

For the EU, the new setting could be an additional burden to all its internal issues, but, at the same time, an opportunity for re-inventing itself and using its main (remaining) assets. The EU is still one of the main international powers (mainly for economic reasons) and can use this position to promote its specific values and interests. But, in order for this to happen, the EU needs, most of all, to overcome its internal division and exhibit a more united and cohesive position at international level. Otherwise, the danger of fragmentation and parochialism could lead it back to past conflicts and economic troubles.

First of all, in the event of a decoupling from the US ally, as the future Trump administration is supposed to be less interested in supporting European allies through NATO and Ukraine against Russian aggression, the EU should accelerate measures for establishing a fully-fledged European Army. The core of this structure could be the Eurocorps (currently, six EU nations are full-members – Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Poland and Spain and four associated – Austria, Greece, Italy and Romania) and it could benefit from the nuclear and spatial capacities of France. The UK could also be associated to this structure, to the

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[5]*David Bokhorst & Magnus G. Schoeller, "Managing constraint: frugal opposition to European fiscal solidarity", 27 July 2023, in Journal of European Public Policy, Volume 31, 2024, Issue 10, pp. 3275-3298.*
[6]*David Bokhorst & Magnus G. Schoeller, "Managing constraint: frugal opposition to European fiscal solidarity", 27 July 2023, in Journal of European Public Policy, Volume 31, 2024, Issue 10, pp. 3275-3298.*

extent to which it would support such a measure. Thus, the European pillar of NATO would be strengthened and EU's military deterrence against Russia could become reality.

Second, the demographic policy of the EU should become more coherent. In what concerns immigration, EU member states should decide what is the main course to be followed. If they decide that no more immigrants are needed, they should instead rely on comprehensive measures of encouraging birth rates at continental level. If immigrants are still necessary, they should be better integrated into host states, with equal rights and fair treatment, without discrimination. Illegal migration should, of course, be discouraged, but not at the price of neglecting respect for democracy, human rights and rule of law, as was the case of agreements with countries such as Egypt, Israel, Tunisia or Turkey.

Third, the EU should not abandon its fight against climate change, under the impact of a short-sighted Trump administration approach in this field. Instead, the Green Deal should be enforced and innovation encouraged, in order to be able to successfully compete with China, the new world leader in green technologies. The future will belong to actors that bring about technological advances fostering clean growth based on renewable energy, not to those relying on old fossil fuels that will any way be soon exhausted and seeking net immediate profit at the expense of future generations.

Fourth, the EU enlargement should continue, especially in what concerns the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe (Moldova and Ukraine). This is the only way in which the EU can show that its values are still worth embracing and generating prosperity. Of course, any future enlargement should be based on fulfilment of accession criteria, but the process should be accelerated as much as possible. This also includes clear provisions to adopt a more reserved attitude towards Russian interference, in order not to bring additional "Trojan horses" (such as Hungary and Slovakia) into the EU (especially concerning Serbia).

At the same time, the EU should emphasize that it prioritizes relations with countries and regional structures that are embracing and actively implementing its own values and be critical and inflexible with those violating them (for example, countries such as Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, China, Cuba, Egypt, Georgia, Iran, Israel, Myanmar, Nicaragua, North Korea, Qatar, Russia, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela). This would counter the impression of some observers that the EU has "double standards" and uses its values only when they match with its immediate interests. The EU should also become involved in the reconstruction of conflict-torn countries such as Lebanon, Libya, Syria and Ukraine, to show that it is still the most important provider of development aid in the world.

Last, but not least, the EU should increase its internal cohesion. This involves a consolidation of the mainstream European parties (EPP, S&D, liberals, conservatives, greens) at the expense of nationalist, extremist and populist right-wing and far left forces. The main pro-European parties should remind the EU citizens that embracing sovereigntist options is not going to bring back the prosperity and high living standards within the EU, but only the conflict, poverty and hunger of the pre-1945 Europe. In order to convince them, though, old parties should come back to the regular citizen and re-assume their role of representation for all groups of society instead of being mere interest groups of the richer. Otherwise, the EU could turn into just another failed project in the long European history of conflicts.

EUROPE

Trump's Election Reinforces the Need for European Defence!

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In 2003 and 2016, the European Union (EU) adopted a pseudo-global strategy, and in 2022, a Strategic Compass, which is only a declaration of intent, incapable of changing the practice of "everybody for himself". At the end of 2024, Europe is still without a truly common foreign policy, a truly common defence policy, or a European army, for lack of a federal government, legitimate because democratic. The EU is not a state, but an association of states, incapable of facing threats, which range from geopolitics to climate change. The Commission is not an executive power, and the European Council does not define the EU's main strategic axes well, because it cares little about the general interest of Europeans, concerned as it is above all with the interests of the governments of the Member States. The EU implements politico-military institutions: an External Action Service; a Political and Security Committee; a Military Committee; a Strategic Staff, but no operational staff; a Defence Agency; a Satellite

Source: https://cvlpress.ro/14.01.2025/se-reseteaza-relatiile-sua-ue/

Centre, which has inaccurate commercial images; an Institute for Security Studies; a College of Security and Defence, but not an intelligence service. It has no military capabilities and therefore no weight on the geopolitical scene. Its *European Peace Facility*, which finances arms deliveries to partner states, has 11.1 billion €. Its *European Defence Fund*, which aims to stimulate cooperation between defence manufacturers, has a budget of €7.9 billion for the period 2021-2027. Crumbs compared to the EU's GDP, €16,970 billion in 2023.

Is Europe's Defence in Danger?

By virtue of Article 24 of the Treaty on EU, this body is competent in the field of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and may progressively define a common defence policy (CSDP) which could lead to a common defence, if the European Council so decides unanimously, as provided for in Article 42(2) TEU. This article further clarifies that the CSDP respects the obligations arising from the North Atlantic Treaty for EU Member States that consider that their common defence is achieved within the framework of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Austria, Cyprus, Ireland and Malta do not consider it, 23 EU member states trust NATO, despite the necessary unanimity in the Atlantic Council which has slowed down the admissions of Finland and Sweden.

If the Atlantic Alliance has been able to deter, it is thanks to American nuclear, intelligence, strategic

transport, anti-aircraft and anti-missile defence capabilities, and to the 1.3 million active military personnel and 800,000 reservists. The American president is the commander-in-chief of these forces, but in fact, he is also ours. Only Charles de Gaulle had been able to emancipate himself from it.

The elections of 5 November 2024 have decided: on 25 January 2025, Mr. Trump will be the next commander-in-chief. They gave his party a majority in both legislative chambers. Mr. Trump does not seem to be in favour of American involvement alongside Europe. Mr. Obama had already had to stop his intervention in Libya due to a lack of parliamentary support. Trump and Biden have put an end to 20 years of American action in Afghanistan, without consultation with their allies. Biden's aid to Ukraine has been blocked for nearly six months as the necessary budget has not been voted.

A European Defence, so that Europe Can Defend Itself Come What May!

Europe should therefore be able, alone if necessary, to defend our common sovereignty, our values and our common interests, to contribute to the protection of the environment, to define and implement industrial, social, monetary, budgetary and energy policies and to fight against tax evasion, particularly by Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft, Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, Xiaomi, Huawei, Tik Tok etc.

The EU and its Member States do not know how to ensure our security and defence, but the European Federation announced in 1950 by Robert Schuman could: a federal state achieves from the outset the unity of politico-military command that allows for effective crisis management, by conferring the ability to assess the situation, to decide and to act accordingly, for as long as necessary, in the broadest spectrum.

European leaders should finally give Europe the means to make itself heard, to weigh in geopolitical relations. Strengthening NATO's European pillar would allow Europe to speak the language of power, to better defend our interests and better help Ukraine. The sum of European defense budgets is close to half of the U.S. defense budget, but of the million two hundred thousand European soldiers, only a few tens of thousands are sufficiently trained, equipped, and trained to intervene in high-intensity operations. Because of the waste induced by the multiplicity of decision-makers, European weapons systems are now produced in small numbers, which makes them more expensive to acquire, implement and maintain. Our armed forces use 178 types of weapon systems compared to 30 in the United States of America. This penalizes our operational capacity and our defense industrial and technological base. The latter, weakened by three decades of underinvestment, can no longer supply quickly and in the face of Russian aggressiveness, it has been necessary to import American, Turkish and South Korean weapons systems.

South Korea has shown us the importance of applying the basic principles of political science when developing defence policy and defence industrial policy. The sustainability of political will plays a crucial role. It is the only way to set relevant priorities, and therefore consensual, and therefore stable. Only a state organization allows this. Coalitions of states, associations of states and confederations bring together only disparate and fluctuating wills. They do not allow the general to take precedence over particular interests.

A Federal Constitution, the Basis of a European Defence

Europe must halt its scientific, technological, industrial, economic and financial decline, and end its dependence on defence. For Europe to cease to be an essentially normative power, i.e. one that limits itself to legislating, we need a European government capable of acting, implementing, accompanying and adapting our response to crises in a flexible manner. A reform of the European treaties would be ineffective. The newly elected Parliament, the legitimate representative of the citizens, should declare itself a constituent body, inspired by the *Manifesto of the European Resistance*[1] of 1944.

Without a federal constitution, Europe will not be strong, sovereign and democratic, it will not regain its rightful place on the international scene. A European federal government, controlled by the Parliament, is essential. A federal constitution includes a social contract and a description of the executive, legislative and judicial powers, as well as the distribution of competences by level of power: Europe, the Member States, the Regions, primarily in the areas of External Relations, Security and Defence, Internal, Economic, Social and Environmental Affairs, and Public Finance. It sets out the procedure for the entry into force and amendment of the constitution.

The United States of America, where the US Army, US Navy, US Marines, US Air & Space Force, US Cost Guards, but also the National Guards coexist, can inspire the distribution of competences in Europe. The national armed forces have the merit of existing, but we must fill our capability gaps and avoid duplication. To

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[1]*See sn, «La Résistance et l'idée européenne», Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and digital History, https://www.cvce.eu/ collections/unit-content/-/unit/02bb76df-d066-4c08-a58a-d4686a3e68ff/81649a8e-0558-4721-b443-d609f19dfa24.*

do this, a single Defence Staff and a single Ministry of Defence should express the needs for re-equipping European armies, including those of the Member States, supervising their preparedness and, if necessary, in the event of aggression, set them to action.

What Can Be Done, Citizens?

Like the Ukrainians, Europeans must find the courage to face up, to dare, to undertake and to innovate. They must invent an ambitious, proud Europe, open to the world and ready to defend its values and interests. They must act, urgently, to restore peace in Europe, to become sovereign, autonomous, independent and respected again. To do this, they must put pressure on their representatives to base the political union of Europe on a federal model, starting with a small nucleus, as was done for the Schengen and € zones.

EUROPE

Europe Needs Another Governance!

PhD. Jean MARSIA (Belgium)

　　　The Polish-Lithuanian Union, the *Rzeczpospolita*, was a kind of noble republic ruled by a king elected by an assembly of nobles. In 1569, the Polish-Lithuanian Union formed one of the most powerful and prosperous kingdoms in Europe. In 1683, it was still one of the most militarily capable states in Europe: on September 12, King John III Sobiewski defeated the Turks at Kahlenberg and forced them to lift the siege of Vienna for the second time.

　　　Unfortunately, the nobles, big or small, had the same weight in the assembly. They all were individually able to block a decision. This rule of *liberum veto* was intended to preserve a certain aristocratic liberalism towards the central power of the monarchy and to promote a constructive logic of political consensus, but also to preserve the privileges of the Polish and Lithuanian nobility and their political autonomy.

　　　The problem arose when other, highly centralized monarchy states emerged around the Union and competed with it. The same form of government that had made it possible to manage the peaceful settlement of conflicts internally has proved incapable of effectively meeting external challenges. The Union lacked the sense of unity necessary to guide its political action as a single social body. In the absence of a shared sense of responsibility, the nobles based their decisions on the interests of their respective families and estates, if not their own personal interest. The haggling for votes between the nobles and the interference of foreign kingdoms, which took advantage of this to influence the government of the Union, increasingly deteriorated the system. The union of the two nations split several times until it completely lost its state autonomy.

　　　It is not inappropriate to consider that the European Union is based, *mutatis mutandis*, on a political regulatory system comparable to the *liberum veto* of the *Rzeczpospolita*. It is primarily intended to respond to the individual needs of sovereign nation states. The constant search for consensus within the European Council takes the place of the unity and meaning of the measures adopted. This system worked satisfactorily when globalisation became the dominant phenomenon in international relations and if the Member States had a mutual interest in economic integration.

Source: https://eudebates.tv/debates/special-debates/strength-in-unity-the-next-eu-strategic-agenda/

Thus, the stability achieved by normative power (cf. the expansion of the number of rules) gave the appearance of a sense of uniformity in the policies of the European Union. Globalisation has thus become the compass of the European Union, a Union of meaning and unity. Unfortunately, this appearance of importance inevitably evaporated when it came to making decisions that affected the hard core of state policy.

After noting that globalization has undeniable limits – which Rodrik's paradox formulated with the words "Democracy, national sovereignty and strong economic integration are incompatible: it is possible to combine two of the three possibilities, but it is never possible to have all three at the same time and completely" – the need to endow Europe with strategic autonomy became apparent. The conclusions of Enrico Letta's report or Mario Draghi's statements leave no doubt on this issue. However, it is by no means clear how this can be achieved without a significant step forward in European unification.

Rodrik's paradox exists with different parameters in geopolitics. Here, the trilemma is: strategic autonomy, free trade, and security. They are incompatible at the same time.

This geopolitical paradox explains why, in the context of globalization, in which the EU has focused on prosperity by free trade and peace or security, its strategic autonomy has shrunk in favour of economic and normative interdependencies.

The path of differentiated integration to which the EU has been committed since the 1990s has favoured the prevalence of an intergovernmental logic in which the internal market is governed by "laws" (EU directives or regulations), while policies that fall within the competence of a federal state continue to be governed by fragile voluntary coordination.

Since the EU wanted to increase autonomy and free trade, it inevitably had to accept a loss in security, which runs counter to the very founding purpose of the Union: peace. However, if autonomy and security were to be combined, then free trade and the technical and normative relations on which it is based could no longer be able to create a sense of unity for Europe.

The nature of this geopolitical paradox leads to the realization that the increasing radicalization of political decisions, both in the Member States and at the European level, is not the cause but the consequence of the dysfunction of the European political system.

Long before the war in Ukraine, European politicians such as Pascal Lamy warned that "a will to power forces Europe to constitute itself as a political space, as a European "demos", stressing that "it is not the transition to a majority rule that will lead to a majority decision on military intervention".

Of course, geopolitics is linked to the will to power of states, but with great power comes great responsibility. The EU cannot be expected to exercise state competences in international power relations without assuming the democratic responsibility that arises from a "permanent relationship between leaders and the people" (Winston Churchill).

The ethereal idea of "federal progress", tirelessly proclaimed by the idealists of a united Europe, must give way to that of a common strategic autonomy, which is henceforth a real necessity and whose political expression will necessarily be federal. Europe must be equipped with a compass other than that of globalisation, with a 'will to meaning' as a European social solidarity body that guides decisions that go beyond free trade and an unpredictable strategy.

Otherwise, given the will to power of the United States of America, China and Russia, Europe risks experiencing the fate of the *Rzeczpospolita*, the Polish-Lithuanian Union. Let's avoid repeating this mistake.[1]

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[1] *According to an article "Il faut munir l'Europe d'une autre boussole" published in La Libre Belgique, p. 34-35, on 18/9/2024, by Francisco Vigalondo, Domenico Rossetti di Valdalbero, Jean Marsia en François Mennerat of the Union of European Federalists - Belgium, https://uef-belgium.be/.*
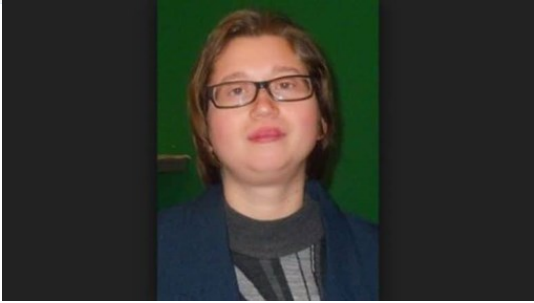
The Geostrategic Importance of the Black Sea Region and its Security Challenges

Mona AGRIGOROAIEI (Romania)

The Black Sea has been, since Antiquity, a point of attraction for empires and powers due to its strategic position. Its direct connection to the Mediterranean Sea, through the Bosporus and Dardanelles straits, has made it an essential corridor for international trade and a vital space for powers seeking access to global sea routes.

Historically, the Black Sea represented a bridge between European and Asian civilizations. In Antiquity, the Greeks used it for maritime trade, turning the region into a "Milesian lake" by creating numerous colonies, such as Histria and Tomis. Later, the Romans and Byzantines integrated the Pontic basin into their trade and military networks, using the Danube as a strategic artery to connect with central Europe.

In the Middle Ages, the Black Sea became a disputed space between the Byzantine Empire, Kievan Russia and later the Ottoman Empire, which turned it into a "Turkish lake". Control over this region was crucial for dominating trade routes and resources. Ottoman rule was succeeded by expanding Russian influence in the 18th century as the Tsarist Empire sought to strengthen its access to warm seas.

Today, the Black Sea remains an essential space for international trade, being crossed by critical maritime corridors linking Europe to Asia and the Middle East. At the same time, its connection with the Caspian Sea basin through the Caucasus region

Source: https://sofiaforum.bg/publications/defining-the-black-sea-security

adds an energy dimension, turning it into an important route for transporting oil and natural gas to Europe.

Its position at the intersection of major geopolitical blocs – NATO and the EU to the west, Russia to the northeast and Turkey to the south – underscores its strategic importance. Riparian states such as Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Ukraine and Georgia benefit from access to this region, but are also exposed to security challenges deriving from regional instability. In this sense, the Black Sea is considered a geopolitical frontier where Western interests meet and sometimes collide with those of Russia and Turkey.

It facilitates shipping for bulk commodities such as grain, oil and natural gas. Major ports such as Constanta, Odessa and Novorossiysk play a major role in global trade networks. For example, the Port of Constanta is the largest in the region, connecting Central and Eastern Europe to global markets via the Danube and maritime transport.

The expansion of energy corridors across the Black Sea, such as the South Stream and Turkish Stream pipelines, amplifies the region's role in European energy security. These infrastructures not only enable the diversification of supply sources, but also create strategic dependencies that can be used as political leverage by the actors involved.

From a military point of view, the Black Sea is a key area for power projection. Russia's Sevastopol fleet, NATO fleets and Turkey's military presence ensure strategic control over this region. The situation became particularly tense after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, an event that reconfigured the balance of power and increased Western military presence, through NATO maneuvers and the consolidation of military bases in Romania and Bulgaria.

Throughout history, the Black Sea has functioned as a bridgehead, a competition ground, and a strategic resource for regional and global powers. Today, its importance is reinforced by new energy routes, trade infrastructures and complex geopolitical dynamics involving NATO, the EU, Russia and other riparian states. As a region of ever-increasing strategic significance, the challenges surrounding security and cooperation will require diplomatic efforts and coordinated strategies to maintain stability and promote prosperity in this area.

It is a focal point in the global geopolitical landscape due to its position at the intersection of vital regions such as Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and the Middle East. Its strategic role is amplified by its function as an energy and commercial transport corridor, but also by its military and political dimension.

The Black Sea plays an essential role in facilitating the transport of energy resources from the Caspian and the Caucasus to European markets. Oil and natural gas pipelines crossing this region, such as those under the Southern Gas Corridor project, support Europe's efforts to diversify energy sources, reducing dependence on Russian resources. Also, projects such as Turkish Stream and South Stream demonstrate the strategic importance of the Pontic route for the transportation of hydrocarbons.

Port infrastructure in the region, which includes major ports such as Constanta, Odessa and Novorossiysk, supports international trade. The Constanta port, for example, is the largest in the Black Sea, with a cargo handling capacity of up to 64 million tons annually, being a crucial transit point for goods from Central and Eastern Europe. These port facilities contribute to regional and global economic integration by connecting riparian states with foreign markets.

From a military point of view, the Black Sea is essential for the power projection of the riparian states. Russia, for example, is strengthening its military presence through its fleet in Sevastopol, which allows it to exert influence over neighboring regions and project its power into the Middle East and the Mediterranean. At the same time, Turkey, controlling the Bosporus and Dardanelles straits, plays a unique role in regulating maritime traffic and access to the Planetary Ocean. These straits are vital for freedom of navigation and energy security, being intensively monitored and protected.

The Black Sea region is also a priority for NATO. The accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the Alliance expanded NATO's eastern frontier and brought the region to the forefront of Euro-Atlantic security policies. NATO's military presence in the region, through maritime exercises and strategic bases, such as those in Romania, demonstrates the Alliance's commitment to maintaining security and stability in this critical area.

The Black Sea is a space of competition between global and regional powers. Russia considers this region a vital part of its sphere of influence, demonstrating this by annexing Crimea in 2014 and supporting the frozen conflicts in Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In contrast, NATO and the European Union are promoting integration and cooperation in the region, bringing states such as Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Georgia closer to Western democratic and security values.

Turkey, having a dual position as a NATO member and as a state with complex economic and political relations with Russia, plays an ambivalent role. On the one hand, it supports Euro-Atlantic initiatives, and on the other, it collaborates with Russia in energy and regional projects.

Political instability and frozen conflicts around the Black Sea are a major source of insecurity. The Russian military presence in Transnistria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, along with its influence on the regimes in these regions, creates an environment of constant insecurity. In addition, the instability in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea have heightened international tensions, turning the Black Sea into a space of direct confrontation between the West and Russia.

This is a region of outstanding strategic importance, playing a key role in energy transport, international trade and the global geopolitical balance. The competition for influence in this region, combined with the need to ensure stability and security, makes the Black Sea remain at the center of strategic concerns of states and international organizations. Investments in infrastructure, strengthening partnerships and promoting collective security are essential to harnessing the potential and reducing risks in this vital space.

Frozen conflicts represent one of the biggest challenges for the security of the Black Sea region. These conflicts, like those in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh, are products of historical tensions and external interventions. They create regional instability and limit the ability of the states involved to collaborate effectively with their international partners.

Transnistria, a breakaway region from the Republic of Moldova, is kept under Russian influence by the presence of Russian troops and financial support. This blocks the full integration of the Republic of Moldova into the European Union and NATO, giving Moscow a strategic point of influence in southeastern Europe.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia are breakaway territories in Georgia where Russia maintains troops under the guise of peacekeeping. The 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia underlined the gravity of the situation, with direct implications for the security of the Black Sea. These regions remain enclaves of instability, hindering Georgia's economic development and integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

Nagorno-Karabakh, located between Armenia and Azerbaijan, is another hot spot. The conflict, fueled by ethnic and territorial disputes, has seen a major escalation in 2020. Although a Russian-backed ceasefire has been signed, tensions remain and regional stability remains fragile.

Russia's involvement in these conflicts is a tactic to maintain influence over states in the region. Moscow uses the frozen conflicts as geopolitical levers to block NATO and EU expansion, as well as to weaken the sovereignty of the states involved.

These conflicts disrupt regional cooperation. They create de facto borders, isolate affected states and fragments economic and social networks. In addition, they favor the phenomenon of cross-border crime and increase the dependence of affected states on external intervention.

The conflict in Ukraine and Russia's annexation of Crimea have added a new dimension to these tensions. The annexation caused a significant shift in the balance of power in the Black Sea, strengthening Russian military presence and reducing NATO's ability to project its influence.

In the absence of durable solutions, these frozen conflicts continue to fuel political and military instability in the region. They undermine democracy and economic development, providing a platform for other forms of threats, such as terrorism and cross-border crime.

The geopolitical rivalry in the Black Sea is generated by the competition between Russia and the Western states, represented by NATO and the EU. Russia considers the region a vital part of its sphere of influence, while the West supports the expansion of democratic values and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 marked a turning point in this rivalry. Moscow justified the action by the need to protect the Russian-speaking population, but the real reasons were geopolitical in nature. Control of Crimea gives Russia strategic access to the Black Sea and a position of strength vis-a-vis NATO.

NATO's presence in the region, through the member states Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey, increased significantly after the crisis in Ukraine. Joint military exercises and the deployment of troops in the states on the Eastern flank of the Alliance are perceived by Russia as a direct threat to its security.

Riparian states play an important role in this rivalry. Romania and Bulgaria support NATO's work and promote regional security, while Turkey takes a more balanced position, collaborating with Russia on energy projects but maintaining its commitments to NATO.

