

"Those who have the privilege to know, have the duty to act." — Albert Einstein

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EUROPEAN UNION AND CANADA

**The European Union
-Canada and the NATO
Summits - Decisive
Events for Europe**

P. 19

NEW WORLD ORDER

**The New World Order:
The Game of Chess in
the Western Balkans**

P. 06

EUROPEAN UNION AND ALBANIA

**Albania's Integration into
the European Union:
Challenges, Achievements
and Future Strategy**

P. 24



EUROPEAN UNION

The Six Reports that Shaped the 2024-2029 European Union Priorities

P. 09

SECURITY AND RESILIENCE

**Cyber Geostrategy:
NATO's Digital Frontiers in
the Era of AI and Quantum**

P. 58

MILITARY DECEPTION AND MEDIA

**Military Deception and
Media: A Romanian
Perspective**

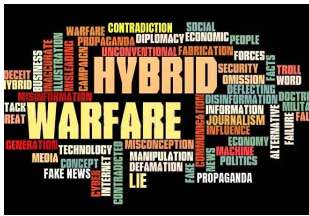
P. 61

EUROPEAN UNION

**The European Union, a
Geopolitical Power?**

P. 16

CONTENT



04

EDITORIAL

Europe - Target of Hybrid Operations



06

NEW WORLD ORDER - WESTERN BALKANS

The New World Order: The Game of Chess in the Western Balkans



09

EUROPEAN UNION

The Six Reports that Shaped the 2024-2029 European Union Priorities



16

EUROPEAN UNION

The European Union, a Geopolitical Power?



19

EUROPEAN UNION AND CANADA

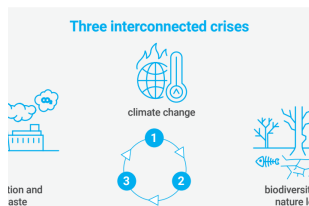
The European Union (EU)-Canada Summit, in Brussels, and the NATO Summit, in The Hague – Decisive Events and a Turning Point for the Future of Europe



24

EUROPEAN UNION AND ALBANIA

Albania's Integration into the European Union: Challenges, Achievements and Future Strategy



33

SECURITY AND RESILIENCE - ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY

Understanding National Security Part VII: The Component of Environmental Security



44

SECURITY AND RESILIENCE - SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka's Strategic Crossroads: Steering Through the Potential Threat of a (Broader) Regional Conflict



55

SECURITY AND RESILIENCE - CHINA AND RUSSIA

The China-Russia Strategic Alliance in the Arctic – A Strategic Cooperation or An Uneasy Tango

CONTENT



58

SECURITY AND RESILIENCE - NATO

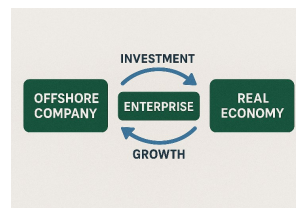
Cyber Geostrategy: NATO's Digital Frontiers in the Era of AI and Quantum



61

MILITARY DECEPTION AND MEDIA

Military Deception and Media: A Romanian Perspective



69

FISCAL SOVEREIGNTY

Defending Fiscal Sovereignty: Why Micro-Jurisdictions Are Not an Anomaly, but a Global Necessity

Europe - Target of Hybrid Operations



„Set your goals high and don't stop until you get there.”

Bo Jackson

[illegible]

Source: <https://kuryerpolski.us/en/Page/View/hybrid-warfare>

Yes, the statement that Europe is currently permeated by hostile espionage is correct. Numerous analyses and reports in the international media indicate that various foreign intelligence services are actively engaged in espionage activities in Europe, even targeting governments, national companies, and research institutions in various fields of interest. This activity poses a persistent challenge to European nations, with concerns about the potential impact on national security and economic competitiveness.

According to more detailed international analyses and debates of the issues currently facing Europe, the following have emerged:

- European countries face risks and threats of espionage from various sources, including Russia, China, and other nations.
- The espionage efforts and their targets are diverse, encompassing government secrets, technological advances, economic data, and political influence.

It has become increasingly clear that hostile espionage activities aim to undermine national stability and security, can compromise critical infrastructure, and can affect national interests and the level of economic development.

- It has become increasingly clear that European nations are actively working to strengthen their capabilities to counter such hostile actions and defend against espionage.
- Increasingly intense espionage activities raise increasingly complex legal and ethical questions, especially regarding the balance between national security and individual freedoms.

It has become very clear and widely reported that Russian intelligence structures are targeting personalities from various fields, especially political and governmental, but also various companies and research institutions in various fields of interest. In another development, Chinese intelligence structures are also of increasing concern in Europe, especially in the areas of new technologies and economic espionage. Traditional human intelligence operations, which involve the networking of spies and informants or other various human sources of information, continue to be a major part of espionage activities. Recruiting various ordinary people is much cheaper than conventional espionage.

The issue of Russian hybrid threats was also one of the main topics discussed during the two-day NATO meeting in Brussels, which ended on December 4, 2024. NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte said that “both Russia and China have sought to destabilize our countries and divide our societies through acts of sabotage, cyberattacks and energy blackmail.” In other statements, M. Rutte also warned of... Russia’s “intensification of the hybrid attack campaign” and highlighted how Moscow was rapidly moving its front line from Ukraine “towards the Baltic region, to Western Europe and even to the far north.” M. Rutte added that the NATO bloc had agreed on a set of measures to counter “Russia’s hostile and cyber activities, including increased information sharing, more exercises, better protection of critical infrastructure and improved cyber defense.” Speaking ahead of meetings with NATO counterparts in Brussels, Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavský stressed that Europe “must send a strong signal to Moscow that this will not be tolerated.” “This year (in 2024) there have been 500 suspicious incidents in Europe. Up to 100 incidents out of these can be attributed to Russian hybrid attacks, espionage, influence operations,” Lipavský said, as Western officials struggle to find a way to respond to alleged Russian sabotage attempts. Speaking separately in Berlin on December 4, 2025, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said his country faces a significant threat of sabotage from both Russia and China. He stressed the need for the country to better prepare for attacks and become more resilient. Germany’s foreign intelligence chief, Bruno Kahl, said Russia’s sabotage could eventually prompt NATO to consider invoking its Article 5 mutual defense clause. Sweden is leading an investigation into alleged sabotage of two undersea cables in the Baltic Sea, with Western officials suspecting a ship deliberately severing the cables by dragging an anchor along the seabed for more than 100 miles. In Britain, a court is examining a “sophisticated” spy ring based in the country that allegedly passed secrets to Russia for nearly three years, gathering intelligence on targets across Europe.

In July 2025, reports raised concerns about Russian espionage activities in Europe, with a focus on the UK and the potential targeting of local criminals for violence, intimidation and surveillance. Adam Lelonek, an expert on information manipulation and hybrid threats, explains why Russia is recruiting low-skilled foreign nationals to carry out operations, what the Polish government is doing in response, and how it all fits into the bigger picture of hybrid threats against Poland.

But we can now say that the aforementioned activities in various states are part of a new set of “hybrid threats” carried out by authoritarian actors and their proxies, targeting democratic countries around the world. The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats defines them as actions “carried out by state or non-state actors, the purpose of which is to undermine or harm a target by combining overt and covert military and non-military means.”

Significantly highlighted was the view expressed by a former senior European defence official, who stated that it was “virtually impossible” to fully confront Moscow’s escalation of hybrid warfare. The former official, who recently left office, said that for years the West had underestimated Russia’s hybrid activities, wasting valuable time on intelligence sharing and expanding defence capabilities.

Hybrid threats are particularly dangerous because the use of proxies and false online identities makes it difficult to attribute responsibility, they are cost-effective, and their target may not be aware that they are being attacked, given that the actions do not resemble conventional espionage.

The continued presence of hostile espionage in Europe highlights the need for continued vigilance and investment in measures to protect national interests. A resilient society must first and foremost be a well-informed society that understands the threats it faces and trusts the state, but also has the power to create deterrents that limit the risk of escalation to full-scale war. All of these measures and decisions could include freezing the financial assets of citizens of hostile states or expelling their diplomats. The main idea behind hybrid activities is that they are cost-effective and bring tangible benefits to the aggressor. The more resilient the society, administration, and legal and systemic framework are, the less benefits there are for hostile actors.

NEW WORLD ORDER - WESTERN BALKANS



The New World Order: The Game of Chess in the Western Balkans

Eduard VASILJ (Croatia)

The Western Balkans remain a geopolitically sensitive region—a chessboard where local rivalries, historical grievances, and global power interests intersect. Within this complex landscape, we see a microcosm of a broader global competition between two world orders: on one side, Serbia, increasingly authoritarian and backed by Russia and China; on the other, Croatia, representing Western interests, though with limited regional leverage. The struggle for influence in the Western Balkans reflects the shifting contours of the new world order.

Serbia: An Authoritarian Player with Geopolitical Backing

Under President Aleksandar Vucic, Serbia has undergone significant internal political changes. Media independence has eroded, democratic checks and balances have weakened, and opposition voices face increasing pressure. This domestic trajectory is matched by a clear foreign policy orientation: Serbia leans heavily on Russia for political support—particularly in the Kosovo dispute and efforts to undermine Bosnia and Herzegovina's stability—and on China for strategic investments.

Russia and Serbia are increasingly cooperating through intelligence services to exert influence over Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Republika Srpska, the Serbian intelligence community—allegedly with backing from Moscow—supports secessionist agendas, which could lead to a potential collapse of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In parallel, similar pressure is being applied in Montenegro, often through disinformation campaigns, economic leverage, and support for pro-Serbian political actors which nearly led to civil war.

The destabilization strategy also extends to Kosovo. Both Serbia and Russia appear to use Kosovo as a tool to challenge regional stability and test the limits of European unity. Serbia's refusal to recognize Kosovo's independence, combined with covert support for unrest in Serb-majority areas, feeds instability that directly undermines the EU and NATO's influence.



Source: <https://albaniantimes.al/western-balkans-countries-launch-wb6-iip-to-promote-regional-investments/>

China plays a crucial role in Serbia's regional strategy as well. Through infrastructure projects, loans, and technology investments—particularly in Serbia and Montenegro—China has created financial dependencies that increase its political leverage. Regarding Serbia in 2022 China invested EUR1,4 billion – roughly equivalent to the total investment of all 27 EU member states combined. In the first half of 2024, it became the largest foreign investor with EUR 697,9 million and signed a memorandum of understanding for a further EUR 2 billion to be directed toward renewable energy projects. In Montenegro, the construction of the Bar – Boljare highway led the country into a debt trap with Beijing, from which it was only able to free itself with considerable effort and support from the West.