Georgia and Ukraine, aspiring to Euro-Atlantic integration, are vulnerable to Russian pressure. Russia is using the frozen conflicts to block their accession to NATO and the EU, keeping them in its sphere of influence.

This geopolitical rivalry is also reflected in economic competition. Russia seeks to dominate energy transport networks, while the EU promotes the diversification of energy routes and sources. Competing projects such as South Stream and the Southern Gas Corridor underscore this competition.

The balance of power in the region is influenced by Turkey's strategic position. Control of the Bosporus and Dardanelles straits gives Turkey a crucial role in regulating access to the Black Sea, being a key player in maintaining regional stability.

Energy security is a central aspect of regional dynamics. The Black Sea plays a vital role in transporting energy resources from the Caspian and the Middle East areas to Europe. Europe's dependence on Russian natural gas, which is transported through pipelines that cross the region, amplifies geopolitical tensions.

Russia uses energy resources as political leverage, reducing or stopping supplies to states that adopt policies contrary to its interests. Ukraine, an important transit state, has been the target of these pressures several times, which has affected supplies to Western Europe.

Alternative energy projects, such as the Southern Gas Corridor, seek to reduce this dependence. Pipelines crossing Turkey and the Black Sea provide alternative routes for gas from Azerbaijan and other Caspian states.

The Turkish Stream project highlights the strategic importance of the Black Sea. This pipeline, which carries gas from Russia to Turkey and southern Europe, strengthens energy cooperation between Moscow and Ankara, but also creates new regional dependencies.

Offshore exploration in the Black Sea has the potential to change the energy dynamic. Romania, through its deposits on the continental shelf, can become an important player in the natural gas sector, contributing to the diversification of European supply.

The Black Sea is also a major route for arms, drug and people-trafficking, posing a serious threat to regional security. Proximity to the Middle East and political instability in some riparian states create an environment conducive to illicit activities.

Riparian states collaborate to combat these phenomena, but corruption and lack of coordination limit the effectiveness of actions. Arms trafficking is of particular concern given the links to terrorist organizations in the Middle East.

Human trafficking and illegal migration are other major challenges. Routes in the Caucasus region and the Middle East region to Europe often pass through the Black Sea, putting pressure on the security systems of the riparian states. The Black Sea is affected by significant pollution, which endangers biodiversity and ecosystem health. Heavy shipping traffic, oil spills and the lack of an effective cooperation framework between riparian states exacerbate this problem.

Regional initiatives such as the Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution are trying to address these issues, but progress is slow. Economic dependence on marine resources and shipping means that pollution remains a long-term challenge.

In addition to all this, the Black Sea has become an essential space in the conflict in Ukraine, not only from the perspective of territorial control, but also as a theater of strategic confrontation between Russian and Ukrainian forces, with implications for regional and global security. In this context, the use of drones – both aerial and maritime – has completely transformed the dynamics of this conflict. Through the intensive use of these technologies, both sides have found ways to offset the power imbalance and add a new dimension to the conflict in the Black Sea region.

For Russia, the Black Sea is strategically vital, being a gateway to the Mediterranean and a launching point for military operations against Ukraine. The Black Sea Fleet, with its main base at Sevastopol in Crimea, is a critical component of Russian military capability. Since the beginning of the invasion, this fleet has been used to launch Kalibr missile attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure and to maintain a maritime blockade designed to control commercial shipping, particularly grain exports. Russia has also used the Black Sea to project power over regions of southern Ukraine, including Kherson and Zaporozhe, as well as logistically support the southern front.

Ukraine had to respond asymmetrically, as its naval fleet was severely reduced after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. In this context, the use of drones proved to be a successful strategy. Ukraine has developed and used a variety of drones, both aerial and maritime, to attack Russian ships and military infrastructure in Crimea. Attacks on the Black Sea Fleet included the use of maritime drones that managed to hit ships in the ports of Sevastopol and Novorossiysk. These drones, which are more affordable and harder to detect than conventional ships, have added an innovative dimension to the conflict.

A significant moment in this drone war was the attack on the cruiser *Moskva*, the flagship of the Black Sea Fleet, which was sunk in April 2022. Although the strike was attributed to *Neptune* missiles, the incident demonstrated the vulnerability of large ships to attack coordinates. In the following months, Ukraine stepped up drone attacks on military infrastructure in Crimea, including ammunition depots, airfields and air defense systems.

Drone warfare is not limited to naval strikes. Russia has made heavy use of Iranian-made Shahed-136 kamikaze drones to strike energy infrastructure and civilian targets in Ukraine. These drones are launched from Crimea and other Russian-controlled regions, demonstrating how the Black Sea serves as a platform for Russian power projection. Ukraine responded by increasing its own drone production and using allied drones such as the Bayraktar TB2, which were instrumental in striking Russian targets early in the conflict.

Another important aspect of the drone war in the Black Sea is the impact on maritime trade. Russia's embargo on Ukrainian grain exports has caused a global food crisis, particularly affecting countries dependent on Ukrainian wheat. The deal brokered by the UN and Turkey to allow grain exports from Ukrainian ports has been fragile and often undermined by escalating attacks. Ukraine has used maritime drones to deter Russian ships and secure alternative export routes through Danube ports and overland through Romania.

The attacks on the Kerch Bridge, which connects Crimea to mainland Russia, are another example of the importance of drones in this conflict. Ukraine used maritime drones and other means to strike this strategic target, disrupting Russian military logistics and affecting morale. These attacks demonstrated not only Ukraine's technological capability, but also the vulnerabilities of Russian critical infrastructure.

The evolution of this technological war has wider implications for regional security. NATO countries in the Black Sea region, such as Romania and Bulgaria, have strengthened air defense and maritime surveillance measures, fearing possible escalations. Drones, with their low cost and extended capabilities, have demonstrated how technology can be a game-changer in modern conflicts. The Black Sea has thus become a laboratory for testing and developing drone-based tactics that will have a lasting impact on how wars are fought in the future.

In conclusion, the drone war in the Black Sea underscores how important this region is to the conflict in Ukraine and global geopolitical dynamics. The Black Sea is not only a stage for confrontations between Ukraine and Russia, but also a space where the new frontiers of modern warfare are defined. As the conflict continues, the role of drones will remain central, redefining not only military tactics but also the balance of power in the region.

The Black Sea has become an epicenter of the conflict in Ukraine, reflecting the geopolitical complexity of the region and its strategic importance to the powers involved. This region is more than a geographical space; it is an arena where the military, economic and political interests of Russia, Ukraine, NATO and other global actors intersect. Drone warfare has redefined combat tactics in this area, illustrating how technology can provide a significant strategic advantage even in the face of a superior conventional force.

On the one hand, Russia is strengthening its military presence to control sea routes and maintain its dominance in the region. On the other hand, Ukraine has demonstrated remarkable adaptability, using maritime and aerial drones to counter Russian advantages and attack strategic targets, including Crimea. At the same time, the conflict has destabilized global trade, affecting grain exports and global food security.

The Black Sea War highlights the lingering tensions between Russia and the West, emphasizing the need for international solutions to reduce risks and restore stability. At the same time, the role of drones in this conflict foreshadows the changes that modern warfare brings, emphasizing the importance of technology in redefining the balance of power.

In this context, the Black Sea will remain a hot spot of global geopolitics, and the resolution of the conflict in Ukraine, along with the management of strategic challenges in the region, will require a concerted effort by the international community.

EUROPE - THE MULTIPOLARISM OF TODAY'S WORLD

Europe: Together in the Competition of a Multipolar World

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PhD. Eng. Cristian-Marcel FELEA (Romania)

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"We live in a truly multipolar world, but multilateralism is in retreat. It seems to be a paradox. Why would that be? Because when the number of participants in a game increases, the natural response should be to strengthen the rules that govern the game. But we are facing exactly the opposite trend: the rules that govern the world are losing their strength. So we need to find ways to overcome this paradox."[1]

　　　　We are told that for various reasons, Europe is in the third place when it comes to the competition of the new multipolar world. Let us recall a few: it is dependent on resources, and these are found either in the territories or areas of influence controlled by the other two competitors, the United States and China, or in the Global South, wary, if not downright hostile. Europe, with its social and secular policies, has become vulnerable because its workforce is not as productive, its demographics are predominantly experiencing negative growth, and its cutting-edge research and innovation are not able to make up for these shortcomings. Moreover, in terms of innovation, Europe is increasingly unable to keep up with its competitors. One more thing: politically Europe is not united, it is somewhat a confederated territory with a number of common institutions, but integration leaves much to be desired and seriously affects, through the difficulty with which strategic decisions are made, the flexibility and agility that the continent should demonstrate in global competition. As a result, Europe is predominantly reactive in today's challenging global arena.

　　　　The fundamental problem of Europe, from which the vulnerabilities so well highlighted by the "Mario Draghi" Report on European competitiveness[3] arise, is linked to the political capacity of the Member States to deepen integration, to equip the European Union not only with community institutions and a thick acquis, but also - as we saw in the conclusions of the Report of the Conference on the Future of Europe[4] - with decision-making mechanisms adapted not only to survive in global competition necessary but also to take the initiative. In other words, Europe can remain a confederation, as it is now, but a strengthened one: with a European Constitution, offering European citizenship, with a common armed force and adequate defense and security policies, with a single force to protect the Union's borders, with a single foreign policy, with a single currency within the Union and perfectly harmonized and integrated fiscal and budgetary policies.

　　　　When all these will align, Europeans will believe even more in the European project, just as Americans believe in the United States and the Chinese in China. If the European integration project does not find solutions to advance, the alternative is absolutely problematic: accelerated vulnerability and ultimately division. A fractured continent leaves room for conflict and the Russian empire's advancement from the East.

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[1] *Original: (https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/multipolarity-without-multilateralism_en) "We live indeed in a more and more multipolar world, but multilateralism is in retreat. It is a paradox. Why? Because when the number of participants in a game increases, the natural response should be to strengthen the rules governing the game. However, we are facing the opposite trend: the rules governing the world are running out of steam must find ways to overcome this paradox."*
[2] *Former High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*
[3] *https://commission.europa.eu/topics/strengthening-european-competitiveness/eu-competitiveness-looking-ahead_en*
[4] *https://www.europarl.europa.eu/resources/library/media/20220509RES29121/20220509RES29121.pdf*

In "Jesus Wars"[5], Philip Jenkins, one of the most respected experts in religious history, referring to the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451, which gave a dogmatic victory to the theological current known today as "orthodox" (of the right Christian faith) at the expense of the "Monophysite"[6] , shows that what followed was a fraternal conflict prolonged for two centuries between the two dogmatic parties greatly weakened the eastern part of the Roman Empire, where the believers were predominantly Monophysites. Because the imperial doctrine followed the orthodox current established at Chalcedon, the Eastern Christians (Syria, Persia, Egypt, etc.) began to lose trust in their leaders, thus opening the gates to the conquest of Islam, which initially promised tolerance and the protection that the Monophysites lacked in the Christian empire. Or, Philip Jenkins believes, we should see here a serious warning from history: when citizens begin to no longer believe in a state project, to see it eventually as indifferent to their fate, if not even hostile, dissolution is inevitable. And the alternative will in not be better.

Multipolarism, Multilateralism, Correlated to Conflicts

During the Cold War, the world was broadly divided into two blocs, known as the capitalist bloc, with the United States as the standard-bearer, and the communist bloc, with the USSR as the leader. This was the result of the regrouping of forces after WW2, which redrawn the global political scene into a bipolar architecture. However, this description is relatively simplistic, given that starting in 1961 a third global trend was created, called the "Non-Aligned Movement"[7], at the initiative of three states that did not find their national interests represented by any of the two great blocs: Jawaharlal Nehru's India, Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt and Josip Broz Tito's Yugoslavia (a federal state that no longer exists).

The multilateral collaboration of states in the bipolar order is determined by the will of the two competing superpowers, each of which forms a system of values, a sphere of influence. States in a sphere of influence are either allied through common interests with that great power, or dominated by it. We find multiple cases that exemplify this generic description in the history of the Cold War. When multilateral collaboration takes place in a multipolar order, the great powers have a relatively equal weight in establishing the terms of cooperation. Smaller states are grouped according to the nature of the power distribution They are under the influence of one great power or the other. In terms of international cooperation, advantages and disadvantages arise. One advantage would be that the states that are part of a coherent and solid alliance will be helped by the great power that creates the pole (of influence, security, culture and civilization) and thus their interests will be more firmly represented within a global multilateral organization. A disadvantage is that alliances in multipolarism can be volatile, and spheres of influence can change quite easily, which makes collaborative relations uncertain. Finally, in a unipolar global order, the superpower sometimes prefers to apply unilateralism instead of multilateralism, which is not necessarily opposed to multilateralism, but is part of the range of strategic options of the dominant state. Having a superior perspective and capabilities as compared to other states, the superpower can end up creating new institutions of multilateral collaboration through its unilateralist initiatives, which highlights the relative nature of unilateralism and multilateralism. A superpower in a unipolar order can create, for example, a collective security organization or a financial-banking system or other new organizations that work for the benefit of satellite states. Multilateralism in unipolarity could become very stable and efficient precisely because it is supported by the only superpower in the system.
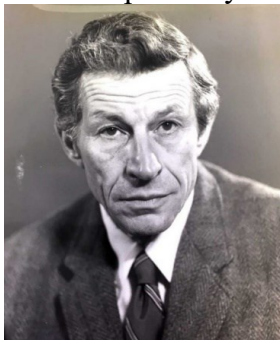
Multipolarism is a distribution of power in which more than two states share power. Multipolarism does not guarantee multilateralism; rather, it can pose a challenge to multilateralism. In 1972, Professor J. David Singer of the University of Michigan, in his academic project Correlatives of War[8], offered a formula for calculating the systemic concentration of power in a given great power system, as follows:

J. David Singer. Source: https://lsa.umich.edu/

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[5]*Philip Jenkins - "Jesus Wars. How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens, and Two Emperors Decided What Christians Would Believe for the Next 1,500 Years"; HarperCollins Publishers, 2010*
[6]*Term used to designate Christians who believed that Jesus was primarily of divine origin and denied the idea of a Jesus in whom both human nature and divine, godly nature were fully manifested (more correctly, the term would be "miaphysites")*
[7]*https://www.britannica.com/topic/Non-Aligned-Movement*
[8]*https://correlatesofwar.org/*

$$\text{Concentration}_t = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{N_t} (S_{it})^2 - \frac{1}{N_t}}{1 - \frac{1}{N_t}}}$$

"t" - the time at which the concentration of resources (i.e. power) is calculated;
"i" - the state in which the proportion of control over the power of the system is measured;
"Nt" - the number of states within the power system, at time "t";
"S" - the proportion of power held; "Sit" - the proportion of power held by state "i" at time "t".

　　　　The data collected over the years in the project initiated by Professor J. David Singer never targeted the European Union as a whole, but important member states, such as Germany, France, Italy, Spain etc. Of course, the power of the Union cannot be interpreted as a simple sum of the power of the 27 member states. It can be an interesting exercise, a calculation of the power that the European bloc would represent if it acted as a power system. For now, the paradigm in which we find ourselves is the one in which Europe is part of the Atlantic bloc, formed post-WW2.
　　　　The "Composite Index of the Power of Nations"[9] – CINC, proposed by Professor J. David Singer, is calculated according to the following formula:

$$\text{CINC} = \frac{TPR + UPR + ISPR + ECR + MER + MPR}{6}$$

Where:

TPR – Proportion[10] of state population;

UPR – Proportion of urban state population;

ISPR – Proportion of state iron and steel production;

ECR – Proportion of energy consumption;

MER – Proportion of military expenditure;

MPR – Proportion of military personnel.
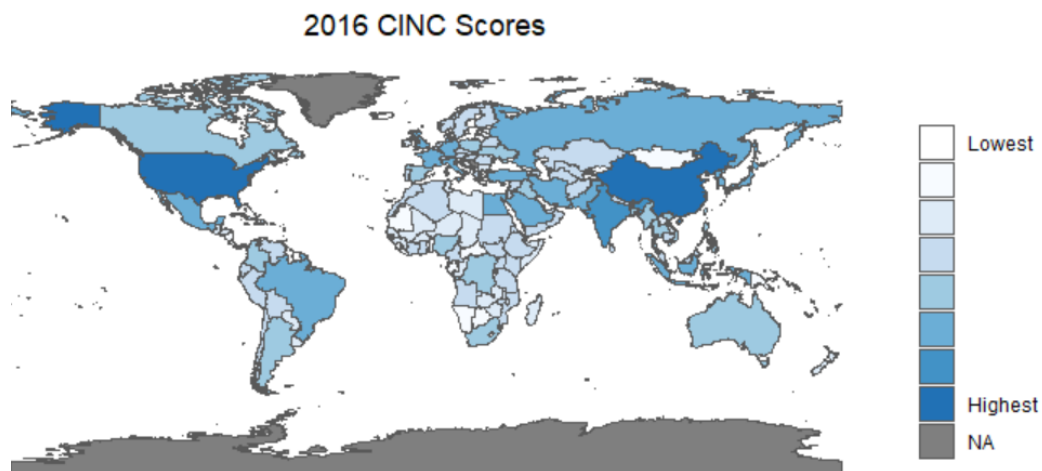
Global representation of states by CINC calculated in 2016. Source: https://correlatesofwar.org/wp-content/ uploads/625684b1-c72f-46dd-96e8-ac92ff76001a-cropped.png

[9]*Composite Index of National Capability, CINC*
[10]*Calculated by the relationship Country / World Total*

The European Union (EU) Economy on the Threshold of 2025

As a global actor, Europe has long been seen as holding the key to "soft power" on the global stage, given its market attractiveness and economic strength. After the Russian Federation attacked the sovereign territory of Ukraine in February 2014, the European Union has faced several waves of crisis. The crisis of migratory waves followed, we probably remember the images on television with those columns of migrants in waves forcing the borders in their march through the Balkans, Hungary and Austria towards Germany, or the improvised boats with hundreds of migrants storming the Mediterranean, towards the coasts of Italy, or in the Aegean Sea, towards the Greek islands.

GDP growth map
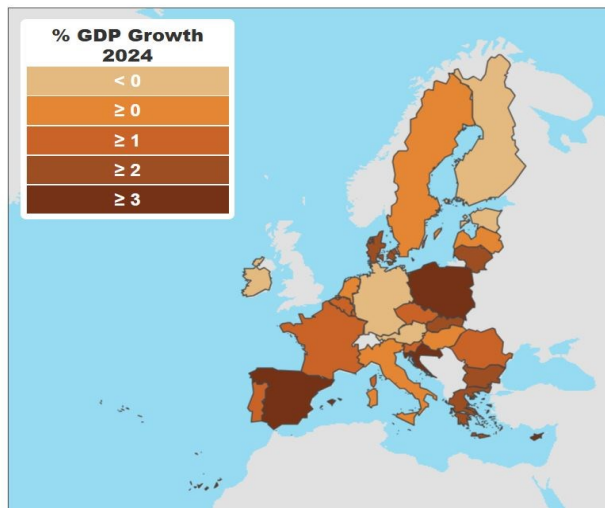
Estimated GDP growth in the European Union member states, according to the autumn forecast

Then the pandemic crisis in 2020 and 2021, the large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, a context in which the European Bloc seemed increasingly vulnerable. The European economy received blow after blow, decoupling itself rapidly from gas and oil imported from the Russian Federation.

The war on the Union's eastern border also showed that Europe's defense architecture is far too dependent on the United States, that there is not yet a credible military reaction force in terms of size and response power, but also that the European defense industry is undercapitalized, disorganized and has insufficient production capacities that can be quickly mobilized. The "soft power" argument can no longer be credibly mobilized by the European Union as long as the Union's economy is weakened, the argument of military force does not exist, and the decision-making capacity of the common institutions is vulnerable to the undermining of unanimity by some European capitals.

The European Commission's[11] autumn forecast projects real EU GDP growth in 2024 at 0.9% in the EU and 0.8% in the Eurozone; the autumn forecast is 0.1 pp below the spring forecast at EU level, and remains unchanged for the Eurozone. EU GDP is expected to grow by 1.5% in 2025, as consumption changes its dynamics and investment is set to return to growth. In 2026, economic activity is expected to grow by 1.8%, supported by continued expansion in demand. A similar dynamic is expected in the Eurozone, with growth of 1.3% in 2025 and 1.6% in 2026.
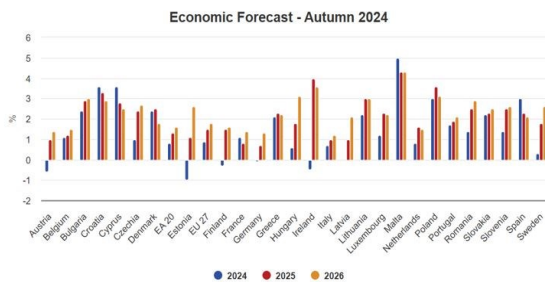
Key highlights of the European Commission's autumn forecast for the EU economy

The economic outlook for the European Union remains fundamentally uncertain. Russia's protracted war of aggression against Ukraine and the escalating conflict in the Middle East fuel geopolitical risks and the continued vulnerability of Europe's energy security, the autumn forecast notes.

Increased protectionist measures by trading partners (mainly the United States and China) could affect global trade, with a negative impact on the EU's highly open economy. Modest productivity growth may make it increasingly difficult for European firms to sustain wage growth, leading them to either reduce their workforce or pass on rising costs to consumers.

Key figures

	GDP	Inflation	Deficit	Unemployment
EU:				
2024:	0.9%	2.6%	-3.1%	6.1%
2025:	1.5%	2.4%	-3.0%	5.9%
2026:	1.8%	2.0%	-2.9%	5.9%
Euro area:				
2024:	0.8%	2.4%	-3.0%	6.5%
2025:	1.3%	2.1%	-2.9%	6.3%
2026:	1.6%	1.9%	-2.8%	6.3%

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[11] *https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-forecast-and-surveys/economic-forecasts/autumn-2024-economic-forecast-gradual-rebound-adverse-environment_en?prefLang=ro*

The unemployment rate is expected to decline to 5.9% in the European Union as a whole and 6.3% in the Eurozone in 2026. After peaking in 2023 (6.1%), wage growth in the Union was expected to follow a sustainable pace in 2024 (4.9%), before slowing to 3.5% in 2025 and 3% in 2026. Wage growth will cover inflation in real terms and is expected to allow for a recovery in purchasing power by 2025, both in the European Union and the Eurozone. Following a generally uneven annual growth in exports of goods in 2024, exports of goods are expected to grow somewhat more strongly in 2025 and 2026. Data for the first half of last year show that service exports performed well in 2024, driving the expected growth in aggregate exports to 1.4% in 2024. In 2025 and 2026, service exports are expected to grow at about the same pace as goods, as the momentum of the return to the global travel spending group moderates.

After broadly stagnating in 2024, imports of goods and services in 2025 and 2026 are expected to recover noticeably. After supporting real GDP growth in 2024, net exports are expected to stop contributing to EU GDP growth in 2025 and 2026. The current account surplus with the rest of the world is set to fall from 3.6% in 2024 to 3.4% in 2025 and 3.3% in 2026, as trade dynamics moderate.

All in all, Brussels does not foresee a positive dynamic for the European economy in the next two years. It looks cautiously at the United States, which will enter the age of a new Trump administration, which sees the European Union more as a competitor than a partner. It looks with distrust at Beijing's protectionist policies on the domestic market and China's aggressiveness on international markets. We are moving forward uncertainly, with caution and hesitation in relations with the Global South and intransigent action is desired in relation to the Russian Federation, although there are member states (Slovakia, Hungary) that are deliberately undermining the common European front in this direction.

The Defining Structure of the Global Competition and the Conclusion that Must Be Drawn

Is the global competition still ongoing between two blocs or is it an emerging triad? On one hand, we have the "G7", as the spearhead of the "Bretton Woods System", and on the other hand, "BRICS+", which denounces the post-WW2 established world order, meaning that it is still a competition between two blocs, or isn't it? Is a world with three poles of influence somehow emerging: China + Russia and their allies, the United States which, since Donald Trump's new mandate, has become very interested in dominating the Americas (see the latest statements regarding expansionist interests targeting Canada, Greenland, the Panama Canal), multilateral competition with China and economic competition with the European Union, and a third pole that can be coagulated by the European Union and other emerging forces of the Global South that cannot and do not want to accept the assertiveness of the other two previously defined blocs?