The Russian – Serbian military brotherhood has a long-standing tradition. Serbia's weapons systems are based on Russian technology (since early 2025 the Serbian Air Force has been equipped with Russian Kh-31 missiles!). Arms deliveries continue to take place without hindrance. Additionally, Beijing has supplied Serbia with weapons systems, including surveillance drones and missile technologies (2022 Serbia acquired the FK-3 air defence system, which was delivered by six large transport aircraft of the Chinese army without requesting clearance to fly through the airspace of several EU and NATO countries), contributing further to the militarization of the region. Serbia's aggressive rearmament is causing great concern throughout the entire region.

The Strategy of the “Serbian World”

At the core of Serbia's regional ambitions lies the concept of the ‘Serbian World’ (Srpski svet)—a geopolitical strategy aimed at uniting all Serbs in the Balkans under Belgrade's political and cultural leadership. Although not officially endorsed as state doctrine, the concept is promoted by high-ranking Serbian and Republika Srpska officials and is often compared to Russia's “Russkiy Mir” strategy.

The “Serbian World” envisions stronger integration—or even political unification—of Serb-populated territories in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Kosovo, under the pretext of protecting Serb minorities. Rather than relying solely on formal border changes, it seeks informal control—via cultural institutions, the Serbian Orthodox Church, dual citizenship policies, and economic dependence. It is a soft-power strategy with hard geopolitical consequences.

Regional Response: Alternative Alliances and Growing Distrust in NATO

Amid growing concerns over NATO's reliability, new regional alliances are forming. On March 18, 2025, Croatia and Albania—both NATO members—along with Kosovo, signed a new independent military pact. This unprecedented move reflects diminishing confidence in NATO's ability to respond effectively to regional threats. At the same time, Serbian President Vucic continues to strengthen ties with Russia. During the Victory Day parade on May 9, 2025, he stood alongside Vladimir Putin, negotiating new resource supply terms—ignoring EU sanctions altogether.

Meanwhile, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and President Vucic signed a separate agreement in April 2025 for increased military cooperation, further signalling the emergence of a parallel, pro-Russian bloc within Europe. The president of Republika Srpska has expressed his desire to join this alliance, a move that could accelerate Bosnia and Herzegovina's disintegration. In the Hungarian embassy in Zagreb, the display of maps portraying “Greater Hungary” including parts of Croatia has raised additional regional tensions.

Croatia: A Western-Aligned Actor with Limited Regional Power

Croatia, as a member of the EU and NATO, aligns itself with Western institutions and values. However, its ability to influence regional developments remains constrained. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia supports the Croat population and maintains economic investments, particularly in Herzegovina. Croatian companies also operate in Serbia, offering Zagreb some leverage. Despite this, Croatia's regional influence remains limited.

Nevertheless, Croatia is seen by Western powers as a stabilizing actor—although one that receives little concrete support. The situation is eerily reminiscent of early Western inaction in Ukraine, where failure to provide robust support allowed external powers to gain strategic ground.

A Regional Arms Race and the Strategic Balance

A regional arms race is unfolding. Serbia has acquired advanced systems from Russia and China and is now also shifting toward Western weapons. The purchase of 12 French Rafale jets has been signed. Croatia, in

turn, has invested in NATO-standard capabilities, such as the German Leopard Tank, the HIMARS rocket system and Croatia already operates Rafale jets. This military build-up reflects broader strategic alignments: Serbia mostly eastward, Croatia westward.

Conclusion: A Divided Region in a Divided World

The Western Balkans serve as a case study in the global contest between democratic and authoritarian models. Serbia, supported logistically, financially, and ideologically by Russia and China, is actively working to destabilize the region through nationalism, intelligence operations, and regional alliances that undermine Western influence.

Croatia, though aligned with the West and a potential bulwark against these forces, receives minimal support. As with Ukraine, the West risks repeating its strategic mistake—failing to decisively back a partner before the balance of power tips irreversibly. Instead of sanctioning Serbia as an EU candidate, the autocrat Vucic is being courted; meanwhile Zagreb is being abandoned and left to stand alone even though Croatia is expected to serve as the regional counterbalance.

The future of the region will depend on whether Europe can move beyond symbolic gestures to real strategic commitment. The geopolitical chess match continues—and the outcome will influence not just the Balkans, but the entire European security architecture.

EUROPEAN UNION



The Six Reports that Shaped the 2024-2029 European Union Priorities

Christos BEZIRTZOGLU (Greece)

European citizens remain optimistic about the future of the EU and continue to hold a positive impression of the EU and its institutions. Trust in the EU is at its highest level since 2007. The EU's post-electoral survey shows that 7 out of 10 Europeans think that their country has benefited from EU membership. The reasons most cited for considering EU membership beneficial include increased co-operation between Member States, the protection of peace and strengthening of security, the EU's contribution to economic growth and the creation of new work opportunities.

The European Commission president Von der Leyen outlined in the Political Guidelines the 6+1 EU priorities for the period 2024-2027, in which she described the EU's role as a geopolitical actor by saying that "it is time for Europe to step up collectively once again". At the core of the programme is European sovereignty in all fields, ranging from a new plan for sustainable prosperity and competitiveness to enhancing social policy, stepping up in security and defence, and a truly global role for the EU. This is a vision of a "more strategic, assertive and united" Europe in the world of permacrisis¹. These are:

1. Competitiveness
 2. Security and Defence
 3. European Social Fairness
 4. Quality of Life
 5. Democracy and Values
 6. A Global Europe
- 6+1. EU Budget and Reform



¹The Collins Dictionary's word of the year for 2022 is "permacrisis". As accolades go, the managing director of Collins Learning, Alex Beecroft, has said that this one "sums up quite succinctly how truly awful 2022 has been for so many people". The word, most widely understood as a portmanteau of "permanent" and "crisis", has been in use for a little longer. In April 2021, policy analysts in Europe saw it as defining the era in which we live. Some in Britain inevitably ascribe the genesis of that era to Brexit. Others point to the pandemic. For others still, it was Russia's invasion of Ukraine that made the word indispensable. As the writer David Shariatmadari has put it: "Permacrisis" is a term that perfectly embodies the dizzying sense of lurching from one unprecedented event to another, as we wonder bleakly what new horrors might be around the corner. (<https://theconversation.com/permacrisis-what-it-means-and-why-its-word-of-the-year-for-2022-194306>)

The EU's governance system is complex and composed of several institutions, but with a sophisticated checks-and-balances design, where the five years priorities of the EU are decided in tandem between them. The 6+1 Von der Leyen II priorities reflects the key goals set both by the EU heads of state and government in the Strategic Agenda as well as the main concerns of the European Parliament political parties.

The findings of the following six reports are contributing to the Commission's work on a new plan for Europe's sustainable prosperity and competitiveness. Many of their recommendations are reflected in the Commission's Political Guidelines as well as the mission letters of the President of the European Commission to the members of the College. These reports are briefly presented below.

A. The Mario Draghi report, entitled "The future of European competitiveness – A competitiveness strategy for Europe", strongly advocates accelerating technological and scientific innovation to ensure that Europe's decarbonisation plans are matched by leadership on the required technologies, and to implement a genuine "foreign economic policy" to increase security and reduce critical dependencies. Draghi proposes to launch a new EU industrial strategy, grounded primarily in full implementation of the single market, which will support the scaling up of young, innovative companies, creation of a true common energy market, an integrated multimodal transport market, increased demand for decarbonisation solutions, more resilient supply chains, and mobilisation of greater volumes of private finance. "*This is an existential challenge,*" he added.

The three pillars of Draghi's vision on inspiring future growth are:

1. The EU should refocus its collective efforts on **closing the innovation gap** with the US and China, especially in advanced technologies. The EU must reignite its innovation engine, create a habitat for young innovative start-ups, promote industrial leadership in high growth sectors based on deep technologies and promote the diffusion of technologies across established companies and SMEs.

2. The second area for action is a joint plan for **decarbonisation and competitiveness**. If Europe's ambitious climate targets are matched by a coherent plan to achieve them, decarbonisation will be an opportunity for Europe. But if it fails to coordinate its policies, there is a risk that decarbonisation could run contrary to competitiveness and growth. The main key challenge is high and volatile energy prices and thus under this pillar EU sets out areas for intervention to facilitate access to clean & affordable energy to the European manufacturing system, including for energy intensive industries.

3. The third area for action is that of **increasing security and reducing dependencies**, as Member States are particularly exposed to these challenges (i.e. the EU heavily relies on a handful of suppliers for critical raw materials, especially from China, even as global demand for those materials is exploding owing to the clean energy transition; it is also hugely reliant on imports of digital technology, especially for chips production, as ~80% of global fabrication capacities are in the Far East). For Europe to keep diversifying and strengthening our supply chains by securing the supply of raw materials, clean energy, sustainable transport fuels, and clean tech from across the world, we need on the external front to invest on effective partnerships and internally to review the EU public procurement rules.

In other words, the five horizontal enablers underpinning EU competitiveness across all sectors are:

1. Simplification
2. Lowering barriers to the Single Market
3. Financing competitiveness
4. Promoting skills and quality jobs
5. Better coordination of policies at EU and national level

B. The Enrico Letta report, entitled "Much More Than a Market – Speed, Security, Solidarity", on the future of the Single Market made references to the defence of Cohesion Policy, a new approach to competition policy that levels the global playing field, a more strategic use of public procurement, a renewed commitment to public services, the social economy and circularity, and the integration of the European defence industry. "*Inertia on the single market means decline,*" he added.

In other words, energy, defence, telecommunications, and the financial sector are the pillars of the future of the Single Market, as indicated by the report, which represents a working basis on the topic of boosting European competitiveness by proposing actions in the following areas:

1. A 5th Freedom to Enhance Research, Innovation, and Education in the Single Market: One of the report's major suggestions is the introduction of a fifth freedom that would be focused on research,

knowledge, innovation, education, competence, and data. This new freedom would be added to the already existing four freedoms which cover goods, services, people (labour), and capital which underpin the Single Market. The aim of this new freedom is to reinforce the internal dynamics and the global competitiveness of the Single Market. The report argues that this new freedom would “transform existing dispersed knowledge, fragmentations and disparities into unified opportunities for growth, innovation, and inclusivity”.

2. A Single Market to Finance Strategic Goals: The emphasis is on innovative mechanisms within the Single Market to mobilise private and public resources and direct them towards bridging the current investment gaps and financing our common key objectives.

- a. Work towards a Savings and Investment Union to unlock the full potential of the single market.
- b. Leverage the single market to enhance green and digital industrial public investments.
- c. Improve investment by establishing a circular economy, and enhanced public procurement and administrative capacity.

e.g. under the Speed umbrella, the EU aims to rapidly advance the creation of a Digital Euro.

3. A Single Market to Play Big: Scale Matters: The Single Market needs to support the scale-up and growth of European companies, and to address issues with specific focus on the sectors that require transformative action to raise the ambition of the Single Market. Looking ahead, we must improve the distribution of the benefits of economic integration.

- a. An effective single market for telecommunications
- b. A single market to foster efficient energy-climate policies
- c. Towards a common market for the defence industry
- d. The single market and space: fostering integration for strategic autonomy
- e. Leveraging the single market to strengthen health resilience
- f. The single market as a catalyst for seamless and sustainable transportation in the EU

e.g. under the Security umbrella, the EU aims promoting Peace and upholding the Rule of Law (i.a. by creating a Common Market for the Security and Defence industry).

4. A Sustainable Single Market for All: The report presents proposals to improve conditions for all citizens, SMEs, and regions.

- a. Freedom to move and freedom to stay
- b. Strengthening the single market social dimension
- c. Unleash the potential of European SMEs
- d. Address tax fragmentation to empower the single market
- e. A single market for consumers

e.g. under the Solidarity umbrella, the EU aims to establish a Single Market that supports job creation and makes doing business easier.

5. A Single Market to Go Fast and Go Far: The report presents a pragmatic approach to improve the regulatory framework and strengthen enforcement tools with the aim of enhancing speed and efficiency in the Single Market.

- a. Enhancing proposal design in the single market
- b. Enhancing rule adoption through informed decision-making
- c. Implementing EU rules with effectiveness and efficiency
- d. Strengthening enforcement to uphold market integrity
- e. Simplifying regulations for a more dynamic single market

6. The Single Market beyond its borders: Examines the external dimension of the Single Market, specifically concentrating on Economic Security, trade, enlargement and the relationship with key strategic partners by exploring the interaction between internal and external dynamics and the potential for the Single Market to extend the EU's influence on the global stage.

- a. A resilient single market in the new geopolitical scenario
- b. Trade as a crucial tool to project single market's influence
- c. The single market as a key tool in the enlargement process
- d. The role of the single market in enhancing economic cooperation with strategic partners

The analyses presented in the Letta and Draghi reports converge on many points, most notably in highlighting examples showing that the single market remains highly fragmented and insisting on the urgency for change. They both identify **Finance** (progressing towards completing the Capital Markets Union to sustain

investment), **Energy** (support for Energy-Intensive Industries), **Telecom** (reform the regulatory environment for High Speed/Capacity Broadband Networks), **Defence** (integrated single market for defence products), and **Space** (functional single market for Space) as key sectors where the single market needs to be deepened as a priority. In addition, Draghi in his report advocated a series of proposals for the **Critical Raw Materials** (create a true single market for waste and recycling), **Computing & AI** (invest in EU-provided cloud services), and **Automotive** (encourage standardisation) sectors. Furthermore, he proposes to invest more on **Innovation** (introduction of the “Innovative European Company” legal statute), **Skills** (establish a common EU skills certification scheme) and **Governance** (minimise the cost of Member State transposition and enhance enforcement of single market legislation).

C. A third report, entitled “Developing European Capital Markets to Finance the Future”, that influenced the single market parts of the Letta and Draghi reports, has been written by a French group of experts headed by **Christian Noyer**. This report was exclusively dedicated to “Capital Market Union” but suggests re-branding the policy as “Savings and Investments Union”. The current underdevelopment of capital markets in Europe is attributable to a smaller investor base and structural fragmentation. To close this gap with other major economies, the report arrived to four key recommendations:

1. Long-term European savings products need to be developed to increase flows into European capital markets.
2. Relaunch the securitization market to strengthen the lending capacity of European banks and create deeper capital markets.
3. Integrated supervision of capital market activities is required to build a true European single market and guarantee financial stability.
4. Consider measures to reduce the fragmentation of settlement of financial transactions in Europe.

D. The **Sauli Niinistö** report, entitled “Strengthening Europe’s civil and military preparedness”, underlines the need for an ambitious new approach to our **Preparedness** and **Readiness**, since the geopolitical and security landscape is changing dramatically, and the EU and its Member States are facing increasingly multi-dimensional, complex and cross-border threats and crises. Strengthening our preparedness will have a dissuasive effect on threat actors, lower residual risks, address the sense of profound uncertainty among citizens, and contribute to the fundamental pre-conditions of economic prosperity and competitiveness. **True preparedness will require a more comprehensive and integrated approach**. All relevant military and civilian crisis response actors need to be fully ready and capable to respond effectively and seamlessly, as part of a wider whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. A higher level of preparedness is needed across the board, linking internal and external security, and drawing on both civilian and/or military means.

The twelve building blocks and recommendations of a fully prepared Union are

1. DECODE THE CRISES OF TODAY AND ANTICIPATE THE THREATS OF TOMORROW
2. ENABLE THE EU TO FUNCTION UNDER ALL CIRCUMSTANCES
 - a. Develop a comprehensive EU Risk Assessment
 - b. Use the upcoming Preparedness Union Strategy to put the EU on track for comprehensive preparedness
 - c. Explore the feasibility of an EU Preparedness Law to set joint standards and long-term targets, aligning EU and national efforts wherever possible
 - d. Articulate a coherent vision for the EU’s role in preparing for and responding to external armed aggression
 - e. Strengthen the EU-NATO interface in view of grave crisis situations, including through an emergency protocol that can be activated to streamline information exchange
3. ENSURE SPEED OF ACTION WITH STRUCTURES AND PROCEDURES THAT ARE FIT FOR PURPOSE
 - a. Reinforce cross-sectoral operational coordination
 - b. Boost and better coordinate situational awareness, anticipation, and foresight
 - c. Strengthen information sharing and communication
 - d. Enhance the EU’s exercise and training culture
4. EMPOWER CITIZENS AS THE BACKBONE OF SOCIETAL RESILIENCE AND PREPAREDNESS
 - a. Enhance individual and household preparedness
 - b. Improve crisis and emergency communication to reach citizens under all conditions

- c. Prepare to better tackle vulnerability to crises and disasters
- d. Address the skills gap and risk of labour shortages during crises and promote active citizenship
- 5. LEVERAGE THE FULL POTENTIAL OF PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS
 - a. Enhance public-private cooperation to facilitate resilience-building, as well as swift and coordinated responses to future crises
 - b. Reinforce private sector crisis preparedness and resilience
 - c. Develop a comprehensive EU Stockpiling Strategy to incentivise coordinated public and private reserves of critical inputs, and ensure their availability under all circumstances
- 6. OUTSMART MALICIOUS ACTORS TO DETER HYBRID ATTACKS
 - a. Strengthen EU intelligence structures step-by-step towards a fully-fledged EU service for intelligence cooperation
 - b. Reinforce the EU's capacity for 'deterrence by denial'
 - c. Reinforce the EU's capacity for 'deterrence by punishment'
- 7. SCALE UP EUROPE'S DEFENCE EFFORTS AND UNLOCK ITS DUAL-USE POTENTIAL
 - a. Develop an EU defence capability package for the next decade
 - b. Strengthen Europe's capacity to provide mid-to-long-term military assistance to Ukraine
 - c. Develop the proposed Single Market for Defence products and services with tangible measures to enhance cross-border cooperation and defence industrial competitiveness
 - d. Strengthen dual-use and civil-military cooperation at the EU level, based on a whole-of-government approach
- 8. BUILD MUTUAL RESILIENCE WITH PARTNERS THROUGH ASSERTIVE EU DIPLOMACY
 - a. Embed the mutual resilience principle in upcoming EU policy initiatives – taking into account sectoral or regional specificities
 - b. Use scenario-based risk assessments to prepare EU crisis response options and guide wider policy development on possible external shocks and crises
 - c. Strengthen outreach and diplomacy to involve and engage with partners at all levels
 - d. Conduct horizontal stock-taking and mapping of the overlapping mutual resilience interests and collaborative opportunities with partner countries as part of the planning for the next Multiannual Financial Framework
 - e. Plan better, deliver faster
 - f. Strengthen the EU's responsiveness to rapidly evolving crisis situations, including in fragile settings
- 9. HARNESS THE ECONOMICS OF PREPAREDNESS BY INVESTING TOGETHER UPFRONT
 - a. Mainstream preparedness across the next EU budget
 - b. Develop a European Preparedness and Readiness Investment Framework to support the EU's transition to a fully prepared Union
- 10. MOVING TOWARDS COMPREHENSIVE PREPAREDNESS

These recommendations of the Niinistö report are directly echoed in the upcoming work for the priorities (2. Security and Defence and 5. Democracy and Values).

E. The recommendations detailed in the **Peter Strohschneider** report, entitled “A shared prospect for farming and food in Europe”, serves as an orientation for action to create socially responsible, economically profitable, and environmentally sustainable agri-food systems, and are structured in five pillars:

1. Working together for a sustainable, resilient and competitive future: this part addresses the need to adapt the CAP in the context of the ongoing transition towards more sustainable and competitive food systems, the importance of strengthening of farmers' position in the food value chain, access to finance, and the role of trade and international standards.

2. Advancing towards sustainable agri-food systems: the recommendations under this heading dive into the support and promotion of sustainable farming practices, including for livestock farming, and advocate for increased awareness about animal welfare and empowerment of consumers to choose sustainable and balanced diets.

3. Promoting transformative resilience: in the face of growing environmental, climate, geopolitical and economic risks, the report outlines the need to strengthen risk management tools and crisis management as well as to better preserve and manage farmland, promote water-resilient agriculture, and develop innovative plant breeding approaches.

4. Building an attractive and diverse sector: the importance of generational renewal and gender equality as well as vibrant rural areas and agri-food systems is detailed in this section, including the need to protect workers.