I believe that both the first and second visions are schematic and reductionist. Let us take Turkey as an example, a formal regional power, still an ally of the West, which, during the sixteenth meeting held in Kazan, in the Russian Federation, has been accepted as an observer state within BRICS+. This regional power, under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is punching well above its apparent specific weight (or, in the terms of Professor J. David Singer, above its power score in the global competition), competing without reservations in the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East, North Africa and in the Balkans with both the European Union and the Russian Federation, the neighboring powers, and the United States, although formally Turkey is still an ally of the Atlantic Bloc.

Turkey, as the heir to the former Ottoman Empire, of Sunni Muslim tradition, has been asserting its "historical right" more and more strongly in the last decade and acting accordingly. In 2020, Azerbaijan, openly supported by Turkey, managed to expel the Armenian population from Nagorno-Karabakh after winning a military confrontation with Armenia. Turkey supports the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization of the Sunni Islamic Revolution, and is one of Qatar's key allies in the region. Turkey supported the offensive led by the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), a group that overthrew the Assad regime in late 2024, taking power in Syria. After that, the Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and the head of the intelligence agency, Ibrahim Kalin, traveled to Damascus to sign an agreement with the new power to redefine maritime zones in the Mediterranean.

At stake in the agreement? Hydrocarbon reserves in the depths of the Eastern Mediterranean. A similar agreement was signed by Ankara with Tripoli in 2019, followed in 2022 by a memorandum for the exploitation of hydrocarbon reserves in the Libyan Sea; both documents were denounced by Greece, Cyprus and Egypt, supported by Brussels.

At this point, Turkey is acting decisively and seems ready to compete regionally with the traditional great powers without any restraint. The Russian military bases – naval and air – in Syria, the only ones in the Mediterranean Sea, depend on the new government in Damascus, which seems to be under Turkey and Qatar's control and will probably be formed by militants who are members or sympathizers of the Muslim Brotherhood.

If Syria enters Turkey's sphere of influence, with a Muslim Brotherhood government, Israel and Egypt, allies of the United States and the European Union, will feel directly threatened. The European Union energy plans will also be threatened: Italy, Greece, Cyprus, together with Israel and Egypt, to compensate for the dependence on the hydrocarbon resources of the Russian Federation. However, Turkey believes that the time has come to bet on a card similar to Russia, forcing an energy blackmail in the Eastern Mediterranean, which would later allow it to continue its policy of regaining historical influence in the territories of the Ottoman Empire.

COUNTRY	COMPOSITE INDEX 2016	COUNTRY	COMPOSITE INDEX 2016
China	0.23062	Pakistan	0.01515
United States	0.13306	Turkey	0.01479
India	0.08684	Mexico	0.01468
Russia	0.03647	Saudi Arabia	0.01448
Japan	0.03297	North Korea	0.01344
Brazil	0.02326	United Kingdom	0.01342
South Korea	0.02326	France	0.01338
Germany	0.01659	Italy	0.01143
Indonesia	0.01622	Egypt	0.01006
Iran	0.01535	Vietnam	0.00949

CINC 2016, top 20 positions. Source: https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/composite-index-of-national-capability-by-country

We are in the year 2025, but if we look at the CINC index calculated from the data of 2016, we notice some interesting aspects, which may provide part of the explanation for the "impatience" with which the post-WW2 world order has been so strongly contested for the last two decades. We can conclude, in a quick analysis, that BRICS+ manages to align more states ranked in the top ten CINC 2016 positions than the G7, for example. That the UK, France and Italy are followed by North Korea, for example. We can also suspect that Iran could be downgraded in 2025 compared to 2016, after the conflict with Israel and the loss of influence in Syria and Lebanon in favor of the Sunni representatives of the Islamic revolution, namely the Muslim Brotherhood.

Here are just a few examples of vigorous mutations thought and put into practice by regional actors claiming their seat at the table of the future global multipolar competition, proposing their own multilateral architectures. What Ankara and Tehran have been planning and doing in the Middle East for the past two decades, with its "proxy" structures in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen, directed against both Israel and Saudi Arabia is proof of that. It took the bloody attack by Hamas on October 7, 2023 and then a bloody war, with great Israeli sacrifices and tens of thousands of civilian casualties in the region, for this Iranian regional multilateral cancer to be weakened. And this is without taking into account the support that the Tehran regime offered to Putin's Russia in the large-scale invasion launched in February 2022 in Ukraine.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANISATION
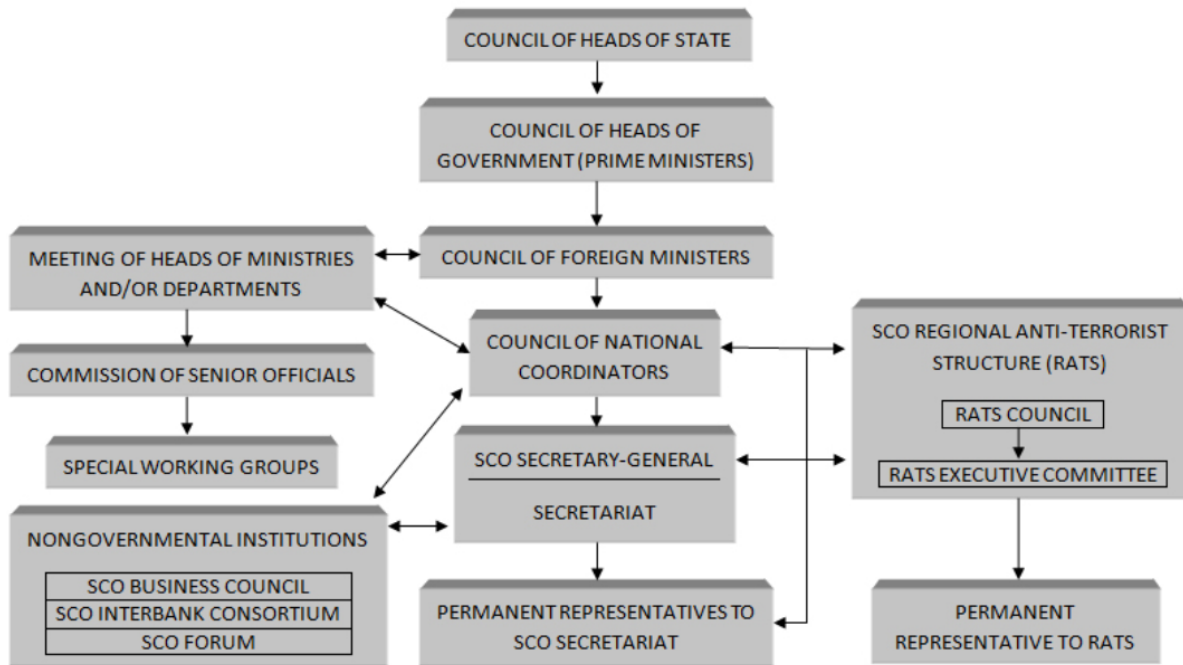
Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shanghai_Cooperation_Organization

The global multipolarism that is emerging on the international stage – actually, an acceptable definition for the term "global chaos" – so far seems to anticipate a certain competition that has gotten out of control. Beijing's idea of replacing Bretton Woods with another global system, more "fair", more "just", together with the Russian Federation, the United Nations, the Security Council and the financial institutions – the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund – leaves the world's architecture without landmarks.

Instead, it proposes a parallel system, prefigured by this BRICS+: BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), New Development Bank, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Interbank Consortium, SCO Business Council, and so on.

I think that, when some observers fear that Europe could lose touch with its main competitors, the United States and China, they are actually losing sight of the essential. We are still talking about a competition between two blocs, as they emerged after WW2, only that the leader of the Eastern Bloc has changed, the USSR was replaced by communist China, while the leader of the North Atlantic Bloc, the United States, has become hesitant in its leadership, because the Washington elites have changed their interests. A political minority tends to view Europe less as a natural ally and more as a future competitor.

In this context, it matters somewhat whether the European economy keeps pace with the economies of the United States or China, but what matters most is whether European capitals can understand the urgency of deepening integration on the continent and equipping the European Union with all the necessary tools to face the most difficult scenario in the future: the transformation of the United States from a committed ally into an economic competitor and a purely temporary military ally, somewhat similar to the role it played between 1939-1941, in its relationship with Great Britain, which was in imminent danger of being invaded by Nazi Germany.

If Europe deepens its integration on the continent, thus optimizing its decision-making chains and the way to manage its resources - following the Japanese model, for example - the continent can recover quickly and greatly in terms of resilience. An innovative Europe, a Europe with pragmatic and efficient diplomacy, which optimally uses the full range of historically inherited assets, a Europe that builds a credible defense force will quickly becomes interesting for the African continent, for the states of the Global South that understand that it is not in their interest to depend on an increasingly assertive China.

　　　Moreover, a Europe that finds its balance can once again become an inspiration for the moderate elites in Washington, who reject the populist and aggressive excesses behind the rhetoric of the Trump-Musk group that will take control of the White House in the next four years.

　　　I would go further by stating that Europe is the hope of the world of tomorrow. If the China-Russia tandem, with their acolytes North Korea or Iran, become increasingly aggressive, if the Trump-Musk administration shakes the trust on the two American continents with the claims it raises against other nations and territories in North and Central America[12], from Brussels and the European continent can come the message of balance, the hope for the future for the world elites whose stake continues to be the values of democracy and freedom.

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[12]*https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/5058013-trump-purchase-canada-panama-canal/*

Multipolarism and its Impact on International Security: Opportunities and Challenges

Abaho Gift CONRAD (Uganda)

The world is changing. Gone are the days when a single nation dictated the course of global affairs. Today, we find ourselves in a multipolar world, where power is distributed across several emerging nations, creating both new opportunities and challenges. This shift is reshaping the way we think about international security and governance, and in a rapidly evolving global landscape, understanding the forces at play has never been more crucial.

A New Global Landscape

In the past, the post-Cold War world was dominated by a singular superpower, the United States. Yet, as the 21st century unfolds, countries like China, India, Russia, and a growing list of African and Latin American nations are asserting themselves as key players in the global political and economic arenas. For many, this moment marks a significant departure from an era of Western dominance, giving rise to what many now call a "multipolar world."

But what does that mean for international security? In a multipolar world, the once-clear lines of geopolitical conflict are becoming blurred. Global governance has no single compass to guide it. Emerging powers and traditional leaders must find a way to coexist, collaborate, and, when necessary, confront one another, each bringing their own perspective on what the future should look like.

Source: https://credendo.com/en/knowledge-hub/world-new-multipolar-order-making-broad-impact

Emerging Opportunities

While the shift toward a multipolar world is undoubtedly complex, it also brings exciting new possibilities. For one, it democratizes global governance. With new voices on the table, we are beginning to see a more inclusive approach to decision-making. Africa, for example, which once played a peripheral role in global security discussions, is now emerging as a central player.

Take **South Africa**, a member of the BRICS group, for instance. It has not only become an influential voice on global governance but has also led peacekeeping missions across the African continent. From the **African Union's** peacekeeping forces in **Somalia** to their efforts to broker peace in **South Sudan**, African leaders are showing that they can lead the charge on their own continent. It's a remarkable shift, reflecting the broader power dynamics at play.

In China, the Belt and Road Initiative is another example of how a multipolar world fosters new kinds of cooperation. Through this program, China is investing heavily in infrastructure projects across Africa, Asia, and Europe, helping to stimulate economies that have long been side-lined.

The emergence of multipolarism also presents an opportunity to address long-standing security issues, particularly those that stem from inequality, poor governance, and lack of infrastructure. By working together with emerging powers, we have a chance to create lasting solutions to these problems-solutions that are no longer dictated by a single nation but are a product of global cooperation.

The Challenges of Multipolarism

Yet, the rise of multipolarism doesn't come without its challenges. As power becomes more fragmented, security threats grow more complex. One of the greatest concerns is the rise of proxy wars, where external powers support competing factions in conflicts, as seen in Syria and Ukraine. The impact of these conflicts often reverberates far beyond the borders of the countries involved, creating instability that undermines international security.

Non-state actors-terrorist organizations, transnational criminal groups, and cybercriminals-further complicate the security landscape. Across Africa, groups like Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and the Islamic State have seized on the absence of strong governance to spread terror. And as global powers increasingly retreat from direct intervention in favour of regional partnerships, local governments are left to shoulder the burden.

In addition, cyber threats present an ever-growing risk. Countries are now engaging in digital warfare-hacking, cyber espionage, and misinformation campaigns-creating a new kind of security challenge that transcends borders. This is a world where conflict is not just fought on battlefields but on servers, with the power to disrupt entire economies and national security.

The Role of Africa in a Multipolar World

So where does Africa fit into all of this? With its abundant resources, strategic geographical location, and emerging leadership, Africa has a unique opportunity to take centre stage in shaping the new world order. No longer content to be passive recipients of international aid or security interventions, African nations are now demanding a seat at the table in discussions about their future.

Countries like Kenya, Nigeria, and Ethiopia are becoming increasingly influential, with Kenya playing a pivotal role in East Africa's stability and Nigeria acting as a heavyweight in West Africa. The African Union is playing a more significant role, especially in peacekeeping operations, and African countries are now more vocal in shaping global policies around climate change, migration, and conflict resolution.

However, Africa's security challenges are far from over. The continent continues to struggle with internal conflicts, from the instability in the Sahel to the ongoing violence in Central African Republic. Africa's leaders must navigate these challenges while balancing the interests of external powers like China, the United States, and Russia, all of whom have invested heavily in the continent.

The question becomes: Can Africa embrace the opportunities of multipolarism while addressing its security concerns? For Africa to secure its place in this evolving global order, it must focus on strengthening internal governance structures, ensuring inclusive political systems, and investing in regional cooperation. Only then can Africa stand as a true partner in global peace and security.

Towards a Unified Global Security Framework

The rise of multipolarism calls for a rethinking of how we address global security. In a fragmented world, it is not enough to rely on the established powers to solve all of our problems. Global governance must be inclusive and collaborative, with a focus on shared values and mutual respect.

For Africa, this means continuing to strengthen its security and economic frameworks while engaging with the global community to foster cooperation. There is no longer a singular path to peace - there are many. And the role of each actor, from the United States to China, Russia to South Africa, will be key in creating a future where all can thrive.

Africa's place in the multipolar world will depend on how it navigates this complex landscape, balancing the pressures of external powers with its own internal needs. The continent's future is not just about security, but about prosperity, development, and cooperation in the pursuit of a common goal—a peaceful, prosperous world where every nation has the opportunity to shape its own destiny.

Conclusion: A World of Opportunity and Challenge

The rise of multipolarism is both a challenge and an opportunity a moment of great uncertainty, but

also great potential. For Africa, the future lies in its ability to harness this new geopolitical reality. By embracing cooperation, investing in peace, and shaping its economic future, Africa can become a leader in the global security framework.

This is Africa's moment a chance to shape its future, its security, and its place in a rapidly changing world. The opportunities are immense, but the challenges are equally significant. The world must rise together, with Africa playing a leading role in crafting a new, multipolar world order, where peace, security, and prosperity are shared goals for all.

Multipolarism, Multilateralism or a New World Order Based on Various Types of Societies

PhD. Eng. Stelian TEODORESCU (Romania)

The world is becoming increasingly complex, with states facing a reality that is difficult to dispute, namely the impossibility of facing the current regional and global challenges alone, especially in the context in which the establishment of a new world order has already been affirmed as an irreversible process, with various positive and negative effects on the development of human society as a whole. As expected, and as can be easily observed, the desire for being in a unique position and asserting principle-based interests that are sometimes taken to the extreme is suppressed by the need to participate in the development of international cooperation in order to solve the problems that the entire world is facing and to be prepared to face the consequences they rise.

As a result, the dynamics and predictability of the current geopolitical and geostrategic environment are strongly influenced by the dynamics and sometimes incomprehensible transformations of relations between the main global actors. They are also influenced by an

"A more multipolar and unequal world needs agreed rules and strong institutions."

JOSEP BORRELL

Source: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/building-multilateralism-21st%C2%A0century_en

increased freedom of action and new regional actors (state or non-state). The entire world is marked by developments characterized by relative successes, but also by the deepening of significant contradictions and the outbreak of conflicts within the international community, which as a whole is facing the crucial test of reconfiguring the geopolitical architecture and transforming the system of international relations.

In addition to the USA, Russia and China, new actors with significant regional and global influence have emerged on the international stage - India, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Turkey, Iran or South Africa, actors that are already asserting themselves as poles of power in various regions of the world. The concept of "geopolitical architecture" was introduced for the first time on 28-29 October 2006, at the International Seminar "The New Architecture of World Politics", held in Piedmont, Italy. Experts in the field have emphasized that the shift from unipolarity to multipolarism took place when the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin delivered its speech. On 10 February 2007, at the Munich conference, he spoke out against the unipolar order, taking advantage of the centers of power present there, believing their presence to be beneficial for international relations.

The notions of "pole of power" and "polarity" are widely used in the analysis of the system of international relations, implying the existence of one or more actors with potential who, when they interact or stop interacting with other international actors, have the ability to influence the changes in the architecture of the system of international relations itself. The essential components that can determine the status of a pole of power in the structure of international relations are: political power, economic power, military power and technological power - various fields that are increasingly sensitive and important for all of humanity.

We are witnessing the reconfiguration of the geopolitical architecture both regionally and globally, in this world that we now see as multipolar. However, the tensions that exist today in certain regions are the result of the competing interests of these international actors, each claiming to be acknowledged as a regional pole of power, a status needed so they can take part in the strategic decisions adopting process on a global or regional level.

In an attempt to understand diplomacy by analyzing diplomatic interactions through a quantitative and qualitative approach, today the term "multilateralism" is used more than ever, a term used because of its complexity in the system of international relations.

At an international level, there are certain points of view or concepts that say the term "multilateralism" is not defined by the theory of international relations. In Russia, for example - as Andrey Kortunov[1] argued in his article "What is Multilateralism in European Terms?", dated May 28, 2020 - the term does not exist. For a long time, "multilateralism" remained in the shadow of the much more popular term "multipolarism", although the latter is gradually being replaced in Russian literature by the term "polycentrism". Sometimes, it seems that "multilateralism" and "multipolarism" are used in Russian scientific and political discourse as synonyms, both reflecting the cyclical change in the system of international relations that began with the dissolution of the "unipolar world" at the beginning of the century. However, "multipolarism" is obviously not the same thing as "multilateralism". The first denotes pluralism in the distribution of power in the international system among at least three or more independent decision-making centers, while the second describes a possible way for these centers to collaborate. Without multipolarism, there can be no multilateralism, since a unipolar or bipolar systems simply do not provide enough actors for multipolar interaction. But, at the same time, multipolarism does not necessarily imply multilateralism, since relations within a multipolar system can theoretically be reduced to a set of bilateral relations only between individual centers of power. At present, the world is going through such a situation.

If, however, we consider that diplomatic interactions cannot be analyzed only through a quantitative approach, but also through a qualitative approach, we must emphasize what many international relations experts believe - multilateralism needs the following three features:
- indivisibility;
- generalized principles of organization;
- diffuse reciprocity.

Many studies and debates provided by various international experts, pay a significant amount of attention to one of the fathers of modern foreign policy thinking, the German professor, Hanns W. Maull[2].In his essay, "Multilateralism: Variants, Potential, Constraints and Conditions for Success", published by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) he allotted a significant amount of words to the concept.

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[1]*Dr. Andrey Kortunov: born 19 August 1957 (age 67), Moscow, Russia. Academic Director of the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) and member. He graduated from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) in 1979 and completed his postgraduate studies at the Institute for US and Canadian Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences in 1982. He holds a PhD in history. Dr. A. Kortunov interned at the Soviet embassies in London and Washington and at the Permanent Delegation of the USSR to the UN. In 1982–1995, Dr. A. Kortunov held various positions at the Institute for US and Canadian Studies, including Deputy Director. He has taught at universities around the world, including the University of California, Berkeley. In addition, he has headed several public organizations involved in higher education, social sciences, and social development. From 2011 to 2023, A. Kortunov was the General Director of RIAC. He is a member of expert and supervisory committees and boards of directors of several Russian and international organizations. His academic interests include contemporary international relations and Russian foreign policy.*

[2]*Hanns W. Maull: born October 5, 1947, Augsburg, Germany. He is a professor at Johns Hopkins University, Bologna. Current research interests: the evolution and future prospects of the international order; German foreign and security policy; comparative analysis of German and Japanese security policies. Since 2021 Associate, The Americas Research Group, SWP; 1991-2013, Professor and Chair for Foreign Policy and International Relations, University of Trier; 2010-2011, Senior Fellow, Transatlantic Academy, Washington, D.C.; 2004-2012, Chair, Research Advisory Committee / Board Member, SWP, Berlin.*

Given the type and unpredictability of the developments in the world we live in, as well as the results and consequences generated on medium and long terms, the opinion of the German scholar, Hanns W. Maull, is more and more realistic. It expressed it in one of his studies, which referred to the moment when the process of transformation of the world order started, so he thought: "dissolution or replacement?".

The first level of understanding, designated by H. W. Maull as Multilateralism I, reduces this concept to diplomatic interaction between three or more states (or other actors in international politics). This understanding does not present difficulties or controversies: multilateralism is reduced to formal issues and is in contrast to unilateral and bilateral formats. Participants in the multilateral format can pursue any objectives and base their cooperation on the principles that suit them. From the aforementioned essay, we can conclude that the three agreements signed in the second half of the 18th century between Russia, Prussia and Poland on the division of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth fits well into the definition of multilateral diplomacy, as all three parties participated in all agreements. Modern German foreign policy uses a broader interpretation of multilateralism, designated by Hanns W. Maull as Multilateralism II. The essence of the German understanding is that multilateralism, in addition to formal criteria, should also include substantive criteria. It therefore includes the interaction of more than two actors with actions within international organizations, oriented towards principles and norms carried out in accordance with the rules and regulations of those organizations (such as the UN Charter). A possible example of Multilateralism II is perhaps the way in which European countries cooperated within the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in the 1970s and 1980s, while maintaining a predominantly competitive relationship between two different social and political systems at that time.

According to detailed international analyses based on the essay published by H. W. Maull, it turned out that, from a historical point of view, this understanding of multilateralism is closely linked to the concept of the Western liberal world order, whose foundations of which were laid in 1945. However, this does not mean that Multilateralism II must inevitably disappear with the declining liberal world order. It can be based on other values and principles; the main element is the creation of common norms in world politics, which are agreed upon in a multilateral format. At the international level, there is this concept that, in fact, multilateral mechanisms should allow us to agree on common norms and values, a universally desirable world order and regulatory practices acceptable for all participants in multilateral negotiations. Multilateralism III represents a more radical understanding of the term. While the main task of Multilateralism II is to achieve the broadest possible compromise on the basic regulatory issues, despite the significant differences in the interests of the participants, Multilateralism III is meant to find "correct" or "adequate" solutions to the problems of world politics, that is, to achieve a transition to "effective global governance". If Multilateralism II proceeds from what the participants in the system believe is achievable, Multilateralism III operates in terms of what is desired and what should be done. In the first case, we are talking about a tactical alliance of players with very different aspirations, and in the second case, about a strategic partnership of similar parties interacting with each other to achieve common goals.

But on September 24, 2023, an interesting conversation was published between Josep Borrell, a Spanish politician who served as High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission from 2019 to 2024, and Professor Joseph Weiler from New York University. The discussion took place in the context of participation in the UN General Assembly in New York, a key event for the international community.

Thus, analyzing the opinions and points of view expressed in a different context generated by the meeting between Josep Borrell and Joseph Weiler, it seems that we currently live in an increasingly multipolar world, but with a declining multilateralism, an evolution considered to be a paradox. Why? Because it is believed that when the number of participants in a game increases, the natural response should be to strengthen the rules that govern the game. However, now it seems that we are facing opposite trends: the rules that govern the world are running out. We must find ways to overcome this paradox. This new multipolarism results from the combination of three dynamics. First, a wider distribution of wealth in the world, second, the desire of states to assert themselves strategically and ideologically and third, the emergence of an increasingly transactional international system, based more on bilateral agreements than on global rules. In 1990, the G7 accounted for 67% of world GDP; today, this share has fallen below 40%. In 1990, China's share of world GDP was 1.6%; today, it is 18%. Within the G7, the US' share has fallen, but much less than that of Europe and Japan, and in the Western world, the US continues to dominate. Beyond the G7, multipolarism is primarily the result of China's impressive rise. Hence the reconfiguration of global relations around the US and China. Together, they account for more than 40% of global wealth and, as a result, wield significant power over the

international system. In the coming decades, we could also have an India that catches up with China and the US.