5. Better access to and use of knowledge and innovation: the recommendations conclude that access to knowledge and skills must be facilitated, and that digitalisation is an opportunity.

F. The recommendations of the **Manuel Heitor** report, entitled “Act, Align, Accelerate – Research, Technology and Innovation to boost European competitiveness”, seek to boost Europe’s competitiveness, defined as the ability to provide state-of-the-art products, services and technology-based solutions which contribute positively to overall sustainability (economic, environmental and social) for which there is a market demand or that create new markets. To achieve this Europe needs to:

- **Align** its efforts to strengthen research, technological development and innovation with its strategic goals but also to ensure that regulatory, economic, financial and other policies are aligned to allow research, technology and innovation to realize its full potential.
 - ◊ Adopt a whole-of-government approach to align research and innovation with the EU strategy for competitiveness and a clean, digital economy
 - ◊ Approach international cooperation with a nuanced strategy, tailoring partnerships to specific domains and global geopolitical considerations
 - ◊ Optimise dual-use technology innovation by managing civilian and military R&I programmes separately, leveraging benefits for national security and civilian needs
- **Act** boldly and effectively to ramp up Europe’s scientific, technological and innovative strength.
 - ◊ Boost Europe’s global competitiveness by fostering impactful research, innovation and scale-ups through a stronger framework programme
 - ◊ Establish an experimental unit to launch disruptive innovation programmes with fast funding options, such as “ARPA-style” initiatives
 - ◊ Strengthen competitive excellence by expanding funding for European Research Council, European Innovation Council and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions to attract top talent.
 - ◊ Create an Industrial Competitiveness and Technology Council to enhance industrial research and innovation investment and ensure relevance to strategic autonomy
 - ◊ Form a Societal Challenges Council to address key societal issues, align with EU strategic priorities and engage with philanthropy and civil society
 - ◊ Build an inclusive and attractive EU R&I ecosystem by securing long-term investments, fostering university alliances and encouraging Member States’ co-investment
- **Accelerate** the creation, utilization and commercialization of research and knowledge, the scaling of innovative solutions, the development and uptake of technology and the green transition. This also requires an acceleration in the ability to respond to challenges and seize opportunities that might arise in a rapidly changing environment.
 - ◊ Adopt a whole-of-government approach to align research and innovation with the EU strategy for competitiveness and a clean, digital economy
 - ◊ Deliver European added value via a portfolio of actions focused on competitive excellence, industrial competitiveness, societal challenges and a strong research and innovation ecosystem.
 - ◊ Establish an experimental unit to launch disruptive innovation programmes with fast funding options, such as “ARPA-style” initiatives.
 - ◊ Strengthen competitive excellence by expanding funding for European Research Council, European Innovation Council and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions to attract top talent.
 - ◊ Create an Industrial Competitiveness and Technology Council to enhance industrial research and innovation investment and ensure relevance to strategic autonomy.
 - ◊ Form a Societal Challenges Council to address key societal issues, align with EU strategic priorities and engage with philanthropy and civil society.
 - ◊ Build an inclusive and attractive EU R&I ecosystem by securing long-term investments, fostering university alliances and encouraging Member States’ co-investment.
 - ◊ Simplify the programme by reducing administrative burdens, embracing agile funding and streamlining application processes.
 - ◊ Develop an innovation procurement programme to stimulate industrial scaling through demand-driven solutions.

In conclusion

The global political landscape is being reshaped by strategic competition, growing global instability, and attempts to undermine the rules-based international order. Europe's natural environment is facing increasing damage and disruption due to climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. The fast development of new technologies brings opportunities and potential risks.

Strong and competitive social market economies will be the driving force in achieving the EU ambitions. This vision builds on the European Union's proven ability to address complex challenges through collective action. By turning planned objectives into tangible solutions (concrete initiatives), the Commission is committed to ensuring a resilient and thriving future for all Europeans.

In one phrase, we could say: Stronger together in times of transitions.

EUROPEAN UNION



The European Union, a Geopolitical Power?

PhD. Jean MARSIA (Belgium)

Many European politicians seem to me to be increasingly out of touch with citizens and realities, including F. Mogherini, who was High Representative of the European Union (EU). In her speech to the general assembly of the *Belgium* section of the Union of European Federalists, which was held on 7 June at the College of Europe in Bruges, of which Mogherini has been rector since 2020, she said in essence that the EU is a geopolitical power.

According to Mogherini, the EU is perceived internationally as a leading and stabilising partner, often seen as the “partner of choice” by global actors seeking predictability, legality and co-operation. She also said that the EU’s internal complexity allows it to better understand and respond to external challenges, making it a particularly reliable player in an increasingly fragmented world. For her, the EU’s main sources of power are its normative power, its *soft power* and its global credibility, and then its strong and stable currency. Finally, she highlighted the EU’s unique ability to maintain a central position on the global stage, and to, engage meaningfully with major and minor international players – a strategic asset that makes the EU “indispensable”.



Source: <https://www.eunews.it/en/2024/05/20/the-parties-election-programs-6-eu-enlargement-promises-and-the-intertwined-fate-of-the-treaties/>

What Is a Geopolitical Power?

The S&D notes that today, the EU seems to carry much less weight on the international scene than Turkey, because the latter has a different conception of the sources of power than Mogherini; it is more in line with ours.

For us, geopolitical power stems from the following factors: the size of the territory and the maritime domain; the population and its growth; technical-scientific innovation; the strength of the economy, industrial production and foreign trade; the military capabilities, in terms of manpower, equipment and operationality, as well as intangible factors, such as moral forces, the ability to manage crises and *soft power*. This is a useful complement to *hard power*, it is not a main source of power as Mogherini thinks.

The weakness of Europe's geopolitical position is nevertheless obvious in the current context of great instability on the international scene. The second Trump administration favours unilateral or bilateral approaches; it undermines the multilateral global governance that the United States of America had played a major role in establishing after the Second World War. Russia, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, has militarily attacked two neighbouring countries; it violates the fundamental principles of international law and humanitarian law; it is waging a hybrid war on Europe. China wants to be the first on the world stage, economically, militarily and politically; it subjects our industries to unfair competition and threatens the freedom to navigate in the China Sea.

The size of Europe's territory and maritime domain is not negligible, but it is not gigantic either; Europe is only the western extremity of Eurasia. Europe's population is ageing and now represents only a limited percentage of the world's population. For lack of implementation of the Lisbon Strategy adopted in 2000, technical and scientific innovation is much less in Europe than in China or the United States of America. The reports by E. Letta and M. Draghi have once again highlighted Europe's industrial, economic and financial decline.

The military capabilities of European States are considerable in terms of manpower, but the equipment of our million and a half military personnel is disparate and the operationality of our units is doubtful, in particular because of the vacuity of our ammunition depots. Our increasing dependence on defence was highlighted by S. Niinistö.

A Divided European Council

Because of the selfishness of our leaders, there is almost always at least one who prevents decision-making in the European Council. It appears that the three above-mentioned reports were archived before their recommendations were followed by remediation.

As for the moral forces of Europeans, how could they be strengthened in the absence of a vision for the future of Europe? The members of the European Council apparently care little about the general interest of Europeans, but a lot about the interests of the Member States.

Europeans have had to note the mediocre ability of the EU institutions to manage the crises (financial, monetary, migration, health, war in Ukraine, conflict in the Middle East) that have followed over the past 20 years. For example, it took six weeks in April-May 2020 to finally implement the emergency package that Italy was urgently demanding. However, this mechanism had been organised in 2002 by Council Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 of 11 November 2002 establishing the *European Union Solidarity Fund*, subsequently clarified on 13 March 2020 by the European Parliament and the Council “*to provide financial assistance to Member States seriously affected by a major public health emergency*“. This episode is, among many others, a striking manifestation of the inability of the EU institutions to take urgent decisions.

A European Commission that Has a Finger in Every Pie, but Is Ineffective

The *Green Deal*, which should have been the Commission's major achievement for 2019-2024, is limited to a package of additional binding standards that have made energy more expensive. Ursula von der Leyen has not had the means to subsidise the green transition as both the United States of America under J. Biden and China have done.

What von der Leyen has achieved between 2019 and 2024 is the gradual concentration of power in her hands, to the detriment of the Presidency of the Council of the EU and the High Representative. It ousted the French Commissioner, Mr Breton, who was overshadowing her. She divided the files entrusted to the vice-presidents so that they could not act in an important area without her formal agreement. She was nevertheless much better confirmed in her position by the European Parliament in July 2024 than for her first term, while the Commission's 2024-2029 programme seems to be inspired by G. Meloni or D. Trump, E. Musk or J. Milei: it consists of deregulation in the social, environmental and digital fields... On migration, von der Leyen is continuing the action taken with Erdogan: she is distributing tens of billions of euros to Egypt and Tunisia to prevent migrants from leaving their countries for Europe. She continues to support Israel and to isolate Europe from the countries of the South.

So far, von der Leyen has failed to increase the financial resources of the European institutions or to strengthen the Union's cohesion and capacity to act. She has not been able to renew the *Next Generation EU* operation and borrow significantly on a European scale, this time to address the energy crisis caused by the war against Ukraine (*RePower EU*), to counter China's *Belt and Road Initiative* (*Global Gateway*) and to revive the European defence and defence industry (*ReArm Europe*). The €150 billion SAFE programme,

adopted on 27 May 2025, the first part of *ReArm Europe*, consists of loans that will have to be repaid by the Member States. SAFE allows borrowing at a lower interest rate than those imposed on governments, but in most cases the difference is minimal and the countries where it is not are those that are already over-indebted. The 2028-2034 European multiannual budget is likely to be smaller than the previous ones, as it will have to include the repayment of *Next Generation EU* loans.

Which Phone Number Should be Dialed to talk to Europe?

It is clear that the question asked by Henry Kissinger in the 1970s has not yet been satisfactorily answered. The EU's external representation is not the prerogative of any of its institutions, all of which have a fragment of it, which constantly leads to confusion among its interlocutors.

The powerlessness of Ursula von der Leyen makes her no longer credible, neither vis-à-vis Putin, nor vis-à-vis Trump, nor vis-à-vis the Europeans. The same applies to its European Commissioner for Defence, to whom the treaties do not give any competence in this area. She should stop presenting herself as if she were the head of a European government: she is not. Lacking democratic legitimacy, the EU is not a State, and it has no government. It is only an association of States that constitutes a free trade area. For nearly seven decades, politicians' communication has misled us. They have imposed on European citizens surrogate democratic institutions, such as a European Parliament deprived of a substantial part of the normal powers of a legislative assembly. A flag, an anthem, a motto is not enough to establish a European State.

Charged by Article 15 TEU with "*giving the Union the necessary impetus for its development and defining its general political orientations and priorities*", the European Council, made up of the Heads of Government of the Member States, ensures that national governments and parties retain real power, as demonstrated by the absence of supranational political parties, in the absence of a legal basis to create one, as Volt has experienced. This prevents any transnational European public debate and makes it difficult for a European public opinion to emerge, which can hardly express itself other than by means of recurrent vague Eurobarometer opinion polls.

In line with its motto and the principle of subsidiarity, the EU tends to favour the "diversity" aspect over that of democratic unity. Even in areas presented as models of cooperation, such as space, the principle of "fair return" on the financial contributions of the various States constitutes a brake on any real common ambition and efforts to increase the efficiency of public spending. This is particularly the case in the field of defence.

In Conclusion

In order to ensure the European common good prevails over the particular interests of the national States, in order for Europe to exist geopolitically in a world that has become explicitly and resolutely hostile, Europe should become a federal State, governed by a constitution that clearly and democratically establishes the respective competences of its organs, in whatever field it may be, eliminating encroachments and preventing abuses of power.

The multiple crises mentioned above should have led to replace the baroque governance of the EU, this mixture of inter-community and intergovernmental methods, with a federal State, better able to face such challenges. So far, this has not happened, but the S&D is continuing its efforts to identify the first government to be persuaded to initiate the federative process. The month of June comprises several stimulating anniversaries: on the 17th, in 1940, in Chartres, Jean Moulin was the first to resist the occupier; the next day, on the BBC, de Gaulle launched his appeal; on the 20th, in 1789, in Versailles, at the *Jeu de Paume* hall, the deputies to the "States-General" initially convened by the King, swore not to separate each other without having given France a constitution.

EUROPEAN UNION AND CANADA



The European Union (EU)-Canada Summit, in Brussels, and the NATO Summit, in The Hague – Decisive Events and a Turning Point for the Future of Europe

PhD. Eng. Stelian TEODORESCU (Romania)

“Problems lead to patience; patience leads to perseverance; perseverance leads to character; character leads to hope; hope leads to strength.”

Hilary Hinton „Zig” Ziglar

Introduction

In practical, security policy terms, the concept of comprehensive security involves treating a very wide range of problems – from drones violating your air, land and maritime space to propaganda and disinformation – as security issues, applying exceptional tools to resolve them.

As a result, within the SWOT analyses for identifying and assessing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, it is undoubtedly necessary to identify, rigorously assess and accurately quantify risks and vulnerabilities. As for risks, they are mainly related to external interference and disinformation, which lead to the polarization of society and the reduction of the capabilities of various institutions to achieve the optimal level of functioning in political, economic, social and, implicitly, in defense and security. As for vulnerabilities, they are related in particular to the critical infrastructure that can become the target of foreign actors, the level of training and the shortage of personnel in key state institutions, as well as the analysis and decision-making capacity of decision-makers who must think and adopt the necessary and effective measures to ensure national security in all areas of activity.

In the context of international developments, it is more necessary than ever to effectively manage and counter asymmetric risks, which, in the context of security and defense, refer to those threats that use tactics and strategies that do not respect the traditional rules of war, thus bringing a surprise advantage to the adversary. It is about using means and methods that maximize the effect, even if they do not involve direct or symmetrical military force. Asymmetric risks are threats that are based on using a tactical-strategic advantage by exploiting the adversary’s vulnerabilities, avoiding a frontal confrontation with the dominant force. These



Source: <https://brusselssignal.eu/2025/06/eu-canada-sign-defence-deal-on-eve-of-nato-summit-in-the-hague/>

threats can be of various types, from terrorism and cyber threats, to disinformation and subversive activities, and can be used by non-state actors or even states with limited resources.

As F. Hoffman said, “hybrid warfare encompasses a wide range of manifestations of different types of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular/asymmetric formations and tactics, violent and coercive terrorist acts, and criminal unrest,” a definition used by P. Huovinen, who considered hybrid warfare “a cocktail of conventional military capabilities, insurgency, terrorism, guerrilla warfare, organized crime, cyber warfare, and advanced military technology.”

It is entirely true that there have been and continue to be those contexts in which, in order to avoid war, you must prepare for war, but it is always true that, in order to achieve peace, you must at least imagine the possibility of achieving such a goal and, at the same time, identify the factors for its achievement, support and build the structures that help ensure it, persistently work for it, and invest in it. The United Nations (UN), as well as other multilateral institutions, were established to provide a favorable legal framework for future activities in the direction of disarmament and peace. Although the member states of the North Atlantic Treaty clearly declare their commitment to this new world of international law, there is little indication that NATO member states are today absolutely all involved in taking these commitments seriously.

In the debates that have emerged at the international level, numerous discussions have begun to appear regarding the role that the UN still has in the process of resolving differences and conflicts, and concrete questions have also been formulated: Why is there no longer any insistence on the part of the states of the world that military spending be accompanied by new efforts and initiatives in the diplomatic field, including by implementing institutional reforms at the international level, which would make the work of various international organizations more efficient? Why not insist on a requirement that a state be obliged to support with at least 10% or 15% of the total amount allocated to security and defense for the development of the level of diplomacy and support for international institutions to achieve very good mediation of relations between states and, implicitly, between states and various other international organizations?

EU-Canada Summit

Here, in an unprecedented context of developments in relations at NATO and EU level, on June 23, the EU and Canada (a North American, bilingual and multicultural state) organized the 20th bilateral summit in Brussels, where they reaffirmed their commitment to a renewed strategic partnership to address a global context marked by geopolitical uncertainty, climate change and economic transformation.

It is significant to emphasize that the aforementioned meeting was attended by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Council, António Costa, and the Canadian Prime Minister, Mark Carney, and a new Security and Defense Agreement was signed to strengthen cooperation in the field of crisis management, hybrid threats, military mobility and the defense industry. Negotiations on a possible digital trade pact were also announced.

At a time of tension and difficulties in relations with the US, and just days before the NATO Summit in The Hague, both sides stressed the importance of a stable and predictable relationship based on shared values. M. Carney reaffirmed Canada's pro-European stance, describing it as “the most European of non-European countries”, while A. Costa stressed that “together we are stronger”. Von der Leyen suggested that the next Summit should take place in the Arctic, as a sign of European support for its Greenlandic partners. According to the final communiqué, the Summit represents “a decisive step” in a partnership that seeks shared prosperity, peace, democracy and international stability.

With deep historical, economic and cultural ties, this EU-Canada cooperation has been formalised through key agreements such as the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), provisionally in force since 2017, which has eliminated tariffs on 98% of products, boosting trade in goods and services to the benefit of businesses and citizens. At the same time, the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) has strengthened political and sectoral cooperation in areas such as defence, energy, digitalisation and the fight against climate change. At the bilateral Summit in 2025, both sides strengthened their ties by signing the first ever security and defence agreement the EU has signed with an American country, which will allow Canadian companies to access European public procurement programmes in this area. In addition, it was agreed to launch an industrial policy dialogue, advance towards a complementary digital trade agreement to CETA and deepen cooperation on key issues such as critical raw materials, economic security and the green transition. Both the EU and Canada maintain a strong position in support of Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression, through coordinated sanctions, action before international courts and joint humanitarian efforts, including their participation in the G7 Donor Coordination Platform.

They also cooperate closely on crisis management operations, maritime security, and the fight against terrorism and cyber threats.

The EU and Canada have taken a decisive step in deepening their strategic partnership by signing an unprecedented security and defence partnership. This agreement will allow Canada to participate in European defence tenders and collaborate in key areas such as crisis management, cybersecurity, maritime security, counter-terrorism and space policy.

Both sides also agreed to work on a second agreement to facilitate Canada's participation in the European "SAFE" programme, which has been allocated €150 billion for joint defence procurement. According to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, the aim is to move forward "swiftly" in these negotiations, based on the principles of reciprocity and security of supply. At the same time, it was agreed to launch a new industrial policy dialogue to strengthen transatlantic competitiveness and align strategic interests, in particular in critical raw materials, for which Canada is a key supplier.

In addition, both sides have officially started negotiations on a Digital Trade Agreement that will complement CETA and will aim to establish common rules on data flows, artificial intelligence, cyber regulation, electronic signatures and consumer protection. It should be noted that the first EU-Canada Digital Partnership Council is scheduled to take place at the end of 2025.

On the political front, both sides reiterated their concern about tensions in the Middle East and their commitment to a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear programme, as well as to a ceasefire in Gaza and peace based on the two-state solution. In the words of European Commissioner A. Costa, it was underlined that, "this partnership will allow us to invest more and better", while Canadian Prime Minister M. Carney underlined that the pact opens the door to a more balanced cooperation, in which Canada can reduce its dependence on the US in the field of defence. As a symbol of political closeness, Von der Leyen recalled that, "Canada is the most European country outside Europe," reflecting the strategic value of a relationship that is strengthening as both partners face growing tensions with the US.

The NATO Summit

As we emphasized in a previous article published in the Geostrategic Pulse magazine, for the first time since the founding of the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) in 1949, on June 24 and 25, 2025, the Netherlands hosted the NATO Summit 2025, at the World Forum in The Hague. It is very necessary to recognize that this special event took place in a tense and fluid international context, in which the global order based on clear rules is under particular pressure, and the security architecture of the international order both at the regional and global levels continues to be deeply affected by the aggressions taking place in many parts of the world.

But here we are, the persistence of the conflict in Ukraine, the escalation of tensions in the Middle East, the interesting and yet apparent consolidation of the China-Russia strategic partnership and the reconfiguration of the balance of power at the global level define a critical stage for collective Euro-Atlantic security, but especially for the security of all of Europe.

At the same time, the entire world is witnessing significant changes in the direction of developments in some states of the world, the intensification of rivalries between the great powers and, in such a context, the proliferation of hybrid and cyber conflicts, but also the increase in the level of disinformation throughout the world and on all levels.