Multipolarism is no longer just the result of the distribution of wealth. The new multipolar world is also characterized by a growing demand for sovereignty and identity, especially in the so-called Global South, although it is a very heterogeneous group of countries. In Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa, and of course in Asia, almost everyone believes that there are credible alternatives to the West, not only economically, but also technologically, militarily and ideologically. This does not necessarily mean that, with China's rise, a new global model is emerging. Nor does it mean that China will try to convince third countries to adopt its model in all its dimensions. Rather, countries are looking for alternatives to the Western model on a case-by-case basis, as is currently happening in various countries in Africa. These countries seem willing to work with any player who seems opportunistically capable of replacing the old ones. These new players seem to offer attractive advantages that suit many regimes of different orientations. For example, this reality is reflected and manifested through diverse attitudes and effects in the reactions to the war of aggression against Ukraine. Most countries in the Global South share the idea that Russia is the aggressor and have voted to denounce its aggression at the UN, but many of them are not ready to go beyond this point. They do not want the case of Ukraine to dominate the global agenda. For example, they fear that financing for the green transition in the Global South could suffer because of the need to finance reconstruction in Ukraine. For many countries far from the EU, the war in Ukraine looks like a simple border dispute between a large country and its smaller neighbor. After all, it is believed that this is not such a major problem, especially in the context where "China and Russia are contesting the universal nature of human rights and many countries in the so-called Global South are receptive to this approach." Beyond that, there is the question of values. Europeans still react based on a worldview enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Universalism is seen as a mere vestige of Western dominance, forgetting that everyone is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. An argument often made is that the West itself does not always respect the rules it claims to defend. This criticism is clearly not entirely well-founded, but neither is it entirely unfounded.

As such, as an alternative, a form of political culturalism is increasingly being proposed, whereby each society would have the right to have its own values. With such an approach, a country's sovereignty would take precedence over upholding human rights and civil liberties. China in particular is playing this card for all it's worth, preferring a transactional world rather than a multilateral one. This new multipolarism triggers a lack of international consensus on almost every issue. It becomes very clear that, if a global collective capacity to establish rules is abandoned, everyone will do what they can or how they want. So, in such a context, we will witness a stalemate in security issues in particular. It can be said that for almost 17 years now, the Security Council has become totally ineffective due to the inappropriate use of their veto by some permanent member states, especially by Russia, which systematically opposes the adoption of many decisions, the most frequent of which in recent times have been those regarding Ukraine, or Syria and Mali. As a result, we can say that the reform of the Security Council is more urgent than ever, since no permanent member is willing to give up the right of veto. So, at the same time, we have increasingly influential players and more and more global challenges, but it is increasingly difficult to reach a consensus to deal with them. There is no longer a coalition of dominant powers capable of imposing a global order. On the contrary, competing powers tend to neutralize each other. This situation is likely to persist until the balance of power between the dominant players stabilizes. The risk of division into competing blocs leads to the splitting of the world order into competing blocs in important areas such as security, defense, economic integration, energy resources and technology. The lack of consensus will then break the world and force third countries to align themselves with one of the competing systems. One of the most well-known cases is the Internet or social networks, where countries like Russia and China could impose their own specific standards and divide the world in the vast cyberspace. Such fragmentation will, of course, create huge economic costs and reduce incentives for cooperation on global issues such as climate. What could and should we do? First of all, we should not delude ourselves: it is difficult to imagine a comprehensive overhaul of the world order while there is no consensus on this issue among the great powers, especially between the US, China and Russia. Traditional "top-down multilateralism", which involves major conferences during which all countries make decisions together on various issues, works less and less. However, if we cannot find a single global alternative to the crisis of multilateralism, could we find some temporary ones? A more promising approach would perhaps be to pursue what is increasingly being called "minilateralism": agreements on various issues between like-minded states. However, to avoid the bloc vs. bloc confrontation that I mentioned earlier, we must implement an approach that goes beyond regional limitation and attracts the support of key countries because only in this way can we widen the circle of like-minded states and objectives so that they can gradually and pragmatically bring other countries closer.

According to what has been said before, we can attest that all of them are perceived at the international level, as a result, in a significant effort to "strengthen multilateralism for a more just and democratic world order". The current surprise bloc BRICS that includes many developing states has reaffirmed its commitment to intensifying the aforementioned process and international laws, and adopt adoption of favorable political decisions and intensify economic growth efforts with the aim of "paving the way for a more equitable, just, democratic and balanced multipolar world order". These states claim and promote this type of world order at the international level to justify the projects they initiated and support with increasingly intense ardor.

Initially composed of Brazil, the Russian Federation, India, China and South Africa, the recently expanded alliance now also includes Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The 16th BRICS Summit was held in Kazan, Russia, from 22 to 24 October 2024, under the theme "Strengthening Multilateralism for Just Global Development and Security". Opening the meeting of the BRICS summit in a restricted format, President F. Ruse and current BRICS Chairman V. Putin stressed the need to discuss the implementation of the decisions adopted at the 15th BRICS Summit: deeper financial cooperation within the BRICS and further expansion of the bloc. Regarding the latter, he said that more than 30 nations "have expressed such aspirations in one form or another". In the same context, it is significant to emphasize here that, in turn, in his statements, UN Secretary-General António Guterres stressed that "no single group and no country can act singularly or in isolation" to address global challenges. Stressing the "very important role" of BRICS in strengthening multilateralism for global development and security, he urged the bloc to contribute to four areas of action: finance, climate, technology and peace. At the end of the Summit, the leaders adopted a 32-page final document, entitled the "Kazan Declaration". In this declaration, the leaders reiterate their "commitment to improving global governance by promoting a more agile, efficient, effective, responsive, representative, legitimate, democratic and accountable international and multilateral system". By calling for a greater and more meaningful participation of emerging markets, developing countries and least developed countries in global decision-making processes, they are making it clear that they are also reaffirming their support for a comprehensive reform of the UN, including the Security Council, creating the perception that they aim to make these international institutions "more democratic, representative, effective and efficient" by increasing the representation of developing countries as full members.

Even though the UN should be the center of the multilateral system of international relations, we can currently consider that the institutions of this organization are no longer strong enough to face all the challenges facing the world today, among which are the development of cooperation based on constructive principles and respect for the sovereignty of states. Moreover, there have been many cases where the lack of effective management tools has transformed regional and global crises into opportunities for various international actors advocating other forms of cooperation and, implicitly, another international order.

Noting the "universal and inclusive nature" of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its goals, the leaders stress that their implementation "should take into account different national circumstances, capacities and levels of development", respecting national policies, priorities and legislation. The declaration outlines the bloc's priorities for the UN Conference on Biodiversity (CBD COP 16), the UN Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP 29) and the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP 16). The leaders highlight the Group of 20 (G20) as the main global forum for multilateral economic and financial cooperation, where both developed and emerging economies can meet "on an equal and mutually beneficial basis" to jointly seek common solutions to global challenges. Stressing the need to reform the global financial architecture, the leaders stress the need to "address international debt appropriately and in a holistic manner to support economic recovery and sustainable development", including through predictable, orderly, timely and coordinated implementation within the G20 framework for debt relief. The declaration also: highlights the leaders' priorities in strengthening cooperation for global and regional stability and security, including through enhanced BRICS dialogue on security policies and issues. It reaffirms the importance of BRICS people-to-people exchanges in enhancing mutual understanding, friendship and cooperation for social and economic development, but it remains to be seen what developments, policies pursued and results achieved will be in 2025 when, as the chair of the alliance, Brazil will host the 17th BRICS Summit.

In the context of a detailed analysis of international developments, I propose we pay attention to the views expressed and forecasts made by Alvin Toffler in his 1970 bestseller, "Future Shock", which closely resembles today's reality. He anticipated the rise of the internet, the sharing economy, companies built on "adhocracy"[3] rather than centralized bureaucracy, as well as social confusion and broader concerns about technology. He predicted that the evolving relationship between people and technology would shape the way

societies and economies develop. This is also the focus of the World Economic Forum's work, which explores how technology advances and how relevant challenges will be addressed by 2030, all of these accelerated developments giving rise to many uncertainties facing policymakers, corporate leaders and key civil society actors, who must adapt to the demands of a new world order in full evolution and transformation.

In conclusion, it is necessary to emphasize that all the financial, economic and conflict crises with unprecedented effects at regional and global levels, the extremely rapid development of threats to the international order and the unexpected evolutionary dynamics of the norms governing the use of force are among those elements that have generated significant consequences on polarity, favoring the development of multipolarism and giving rise to many uncertainties regarding multilateralism. The development and consequences of multipolarism, together with the significant trend of development of populism and nationalism, will probably determine the direction of the global order towards a hybrid system of international relations, with a fragile level of stability, but characterized by a stronger commitment at the regional level. An uncertain political, military and security environment due to increased volatility will constitute a favorable environment for certain medium and small powers to adopt unpredictable decisions with long-term consequences, especially in the context of the increasing trend towards nationalist and populist demands and claims. In this context, a better understanding of the interaction between domestic and international factors will become imperative in order to see how conflictual tendencies of any type will affect the world order.

As a result, such an evolution could mean an increase in rivalries and competition between actors at the global and regional levels, but their policies could become more inward-looking, since all these entities will have a strategic interest in investing only in those systems of cooperative relations that will firmly ensure their prosperity and security in its entirety.

Such an evolution offers favorable conditions for the emergence of an interpolar world based on the convergence of the interests of the great powers, but also on the identification of the most effective cooperative solutions to face the challenges generated by this multipolar world.

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³*Term that designates in contemporary sociology and political futurology the chronic instability experienced by various forms of organization (economic and social) as a result of the impact of capitalist society developed with the scientific-technical revolution, the requirement to introduce new organizational structures at various levels of leadership. (https://dexonline.ro/definitie/adhocra%C8%9Bie).*

SECURITY AND RESILIENCE

Understanding National Security
Part IV: The Component of
Critical National Infrastructure (CNI) Security

Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Georgios KOUKAKIS (Greece)

"Critical national infrastructure is assets that are essential for the functioning of society, such as those associated with energy supply, water supply, transportation, health and telecommunications."

National Cyber Security Centre of the UK

Abstract

This article is the fourth part of an article series that aim to present the various components of *national security*, a dimension of security that has recently been under the spotlight due to the numerous crises that have emerged and the plethora of threats that prevail in the contemporary security environment. It focuses on critical national infrastructure security, a component of national security that is interconnected[2] with a significant number of policy fields and therefore affects the proper functioning of states and the well-being of their citizens. Its purpose is to clarify the context of this component, present its interconnection with other components of national security, analyze its impact to a variety of policy fields and finally highlight its importance for peace and stability. Its <u>main conclusion</u> is that critical national infrastructure security is a very important component of national security and must not be overlooked.

Introduction

The contemporary security environment has been characterized as an environment of *polycrises* (multiple crises) and *permacrises* (permanent crises)[1], due to the numerous long-lasting and different types (military, economic, energy, food, health, etc.) crises that have occurred. In this context, national security is of vital importance for every state, as it contributes greatly to the promotion of its national energy interests and the wellbeing of its citizens as well, since security and development are interconnected. One of the components of national security is *critical national infrastructure security*, the importance of which has been highlighted through several incidents that are going to be presented in the article, having a direct or indirect impact on several policy fields.

The article presents the context of critical national infrastructure security, a significant component of national security. Its <u>importance</u> lies in the fact that energy security is very important for every state, as it ensures the states' *proper function* and the well-being of its citizens. Current research indicates that the hostile contemporary security environment of polycrises and permacrises forced states to re-evaluate their policy regarding its

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[1]Koukakis, G. (2023). *Permacrises and Polycrises: Outlining the Contemporary Security Environment through References to Strategic Documents of Regional and International Actors. HAPSc Policy Briefs Series, Vol 4 (2).* 55-64. https://doi.org/10.12681/hapscpbs.36661.

[2]Stern, M., & Öjendal, J. (2010). *Mapping the Security–Development Nexus: Conflict, Complexity, Cacophony, Convergence? Security Dialogue, 41(1),* 5–29. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26301183

critical infrastructure in order to enhance their national security, thus the article <u>contributes</u> in existing literature as it provides additional information that can help *citizens* understand the need for enhancing critical national infrastructure security and *policy makers* plan and implement respective policies in a more effective way. Its <u>purpose</u> is to clarify the context of critical national infrastructure security, present its interconnection with the other components of national security and policy fields, and highlight its importance for peace and stability. The <u>main conclusion</u> is that critical national infrastructure security is a very important component of national security and must not be overlooked. As far as the <u>structure</u> of the article is concerned, it initially clarifies the concept of national security, explains the context of critical national infrastructure security, after that presents the main collaborative schemes between actors and several incidents that reveal the vulnerabilities of critical national infrastructure, it proceeds to a brief analysis of the interconnection between critical national infrastructure security and other policy fields, and concludes by referring to the future challenges and opportunities regarding the aforementioned component of national security.
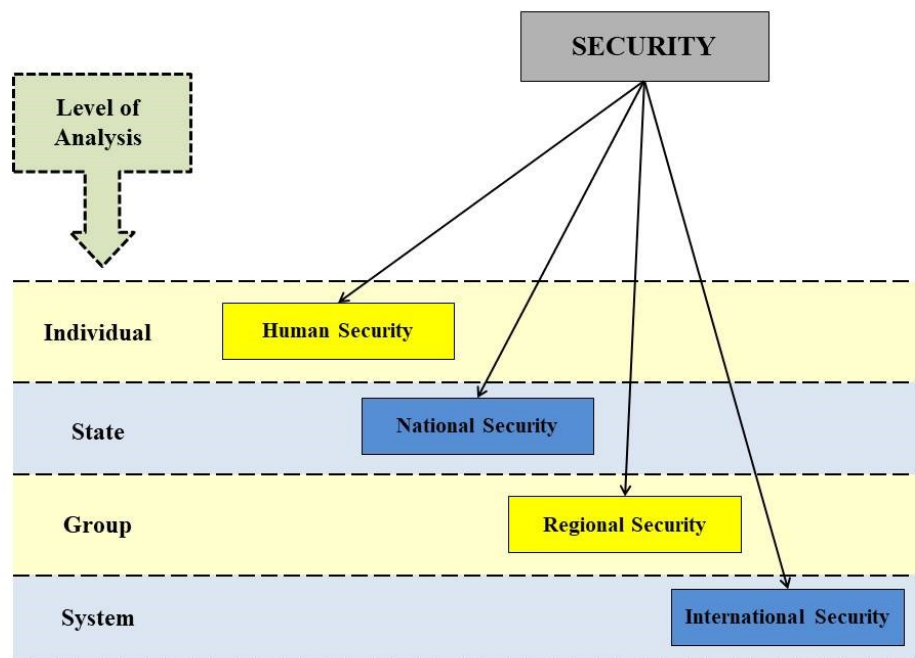
Picture 1: *The 4 types of security*
Source: *Compiled by Georgios Koukakis*

The Concept of Security

The term *security* originates from the Latin word *securitas/securus* whose first compound is the word *sine* meaning *without* and the second compound the word *cura* meaning *fear*, *worry*, *anxiety*, etc[3]. Thus, security is the state in which fear, worry, and anxiety are absent, due to the necessary actions taken by an actor (individual, group, state, organization, etc.) in order to be protected against threats and/or risks. Therefore, security can be categorized according to the level of analysis (*Picture 1*) into *four types*; *Human Security* at the individual level, *National Security* at the state level, *Regional Security* at the group level, and *International Security* at the system level (**Picture 1**).

At first security was mainly related to *national security* (the protection of the state), a concept that was introduced by the United States of America (USA) through the *National Security Act* signed in *1947[4]*.

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[3]*Neocleous, M. (2000). Against security. Radical Philosophy, 100, 7-15. https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/against-security.*
[4]*Department of State. (n.d.). National Security Act of 1947 [Official Document]. https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/national-security-act#:~:text=The%20National%20Security%20Act%20of,National%20Security%20Council%20(NSC).*

This new paradigm related security to the internal structure of each state, reflecting its interaction with the security environment, a relation that is based on the state's perception of insecurity[5]. Later on, the United Nations (UN) related security to people and the eradication of poverty and underdevelopment[6], introducing the concept of *human security* through the *Human Development Report* that was published in *1994*[7]. As far as *regional security* is concerned, despite the fact that it (etymologically) comprises the national security of the states of a specific region, it also expresses the strong relations developed among them due to their similar cultural, political and legal systems[8]. Therefore, it enables them to act collectively against common threats and cooperate in several fields in order to facilitate development –as security and development are two closely related terms[9]– leading to the establishment of several regional organisations such as the EU[10].
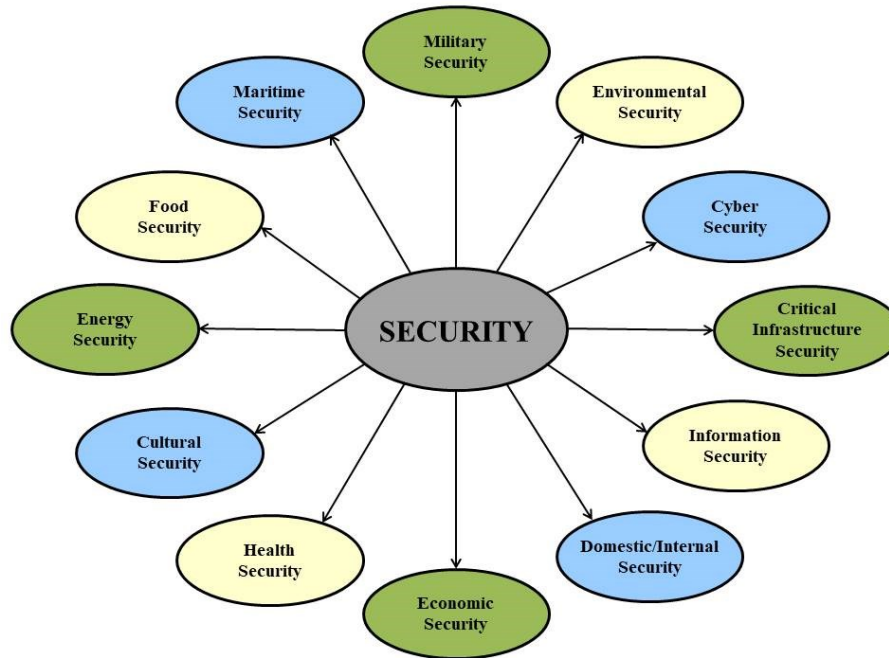
Picture 2: *Indicative dimensions/components of security*
Source: *Compiled by Georgios Koukakis*

Finally, *international security* is closely related to globalization[11], mostly dealing with global threats through international organizations such as the United Nations[12]. Moreover, security – regardless the institutional level in which it is examined – encompasses several *dimensions/components*, depending on the specific aspect/policy field that is endangered and/or the origin of threats/risks. These include, but are not limited to the following: (1) military security, (2) economic security, (3) energy security, (4) critical infrastructure security, (5) maritime security, (6) food security, (7) environmental security, (8) health security, (9) domestic/internal security, (10) cyber security, (11) cultural security, (12) water security, (13) demographic security, (14) information security, and (15) space security (**Picture 2**).

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[5]*Buzan, B. (1983). People, States, and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations.Wheatsheaf Books, 69.*

[6]*Buzan, B. & Hansen, L. (2009). People, States, and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations. Cambridge University Press, 203.*

[7]*United Nations Development Programme. (1994). Human Development Report 1994. https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/ hdr1994encompletenostatspdf.pdf.*

[8]*Graham, K. & Felicio, T. (2005). Regional Security and Global Governance: A Proposal for a 'Regional-Global Security Mechanism' in Light of the UN High-Level Panel's Report, Egmont Paper, 4. http://aei.pitt.edu/8985/.*

[9]*Krause, K. & Jütersonke, O. (2005). Peace, Security and Development, Security Dialogue, 36(4), 447-462. https:// journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0967010605060449.*

[10]*Bailes, A. & Cottey, A. (2006). Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century, in Bailes, A. (ed.) SIPRI Yearbook 2006: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security. Oxford University Press, 195–223.*

[11]*Cha, V. (2000). Globalization and the Study of International Security, Journal of Peace Research, 37(3), 391-403. https:// journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0022343300037003007.*

[12]*United Nations. (2023). Determined: Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Organization [Official Document]. https:// www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_annual_report_2023_en_0.pdf.*

The Context of Critical National Infrastructure Security

Taking into consideration the aforementioned definition of security, it is understood that critical national infrastructure security is the protection of a state's critical infrastructure against any threat/risk. As far as *critical national infrastructure (CNI)* is concerned, according to the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) of the United Kingdom (UK) it is defined:

> "*National assets that are essential for the functioning of society, such as those associated with energy supply, water supply, transportation, health and telecommunications.*".[13]

Moreover, the US *Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency* (CISA) defines its *critical infrastructure sectors* as those sectors:

> "*[...] whose assets, systems, and networks, whether physical or virtual, are considered so vital to the United States that their incapacitation or destruction would have a debilitating effect on security, national economic security, national public health or safety, or any combination thereof*".[14]

To be more precise, the CISA identifies the following 16 *critical infrastructure sectors*:

1.   Chemical Sector.

2.   Commercial Facilities Sector.

3.   Communications Sector.

4.   Critical Manufacturing Sector.

5.   Dams Sector.

6.   Defense Industrial Base Sector.

7.   Emergency Services Sector.

8.   Energy Sector.

9.   Financial Services Sector.

10.   Food and Agriculture Sector.

11.   Government Services and Facilities Sector.

12.   Healthcare and Public Health Sector.

13.   Information Technology Sector.

14.   Nuclear Reactors, Materials, and Waste Sector.

15.   Transportation Systems Sector.

16.   Water and Wastewater Systems

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[13]*National Cyber Security Centre. (n.d.). Critical National Infrastructure (CNI). https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/section/advice-guidance/all-topics?allTopics=true&topics=critical%20national%20infrastructure%20(cni)&sort=date%2Bdesc.*
[14]*Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency. (n.d.). Critical Infrastructure Sectors. https://www.cisa.gov/topics/critical-infrastructure-security-and-resilience/critical-infrastructure-sectors.*

As far as the European Union is concerned, it has adopted the *Directive on the Resilience of Critical Entities* which defines *critical infrastructure* as:

> "*[...] an asset, a facility, equipment, a network or a system, or a part of an asset, a facility, equipment, a network or a system, which is necessary for the provision of an essential service*". [15]

also defining *essential service* as:

> "*[...] a service which is crucial for the maintenance of vital societal functions, economic activities, public health and safety, or the environment*".[16]

Moreover, the EU's aforementioned Directive identifies the following 11 *critical infrastructure sectors*:

1. Energy.

2. Transport.

3. Banking.

4. Financial market infrastructure.

5. Health.

6. Drinking water.

7. Wastewater.

8. Digital infrastructure.

9. Public administration.

10. Space.

11. Production, processing and distribution of food.

In order though for the context of critical national infrastructure security to be fully comprehended, the article analyzes the following critical national infrastructure security elements:

1. **Threats:** As far as critical national infrastructure security threats are concerned, it must be stressed that they usually include *state* and *non-state* (public and/or private sector enterprises/companies/organizations) *actors* that can harm the critical infrastructure of another state.

2. **Means:** As far as the means that an actor may use to threaten the critical national infrastructure security of a state, they usually include physical means, cyber means, or administrative/operational means. Moreover, an state's critical infrastructure security can be threatened (unintentionally) by a technical situation (malfunction) or a natural disaster.

3. **Ways:** As far as the ways that the aforementioned means are used, the most common ones include the implementation of embargos, the restriction of exports, cyberattacks and physical attacks against a state's critical infrastructure.

4. **Goals/Objectives:** The main goal that an actor aspires to accomplish by disrupting the functioning of a state's critical infrastructure is to impose its will by coercion. As far as the objectives are concerned, they usually include the *malfunction* and/or *degradation* of an actor's *economy*, *defence*, and/or *financial/energy system* and/or the *deprivation* of its critical resources in order to cause the overall malfunction of

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[15]*EUR-Lex. (2022). Directive (EU) 2022/2557 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 on the resilience of critical entities and repealing Council Directive 2008/114/EC (Text with EEA relevance) [Official Document]. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2022/2557/oj.*
[16]*Ibid.*

a state and public unrest which will put pressure on the state's leadership and thus manage reach to a favorable agreement.