However, we can say that no single and very clear position has been expressed by the NATO member states, located in Europe or not, on how the provisions of Article 5¹ of the North Atlantic Treaty (04.04.1949) would be respected and what decisions could be adopted and how to proceed if NATO's eastern flank were attacked by an aggressor state, in this case Russia, which is already engaged in a war of aggression against a European state bordering the Black Sea. Together with other states, such as Russia, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania and Georgia, Ukraine has access to the sea, the Ukrainian coast on the Black Sea being important from a strategic and economic point of view, including for the exploitation and transportation of hydrocarbon resources and some agricultural resources.

¹Article 5 - The parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them, in Europe or in North America, shall be considered an attack against all parties and, consequently, they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will support the party or parties so attacked by taking immediately, individually and in concert with the other parties, any action it considers necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain security in the North Atlantic area. Any such armed attack and all measures taken in consequence thereof shall be immediately reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall cease when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.

Considering the process of adopting decisions by consensus at NATO level, but also the existence of some member states of the Alliance that have expressed different points of view regarding various commitments of the Alliance in solving various problems at a global level, we can say that, currently, numerous question marks have emerged regarding certain vulnerabilities that must be identified and carefully managed at NATO level in order to consolidate the stability and credibility of the North Atlantic Alliance, in order to reach a common commitment to international law and the North Atlantic Treaty, this constituting a basis for achieving impeccable stability of NATO.

As a result, it is very necessary to emphasize here that the NATO Summit in The Hague sent several clear signals:

- Reaffirming the solidarity of allied states and strengthening collective defense capabilities, especially on the eastern flank of Europe;
- Accelerating the implementation of regional defense plans, part of NATO's new deterrence and response strategy;
- Increased support for Ukraine, including through more robust arms supply lines, technical assistance and exchange of operational information;
- Assessing the state of readiness of allied military capabilities in relation to the new concept of "multi-domain defense" (land, air, maritime, space, cyber).

Reflecting on the NATO Summit, on June 24-25, in The Hague – a day after the 80th anniversary of the signing of the UN Charter – we can say that among the key topics discussed were the strengthening of NATO's deterrence and defense capabilities, the increase in defense spending by all NATO member states and the development of the defense industry, as well as maintaining support for Ukraine.

One of the main problems of NATO is the agreement of all member states to massively expand basic military spending to 3.5% (plus 1.5% for defense-related spending) of member states' GDP by 2035, at a time when military spending is already growing globally. Despite the demonstrated unity, NATO still faces challenges regarding unequal defense budgets (not all states now reach the 2% of GDP threshold and it is very difficult to believe that the new values discussed in The Hague will be reached).

A chart of NATO defense spending as a percentage of GDP, by member country, shows that in 2024 most countries met the 2% limit, but most would need a significant increase to meet the proposed 3.5% limit: Poland 4.1%, Estonia 3.4%, USA 3.4%, Latvia 3.1%, Greece 3.1%, Lithuania 2.8%, Finland 2.4%, Denmark 2.4%, United Kingdom 2.3%, Romania 2.3%, North Macedonia 2.2%, Norway 2.2%, Bulgaria 2.2%, Sweden 2.1%, Germany 2.1%, Hungary 2.1%, Czech Republic 2.1%, Turkey 2.1%, France 2.1%, Netherlands 2%, Albania 2%, Montenegro 2%, Slovakia 2%, Croatia 1.8%, Portugal 1.5%, Italy 1.5%, Canada 1.4%, Belgium 1.3%, Luxembourg 1.3%, Slovenia 1.3%, Spain 1.3%. As can be clearly seen, 21 European states have achieved defense spendings of at least 2%. The US direct financial contribution to the NATO budget, which is different from the commitment to national defense spending, could also be reduced from 16% of the budget (already negotiated in reduction during Trump's first term, but still mostly with Germany) to almost zero. A White House memo leaked online suggested cutting State Department spending in half, including eliminating the contribution to the NATO budget completely. Trump himself suggested that the US should pay nothing for NATO. This would leave NATO's European allies with another \$3.5 billion deficit to cover.

Despite the fact that we have recalled the existence of a significant unity, we should not omit the persistent bilateral frictions on various issues (e.g. Turkey-Greece, Bulgaria-North Macedonia), the intransigent and different positions at NATO and EU level of Hungary and Slovakia regarding Ukraine, although the latter is not a NATO or EU member, as well as the positions expressed in the context of the influence of domestic politics on military efficiency and contributing intelligence services at NATO level. In support of this last assessment, we argue that information warfare requires an increased capacity to detect disinformation, making it more necessary than ever to build authentic cooperation between allied intelligence services and strengthen protection against Trojan horse infiltrations within the Alliance and, implicitly, to achieve protection against information leakage.

Conclusions

It has become abundantly clear that for some time now we have been warning that Europe faces major threats coming from both the East and the West. Looking to the Eastern flank, Russia continues to wage a brutal war of aggression in Ukraine and is escalating its hybrid activity on NATO soil, including arson attacks, sabotage operations and assassination attempts. Intelligence community leaders from key Allies have begun to publicly warn about the destabilizing effects of asymmetric threats and Russia's deployment of hybrid operations, and are expressing concern about the possibility of a "direct military confrontation" and "full-scale war"

in Europe by the end of this decade.

It is significant to mention here that a first priority is to continue the review of NATO's strategic approach towards Russia, which was agreed at last year's Summit. This issue was also subject to debate in the run-up to The Hague, as it proved difficult to convince the US that Russia poses a threat, but especially how NATO should approach Russia in the future through decisions taken by consensus. Any recommendations on future relations with Russia should take into account possible changes in Russian leadership, a stronger deterrence and defence posture generated by NATO, while managing relations with a nuclear-armed state.

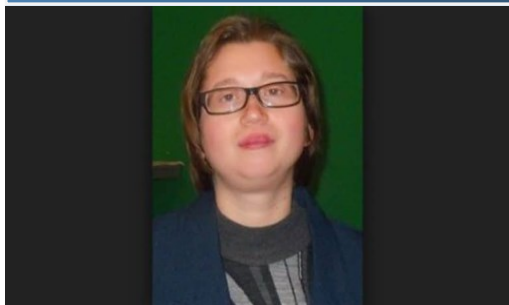
A second essential priority for NATO, but especially for Europe, is to prepare for the situation of a reduction in the number of US troops on the territory of some European states. Although the review of the US force posture has not yet begun, it is already clear that there will be reductions in US troops in Europe – perhaps a potential return to the troop levels recorded before 2022, possibly even at lower levels. Such a development should certainly accelerate the actions of NATO's European allies and Canada in terms of recruiting, training and sustaining troops, but this is only the starting point. If NATO's Article 5 is to enter a period of inducing testing, a rapid first response will be crucial. This requires sufficient troops along the eastern flank and supporting them with adequate military capabilities to deal with possible massive hybrid actions and even attacks in depth.

This brings us to another priority: the need to build industrial facilities. Ukraine has demonstrated the importance of having a pre-existing defence industrial and technological base in order to be able to innovate and scale rapidly in the event of a crisis. Europe and Canada need to increase their capabilities by about a third to serve NATO's regional plans, but taking into account the redundancies, this means in practice an increase of about 50%. Improving access to funding across the EU to support defence innovation should continue to be a key priority.

Another priority to consider is the engagement of NATO's Indo-Pacific Four (IP4)² partners to help counter China. With three of the four IP4 heads of government absent from the NATO summit, the perception is that the relationship is cooling. However, much closer engagement and cooperation is needed on advanced maritime domain awareness and joint submarine surveillance – a threat that both NATO allies and IP4 countries face from Russia and China.

²The Indo-Pacific Four (IP4) are four NATO partner states in the Asia-Pacific region: South Korea, Japan, New Zealand, and Australia. All four countries border the western Pacific Ocean: Japan and South Korea in East Asia, and Australia and New Zealand in Australasia. In the context of a more volatile regional security landscape, experts have recently advocated for stronger cooperation between the IP4 and both Europe and the US, with the aim of promoting a more stable Indo-Pacific region.

EUROPEAN UNION AND ALBANIA



Albania's Integration into the European Union: Challenges, Achievements and Future Strategy

Mona AGRIGOROAIEI (Romania)

Albania's integration into the European Union (EU) is a crucial process for the long-term stability, prosperity and development of the Western Balkans. Albania has taken important steps in recent decade to meet EU requirements, and the start of accession negotiations is a sign of the country's commitment to building a European future. However, integration is not a simple or quick process, and Albania faces multiple challenges in several areas.

For Albania, EU integration means more than economic and trade changes; it is also about the profound transformation of its political institutions. After the fall of the communist regime in 1991, the country went through a difficult transition, characterized by political and social instability, but also by a series of economic and democratic reforms. However, the post-communist period was marked by a fragile political system, in which governmental instability and corruption had a significant impact on the reform process. In this context, Albania has had to take drastic measures to strengthen democratic institutions, reduce corruption and align its political system with EU standards. Institutional reform has been a crucial step and changes have been visible, particularly in the areas of justice, governance and public administration. However, Albania needs to maintain a steady pace in implementing reforms, ensuring that institutions function transparently and efficiently.



Source: <https://www.argumentum.al/en/ep-hints-albanias-accession-talks-with-eu-to-start-within-june-this-year/>

Albania has a relatively small economy and an underdeveloped infrastructure, and its integration into the European single market requires a number of major structural reforms. One of Albania's main economic goals is to modernize the economy, with the aim of increasing competitiveness and attracting foreign investment. Although Albania has made significant progress in this area, such as aligning its economic legislation with European regulations, there are still many challenges in terms of infrastructure, education and administrative capacity. In addition, Albania relies heavily on traditional sectors such as agriculture and tourism to support its economy. However, in recent decades, Albania has tried to diversify its economy, focusing on areas such as energy, IT and infrastructure. In addition, EU integration would mean greater access for Albania to

European structural funds, which could stimulate economic development and job creation. Another important aspect is ensuring free and fair trade with EU member states. Albania has signed trade agreements with the EU, including the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), which allows them to access the European market and reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers. This will help Albania to improve its trade relations and participate more actively in the development of the European internal market.