STRATEGIC LEVEL

STRATEGIC DOCUMENT
(OFFICIAL DOCUMENT)

ASSESSMENT OF THE SECURITY ENVIROMENT

THREATS | RISKS

CHALLENGES | OPPORTUNITIES

ENDS

MEANS

WAYS

OPERATIONAL LEVEL
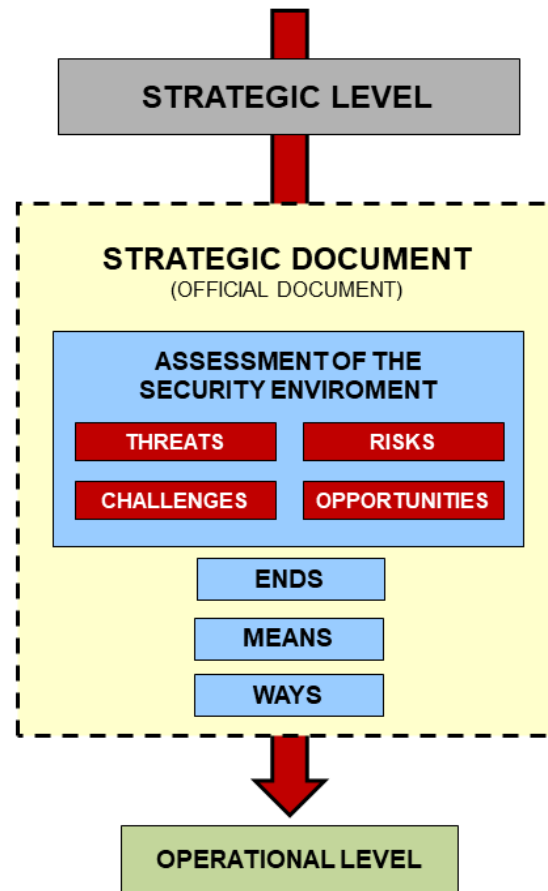
Picture 3: The function of Strategic Documents
Source: *Compiled by Georgios Koukakis*

5. **Strategic documents:** As far as the strategic documents that are related to energy security are concerned, they include either national security strategic documents such as the *National Security Strategy* (NSS) of the United States[17], the *National Strategic Review* (NSR) of France[18], and the *Integrated Review Refresh* (SRR) of the United Kingdom[19], that include special chapters/sections regarding critical national infrastructure security, or specialized strategic documents such as the *National Risk Register* of the UK[20]. Their main purpose is to provide the framework –by assessing the conditions (threats, risks, challenges and opportunities) of the security environment, defining the desired ends (goals), necessary means, and preferable ways of using them– in which the departments of the public sector will implement their respective strategies (**Picture 3**).

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[17]*Koukakis, G. (2022). The National Security Strategy of the USA: Background, Recent Developments and Future Considerations Regarding the International Security Environment. HAPSc Policy Briefs Series, 3(2), 122–132. https://doi.org/10.12681/ hapscpbs.33792.*

[18]*Republic of France. (2022). National Strategic Review [Official Document]. https://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/files/files/rns-uk-20221202.pdf.*

[19]*HM Government. (2023). Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world [Official Document]. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-refresh-2023-responding-to-a-more-contested-and-volatile-world.*

[20]*HM Government. (2023). National Risk Register [Official Document]. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/ media/64ca1dfe19f5622669f3c1b1/2023_NATIONAL_RISK_REGISTER_NRR.pdf.*

6.   **Decision-making:** As far as the decision making process regarding issues related to critical national infrastructure security is concerned, due to the fact that it is a policy field with severe political, diplomatic and social consequences that must be coordinated with other actors, the decision for the implementation of a certain critical infrastructure policy is usually taken in the higher strategic political level.
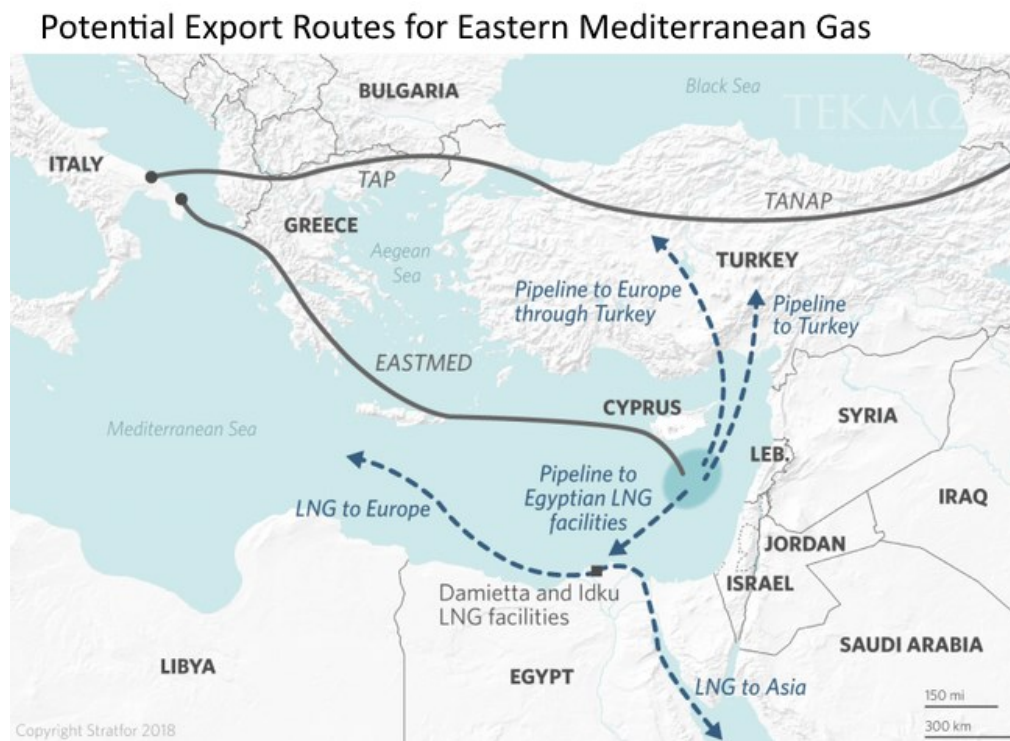
Collaborative Schemes Related to Critical National Infrastructure

Having understood that cooperation is the best way to ensure CNI security, many actors have proceeded to the establishment of several collaborative schemes in the field of critical infrastructure in order to enhance their *capabilities* and/or achieve *favorable conditions* in the sectors related to CNI. These schemes are mainly *multilateral* and *bilateral agreements* regarding the energy sector. Some of the most important ones that affect the regional security of Europe and Eastern Mediterranean are the following:

1.   The agreement between *Turkey* and *Russia* that was signed in *2010* regarding the construction of the *Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant* in the southern province of Mersin.[21]

2.   The memoranda on energy infrastructure between *Greece* and *Bulgaria* that were signed in *2023* regarding: (1) security of supply and storage of natural gas, and (2) the possibility of building a new pipeline that will connect Alexandroupolis to Burgas[22], that was followed by an *interconnection agreement* signed in *2024* between the Natural Gas Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria (ICGB) and the Transmission System Operator (DESFA).[23]

3.   The bilateral cooperation of *Greece* and *Romania*, in the context of which the two states have planned to extend the existing NATO fuel pipeline network by constructing a Vertical Gas Corridor.[24]

Picture 4: *The proposed route of East Med*
Source: *https://tekmormonitor.blogspot.com/2018/11/israel-cyprus-greece-and-italy-agree-on.html*

[21]*Yuksel, F. (2022, July 29). Russia transferring $15B for Türkiye for Akkuyu NPP. Anadolu Agency. https://www.aa.com.tr/en/ energy/nuclear/russia-transferring-15b-for-turkiye-for-akkuyu-npp/35933*

[22]*Ekathimerini. (2023, February 16). Greece, Bulgaria sign memoranda that 'change the energy map of SE Europe'. https:// www.ekathimerini.com/news/1204875/greece-bulgaria-sign-memoranda-that-change-the-energy-map-of-se-europe/*

[23]*Laurenson, J. (2024, September 24). Greece-Bulgaria gas interconnector signs Alexandroupolis agreement with transmission operator.   https://ceenergynews.com/lng/greece-bulgaria-gas-interconnector-signs-alexandroupolis-agreement-with-transmissionoperator/*

[24]*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic. (n.d.). Energy Diplomacy. https://www.mfa.gr/en/energy-diplomacy/*

4.   The trilateral partnership between *Greece*, *Cyprus* and *Israel* that was augmented in 2013 which inter alia provides for the construction of the *Eastern Mediterranean (EastMed)* pipeline (**Picture 4**) and the *EuroAsia Interconnector* (**Picture 5**) that that will transfer natural gas and electricity respectively from Israel to Greece and then Europe.[25]
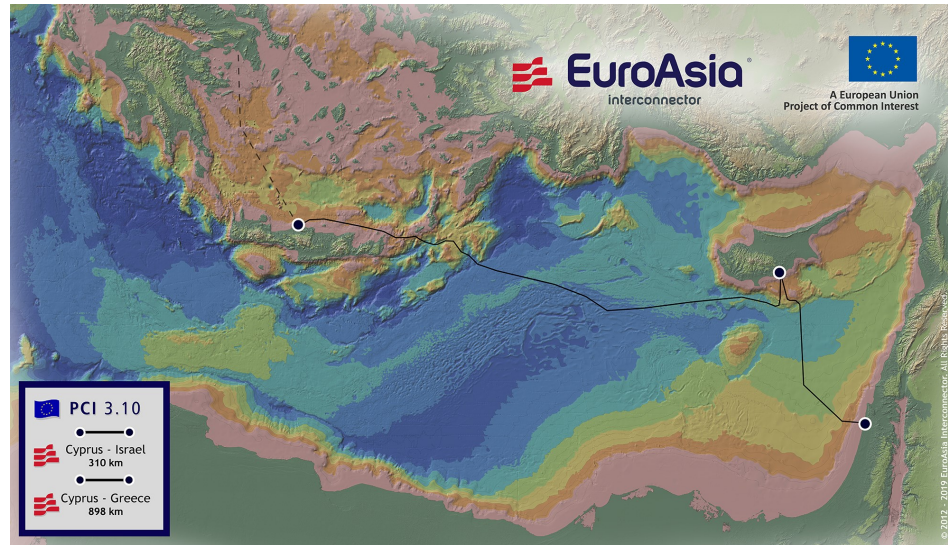
Picture 5: *The proposed route of EuroAsia Interconnector*
Source: *https://www.cbn.com.cy/article/2023/10/9/736298/greek-ipto-project-promoter-of-euroasia-interconnector/*

5.   The trilateral partnership between *Greece*, *Cyprus* and *Egypt* that was augmented in 2014 which inter alia provides for the construction of the *EuroAfrica Interconnector* (**Picture 6**) that that will transfer electricity from the Egypt to Greece and then Europe.[26]
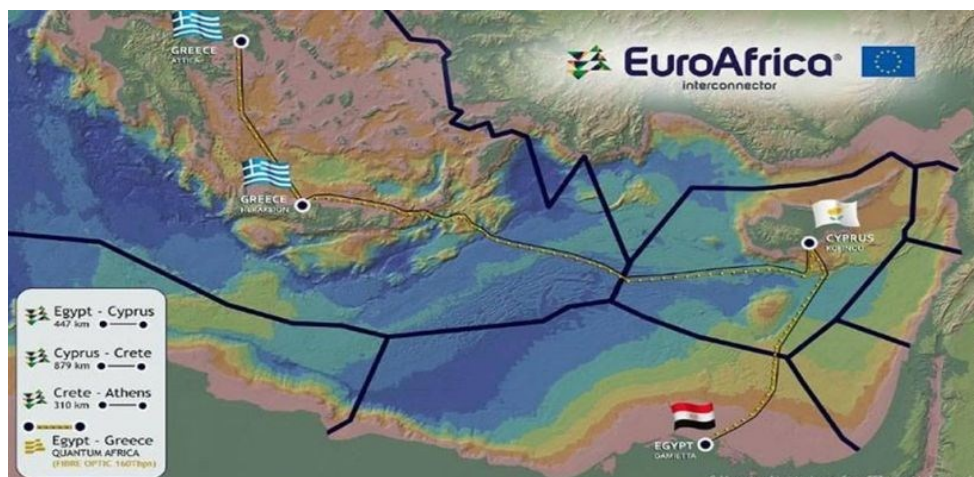
Picture 6: *The proposed route of EuroAfrica Interconnector*
Source: *https://energypress.gr/news/syntoma-ta-egkainia-toy-euroafrica-interconnector-tis-175-twh-tha-fthanei-i-etisia-metaforiki*

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[25]*Koukakis, G. (2023). The 9th Trilateral Summit of Cyprus, Greece and Israel: Türkiye's struggle for power in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Competition between India and China in the Middle East, and the New Era of "Economic Peace" [Occasional Paper 1/2023]. HERMES Institute of International Affairs, Security & Geoeconomy,. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.18271.84645.*
[26]*Shama, N. (2019). Between Alliance and Entente: The Egyptian-Greek-Cypriot Partnership, in Tziarras, Z. (ed.), The New Geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean: Trilateral Partnerships and Regional Security. Re-imagining the Eastern Mediterranean Series: PCC Report, 3. Nicosia: PRIO Cyprus Centre, 95-110. https://cdn.cloud.prio.org/files/0548bfa7-dc4f-4818-b860-1f8b051241ae/The%20New%20Geopolitics%20of%20the%20Eastern%20Mediterranean%20-%20Chapter%206%20-%20Between%20Alliance%20and%20-%20Nael%20Shama.pdf?inline=true.*

6.   The trilateral cooperation between *Greece*, *Romania* and *Bulgaria*, in the context of which the three states have planned to build a highway and rail transport corridor connecting the three states.[27]

Contemporary Incidents Related to Critical National Infrastructure

As far as the contemporary incidents related to critical national infrastructure are concerned, one of the most famous one regards the *explosions* that took place on *26 September 2022* on the Russian *Nord Stream* gas pipelines that provided gas to Germany, an incident that led both Russia and the West to accusing each other for sabotage.[28]

Moreover, *cyberattacks* on several critical national infrastructure have been reported by many agencies and enterprises. For example, according to the *Office of the director of National Intelligence* (DNI) of the United States a significant number (**Picture 7**) of agriculture, education, energy, healthcare, manufacturing, telecommunications, water and government facilities were under attack by actors using cyberspace[29], while according to Bahadir Candan some of the most severe *critical infrastructure cyberattacks* between *2021-2024*[30], were conducted against the following critical infrastructure:

1.   The USA *healthcare system* in 2024.

2.   The *solar panels* of Netherlands in 2024.

3.   The *water system* of Pennsylvania in 2023.

4.   Ukraine's *power grid* in 2022.

5.   The US colonial *oil pipeline* in 2021.

Picture 7: *Cyberattacks on US critical infrastructure*
Source:*https://www.dni.gov/files/CTIIC/documents/products/*
Recent_Cyber_Attacks_on_US_Infrastructure_Underscore_Vulnerability_of_Critical_US_Systems-June2024.pdf

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[27]*Gherasim Cristian, "Romania, Greece and Bulgaria want to build a highway and rail transport corridor connecting the three countries". Eureporter, 12 October 2023. https://www.eureporter.co/world/romania/2023/10/12/romania-greece-and-bulgaria-want-to-build-a-highway-and-rail-transport-corridor-connecting-the-three-countries/*
[28]*Adomaitis, N. & Ahlander, J. (2024, February 07). Nord Stream: What's known about the mystery pipeline explosions?. Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/qa-what-is-known-about-nord-stream-gas-pipeline-explosions-2023-09-26/*
[29]*Office of the director of National Intelligence. (2024, June). Recent Cyber Attacks on US Infrastructure Underscore Vulnerability of Critical US Systems, November 2023–April 2024 [Official Document]. https://www.dni.gov/files/CTIIC/documents/products/ Recent_Cyber_Attacks_on_US_Infrastructure_Underscore_Vulnerability_of_Critical_US_Systems-June2024.pdf*
[30]*Canda, B. (2024, Octiber 17). Top 5 critical infrastructure cyberattacks. Anapaya. https://www.anapaya.net/blog/top-5-critical-infrastructure-cyberattacks*

In addition to the aforementioned physical and cyber incidents, it must be noted that Russia had interrupted the natural gas flow to Europe in 2022 claiming technical reasons (maintenance).[31]

The Interconnection of CNI Security with Other Policy Fields

As far as the interconnection of critical national infrastructure security with other fields is concerned, it must be noted that when critical infrastructure is threatened, both the public and private sectors that are related to the respective infrastructure malfunction as they cannot operate properly. In addition to that, critical national infrastructure security is interconnected to the following fields:

1. **Economy:** The first policy field that comes in mind when referring to CNI security is the economy, as a large number of CNI is related to sectors –such as *transportation*, *energy*, *financial* services, *critical manufacturing*, *food & agriculture*, *commercial* facilities, etc.– that affect the economy.

2. **Security & Defence:** Another field that is interconnected with CNI security is the sector of the security & defence, as it the *defense industrial base* sector and the *emergency services* sector which are vital for S&D are included to the CNI.

3. **Resilience:** Though it is not always stressed enough, resilience is a prerequisite of CNI security, as it aims inter alia to minimize the *vulnerabilities* of CNI so that they are not an easy target for hostile actors. It must also be stressed that resilience is nowadays one of the most important capacities for actors.[32]

4. **Public Health:** As far as public health is concerned, CNI security plays a vital role as the proper function of *healthcare*, *food & agriculture*, and *water* facilities that are included in the CNI greatly affect public health.

5. **Technology:** In addition to the aforementioned policy fields, technology is another factor – probably the most important one– that has a great (both positive and negative) impact to CNI security, as it facilitates *innovation* not only as far as *countering* threats/risks are concerned but also inventing new means and ways of *attacking* CNI.

6. **Environment:** As far as the environment is concerned, CNI security can have a severe impact on environmental security in case facilities related to wastewater systems and the chemical sector are physically attacked as this can lead to the pollution of the ecosystem.

7. **Public Administration**: The relation between public administration and CNI security stems from the fact that most *government services and departments* facilities are included in the CNI, as they guarantee the proper functioning of a state. In fact, those related to elections play a vital role to the upholding of the democratic values and principles, and are often the main target of authoritarian actors that try to make citizens lose their faith to Democracy in the context of *Foreign Information Manipulation & Interference* (FIMI).[33]

8. **Intelligence**: Due to the fact that the facilities that are related to the *information technology* and the *communications* sector –two sectors that are extremely important for intelligence gathering and dissemination– are part of CNI, the field of intelligence is dependent on CNI security.

Concluding Remarks

Taking into consideration the information presented in this article it is concluded that <u>critical infrastructure security is a very important component of national security and must not be overlooked, as this will have severe consequences to many policy fields</u>, such as security & defense, energy, transportation, the economy, public health, the environment, public administration, space, food & agriculture, etc. In fact, in order for a state to achieve the goals set in each one of these fields it must be able to protect the respective critical infrastructure in order to function in proper way. As far as the main *challenge* for every state is concerned, it lies in the ability to keep up with the *technological advancement* –especially as far as cyberspace is concerned– as the main threats against CNI are cyber threats. As for the main *opportunity* that lies ahead, actors must take

[31]*Connolly, K. (2022, August 31). Nord Stream 1: Russia switches off gas pipeline citing maintenance. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/aug/31/nord-stream-1-russia-switches-off-gas-pipeline-citing-maintenance.*
[32]*Koukakis, G. (2023). Resilience: Highlighting its Importance for Security and Development through References to (National) Security Strategic Documents of International Actors. HAPSc Policy Briefs Series, 4(1), 77–87. https://doi.org/10.12681/hapscpbs.35186*
[33]*European External Action Service. (2024, May 27). Tackling Disinformation, Foreign Information Manipulation & Interference. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/tackling-disinformation-foreign-information-manipulation-interference_en.*

advantage of the existing technology and collaborate with other actors in order to increase their resilience. Finally, it is imperative that everyone keeps in mind the importance of cooperation in enhancing security in every level, as according to *Franklin D. Roosevelt*:

> *"Competition has been shown to be useful up to a certain point and no further, but cooperation, which is the thing we must strive for today, begins where competition leaves of".[34]*

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[34]*Filski, M. (2013, February 25). Comment: Competition versus cooperation. International Accounting Bulletin. https://www.internationalaccountingbulletin.com/comment/commentscomment-competition-versus-cooperation/.*

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A Geopolitical Analysis of Venezuela: China's, Iran's and Russia's Defiance of the United States[1]

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Abstract

This article amounts to a geopolitical analysis of Venezuela, considering relations between China, Iran and Russia with this Latin American country along with the implications of all this, mainly in relation to the United States (U.S.). This work addresses the stated aspects, while highlighting the presidencies of Chávez and Maduro. In this piece, media warfare and psychological warfare also warrant noteworthiness in geopolitical terms.

This article results from both bibliographical research and an exclusive interview with Professor Esther Mobilia, Director of the Central University of Venezuela's International Relations Department.

Keywords: Geopolitics; Latin America and the Caribbean; media warfare; psychological warfare; Venezuela.

Introduction

(To draft this article, bibliographical research was conducted, along with an exclusive interview with Professor Esther Mobilia*, Director of the Central University of Venezuela's International Relations Department (*Esther Mobilia*)).

This work addresses a few geopolitical aspects of Venezuela under the presidencies of Hugo Chávez (from 1999 until his death in 2013) and Nicolás Maduro (from 2013 to the present). This latter politician was handpicked by Chávez to be his successor as Venezuelan head of state (Buxton August 27, 2019, p. 1383).

Chávez's first presidential victory is regarded as a political revolution (Buxton August 27, 2019, p. 1371), giving rise to the Pink Tide, that is, the surge of the Left in Latin America (Guan, Hongying March / April 2023, pp. 100-101). This means a rejection of neo-liberalism and hostility toward U.S. hegemony in said region (Marshall 2021, pp. 33/35). Nicolás Maduro is also considered a Pink Tide leader (Grattan, October 31, 2022). With regard to Venezuela, this article highlights three countries currently in strategic competition with the U.S.: China, Iran and Russia.

Another aspect addressed in this piece is the relationship of the media and psychological warfare / influence operations to geopolitics, considering Venezuela's context. Recently, General Laura Richardson (March 12, 2024, p. 30), as Head of the U.S. Southern Command, acknowledged that, on the part of the organization she directs, there are information teams working incessantly to spread, in the region under analysis, narratives favorable to the U.S., for the purpose of countering that which she called disinformation and malign narratives disseminated by adversaries. However, this article is not aimed at determining to what extent and

with what consequences Venezuela is the target of influence operations / psychological operations organized by foreign powers; rather, it seeks to emphasize how said operations, with their geopolitical component, have been publicly stressed in official statements from senior members of the Venezuelan Government, including Presidents Chávez and Maduro. This is somehow related to the importance, in international relations, of rhetoric and narratives, disseminated through the media.

Geopolitical Context of Venezuela / Latin America and the Caribbean

With Hugo Chávez's election to the Presidency of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in 1999, this country ceased to align itself with the U.S., having forged relations with China, Cuba and Russia (Creutzfeldt, Alvarado February 16, 2024). From the days of Chávez's presidency to the present, with Maduro, China has been a key ally for Venezuela (Deri November 13, 2024). The way current Sino-Venezuelan relations are regarded, in the U.S., is reflected in the following title of a "Georgetown Security Studies Review" article: *A Dangerous Alliance: China, Venezuela, and the Twilight of Democracy in Latin America* (Deri November 13, 2024).

Countries such as China, Iran and Russia are considered adversaries of the U.S. and supporters of current Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro (*Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community* February 5, 2024, pp. 5 / 29). General Laura Richardson (March 12, 2024, p. 2) stated that China and Russia strategically competed with her country in Latin America and the Caribbean. In this regard, General Richardson (March 12, 2024. p. 2) specifically mentioned Venezuela.

According to Isabell (March 10, 2008), from the dawn of this century, Latin America's geopolitical relevance has asserted itself, mainly due to its energy resources. Proof positive is that, in 2023, Venezuela had the world's largest crude oil reserves (*Country Analysis Brief: Venezuela* February 2024, p. 5). Venezuelan natural resources also include natural gas, gold, diamonds, iron, bauxite, among other minerals (*Venezuela: Facts and Figures*).

Venezuela is a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)

In Latin America, which is known as the backyard of the U.S., the Russians, Chinese and Iranians have been more welcome than the Americans (Isbell March 10, 2008). This is a situation that the U.S. has been unable to reverse (Isbell March 10, 2008). With the end of the Monroe Doctrine, this nation turns its gaze toward Asia, chiefly to China (Isbell March 10, 2008). When it comes to rivaling China and Russia, this reduced U.S. interest and lack of action relative to Latin America and the Caribbean is a strategic error that needs to be

urgently corrected, according to some analysts (Kroenig, et alii February 12, 2024). To this end, a Rand Corporation study recommends that the U.S. carefully monitor what's going on in Latin America and the Caribbean and that it get ready to deal with a variety of emerging threats from countries hostile to the U.S., such as Venezuela (Chindea, et alii 2023, p. vi).

From the early 21st century, compared to the period subsequent to the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's interest in Latin America has grown, for several reasons, among them relations with the U.S. taking a downturn (Jutten October 2024, p. 2). Russia also exploits, in its favor, the left's political triumph, in several countries in said region, including Venezuela, along with anti-American discourse from various Latin-American political leaders (Jutten October 2024, p. 2). Venezuela can be regarded as a country which engages in anti-American diplomatic initiatives in the region's organizations to which it belongs (Carothers, Feldman December 13, 2023).

Since 2016, Latin America has been present in Russia's Foreign Policy Concept (FPC) (Jutten October 2024, p. 2). In 2023, while mentioning Venezuela, the FPC highlights the forging of ties between Russia and Latin America and the Caribbean, together with various regional political and economic organizations (*The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* March 31, 2023). This is related to Russia's goal of setting up a multipolar international system, while prioritizing doing away with remnants of dominance from the U.S. and other non-friendly States in global affairs (*The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* March 31, 2023).

Russian President Putin is committed to diminishing U.S. global influence, even in the Americas. This is why Venezuela is particularly relevant (Vicenzino February 2, 2019). Recently, while directly addressing Venezuelan President Maduro, in Kazan, Russia, Putin underscored the lasting and solid relations between their two countries (*Meeting with President of Venezuela Nicolas Maduro* October 23, 2024). On that same occasion, Maduro reaffirmed Venezuela's willingness to keep on cooperating with the Russian State in many areas (*Meeting with President of Venezuela Nicolas Maduro* October 23, 2024). A few days later, on November 7, 2024, Russia strengthened ties with Venezuela in the spheres of intelligence, counter-espionage and energy (*PVDSA and Rosneft Monopolize the Bulk of New Venezuela-Russia Agreements* November 8, 2024). Russian Deputy Prime Minister Chernyshenko regarded Venezuela as a strategic partner and powerful ally of Russia in Latin America (*PVDSA and Rosneft Monopolize the Bulk of New Venezuela-Russia Agreements* November 8, 2024).

From the standpoint of various experts, the Primakov Doctrine has guided relations between Russia and countries in Latin America and the Caribbean: Russia needs to get involved with the U.S.'s neighbors in response to American interference in nations Moscow considers to be in its sphere of influence (Ziemer, et alii July 25, 2024). Said response includes the military domain, for instance in the context of the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine (Ziemer, et alii July 25, 2024). There are those who regard a Russian warship moored at a Venezuelan port, in August 2024, as a reciprocal measure relative to U.S. support of Ukraine (Levaggi, Rouvinski August 15, 2024). In several aspects, including military ones, Russia's backing of Maduro can not only remain in place but even further strengthen, despite Russia's being committed in an armed conflict with Ukraine (Levaggi, Rouvinski August 15, 2024). In Ellis' view (September 15, 2024), Russia's current power-projecting capabilities are not as pronounced as they were during the Cold War years, with military limitations due to the conflict with Ukraine. However, Putin decided to send military resources to Latin America and the Caribbean, so that, along with its partners, such as Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, Russia can show its adversaries in that part of the world that it constitutes a threat to regional security (Ellis September 15, 2024).

As part of Latin America and the Caribbean, a significant aspect of Chavism is the creation of regional organizations, such as the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) and the Union of the South American Nations (UNASUR), for the purpose of minimizing U.S. influence in that geographical area (Creutzfeldt, Alvarado February 16, 2024). This was regarded by China as an opportunity to start wielding greater influence in said region (Creutzfeldt, Alvarado February 16, 2024). According to Margaret Myers (May 7, 2020), China's success in Latin America depends on its relations with regional organizations and their ability and efficiency. With both Chávez and Maduro, Venezuela has contributed toward China's involvement in those organizations (Creutzfeldt, Alvarado February 16, 2024). In 2023, China's President Xi Jinping asserted his nation's backing of regional integration of Latin American and Caribbean countries (Barrios, Rio June 23, 2023). In June 2024, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stressed that Venezuela can rely on China to have a greater role in Latin America (Arain June 5, 2024). China attributes a high degree of importance to its ties with Venezuela (*Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lin Jian's Regular Press Conference on July 29, 2024*). China's Belt and Road Initiative includes Latin America, which has the U.S. worried (Chiodi, Anh March 18,

2022).

China's military ties with several Latin American countries and, particularly, with Venezuela are a reality (Roy June 15, 2023). China is referred to as a major supplier of military hardware to Venezuela (Vidarte, Díaz August 1, 2024). However, according to a Rand Corporation study, China does not start off by raising the military aspect of its cooperation with Latin America, for several reasons, including a limited Chinese expeditionary capability and lack of resources, namely on the part of the Navy, to operate in the Western Hemisphere, even for a reduced period of time (Chindea, et alii 2023, p. 40).

Iran seeks to strengthen its ties with various Latin American countries, including Venezuela (*Iran Congratulates Venezuela on Successful Presidential Election* July 29, 2024). Venezuela's relations with Iran, which date back to before the 1979 Iranian Revolution, stepped up with President Chávez, enabling Iran to establish a diplomatic and commercial expansion in Latin America (Rendon, Fernandez October 19, 2020). Currently, Iran counteracts U.S. pressure to overthrow President Nicolás Maduro (Rendon, Fernandez October 19, 2020). The alliance between Iran and Venezuela aims to overcome the difficulties experienced by these two countries, due to U.S. sanctions imposed upon them (*Iran Congratulates Venezuela on Successful Presidential Election* July 29, 2024). In 2023, then-Iranian President Raisi stated that his country's relationship to Venezuela is a strategic one, as he underscored that the two States have common interests and enemies (Gamba, Mehdi June 13, 2023). According to Amal Mokhtar (April 2024, p. 64), Iran is looking to forge alliances against the U.S. In the military sphere, Iran has provided missiles, drones and other equipment to Venezuela, thereby contributed toward increasing this Latin American country's power-projecting capabilities in its region (Prince October 24, 2024). In Mokhtar's view (April 2024, p. 64), Latin American countries' growing interest in engaging in military cooperation with Iran has left the U.S. concerned.

Media / Psychological Warfare

Influence operations can be regarded as instruments that governments use as part of strategic geopolitical competition (Sin, et alii December 2021, p. 3). These operations can be carried out by both state and non-state actors (Rasheed April 2024, p. 5). Influence operations include psychological, political, subversive, economic and technological means, for the purpose of affecting the security and governance of a given targeted country (Rasheed April 2024, p. 5). Said operations, comprising many common aspects with both psychological and information operations, amount to a sphere of intelligence that is currently an essential tool for pursuing certain geopolitical goals, without directly involving military force (Rasheed April 2024, p. 5). Faruk Hadzic (February 11, 2021) even uses the expression "psychological geopolitical warfare".

The title of an article by Puhr and Kupfer (January 17, 2023) reveals that which is at issue with the subject matter under analysis: "Media in the Geopolitical Crossfire". Psychological operations can include conveying a message, via specific media, so as to influence a target audience (Kaprisma 2020, p. 225). The latter can comprise a large number of people or a single individual; in order for a certain message to reach them, the sender can use traditional media and, in the Internet age, social media, text messaging and email, with a great deal of precision. In part, the power of psychological operations results from progress in the field of information and communication technologies, chiefly from the start of this century (Rashi, Schleifer May 9, 2023).

According to Parezanovic and Prorokovic (2024, p. 43), psychological operations and international relations are currently inseparable. Political warfare encompasses psychological warfare (Coombs April 21, 2021). This type of activities, which seeks to discredit political adversaries and sway foreign affairs through disinformation, for instance, can take place even under circumstances not regarded as warfare (Uppal August 2, 2020).

In 2007, then-President Chávez stated that the U.S. was using psychological warfare for the purpose of overthrowing his government (*Chavez Warns of 'Resistance War' Against U.S.* June 25, 2007). Hugo Chávez added that his country was also being the target of both media and political warfare (Carroll June 26, 2007). Specifically, Chávez asserted that the U.S. television station CNN was part of that nation's psychological warfare, in order to create instability on Venezuelan soil (*Venezuela Chávez: CNN May Be Instigating My Murder* November 28, 2007). (Said TV station considered their journalism pieces to be objective (*Venezuela Chávez: CNN May Be Instigating My Murder* November 28, 2007)).

Ernesto Villegas, Venezuela's Information and Communications Minister in 2012-2013, pointed out that, by taking the topic of then-President Chávez's health, transnational media mounted a psychological war bent on destabilizing his country (Fraga January 7, 2013).

In 2014, President Nicolás Maduro threatened legal action against the local and international press, on the grounds that such media were involved in psychological warfare that sought to create political instability in Venezuela (Wyss September 18, 2014). Some two years later, Maduro went on a Venezuelan public television

station to announce that he was considering the possibility of legal action against Spanish media, accusing them of setting up ongoing psychological war against his government (Scharfenberg June 2, 2016). Venezuela's current President stated that, presumably, the U.S. was vested in psychological warfare to try to remove him from power (*US 'Childish' in Conducting Foreign Policy, Says Venezuela's Maduro* January 30, 2019).

On September 25, 2024, in New York, at the United Nations General Assembly, Venezuela's Minister of People's Power for Foreign Affairs stated that the U.S. sparked psychological wars against countries such as his own, for the purpose of causing instability (*Statement Delivered by H.E. Mr. Yvan Gil Pinto* September 25, 2024). In that same regard, recently, as reported by Xinhua, China's news agency, Venezuelan President Maduro gave a speech as part of the 19th Anniversary of the Strategic Operational Command of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces, giving rise to news under the following headline: *U.S. Resorts to 'Psychological Warfare' Against Venezuela: Maduro* (September 27, 2024). This head of state stressed that the main component of the hybrid war affecting Venezuela is psychological in nature, and that its power goes by way of not only traditional media but also social media (*U.S. Resorts to 'Psychological Warfare' Against Venezuela: Maduro* September, 27 2024).

Professor Esther Mobilia's Analysis

In an exclusive interview for this article, Professor Esther Mobilia, Director of the Central University of Venezuela's International Relations Department, pointed out that Latin America is currently not a foreign policy priority for the U.S., especially considering the Trump Administration. The interviewee thinks that, during the presidential campaign, said region was relevant only as concerns domestic policy and national security. Mobilia asserted that, under President Joe Biden, the U.S. administration sought to resume ties with Latin America, without ceasing to disseminate democratic values or antagonizing Venezuela. In this regard, Esther Mobilia added, however, that relations between the U.S. and Venezuela were guided by a sort of coexistence without significantly escalating tensions but under prevailing rhetorical pressure.

Professor Esther Mobilia highlighted the following Venezuelan foreign policy interests: in the economic sphere, closer relations with China; in the geopolitical domain, cooperation with Russia; furthering the anti-American agenda. However, these keystones may vary. This is because, according to this expert, Venezuela's foreign policy is influenced by this nation's need to seek international backing, following the July 28, 2024 elections, and to obtain international recognition of Maduro's victory. Mobilia underlined that Venezuela's priority, on the international stage, is to see Nicolás Maduro recognized as President.

In Professor Mobilia's view, relative to the international acceptance of Venezuela's latest presidential election results, for the Biden Administration, more than U.S. pressure on President Maduro, it would be preferable for Latin American countries, such as Brazil and Colombia, to wield influence instead of the U.S. This way, according to the interviewee, the U.S. would avoid narratives that include an aspect known to Latin American republics in the past: American interventionism.

Esther Mobilia stated that, in October 2024, Venezuela made a heavy-handed attempt to join BRICS, since, relative to said organization, it aimed to gain support from one of the fastest-growing economies, in the last few years. This scholar explained that Brazil was against Venezuela joining BRICS because, regarding the latter's last presidential election, Brasilia does not recognize the results pointing to Maduro as President.

As for Brazilian President Lula da Silva and Venezuela's President possibly vying for leadership in Latin America, Mobilia emphasized that Caracas does not have the resources to rival Brazil and that, in terms of political leadership, Nicolás Maduro lacks charisma to stir up the masses.

From Esther Mobilia's standpoint, Venezuela's territorial aspirations / claims regarding Essequibo (Guyana) serve to draw the community's attention away from the issue of presidential elections, including disqualifying certain significant opposition candidates. This expert considered that, with said aspirations / claims, the idea is also to promote the national sentiment of Venezuelans: that which has always been regarded as being at issue is the loss of a territory that has historically belonged to Venezuela. Mobilia pointed out that Guyana chooses a narrative in which it appears as the weaker side, whereas Venezuela is portrayed as the interventionist State. The way this scholar sees it, the issue of legitimacy and the lack of recognition of the results of Venezuela's recent presidential election will restrict any type of Venezuelan claim regarding Essequibo.

Esther Mobilia feels that, with Donald Trump's upcoming presidency starting in January 2025, the issue of Taiwan and rivalries with China will be more present in U.S. foreign policy. From this interviewee's standpoint, the U.S. will use public diplomacy instruments to keep constraining Venezuela; however, in relation to this Latin-American country, the interests of U.S. oil companies can lead to careful management of the situation. Still, as Mobilia underlined, recent statements from some members of Trump's new cabinet point to

the possibility of Venezuela being even more pressured with new sanctions.

Professor Esther Mobilia's analysis also concerned media-related aspects. In this expert's view, Venezuelan public diplomacy mechanisms currently try to portray the government as being dynamic, inclusive and democratic and showing an alternative face relative to that which can be considered traditional Chavism while in power until 2013. Mobilia noted that, within the context of public diplomacy, Venezuela not only uses television networks (for instance, Telesur) but also hired personalities to bolster a certain image, through paid advertising and social networks. At media level, while this amounts to strategies that various governments put into practice, its effectiveness, as concerns Venezuela, according to Mobilia, is not as great as Caracas would like. As per Professor Esther Mobilia, this discrepancy is due to disseminating news and reports from reputable international organizations that paint a different picture of the Venezuelan administration.

Conclusion

Venezuela's current geopolitical positioning is linked to a crucial development: in 1999, Hugo Chávez's victory in presidential elections. This President was against U.S. hegemony in Latin America and the Caribbean, until his death in 2013. This opposition to the U.S. somehow continued with Venezuela's next President, Nicolás Maduro, from 2013 to the present.

Another aspect currently influencing Venezuelan foreign policy is the issue of international recognition of Maduro's victory in the last presidential elections, on July 28, 2024. However, there are those who maintain that U.S. pressures in relation to the results of said elections are managed in order for Venezuela to keep the door from completely closing off to U.S. companies interested in Venezuelan crude oil reserves. On top of the geographic location, Venezuela's natural wealth, including energy and mineral resources, is attractive to several foreign powers. In reality, countries' interests are present in international relations.

Countries strategically rivaling the U.S., such as China, Iran and Russia, back a number of Latin-American and Caribbean nations, in the political, economic and military spheres, assigning Venezuela considerable importance. Said foreign powers also show interest in regional organizations. All this is certainly taken into account by the U.S., even though Washington's attention may possibly be geared more to the Far East, particularly to China, than to Latin-American and Caribbean countries. This could end up still taking place with the next U.S. Administration, led by Donald Trump, despite not ruling out more sanctions on Venezuela in the future. Nevertheless, the U.S. is actually not keeping still, and, as such, it monitors and is active in Latin America and the Caribbean, for the purpose of countering the negative effects resulting from ties forged by adversary powers with countries in said region. As part of this, the U.S. may, for example, turn to several kinds of actions that are interrelated: influence operations / information warfare / political warfare / psychological warfare. All this can be carried out by state and non-state actors, in order to pursue certain geopolitical goals, through various instruments, such as traditional and social media. This subject matter takes on greater importance in international relations. In publicly disseminated narratives, with a rhetorical component, several senior Venezuelan political officials, such as Presidents Chávez and Maduro, maintained that the U.S. has intended to destabilize Venezuela using both media and psychological warfare.

Through a number of instruments, such as traditional media and social media, Venezuelan public diplomacy currently attempts to portray that nation's government with an alternative face to traditional Chavism and with an image of dynamism and a democratic nature. The efficiency of said public diplomacy depends on its ability to override a different image of Venezuela that is disseminated by reputable international organizations. Strategic communication is an essential aspect in the sphere of geopolitical competition.

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SECURITY AND RESILIENCE - AFRICA

Cybersecurity as a Pillar of National Security in African Countries

Mehdi MAHIR (Marocco)

In the digital age, **cybersecurity is no longer optional; it is a critical component of national security.** For African countries, the rapid adoption of technology across sectors has introduced vulnerabilities that, if left unaddressed, can undermine political stability, compromise sensitive government data, and jeopardize public trust. As nations become more interconnected, cyber threats have grown in sophistication and scale, demanding robust strategies to mitigate their impact.

This article delves into the importance of cybersecurity as a cornerstone of national security in Africa, exploring its role in safeguarding sensitive information, securing election systems, and recommending strategic policies to fortify defense mechanisms against emerging threats.

Source: https://africacenter.org/programs/cyber/

1. The Impact of Weak Cybersecurity on Political Stability and National Security

1.1 How Cyber Threats Undermine Political Stability

Weak cybersecurity infrastructure leaves nations vulnerable to a range of threats that can destabilize political systems. **Election interference** is among the most alarming, as it undermines the integrity of democratic processes. Cyberattacks targeting voting systems, such as hacking voter databases or disrupting communication channels, can lead to contested results, mistrust in electoral outcomes, and civil unrest.

Additionally, **disinformation campaigns** have become potent tools for malicious actors, weaponizing digital platforms to spread false narratives, manipulate public opinion, and discredit government institutions. In African countries, where access to verified information can be limited, these campaigns often exacerbate ethnic, political, and social tensions.

Cyber espionage further complicates political stability by enabling unauthorized entities—both state and non-state actors—to gather intelligence on sensitive governmental operations. This access can influence political negotiations, undermine diplomatic efforts, and expose vulnerabilities that adversaries can exploit.

1.2 The Economic Consequences of Cyber Vulnerabilities

Cybersecurity weaknesses do not only threaten political stability but also have **far-reaching economic implications.** Attacks on critical infrastructure, such as energy grids, healthcare systems, and

transportation networks, disrupt essential services and threaten national resilience. For example, a single ransomware attack on a national power grid can cripple economic activities, lead to prolonged blackouts, and heighten social tensions.

Frequent cyber breaches erode investor confidence, deterring foreign investments in key sectors. When companies perceive a high-risk digital environment, they hesitate to establish operations, hindering economic growth. Furthermore, nations with poor cybersecurity frameworks face the added burden of financial losses from cybercrime, making it harder to allocate resources toward developmental goals.

A **stable and secure digital environment** is vital for fostering sustainable development, ensuring business continuity, and promoting trust among citizens and stakeholders.

2. Protecting Sensitive Government Data and Election Systems

2.1 The Importance of Safeguarding Government Data

Governments manage vast repositories of sensitive data, ranging from military strategies to citizens' personal information. Cyber breaches targeting such information can have **catastrophic consequences.** For example, unauthorized access to classified documents compromises a country's defense posture, giving adversaries leverage in conflicts or negotiations.

Additionally, breaches involving citizens' personal data lead to identity theft, fraud, and erosion of trust in public institutions. In countries where digital adoption is growing, the loss of trust in government systems can have long-term social and political repercussions.

To address these risks, governments must invest in:

•**Robust encryption protocols** to secure data during storage and transmission.

•**Advanced monitoring systems** to detect and respond to breaches in real time.

•A **proactive approach to cybersecurity** by regularly updating security measures and training personnel on emerging threats.

2.2 Election Security as a Cornerstone of Digital Democracy

In the digital age, elections are increasingly dependent on technology for voter registration, ballot counting, and results dissemination. As such, **election security has become a cornerstone of digital democracy.** A failure to protect election systems not only jeopardizes national stability but also diminishes public confidence in democratic processes.

To safeguard elections, governments should implement:

•**End-to-end encryption** to ensure data integrity during transmission.

•**Blockchain-based solutions** to create auditable and tamper-proof election systems.

•**Public education campaigns** to combat disinformation and promote digital literacy among voters.

By adopting a **holistic approach to election security**, African nations can preserve the sanctity of their democratic processes and foster trust in governance.

3. Integrating Cybersecurity into National Defense Strategies

3.1 The Role of Policies in Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity must be recognized as a national priority, integrated into broader defense and security frameworks. For African countries, this involves **establishing dedicated cybersecurity agencies**, such as national cybersecurity centers, to coordinate efforts, monitor threats, and respond rapidly to incidents.

Regulatory frameworks tailored for critical sectors like finance, healthcare, and telecommunications ensure that these industries are fortified against cyberattacks. Furthermore, bilateral and multilateral cooperation is essential for **threat intelligence sharing,** enabling countries to stay ahead of evolving threats. Collaborations with international organizations and neighboring states can amplify the effectiveness of these strategies.

3.2 Building a Resilient Workforce

A robust cybersecurity strategy requires **significant investments in human capital.** Training IT professionals to address emerging threats equips nations with the local expertise needed to secure their digital infrastructures. Governments should also foster **public-private partnerships** to leverage the innovation and

technical expertise of private companies.

By encouraging collaboration between public institutions, private enterprises, and academia, African countries can build a **resilient cybersecurity workforce** capable of adapting to dynamic challenges. These partnerships also facilitate the development of **cutting-edge technologies** tailored to local needs.

3.3 Leveraging Advanced Technologies

The adoption of advanced technologies is critical for **staying ahead of cyber threats.** Artificial intelligence (AI) can revolutionize threat detection by identifying anomalies and predicting potential attacks, allowing governments to respond proactively. Similarly, **blockchain technology** offers secure and tamper-resistant solutions for managing sensitive data and transactions.

Implementing a **zero-trust architecture** is another essential step, ensuring that all users—internal or external—must verify their identities before accessing systems. These advanced technologies provide African nations with the tools to **build resilient digital ecosystems** and fortify national defenses.

4. Challenges to Implementing Cybersecurity in African Countries

Despite its importance, the integration of cybersecurity into national strategies faces several **challenges in African countries**:

•**Budgetary Constraints**: Many nations lack the financial resources to invest in advanced cybersecurity infrastructure, leaving critical sectors vulnerable.

•**Public Awareness**: Policymakers and the general population often underestimate the significance of cybersecurity, leading to delays in adopting necessary measures.

•**Global Cybercrime Syndicates**: These organized groups frequently target African nations, exploiting their relatively weak defenses to execute ransomware attacks, data breaches, and espionage.

Overcoming these challenges requires **strategic investments, public education campaigns, and stronger international collaborations.**

5. Recommendations for Strengthening Cybersecurity as National Security

To establish cybersecurity as a pillar of national security, African nations must adopt comprehensive strategies that address both immediate risks and long-term goals.

Recommendations include:

1.**Developing National Cybersecurity Strategies**: Governments should create detailed plans outlining objectives, resources, and timelines for enhancing cybersecurity.

2.**Fostering Regional Collaboration**: African countries can benefit from platforms that facilitate knowledge-sharing, threat intelligence exchange, and resource pooling.

3.**Promoting Public Awareness**: Educating citizens about the importance of cybersecurity fosters a culture of vigilance and digital hygiene.

4.**Leveraging International Support**: By partnering with global organizations, African nations can access funding, training, and advanced technologies to bolster their defenses.

These measures ensure that cybersecurity becomes a **fundamental component of national security**, safeguarding sovereignty and fostering sustainable development.

Conclusion

As African countries navigate the complexities of the digital era, **cybersecurity must be recognized as a cornerstone of national security.** Weak cyber defenses expose nations to political instability, economic losses, and erosion of trust in government institutions. By adopting comprehensive policies, fostering regional and international collaboration, and leveraging advanced technologies, African nations can build resilient digital ecosystems that protect their sovereignty and citizens.

In this interconnected world, **cybersecurity is not just a technical issue—it is a matter of national survival and progress.**

SECURITY AND RESILIENCE - INDO- PACIFIC AREA

India's Role in the Indo-Pacific: Theatre of Opportunities and Challenges

Article on Indo-Pacific Discourse

Gargi AWASHTI (India)

The emergent Indo-Pacific discourse, which combines elements of India's 'Look South' and 'Look East' policies, and in which a core Indo-Pacific of the eastern Indian Ocean and western Pacific Ocean has particular strategic coherence. A very substantial part of India's interests now lie towards the East, beyond the Indian Ocean and into the Pacific. The political dimension of the Indo-Pacific is equally strong but has a very different logic. Simply put, the separation of the Pacific from the Indian Ocean theatre was a direct outcome of American strategic dominance after 1945.