Albania's integration into the EU is not only a process of alignment with economic and political standards, but also involves fundamental changes in society and culture. Albania faces a number of social challenges, including the massive migration of young talents in search of better opportunities in the EU, a phenomenon that has had a negative impact on the economy and social structure. The country also faces a high rate of youth unemployment, and their integration into the labour market remains a key priority. In addition, Albania needs to adopt and implement modern social policies that respect human rights, gender equality and the protection of minorities. Although Albania has made significant progress in these areas, particularly regarding legislation on women's and minority rights, there are still a number of challenges in implementing these policies at the local level.

Albania will need to continue investing in education and training to ensure a competitive and adaptable workforce to meet the demands of the modern economy. In addition, Albania's integration into the EU also requires an effort to remove stereotypes and prejudices that may exist towards Albanian immigrants in Europe, in order to promote a climate of intercultural understanding and cooperation.

Judicial reform was one of the most important conditions imposed on Albania by the EU during the accession process. Albania's judicial system has been marked by corruption and inefficiency, and judicial reform was essential to restore citizens' trust in the rule of law. In 2016, Albania implemented a profound reform, and the "vetting" process of magistrates was a significant step in this direction. Vetting involves verifying the professionalism, integrity and conduct of magistrates, and this process has led to the dismissal or suspension of a significant number of judges and prosecutors involved in corruption. Albania has also had to strengthen its law enforcement institutions and improve its anti-corruption mechanisms, and the EU has provided significant support in this regard. In this context, anti-corruption agencies and financial control courts have been strengthened, and Albania has received positive assessments in the European Commission's monitoring reports, even if progress in some areas is still being made.

Another essential aspect of Albania's EU integration is strengthening its relations with its neighbours, in particular Greece, Serbia and Montenegro. Albania is part of a region with historical conflicts and political tensions, and the integration process cannot be achieved without close cooperation and a commitment to regional stability. In this regard, Albania needs to continue to play an active role in promoting peace and security in the Western Balkans, and its EU integration can help to stabilise the region and create an environment for cooperation between neighbouring states. In addition, Albania needs to meet the requirements of European foreign policy, align its defence policy with that of the EU and adopt a constructive approach to the negotiation process with other states in the region.

Albania's integration into the EU is a complex and challenging process, but with considerable progress in many areas. From judicial reform and the fight against corruption to economic alignment and strengthening regional relations, Albania has demonstrated its commitment to European principles and values. However, challenges remain to be overcome, and the success of the accession process will depend on Albania's ability to continue implementing the necessary reforms, ensure political and social stability and meet the EU's long-term requirements.

Historical and Political Context of Albania's EU Integration

Albania was under communist rule for more than 45 years, until 1991, under the dictatorial rule of Enver Hoxha. During this period, the country was one of the most isolated in Europe, with an authoritarian regime that rejected any form of external influence, including from the former Soviet Union, and was considered an extremist totalitarian state. After Hoxha's death in 1985, the regime began to show signs of weakness, and in 1991, following popular pressure and global transformations, Albania began to open its borders and implement economic and political reforms. The transition was marked by economic and political instability, with massive protests and sudden changes of regimes.

During this transition period, Albania faced multiple difficulties, including the rapid privatization of the economy and the shift from a centrally planned to a free market system. This period of adjustment was marked by instability, with severe economic crises, such as the collapse of pyramid schemes in 1997, which further deepened poverty and led to mass migration to European countries. However, political transition was

inevitable, and as Albania learned from its past mistakes, it began to shape a foreign policy oriented towards integration into international structures, with the EU becoming a key objective of this strategy.

In the 1990s, Albania began to seek international support for the consolidation of democracy and economic reconstruction, and the EU was seen as an ideal model for political, economic and social development. Albania signed Association and Stabilisation Agreements with the EU in 2006, thus beginning a gradual process of alignment with European norms and regulations, even if integration itself seemed a distant goal. However, Albania faced numerous difficulties in these early stages. Corruption, political instability and internal conflicts between political parties have hindered rapid progress in this regard. Even so, Albania has continued to express its desire to join the EU, and since 2009, the country has been granted the status of “candidate country” for EU membership. This status was an important step, but it also came with a set of obligations, such as implementing fundamental reforms in areas such as the rule of law, human rights and economic reform.

The year 2014 was a crucial moment in Albania’s EU integration process. After decades of waiting and limited reforms, Albania officially submitted its application for EU membership. This was a decisive moment, as until then Albania had not been considered fully prepared economically, politically and socially for EU membership. This application was welcomed by European officials, who welcomed the progress made by Albania, but also highlighted the challenges that needed to be overcome before formal negotiations could begin. The EU assessed the prerequisites and considered that Albania had made significant progress in key areas, such as political stability, the implementation of fundamental legislative reforms, improved external relations and progress in the field of human rights. Following this application, Albania received a favorable response and began the formal accession process. However, this stage also brought significant challenges. The EU set a clear set of criteria that Albania had to meet, and accession negotiations were expected to be slow and difficult, given the complexity of European economic, political and social standards.

After submitting its application for membership, Albania continued to implement reforms aimed at bringing it closer to EU standards. Among the most important advances are judicial reform, the fight against corruption, improving relations with neighboring countries, and implementing economic policies that contribute to the development of a strong private sector and attracting foreign investment. At the same time, Albania continued to support the integrity of the accession process, abandoning nationalist visions and focusing on the development of constructive foreign policies, including cooperation with other Western Balkan states, such as Kosovo and Serbia. Open dialogue with neighbors and the promotion of a stable and peaceful region were essential to create a favorable environment for Albania’s integration into the EU. However, the process was not without obstacles. Although Albania has made significant progress, there are still considerable challenges in implementing reforms. Persistent corruption, excessive bureaucracy and political instability have continued to be significant barriers to progress. Issues related to respect for human rights and the management of ethnic minorities have also been the subject of ongoing discussion, and in some areas Albania has been criticized for falling short of European standards.

The EU acknowledged Albania’s efforts, but insisted that the accession process should not be rushed. Each candidate country must meet all the criteria before becoming a member, and Albania was encouraged to continue on the path of reforms. Moreover, Albania’s integration into the EU is seen as an opportunity not only for the country but also for the entire Western Balkans region. The EU wants to establish a stable and prosperous region in the Balkans, and Albania, as part of this process, plays an important role.

Albania’s future in the EU depends to a large extent on continuing and deepening internal reforms, maintaining a strong commitment to the Union’s fundamental values, and continuing cooperation with EU Member States and the Balkan countries. At the same time, Albania’s full integration into the EU will contribute not only to the country’s political and economic stability, but also to the prosperity of the region and to the long-term strengthening of the EU.

Progress Made

One of the biggest obstacles to Albania’s integration was its justice system, which was characterized by endemic corruption, inefficiency and lack of transparency. Judicial reform has therefore become a key priority on the road to accession, and Albania has received substantial EU assistance to implement far-reaching changes.

A significant example of this effort is the “vetting” process, which involves checking magistrates to ensure that they meet European standards of integrity and professionalism. This reform was a key step in restoring citizens’ trust in the judiciary and in preventing external influences and systemic corruption. Although there were delays in implementing this reform and a significant number of magistrates were dismissed or suspended, it was nevertheless a major achievement and Albania demonstrated its willingness to meet EU

standards in this area.

Corruption remains one of Albania's biggest challenges, but the country has made important steps in combating it. Implementing stricter control mechanisms, strengthening anti-corruption agencies and developing a more efficient system of transparency in public administration have been essential in improving governance. The EU has provided financial and technical support for the implementation of these measures, and progress has also been noted by the European institutions.

Also in 2020, Albania established the National Audit and Fiscal Control Agency, which aligns with international standards. This is a sign of Albania's commitment to reducing corruption risks and improving public financial management.

In the economic field, Albania has made considerable progress in aligning its economy with the rules of the European internal market. Despite being a relatively small economy, Albania has implemented structural reforms aimed at increasing competitiveness and attracting foreign investment. Improving transport and energy infrastructure, as well as reducing administrative barriers to business, are just some of the areas in which Albania has made progress.

Albania has also signed a free trade agreement with the EU, which has allowed for increased trade and capital flows between the two parties. These economic changes have not only increased investor confidence, but have also had a direct impact on improving the standard of living of citizens.

Although Albania has made significant progress in many areas, there are still many challenges to overcome for the country to be fully integrated into the EU. Although anti-corruption measures have been implemented, corruption remains a major problem in many sectors of public administration. Despite reforms, there is still a lack of transparency and efficiency in many state institutions, which makes the accession process fragile. The EU will closely monitor Albania's progress in this area, and strengthening the rule of law will continue to be an essential condition for accession.

Albania's economy faces structural weaknesses that hinder its long-term development. Although the country has managed to improve its infrastructure, much remains to be done in the areas of education and workforce training. Unemployment remains a persistent problem, especially among young people and those in rural areas. Albania also needs to improve the competitiveness of its agricultural sector and implement sustainable economic policies to face the challenges of the global economy.

Despite relative political stability, Albania still faces significant political polarization. Political parties, especially the Socialist Party and the Democratic Party, are in constant competition, which makes the implementation of reforms sometimes fragmented and ineffective. In addition, there is ongoing tension over control of key state institutions, which may jeopardize the progress made so far.

Albania's EU Integration Strategy

One of the most challenging and essential objectives for Albania in its EU integration process is to significantly improve the rule of law. The rule of law is a foundation for the functioning of a democratic system and establishes the legal and institutional framework in which citizens' rights and freedoms are protected and public institutions act responsibly and efficiently. An independent and efficient judiciary, where justice is fair and accessible to all citizens, is essential for strengthening public trust in the state and attracting foreign investment.

Albania faced a number of shortcomings in the justice sector before the reforms were launched, in particular with regard to endemic corruption, inefficiency and lack of transparency. While there has been significant progress, the process of strengthening the rule of law remains an ongoing challenge and Albania needs to make further efforts to comply with European standards.

The 2016 judicial reform was a significant step towards improving the rule of law in Albania. This reform aimed to eliminate corruption from the judicial system and restore public confidence in the justice institutions. One of the key components of the reform was the implementation of the "vetting" process, which involves assessing the integrity and competence of magistrates – judges and prosecutors. The "vetting" process is an essential mechanism, created to examine the financial files of magistrates, check for potential conflicts of interest and analyze their behavior and decisions according to international standards of ethics and professional integrity. So far, this process has led to the suspension and dismissal of a significant number of judges and prosecutors, which, although a painful step, was considered necessary to clean up the system and create a fairer and more efficient justice system.