The re-positioning of the US, the rise of China and India, the greater external engagement of Japan and Australia, the wider interests of South Korea and indeed, the broader outlook of the ASEAN have all contributed to this transformation. A more collaborative outlook that transcends the orthodoxy of earlier theatres is the need of the day. At the end of the day, this is about recognizing the realities of globalization and the consequences of "rebalancing" India's vision. We consider Indo-Pacific as a region extending from the Eastern shores of Africa to the Western shores of America. The Indo-Pacific contributes to 64% of global population and over 60% of global GDP. India's Indo-Pacific vision builds on India's "Act East Policy" and the doctrine of "Security and Growth for All in the Region" articulated by our Prime Minister, in 2015.

India's endeavours and opportunities which lie ahead: to give concrete shape to India's vision of the Indo-Pacific, India has moved on many fronts

Source: https://redlanternanalytica.com/tracing-chinas-strategic-approach-in-the-indo-pacific-region/

simultaneously. Let me emphasize that India envisages the ASEAN to be at the centre of the Indo-Pacific, both literally and substantive. An appropriate fit for the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific adopted during Thailand's chairmanship of ASEAN are committed to implement the synergies between our Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative and ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific to achieve a sustainable future in synchronization with the national goals of all EAS partner Nations India's approach towards Indo-Pacific under the IPOI looks at establishing

a safe, secure and stable maritime domain.

On the economic side, the in-principle decision to initiate the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework is a significant development. Another interesting effort is the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness Initiative that concentrates on maritime safety, IUU fishing and consequences of natural disasters. The QUAD is the most prominent multilateral platform that addresses contemporary challenges and opportunities in the Indo-Pacific. And that is validated by the growing recognition of its importance in the international community. The energies of the QUAD are directed at a broad range of activities from maritime safety and security, HADR, cyber security, critical and emerging technologies and connectivity to education, health and space cooperation. And that is validated by the growing recognition of its importance in the international community.

The Indo-Pacific concept has gained importance due to globalization, trade dependence, and the trans-national nature of maritime threats. The acceptance of the Indo-Pacific as a single strategic construct linking the contiguous waters of the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean has gained currency in the last few years with the shift in the geopolitical centre of gravity to this region. For the US, it extends up to the west coast of India which is also the geographic boundary of the US Indo-Pacific command whereas for India it includes the entire Indian Ocean and the western Pacific as highlighted by Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, at his keynote speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue, in 2018. In his speech he had clearly indicated the geographical reach of India's idea of the Indo-Pacific starting from Africa to the Americas, which covers both the Indian and Pacific Oceans, in tandem with that of Japan.

The focus of the Indo-Pacific initiative is on connectivity, enhancing maritime security, counterterrorism, non-proliferation and cyber issues. Last November, senior officials from the US, Australia, India, and Japan had met in Singapore for consultations on the Indo-Pacific region. The Indo-Pacific is based on oceans, which is the common thread that connects all. The government has introduced the concept of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and believes in an Indo-Pacific that is free, open and inclusive, and one that is founded upon a cooperative and collaborative rules-based order.

The global consequences of a rising India is evident but it should be embedded in realities of the country's inherent limitations. India's foreign exchange reserve has grown to around $600 billion, and a war with Pakistan is not something Indian leaders lose sleep over China has taken that place though and there is a general sense of foreign policy optimism. Ranked as the world's fifth largest economy, India's nominal GDP could soon touch $4 trillion; it has one of the largest militaries in the world with over a hundred nuclear weapons.

The US is now one of India's closest friends, and New Delhi enjoys strong relationships with several powerful states around the world. The US and the wealthy West want India to be on their side. New Delhi, increasingly, uses the language of mediation in global crises and being a bridge between the north and south and east and west, indirectly indicating that it is a major "pole" in world politics. Although tens of millions of people in India still live in poverty, the country's national power has increased dramatically, making it a force with system-shaping capabilities and intentions.

The other side of the great power story despite being the fifth largest economy in the world, its GDP per capita was $1,947 in 2021 whereas that of Bangladesh, at $2,227, was more than that of India even though Bangladesh is only the 40th largest military power in the world. The argument from this comparison is a well-known one: GDP and military strength do not equal the well-being of a country's citizens. But at the same time, the well-being of a country's population does not equal to the gross material power that a state can bring to bear in its foreign and security policies. India's domestic challenges will continue to distract the attention of its political leaders from attending to global problems. One of the most pressing concerns for India's political class is to reduce poverty and improve the well-being of millions of Indians living below the poverty line, a task that is bound to divert its attention from serious external engagements. When the political class gives scant attention to the country's foreign and security policy, as it usually happens in India's case, it is managed by career bureaucrats who usually do not diverge from precedents and avoid taking even remotely risky decisions. For instance, the Parliamentary Committee on External Affairs observed that despite an increase in the overall budget allocation of the Government of India, the allocation made to MEA (the Ministry of External Affairs) in percentage terms has witnessed a downward turn during the last four years and during 2022-23 it is only 0. Or should India continue to assert its place in the world and aspire to be a great power? Even though India's domestic inabilities will continue to moderate its ability to influence the world order befitting of its size and ambition, being unwilling to engage and shape it would be a strategic blunder.

India's ability to shape international politics must also be a reflection of its domestic context, and its global engagement must necessarily be geared towards the well-being of its people. Neither is strategic autarky

an option nor is India's assertiveness on the global stage a matter of nationalistic hubris or officious vanity. Even though India's domestic inabilities will continue to moderate its ability to influence the world order befitting of its size and ambition, being unwilling to engage and shape it would be a strategic blunder. Whether it likes it or not, India's impact on the world order is a given, and, in a globalised world, the relationship between a state's global influence and domestic growth is an unavoidable one. To begin with, New Delhi must revisit some of its traditional conceptions of the region, its primacy in South Asia, and take proactive and imaginative policy steps to meet the China challenge in the region. We must accept the reality that the region, the neighbours and the region's geopolitics have fundamentally changed over the decade-and-a-half at the least. New Delhi must focus on its strengths rather than trying to match the might of the People's Republic of China in every respect the latter is a fool's errand.

Fashioning a new engagement with the region that reflects India's traditional strengths and the region's changed realities is essential. There is an openness today in New Delhi to view the region through a non-India centric lens. This also means that New Delhi is no longer uneasy about external powers in its neighbourhood as it used to be during the Cold War. As a consequence, there is a desire to join hands with external friendly partners both in the Indian Ocean and South Asia so as to deal with the region's common challenges. This openness in New Delhi, and the desire of the external actors to engage the region, must be utilised to address the difficulties arising out of New Delhi's regional decline. New Delhi should make creative uses of its soft power to retain its influence in the region.

The rise of China and what India must do but the rise of China explains India's regional decline more than anything else. This openness in New Delhi, and the desire of the external actors to engage the region, must be utilised to address the difficulties arising out of New Delhi's regional decline. Although India faces numerous domestic challenges, such as health care, education, India's Government is striving to address these challenges and is implementing policies that promote the wellbeing and prosperity of its citizens. Climate change poses a major threat to India's environment, economy, and people, and India's efforts on climate change are gradual and balanced, taking into account the specific needs and circumstances of its diverse population. India's rich history and culture exemplify resilience, innovation, and leadership, which have shaped the country's current and future role in the international system. Income gap between the rich and the poor is large, leading to social unrest and disparities.

When analysing the evolution of different strategies aimed at defining the Indo-Pacific region and India, China, the purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific region, specifically India's role in Indo-Pacific Strategy. Since the conception of a region that encapsulated the security interests of powers beyond the imagined system, India has been at the centre of the re-imagining of the Indo-Pacific discourse, especially when pinning China as a genuine security challenge. This is based on the idea that India is "the only nation with the force capability and political intent to prevent China from extending its "hard power" dominance...of the Indian Ocean Region". This alliance can, therefore, be viewed under the lens of the balance of threat theory, whereby China's mounting impact in and around the Indo-Pacific may create common threat perceptions for both states. Primarily, it seeks to ascertain the geopolitical competitions that led to the endorsement of IPS, and what significance India holds in the implementation of the strategy.

More specifically, it further examines the degree and nature of India's response to China's growing influence and how it differs from the approach undertaken by the U.S. Through a simple analytical inquiry of secondary sources, the study assesses China's influence on the reconstruction and development of American policies toward the greater Indo-Pacific through the years, and how India has been envisioned within it. India's adherence to its Strategic Autonomy policy and its repercussions on the broader neighbourhood are crucial factors to examine to comprehend the evolving geopolitics in Asia. In this context, the Indo-Pacific region appears to have emerged as a new geopolitical arena, primarily due to the economic growth of Asia and the increased interaction between Asian states. The region's landmass has been defined and redefined by nation-states from within and outside of it in terms of civilisation, regions, and geopolitical constructs.

China's rapid military build-up in the South China Sea supports the theory, and it shows China's ambiguous intentions and willingness to change the status quo unilaterally with force. Although China's economic influence in the region is significant, the United States' military capabilities continue to hold the upper hand in Asia. China's unprecedented growth over the past few decades has altered the geopolitics of Asia and beyond. As China's power grows and America's power declines, two things are likely to happen: China will use its mounting influence to reshape the international system's rules and institutions to serve its interests, and other states in the system will see China as a growing security threat. As a result, China may try to dominate the region to become Asia's most powerful nation and ensure that no other country can threaten it. An increasingly

powerful China may try to push the US out of Asia and refuse American military presence in its neighbourhood. As a result, countries affected by the power transition, such as the United States and other major players in Asia and beyond, must calculate the threat from China's rise and respond accordingly. China's rise worries the U.S., which has long dominated international affairs and the Asia-Pacific region. Similarly, China's neighbours are bound to be alarmed by its rise and will do everything in their power to prevent the Chinese from attaining regional dominance. The US and its allies, including India, are being persuaded to form a balancing coalition to contain China's aggressive foreign policy. The most significant developments have been the strengthening of the United States, Japan, India, and Australia's Quadrilateral alliance and the Trump administration's clearly articulated Indo-Pacific strategy to contain China. Due to the perception that China has offensive intentions and its proximity to the region, India, Japan, and other regional actors are more concerned with Chinese power than American power.

SECURITY AND RESILIENCE - MILITARY TECHNOLOGIES COMPETITION

Stolen and Reverse-Engineered
Military Technologies

Jaap Van RENNES (Belgium)

While the theft of military innovations and technologies through espionage and hacking is a significant problem, it may not be as severe a threat as often perceived.

China possesses sufficient blueprints and stolen data for numerous Western and Russian jet and helicopter engines, yet it is still struggling to make anything domestically even coming close. Stealing is one thing, producing (reliable and cost effective) is a whole other matter. Russia also has a lot of western technologies captured from the Ukraine war, however their industry is far from capable of matching the perfection, miniaturisation and quality of the West, and that is without factoring in the lack of advanced electronics due to the sanctions.

Fig. 01 - Source: https://www.sandboxx.us/news/stolen-stealth-fighter-why-chinas-j-20-has-both-us-and-russian-dna/
(One example of this influence is the MiG 1.44 or the MiG MFI project, which appears to have served as a foundation for the Chinese Chengdu J-20 'Powerful Dragon).

The complex process of developing reliable, military jet engines presents an enormous challenge for the AECC (Aero Engine Corporation Of China). Different challenges like technological, material, and geopolitical factors hinder China's attempts to catch up with the West and Russia in engine technology.

While the country has made notable progress in recent years, overcoming these challenges is crucial for its military aviation capabilities and becoming self-sufficient.

- **Technical Challenges:** Developing military jet engines involves advanced knowledge and complex engineering. This includes disciplines such as materials science (metallurgy), aerodynamics, and thermodynamics. Achieving high thrust-to-weight ratios, fuel efficiency, and reliability while maintaining stealth capabilities requires innovative design solutions, advanced materials, and cutting-edge technology.
- **Material challenges:** Engine components must withstand extreme temperatures and stress. Developing high-performance materials that can endure these conditions is crucial. China has been trying to catch up in producing advanced alloys and composite materials required for next-generation engines. Advanced manufacturing methods, such as precision casting and 3D printing, are essential for creating complex engine parts. While China has progressed in this area, ensuring quality control remains challenging.
- **Historically,** China has relied on foreign technology and imports for advanced aircraft engines and critical engine components, especially from Russia. This dependency has limited China's ability to develop fully indigenous capabilities in this crucial area. For instance, China's early fighter jets, such as the J-11, used Russian engines (AL-31F), which affected operational independence. While efforts are underway to develop indigenous capabilities, breaking this dependency takes time. Attempts to acquire foreign technology through partnerships and joint ventures have often faced political hurdles.
- **Reliability and Quality challenges:** Rigorous testing and quality assurance are vital to ensuring engine reliability. Despite advancements, Chinese engines have struggled with quality and reliability issues compared to their Western and Russian counterparts. The Russian quality is somewhere between the Western and the Chinese engines. Early versions of domestically produced engines, like the WS-10, experienced reliability issues that needed to be addressed through ongoing refinements and improvements. There have been concerns about durability and performance under extreme conditions.

China Tests 'Home Grown' Jet Engine It Was Accused Of Stealing Technology

In a major leap forward for China's aviation industry, reports indicate that the Chinese J-20 stealth fighter has completed its maiden flight equipped with two newly developed WS-15B jet engines.

Until now, the Chinese had been flying its J-20 using the under powered WS-10B jet engines, which itself is a copy of the Russian AL-31F engines.

It is believed that the Chinese may have stolen advanced aero-engine technologies from the United States engine-maker Pratt and Whitney. In 2018, Xiaoqing Zheng, a Chinese-American citizen, was convicted by the US Department of Justice (DOJ) in 2018 for his involvement in the theft of trade secrets related to turbine sealing.

In a separate case, Xu Yanjun, identified as a Chinese intelligence officer, has been accused of orchestrating a scheme to target and obtain valuable information from experts employed in Western aerospace companies, as well.

The alleged objective of this operation was to facilitate knowledge transfer and enhance China's manufacturing processes in the aerospace domain. This is coming at a time when, India and the US, signed an agreement to co-manufacture General Electric (GE) F-414 engines in India, in a state visit of PM Modi to the US.

The deal involved transfer of technologies (ToT) of over eighty percent, which included eleven critical aero-engine manufacturing technologies which, until now, the US has not even shared with its treaty allies like the UK, France and Australia.

These include special coating for erosion and corrosion, repair technology for turbines, compression disc and blades, coating and machining of single crystal turbine blades, machining and coating of hot end parts, complete tech transfer for bilks machining, machining of powder metallurgy, polymer matrix composite, laser drilling for combustion, and bottle boring of shafts.

It's obvious these 3 engines are closely related to each other and the Chinese stealing technology wherever they can and incorporating everything into one engine. It's hard to obtain correct data on the Chinese engines.

When comparing the engines, realise that the Western engine is not the one used in the latest jets like F-22/F-35/B-21 but rather the F-18 family, the Russian engine is in full production while testing is going on for its successor and the Chinese engine is their top of the line going through flight testing.

The comparison of the engines:
Shenyang WS-10:
Type: Afterburning turbofan

Fig. 02 - Source: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shenyang_WS-10

- Dry weight: 1,795 kg (3,957 lb)
- Maximum thrust: 135 kilonewtons (30,000 lbf)
- Overall pressure ratio: ?
- Bypass ratio: ?
- Thrust-to-weight ratio: 8,8

Saturn AL-31:
Type: Two-shaft axial flow afterburning turbofan

Fig. 03 - Source: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saturn_AL-31

- Dry weight: 1,520 kg (3,350 lb)
- Maximum thrust: 7.8 tf (76.49 kN; 17,200 lbf) dry thrust, 12.5 tf (122.6 kN; 27,560 lbf) with afterburner
- Overall pressure ratio: 23:1
- Bypass ratio: 0,56:1
- Thrust-to-weight ratio: 4,93 (dry), 8,22 (afterburning)
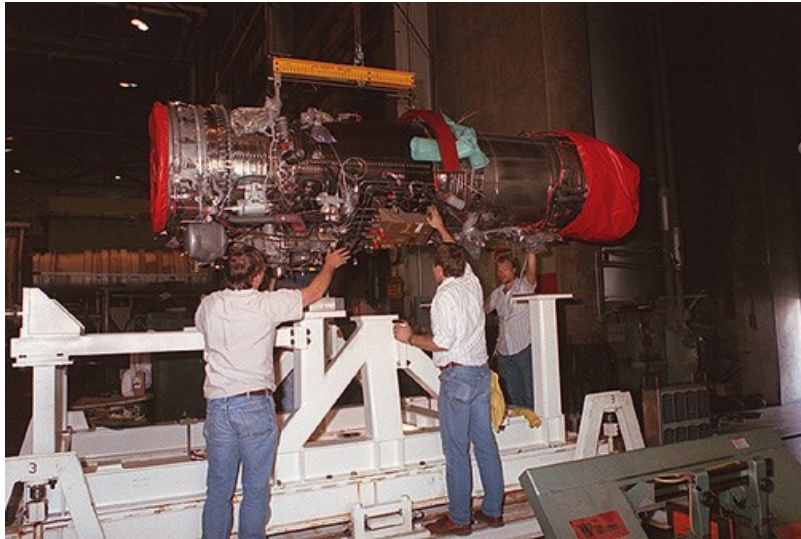
GE F414:
Type: Afterburning turbofan

Fig. 04 - Source: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Electric_F414

- Dry weight: 2,445 lb (1,110 kg) max weight
- Maximum thrust: 13,000 lbf (57.8kN) dry thrust, 22,000 lbf (97.9 kN) with afterburner
- Overall pressure ratio: 30:1
- Bypass ratio: 0,25:1
- Thrust-to-weight ratio**: 9**

Fig. 05 - Source: https://www.aeroflap.com.br/nl/vijf-vliegtuigen-die-China-uit-andere-landen-heeft-gekopieerd/
(The American Sikorsky S-70 and the Chinese Harbin Z-20 are so similar, it's hard to tell them apart).

Stealing, reverse engineering and producing is already a formidable challenge, innovating from that point on is close to impossible. The time needed for incorporating all of this will mean that your opponent has by that time already the next generation of whatever you stole from them before you yourself can even begin any improvements of your own. While advanced weapons and systems are critical, they are not the sole determinants of military success. There is also training, experience, numerical (dis)advantage, interoperability, and many more to consider.

Fig 06 - Source: https://idrw.org/russias-su-57-felon-fighter-jet-faces-criticism-at-airshow-china-2024-over-quality-issues/
(The poor build quality of the Sukhoi Su-57 Felon clearly visible at the 2024 Chinese Zhuhai airshow).

Take for example the hype of the 5th gen fighter aircraft. The Russian Su-57 Felon is several decades behind on schedule, doesn't have it intended engines and as seen on the Zhuhai air show, the build quality is shoddy to say the least.

Fig 07 - Source: https://www.threads.net/@protossw/post/DCBvVgDPWat/j35-is-officially-introduced-in-zhuhai-airshow-aviation-jet-stealth?hl=de
(Comparison between the Chinese Shenyang J-35 and the American Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II).

The Chinese J-35 general shape, without a doubt based on stolen F-35 data, but when it comes to stealth or low RCS, if you push it far enough, inevitably, at some point all planes will start to look alike. But when it comes to true stealth capabilities, there is a lot more to it than just the shape of the plane. There is the RAM-coating, radar, build quality like rivets, edges, panel lines, protruding sensors/antennas, active (counter) measures etc.

Fig 08 - Source: Facebook - Sukhoi 75 (group)
(The Sukhoi concept Su-75 Checkmate vs. The Boeing X-32 concept demonstrator for the joint strike fighter competition).

The Russian Su-75 Checkmate. You can build an impressive mock-up and present it to the world, having it in large scale production and operational is a big difference.

The majority of Chinese technologies are still based on Russian or even Soviet tech and the war in Ukraine has shown the world it's far from as formidable as they claimed it to be. This goes for Main Battle Tanks, air defence radars and SAM systems to even some of their latest fighter planes.

Fig 09 - Source: https://m.mobile01.com/topicdetail.php?f=637&t=5900494
(Sukhoi Su-33 vs. Shenyang J-15 Flying Shark).

Fig 10 - Source: https://youtu.be/j-sRF-8RYQg?si=N2R7IiXFwDY8dHIw
(The Russian NPO Almaz S-400 Triumf vs the Chinese HQ-9).

And remember, Russia still had experience in actual combat, which China lacks. Also the endemic corruption of these authoritarian regimes plays a far more important role than anybody would have expected as seen yet again in the Ukraine war. In large part fuelled by the military personnel on all levels never expecting there would come an actual fight.

SPACE WARFARE RULES

Paul's Top Rules to Fight and Win Space Wars!

Paul SZYMANSKI (USA)

1. Situational Awareness Dominates

a. Where is your adversary, how soon can he attack you, and what are his capabilities?

b. Where are your own space forces and what are their capabilities and readiness?

c. What are the timelines for your detection of adversary maneuvers and your battle management ability to respond (OODA loops)?

d. What are the training levels of your own space forces?

2. Pre-Conflict Positioning

a. You fight only with what you already have optimized for the local region of space. It takes too long to maneuver into position during combat, as simulations have shown that major space wars are over within 24 – 48 hours. Your NATO friends in Europe cannot maneuver fast enough to help you in a space conflict in the Western Pacific, and will use up a lot of operational fuel getting there, thus limiting the satellites' lifetimes.

Source: https://gsdn.live/role-of-space-supremacy-in-future-wars/
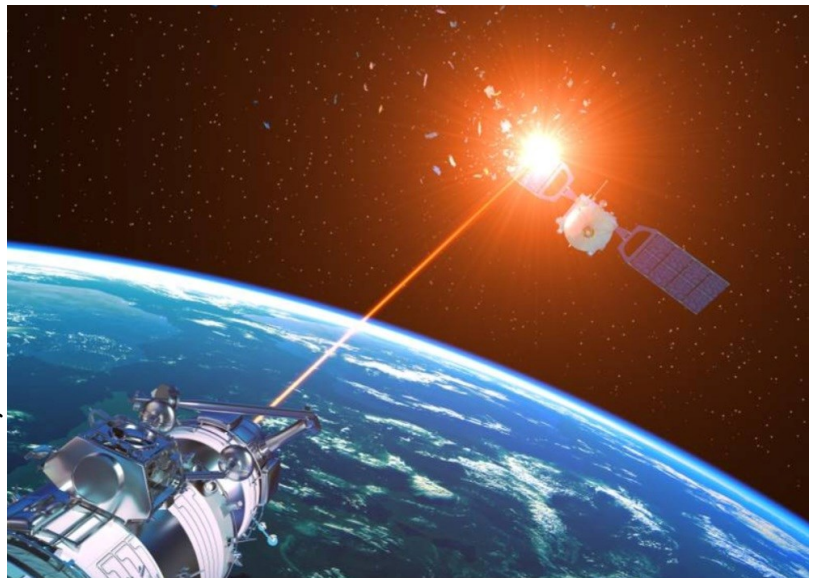
3. Decisive Political Will

a. If the major space wars are over within 24 – 48 hours you have to decide quickly who is attacking you and why. Anti-satellite weapons do not have big red stars painted on their sides, and are easily hiding in the vastness of space.

b. You can easily self-deter by waiting too long to respond while trying to figure out who is attacking you. If you are at war in the Western Pacific you cannot assume that China is attacking you. Maybe the Russians or North Koreans are just trying to stir things up?

c. However, if you counter-attack too soon, you may be the one actually initiating the space conflict, and possibly escalating the terrestrial war too.

d. Space wars have an instability much like nuclear conflicts, as whomever attacks first probably wins.

4. What are the adversary objectives

a. Determining adversary intent is the most difficult mission to accomplish. Many wars have started due to misinterpreting adversary intent.

b. Potential adversary objectives in space:

i. Decapitation of your command and control ability?

ii. Deny ability to observe battlefield?

iii. Deny ability to detect nuclear ICBM attacks (precursor to nuclear conflict)?

iv. Deny ability to predict weather on future battlefields (probably will not be negated in space)?

v. Deny GPS / PNT navigation/timing ability?

vi. As a deterrent for something you are doing on the terrestrial battlefield?

vii. Show of intent and will for overall deterrence?

viii. Testing your space defenses and timeliness of responses?

ix. Inspire you to use up delta-v fuel on space assets by responding to meaningless threatening behavior? In addition, maneuvering a satellite to avoid a potential threat essentially makes that satellite unable to perform its assigned mission for a time.

5. Define Winning

a. One side takes out your communications satellites and you take out all of their imagery assets in space. Who won? What is most important on the terrestrial battlefield? This assessment probably changes based on the geographic region the conflict is in and the inherent natures of the governments and people you are attacking.

b. Since satellites mostly generate and transmit information, then you are really fighting an information war when attacking space systems. You are not attacking the satellite – you are attacking the mission of the satellite. You are not really attacking the mission of the satellite – you are attacking the information it is generating or transmitting. Finally, you are not attacking the information that the satellite is generating – you are actually attacking the adversary commanders' minds that are employing this space-generated information as they make decisions on the terrestrial battlefields.

c. It is impossible to mathematically model how an adversary commander will react to the lack of information from an attacked satellite. If in one year at the Pentagon you have to decide either to allocate some extra money to a brand new, really cool, space weapon system, you cannot prove its overall effectiveness on the terrestrial battlefield like one can mathematically prove the effectives of a new Army tank battalion purchased with the same amount of money.

d. United States JP 5-0 ([Joint Publication 5-0](#)) states that before any deployment of military forces to the battlefield one must list the war termination (surrender) criteria first, and all other planning flows from these ultimate goals. After thousands of years of terrestrial conflict history, these goals are readily understandable, most of the time: invade and gain adversary territory, seize their capital city, destroy war-making ability, overthrow adversary government, etc. OK, what are the war termination criteria for space? There is no space capital to seize, and you cannot legally occupy territory in space. Even destroying war-making space capabilities would be impossible with 100% confidence since it is way too easy to hide space weapons in the vastness of space. (Currently, over 30% of objects in space are listed as "analyst objects," meaning we don't know who owns them and what their purpose is).

6. Purpose of Space Systems

a. Since there are no colonies of humans in space for USSF to defend, the main and, quite frankly, only current purpose of military space systems is to support the terrestrial battlefield.

b. Consequently, you better have combined Army-USSF situation maps with common terminology so Army generals can understand the value of space to their terrestrial battlefields. Another recent quote: "I would argue that space begins and ends on the ground." - Lt. Gen. Daniel Karbler, USA-SMDC Commanding General.

7. Overemphasis on Tactical vs Strategic Nature of Space Warfare

a. Current USAF/USSF thinking emphasizes tactical actions in space. This misunderstands the true nature of warfare in space, as satellites cover the globe and any attacks in space have strategic, political, diplomatic, treaty and economic consequences. Satellites can be attacked anywhere along their orbital tracks, so space weapons can be placed way outside current theaters of operations. Consequently, any war in space is, by definition, a world war.

b. "Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat." (Sun Tzu)

8. The First Step to Defeat is Overconfidence

a. US Air Force and USSF think they know what all space objects are and their threat potentials. However, we have lost many Russian satellites for years due to their highly inclined and highly eccentric orbits that make them difficult to track.

b. Space is way too vast, its wars are over with too quickly, and there is a lack of military history to go on for anyone to have full confidence in what they are doing during space conflicts.

c. You may want to consider other political players in the pre-conflict space weapons development programs (such as the State Department) as they may very well nix your ability to employ these politically sensitive systems later on.

9. The Second Step to Defeat is Outdated Strategies Optimized for the Last War

a. The United Sates has had too many conflicts with third rate countries. We have overconfident due to this. You learn more from defeat than from constant victories. The war in Ukraine is a perfect example of this – who knew we would be back to trench warfare much like World War One?

10. The Third Step to Defeat Is Falling in Love With Your "Superior" Military Technology

a. There are many instances in history where one supposedly inferior side beat the technologically better or superior numbers side due to better generalship or better doctrine. France and Briton had 17 times more tanks than the Germans at the beginning of WW2, and their tanks were technologically superior in capabilities. What good did that do them when facing the German blitzkrieg? What good did the high tech German V2 rockets, jet fighters, Tiger tanks, etc. ultimately do for them?

b. Supposedly superior NATO military technology was ultimately defeated in Ukraine.

11. The Fourth Step to Defeat Is Not Understanding Strategic & Political Post-War Consequences

a. Traditionally, we win many battles and lose the war. Sometimes we win all the battles, win the war, and then consequently lose the peace.

b. Unfortunately, we are used to terrestrial conflicts with large casualties. We are not used to conflicts in space, and they will have special political considerations. Possibly, dictatorships have an advantage here, as they do not care what their citizens think of their actions in space.

c. One may consider that countries with dictatorships have soldiers who readily freeze in their trenches when they lose contact with their commanders. Consequently, if you are planning a conflict with these types of countries you may want to empathize space weapons that deny communications and command and control of their forces. If you are thinking of attacking freer-thinking countries, you may want to pre-locate anti-imagery categories of space weapons assets.

d. In actuality, you are not fighting the war, you are fighting the peace and geopolitical realignments afterwards. Space war is only a supporting part of these ultimate goals. ("War is a continuation of politics by other means" - Carl von Clausewitz) You might feel you did a great job conducting the space war, but you may ultimately lose this conflict because you created too much space debris and now your allies hate you. You might also inspire world bodies, post-conflict, to develop new anti-space weapons treaties. And, you may want to hold back using certain exotic space weapon systems, as your adversaries will develop techniques to neutralize them during the post-war era.

e. Also, one should be aware that in fighting a conflict, you are also training your adversary on how to fight you better next time around. You should always consider how you are shaping your adversary's perceptions, lessons learned, and how the rest of the world interprets the results of the conflict, and what treaties/alliances are generated afterwards.

f. Remember, you are shaping the post-conflict environment and your adversaries' military doctrine in the post-conflict world. You may want to consider all of these factors when planning the employment and timing of space weapons during the conflict.

g. Countries are just like children – they will do anything they want if they can get away with it from their "parents". "Parents" in this case mean the UN, world legal bodies, other countries, parts of their own government (do you really think if the USSF is conducting a covert weapons attack in space they are going to tell the Army or State Department, or even the President for that matter?) It is way too easy to get away with anything in space, much like undersea warfare and spy-vs spy operations.

12. Effective Doctrine

a. Fundamentally, military conflict is more than just simply a clash of weapons—all warfare manifests as a competition between human minds. The same holds true in the battle beyond in outer space. The contests of space warfare will test the knowledge, experience, fears, beliefs, stamina, and will of the people, their military commanders, and their political leadership like never before. It is thus essential to prepare for the military implications of wars that extend into space, to root some aspects of space warfare in the military thought of the past, to adapt it to the needs of the future, and to complete its integration as an essential part of the Western way of war.

b. War, whether ancient Greek hoplite warfare or futuristic space warfare, is still about human mind vs human mind. It is adversary commanders' forcing their will on the opposing side. They send messages via soldiers, sailors, airmen, guardians, etc. with military equipment to force the other side to change its mind. You are not fighting the war - you are fighting the peace and the geopolitical realignments that come afterwards. Otherwise, why are you fighting this conflict? The ancient Greeks understood this better than we currently do: "It is not the object of war to annihilate those who have given provocation for it, but to cause them to mend their ways." - Polybius, History (2nd century B.C.). It is ultimately those lucky enough to have the better space general and more broadly-thinking political leaders that will win a space war.

Misinformation in Modern Times: the Cases of Mass Information, Confirmation Bias and Echo Chambers

Peter FILIPPIDES (Greece)

The internet, if left unchecked, can become a breeding ground for racist and fascist rhetoric. It fosters polarization and renders the new generations passive recipients of racist behavior, enabling ideologies to proliferate in a simplified and populist form tailored for those who readily accept them. Through this medium, such ideologies permeate deeply into the fabric of society, posing a threat from within. Half-truths and manipulated statistics are weaponized to serve biased agendas, solidifying political rhetoric laden with racism and scapegoating. These narratives gain traction through the mechanism of reposting, which can lend credibility to even the most blatant lies and grant fleeting notoriety to individuals of little significance.

The Mass Information and Brain Rot

Francis Bacon's assertion that "Knowledge is power" takes on a new urgency in today's information-saturated world. Our reliance on technology—whether for online therapy, dating apps, or virtual education—has led to in-

Source: https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/wheres-first-line-defence-tackling-fake-news-alison-mills-byqze/

formation overload. Bombarded with data daily, many fail to critically assess its validity, becoming passive consumers of information shaped by external agendas. This dependence fosters a culture of superficiality, where efficiency and output are prioritized over content quality and depth (MacVicar, 1985, pp. 40-43). Information—such as facts, graphs, and data—does not equate to knowledge. True understanding requires critical thinking and education, which transform raw data into meaningful insights. Without these, society risks falling into a modern "Plato's cave" (Plato, 2013). Blinded by the shadows of misinformation, superficial interpretations and overconsumption of information, presented as "entertaining or educating" content, we arrive at the phenomena of fake news and the newest Oxford Word of the Year for 2024: *brain rot* (Oxford University Press, 2024). The last term encapsulates the effects of overindulging in online content, that most of the times, is unverified.

Proximity to Contemporary Racism

Racist and far-right opinions are no longer confined to newspapers or radio stations. Today, they are accessible at our fingertips, a single click away, if there is space in our minds for such ideologies. This space often emerges from a lack of critical thinking (Fuchs, *A Critical Theory*, 2020, pp. 83-84). On the flip side, the internet also provides a platform for counterarguments, scepticism, and the analytical deconstruction of these ideologies. By presenting the complexities and contradictions of the world, we can address societal issues intelligently and critically. Ultimately, the challenge we face is encapsulated in the saying: *We will find what we want to believe*, a truth that holds particularly strong in our times (Fuchs, *A Critical Theory*, 2020, p. 85) in a phenomenon called confirmation bias. This highlights the necessity of cultivating critical thinking and fostering intelligent dialogue to navigate the vast sea of information and misinformation online.

Confirmation Bias

Refers to the selective gathering of information—whether from real-life experiences or increasingly from the digital environment—to validate one's pre-existing, often erroneous, beliefs. This cognitive tendency is especially prevalent among individuals with high self-confidence, limited knowledge, and elevated exposure to misinformation or incomplete information. The consequences of confirmation bias can escalate to alarming levels, sometimes culminating in violence or even loss of life (Baltezarević, Baltezarević, & Ravić, 2023, p. 25). This phenomenon involves the habitual reinforcement of our worldview through personal experiences, which leads us to seek evidence supporting these empirically constructed beliefs. Often occurring unconsciously, confirmation bias manifests in various forms, including ideological, political, self-serving, news-related, and content-specific biases (Baltezarević, Baltezarević, & Ravić, 2023, pp. 26-27).

Echo Chambers and Polarization

One key factor amplifying the confirmation bias effect is excessive self-confidence, which makes individuals resistant to challenging their baseless beliefs. Instead, they seek **echo chambers**—especially on social media—that reinforce pre-existing views by engaging with like-minded opinions of comparable quality. Echo chambers can be described as environments where users' opinions, political views, or beliefs about a topic are amplified due to repeated interactions with individuals or sources that share similar perspectives. This phenomenon can be explained by selective exposure—the inclination to seek information that aligns with one's existing views—and confirmation bias, which reinforces pre-existing beliefs (Cinelli, Morales, Galeazzi, Quattrociocchi, & Starnini, 2020) According to *group polarization theory*, echo chambers function to intensify shared opinions within a group, often pushing the collective viewpoint toward more extreme stances. These environments are prevalent across various online platforms, including blogs, forums, and social media networks. Research highlights that echo chambers arise from natural human tendencies, such as the preference for like-minded information, social contagion, and the dynamics of group polarization (Cinelli, Morales, Galeazzi, Quattrociocchi, & Starnini, 2020).

Ignorance

Another contributing factor to this bias is the unawareness of ignorance: many individuals struggle to grasp complex problems. This limitation is not necessarily a matter of low IQ but an inherent cognitive tendency requiring more structured and logical mechanisms to overcome (Baltezarević, Baltezarević, & Ravić, 2023, pp. 26-29). In today's social dynamics, conformity to group norms plays a significant role too. The fear of isolation drives individuals to participate in echo chambers, where they maintain group identity and reinforce its inherent ideas. Consequently, individuals are likely to accept factors supporting their beliefs while dismissing factual and logical information (Baltezarević, Baltezarević, & Ravić, 2023, pp. 26-29). Social media platforms exacerbate this issue by circulating vast amounts of misinformation, posing a significant threat in an era characterized by rapid information flow and large data volumes. Addressing confirmation bias requires fostering environments where individuals encounter conflicting evidence with reduced negative emotions. This approach can create space for uncertainty to take root, ultimately weakening the bias (Baltezarević, Baltezarević, & Ravić, 2023, pp. 28-30).

Conclusion

As a conclusion, we can detect that online presence is a very serious matter: the over consumption of information, the lack of critical thinking, the passive or even positive attitude toward the most popular opinions, driven by the need for a sense of belonging and a tendency to embrace oversimplified narratives leave

societies vulnerable to divisive ideologies and false information. Social media platforms amplify this by enabling the spread of manipulated data and half-truths, granting undeserved credibility to misleading content. The digital era's challenges call for precise strategies to mitigate the dangers of misinformation and cognitive biases. By promoting critical thinking and emotional resilience, we can navigate the complexities of modern information systems more effectively. Education must cultivate critical minds capable of discerning truth amid the noise of the digital age. We must seek analysis, diverse perspectives, teaching the value of interaction with each other and seek validation for the information we see online. Only through this effort can we attain a genuine understanding of the world around us, navigate the complexities of the digital world effectively, and break free from the shadows of misinformation.

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Biographies of the authors

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PhD student George Vadim TIUGEA (Romania)

Political science researcher and English translator. In 2001, he graduated from the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Bucharest, with the bachelor thesis Sources and Features of Ethnic Conflict. In 2003, he graduated from the Master's Degree in International Relations of the Faculty of Political Sciences of the University of Bucharest, with the dissertation Ethnic Conflict Resolution Perspectives in Southeast Asia. Between 2003-2019 he was a researcher at the "Ovidiu Şincai" Social-Democrat Institute, since 2004 serving as coordinator of the Department of International Relations and project manager at the "Ovidiu Şincai" European School (project carried out under the auspices of the Council of Europe). Since 2019, he is a civil servant in the International Relations Department of the National Public Pension House and a PhD candidate in political sciences at the Faculty of Political Sciences of the University of Bucharest, defending in October 2023 the thesis entitled The role of identity in shaping the European policy of the Russian Federation at the beginning 21st century. He has published articles on topics such as: the geopolitics of Eastern Europe, European nations and identities, conflicts and cooperation organizations in the Balkans, the transition in Romania, the foreign and security policy of the Russian Federation, in English, Romanian and Russian for magazines and publications online from Romania, Russia, Slovenia and Kosovo. He is the co-author of Contemporary Social Democracy – Between Tradition and Globalization (2004; chapters on social democracy in Great Britain, Latin America and North America) and The Dark Side of Globalization (2016; chapters on guerrilla movements in Colombia and Peru).

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### Lieutenant Colonel (ret.) Georgios KOUKAKIS (Greece)

Georgios KOUKAKIS is a graduate of the Hellenic Military Academy (2002), the Hellenic Army War College (2020) and the Hellenic Supreme Joint War College (2023), with a strong professional and academic background in the field of security & defence, international relations, and adult training. He holds a Master of Arts in International Relations in "Governance, Development and Security in the Mediterranean" from the Department of Mediterranean Studies of the University of the Aegean (Rhodes, Greece) and is a Senior Researcher and Secretary General of the "Center for International Strategic Analyses" (KEDISA), a member of the "Hellenic Institute of Strategic Studies" (HEL.I.S.S.), a Research Associate of "HERMES Institution of International Affairs, Security & Geoeconomy", a member of "ALLILON" (the Global Network of Greeks and Friends of Greece for Solidarity in the Professional Field) and a member of the "Mercury Negotiation Academy" (MNA). He has participated as a speaker in several seminars/conferences regarding international relations in the fields of foreign policy, security and defense, while several of his articles and research papers have been published in many scientific journals, the official "Military Review" journal of the Hellenic Army General Staff, the "Foreign Affairs The Hellenic Edition" magazine, the "Policy Journal","HuffPost Greece", "Geopolitics & Daily News", "Liberal", as well as other international relations, security and defence websites. His research interests include National Security, Grand Strategy, EU Affairs, Greek Foreign Policy, Military Diplomacy, Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Cultural Diplomacy, and International & Regional Organizations (NATO, UN, EU, OIC, EfM, etc.). He is the co-author of the book "National Security: Myths and Reality" (in Greek) that was published in April 2023 and the Academic Head of the Educational Programmes "Security Studies in the Mediterranean" and "Getting to know Security Studies through the work of Thucydides" of the Continuing Education-Lifelong Learning Center (CE-LLC) of the University of the Aegean.

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PhD. Eng. Cristian-Marcel FELEA (Romania)

He completed engineering studies at the University of Petroșani (former Institute of Mines) and master and doctoral studies in mines, oil and gas. He also completed post-graduate studies at the "Carol I" Defense University and the "Al. I. Cuza" Police Academy. He is a columnist at RepublikaNEWS Ploiești and a contributor to HotNEWS.

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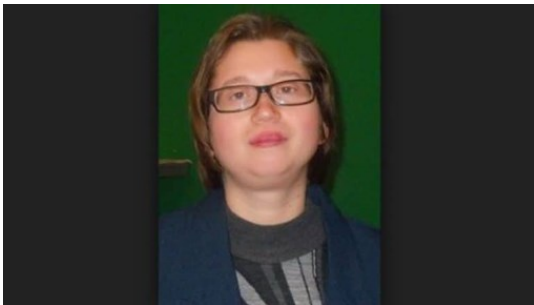
Mona AGRIGOROAIE (Romania)

Born on August 8, 1984, in Iasi. She graduated in Political Science - Bachelor and Master in Political Marketing and Communication at "Al. I. Cuza" University in Iasi. In 2023 she also graduated with a second master's degree "Security and Diplomacy" at SNSPA, Bucharest. She followed an internship at the "Centre for Conflict Prevention and Early Warning during her studies at SNSPA. She specializes in academic research and exploration of Western Balkan political and security topics, publishing several analyses in the media of this area in various newspapers in Albania , Kosovo, North Macedonia. Also published two books of poems in Albanian language in Pristina, Kosovo in 2014 and 2022.

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PhD. Jean MARSIA Colonel (Ret.) (Belgium)

He is President of the European Defense Society INPA (SЄD). He graduated in 1975 from the Royal Military School in Brussels, obtaining a master's degree in Social and Military Sciences. After several posts in the logistics corps of the land forces, he obtained an additional master's degree in Administrative Science. He was then selected for the School of Military Administration. In 1999, he became an advisor to the Minister of Defence, primarily responsible for military procurement, scientific research and education. In 2003, he was appointed director of the Royal Military School, where he served until his retirement in 2009. He then became a PhD student at the Free University of Brussels. From January 2013 to October 2014, he was Defence Adviser to the Belgian Prime Minister. In 2015, he became a Doctor of Political Science at the Free University of Brussels and a Doctor of Social and Military Sciences at the Royal Military School. Since late 2015, he has served as founding president of the European Defence Society, an international non-profit association working to reinvigorate Europe's political union and achieve an effective European defense better suited to burden-sharing and the international risk inherent in NATO.

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Abaho Gift CONRAD (Uganda)

Bachelor of Commerce at Makerere University. He is a dedicated Human Rights Activist and Author with over 8 years of experience in program management, operations, and advocacy for peace and human rights. He brings a global perspective on issues ranging from refugee welfare to international peace efforts, through his leadership in humanitarian initiatives and work as a correspondent and author.

Executive Director Humanity HEART Charity - 2022-present

Lead initiatives to rescue and rehabilitate child soldiers, and facilitate trauma healing in refugee camps across Uganda, focusing on Kyaka 2, Rwamwanja, and Nakivale Camps.

Expanded humanitarian efforts by establishing programs across multiple refugee camps, impacting hundreds of lives through community healing and conflict resolution.

Collaborated with international partners to raise awareness and advocate for refugee rights, child welfare, and human dignity.

Africa Correspondent Duniya Journal (Canada) - 2020-present

Provides in-depth coverage of humanitarian issues, human rights violations, and peacebuilding efforts across Africa.

Analyzes political, social, and environmental issues affecting vulnerable populations, offering a balanced, fact-driven global perspective.

Published articles highlighting stories of resilience and advocacy within refugee camps, with a focus on amplifying marginalized voices in international discourse.

Ambassador of Peace - Musical Ambassadors of Peace (Colorado, USA) - 2013 – 2020

Led cross-cultural peace initiatives by using music and storytelling as tools for reconciliation and healing among conflict-affected communities.

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PhD in Communication Sciences – University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain

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University of Southern California Center on Public Diplomacy Blog contributor

International Affairs Forum – Center for International Relations (Washington D.C., United States of America) contributor

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Jacob G. van RENNES (Belgium)

44 years old.

Exceptionally gifted (IQ 145+), autistic, core strength analytical thinking.

With almost 30 years studying Defence history, technology, challenges and current events, cooperating and analysing with professionals and experts in the fields of Defence and Geopolitics.

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Paul SZYMANSKI (USA)

Mr. Paul Szymanski has 50 years' experience in space war policy, strategy, doctrine, simulations, surveillance, survivability, threat assessment, strategic planning, & command and control. He has published/lectured over 145 times in Aviation Week, the United States, Britain, Scotland, Netherlands, France, Germany, Italy, Greece, Estonia, Ukraine, India, Taiwan, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. He has helped the United States fight space wars over this time period (10 space wars and "incidents"). Noted expert in space warfare theory, policy, doctrine, strategies & tactics. Includes space control, space superiority, force application (space-to-Earth weapons), Space Situational Awareness (SSA), Space Domain Awareness (SDA) & space Battle Management Command and Control (BMC2) studies, analyses, simulations & operations research.

50 years experience in space warfare:
* Space Situational Awareness (SSA/SDA) assessments employing Big Data algorithms
* Space surveillance/imaging, orbital dynamics and sensor coverage analyses
* Space battle management, command, control & communications (BMC3)
* Space control policy, requirements, & strategic long-range planning
* Modeling & simulation of conceptual space weapons, sensors and targets
* Space systems survivability/resilience/hardening analyses
* Commercial space threat assessment
* Member of multiple Boards of Directors

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Mehdi MAHIR (Marocco)

With over 10 years of dedicated experience as a results-oriented sales professional, he has navigated the complex landscapes of different countries with a relentless passion for making a difference, especially in the field of security and crime prevention in Africa. His expertise spans human identification, biotechnology, and healthcare, where he strives to use cutting-edge solutions to address the continent's pressing challenges. Having had the privilege to work with Moroccan, French, and American companies, he has gained invaluable insights into diverse markets and cultures, honing his skills in building robust partnerships. He demonstrates a strong educational foundation, having studied both Engineering and Business in France. He is deeply motivated by the opportunity to collaborate with like-minded professionals and organizations dedicated to shaping a brighter future for Africa and beyond.

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Peter FILIPPIDES (Greece)

He is a sociologist with a Master's degree in Political Science and Sociology, specializing in Critical Theory. Since 2020, He has been working on issues related to human rights and the access of Roma communities to education. He has collaborated with the Council of Europe, European NGOs, and NGOs based in Athens and Thessaloniki. Additionally, he worked with the Ministry of Labour in the General Secretariat for Solidarity and fight against poverty with a six-month project-based contract focusing on Roma issues. In his free time, he engages in conducting statistical research about human rights, writing poetry in Greek and Romani, and authoring articles on sociological topics.

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Gargi AWASHTI (India)

She is dedicated to assisting community by utilizing area expertize to drive change. She is proficient in devising and managing information gathering systems for collecting data on policies and impacts. She has excellent interpersonal, analytical and public communications skills.

Bachelor of Tehnology, Mechanical Engineering at Chandra Shekhar Azad University in Kanpur.

She has experience to United Nations, ISPPR, as Policy Analyst and Diplomat, New Delhi, from 12/2022 until now.

She participated in multilateral negotiations concerning regional security initiatives sponsored by United Nations. She organized meetings with foreign government officials to discuss areas of mutual interests.

She built and updated crisis communication plans to handle diverse situations. She is engaged in public diplomacy activities, such as briefings, interviews, lectures and workshops designed for students interested in learning more about Foreign Services careers.

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He is an aviation engineer and during his doctoral studies he was admitted to the SmartSPODAS Project - *"Transnational network for the integrated management of smart doctoral and postdoctoral research in the fields of Military Sciences"*, *"Security and Information"* and *"Public Order and National Security"* - Continuous training program for elite researchers - *"SmartSPODAS"*, in this context participating in various research activities, among them being those organized by CRISMART in Sweden. During the first part of his career, he performed various executive within the Air Force Staff, and in the second part of his career, he was an executive and leadership positions within the Ministry of National Defence. He participated in various cooperation activities at the national and international level, gaining professional experience in the field of international relations and geopolitics. He carried out teaching activities in the academic environment (undergraduate and postgraduate studies).

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