Another critical area for Albania is improving the transparency and accessibility of its judicial system.

Corruption and inefficiency have contributed to a negative perception of justice by citizens, which has led to low trust in the courts. A transparent judicial system means that judicial proceedings are clear, court records and decisions are publicly accessible, and judges and prosecutors are held accountable for their work. To ensure this level of transparency, Albania needs to adopt new regulations and implement modern technology to facilitate public access to legal information. Online platforms, accessible databases, and the publication of judicial decisions can help increase transparency. Implementing a system of public legal education and informing citizens about their rights will also help to increase trust in the justice system and encourage more active participation in the justice system.

Another central objective of the justice reform is to strengthen the independence of the courts and the prosecution service. In many cases, political pressure and external interference have been major obstacles to a truly independent judiciary. Albania needs to strengthen its judicial institutions, ensuring that they can function without external interference or political influence. Judicial independence is a key pillar of the European integration process, and the EU has been very clear in its demands that Albania demonstrate its respect for this principle. In addition to judicial reform, Albania needs to ensure that regulatory authorities are autonomous and that there are no conflicts of interest that could compromise the work of judicial institutions. Judicial reform also needs to include better protection of judges and prosecutors, who need to be protected from threats or pressure. In this regard, Albania needs to implement protection mechanisms for them, in particular for those working on sensitive corruption or organized crime cases.

Corruption remains a major problem for Albania, and combating it is a constant priority for the Albanian authorities. The judicial reform process has been essential to combat corruption among magistrates, but Albania needs to go further and implement stricter and more effective measures to combat corruption in all sectors. The fight against corruption must be a priority not only for the judiciary, but also for the public administration, police, customs and other state institutions. Anti-corruption agencies must have sufficient financial and human resources to carry out their mission, and the authorities must ensure full transparency in the public procurement process and in the management of public funds. Creating a system of monitoring and evaluation of government agencies and establishing external control over them will contribute to creating a more transparent and accountable governance environment.

To support the strengthening of the rule of law, Albania needs to implement an effective system of control and accountability, allowing for the identification and sanctioning of abuses of power, violations of the law and acts of corruption. This system may include the establishment of independent audit and monitoring mechanisms, the creation of a clear legislative framework regulating the actions of the government and public agencies, and the promotion of a culture of transparency in public administration. In this context, Albania needs to focus on developing professional and ethical government staff, capable of applying the law fairly and without succumbing to external pressures. The EU will closely monitor Albania's progress in this area, and the success of implementing these measures will be a decisive factor in assessing the country's readiness for accession.

Improving the rule of law is a continuous process and essential for Albania's integration into the EU. Reforms in the judiciary, the fight against corruption, strengthening the independence of the courts and transparency in the administration are fundamental steps to achieve this objective. Albania needs to demonstrate its strong commitment to the fundamental values of the EU, in particular the rule of law, and to continue implementing the necessary reforms to ensure a functioning, fair and independent judiciary. Only with an efficient judiciary and a strong rule of law will Albania be able to become a full member of the EU.

A fundamental aspect of Albania's EU integration process is the transformation and modernization of the economy. In order to align with the Union's economic standards, Albania needs to overcome its historical dependence on traditional economic sectors, such as agriculture and tourism, and diversify its economy in a sustainable way. In this context, integration into the European internal market requires not only economic and financial reforms, but also the adoption of a long-term vision for a dynamic private sector, modern infrastructure and a green and innovative economy.

Currently, the Albanian economy is highly vulnerable to external market fluctuations, due to its heavy reliance on subsistence agriculture and tourism. While tourism can be a profitable sector, it is often exposed to external crises, such as pandemics, geopolitical conflicts or climate change, which can directly affect tourist flows. Agriculture, on the other hand, faces challenges related to weak infrastructure, limited innovation and vulnerability to climate change. To reduce economic vulnerability, Albania needs to develop new and innovative economic sectors, such as information technology, creative industries, value-added production, research and development (R&D), as well as to develop a sustainable agricultural sector that is more resilient to external crises. This will require a more flexible and favorable legislative and institutional framework for investors

in these areas, and the implementation of coherent economic policies will be key to success. To stimulate economic growth and attract foreign direct investment, Albania needs to create a favorable environment for the private sector. Currently, many companies face an often complex and bureaucratic economic climate, and administrative and tax costs are a major obstacle to their development. Thus, Albania will need to adopt economic policies that reduce bureaucracy and simplify administrative processes. This may include digitizing public administration, improving transparency, and speeding up procedures related to setting up and managing businesses.

Another important point in this process is the reform of the tax system to make it fairer and more efficient. Albania will need to adopt a tax system that stimulates investment, ensures proper revenue collection, but is not burdensome for small and medium-sized companies. Tax reforms must be accompanied by measures to support the SME (small and medium-sized enterprise) sector, given that this sector plays a key role in job creation and economic diversification.

Another important objective for Albania is to align with EU economic standards. Albania needs to implement European legislation in the areas of competition, consumer protection and food safety, in order to facilitate integration into the European internal market. These rules will contribute to creating a fair business environment, protecting both consumers and entrepreneurs.

Competition: Albania will need to adopt competition legislation that ensures a free, transparent and fair business environment. Anti-monopoly measures and merger and acquisition control will be needed to prevent market concentration and protect small and medium-sized enterprises from unfair practices.

Consumer protection: In line with EU standards, Albania needs to improve consumer protection regulations, ensuring that products and services offered are safe and comply with European regulations. This will help increase consumer confidence and stimulate the domestic economy.

Food security: Albania will need to implement strict regulations on food safety and agricultural production standards, in order to protect citizens' health and facilitate trade with the EU. Improving food supply chains and modernizing the agricultural sector will help to achieve more competitive products and increase exports. Albania faces significant environmental challenges, including climate change, pollution and environmental degradation. The EU is placing increasing emphasis on sustainable development and combating climate change, and Albania needs to align itself with these objectives through a sustainable development policy. This process involves a fundamental change in the way the Albanian economy uses natural resources, with a focus on energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy sources.

Renewable energy: Albania has considerable potential in the renewable energy sector, with significant hydroelectric and solar energy resources. In this context, Albania needs to invest in modernizing its energy infrastructure and implement policies that support the transition to a greener economy. These measures include increasing renewable energy production capacity and improving energy efficiency in key sectors such as transport, industry and households.

Reducing carbon emissions and combating climate change: Albania will need to adopt clear policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and implement strategies for adapting to climate change. It will also need to support the deployment of greener technologies and integrate green solutions into its urban and rural infrastructure.

Circular economy: Albania needs to adopt principles of the circular economy, where resources are used more efficiently and waste is reduced and recycled. These initiatives will help protect the environment and increase economic sustainability in the long term.

The EU is supporting Albania with funds and technical resources to facilitate its transition towards an economy based on innovation, sustainability and green growth. Structural and cohesion funds, as well as European environment programs, will help implement these reforms. Albania needs to use these funds effectively, investing in green infrastructure, innovative technologies and research and development. The EU is also a crucial partner in promoting mobility and trade. Albania will benefit from access to the European internal market, which will boost trade and facilitate the transfer of technology and knowledge. Modernizing the Albanian economy is essential for EU integration and for creating a prosperous and sustainable future. Albania needs to focus on diversifying its economy, supporting the private sector, aligning with European standards and transitioning to a green and innovative economy. Implementing these policies will contribute not only to economic development, but also to creating sustainable jobs, protecting the environment and improving the standard of

In the context of Albania's EU integration process, respect for and promotion of human rights is a key area. The EU is a promoter of fundamental values such as fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law, and Albania needs to align itself with these principles. Thus, as part of its accession process, Albania will need to implement a set of legislative and institutional reforms to guarantee the protection of human rights for all citizens, including minorities, women and vulnerable groups.

Albania, as a state located in a region with great ethnic and religious diversity, needs to ensure that the rights of minorities are protected and respected. The EU places strong emphasis on promoting minority rights and their integration into political and social life. Minorities, such as Serbs, Greeks, Roma and other ethnic groups, must benefit from legal protection, education in their mother tongue, access to public services and active participation in political life. To ensure these rights, Albania needs to adopt social inclusion policies and strengthen legislation on minority rights. It is important for the state to guarantee equal access to education, employment and public services, to protect the right to cultural and religious identity and to encourage constructive intercultural dialogue between different ethnic and religious groups. Freedom of expression is a fundamental pillar of democracy and respect for human rights. Albania has made progress in this area, but much remains to be done to strengthen an environment in which the media can operate freely and independently, free from external influences or political pressure. Challenges remain regarding the safety of journalists, the quality of information and media pluralism. In this context, Albania needs to implement measures to protect journalists from threats and attacks, support media diversity and ensure a climate of independence and freedom in the media. The authorities also need to protect citizens' right to access information of public interest, promote transparency and regulate political advertising more effectively.

Albania needs to improve legislation and policies to protect the rights of the most vulnerable groups in its society. These include children, people with disabilities and refugees. The EU places particular emphasis on the integration of these groups into society and ensuring a decent living and fair living conditions.

Children and education: Albania needs to improve the protection of children, adopt measures to combat child labour, abuse and exploitation, and ensure equal access to quality education for all children, regardless of their economic or social status. Educational reform should also include education programs for the development of life skills and the integration of young talents into society.

Persons with disabilities: Albania needs to implement clearer policies to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, ensure the accessibility of public infrastructure and support their integration into the labour market. Albania will also need to improve access to health services for persons with disabilities and promote their inclusion in the country's social and cultural life.

Refugees and migrants: Albania, located in a transit region for migrants and refugees, needs to adopt more effective policies in the field of international protection. Adherence to the Geneva Convention and respect for international asylum law are essential for integration into the European Union. Albania needs to ensure the protection of refugees, improve their living conditions and support their integration into Albanian society.

Another key area in Albania's EU integration process is improving the status of women and promoting gender equality. Albania has made progress, but significant disparities between men and women still exist in many areas of public and economic life.

Combating gender-based violence: The EU places particular emphasis on combating gender-based violence, in particular domestic violence. Albania needs to adopt clear and effective measures to prevent and combat domestic violence, create safe shelters for victims of violence and provide psychological and social support for women who have suffered abuse. The authorities also need to develop stricter legislation and implement educational measures to change attitudes and behaviour in society.

Participation of women in political and economic life: Albania needs to support women's participation in decision-making and leadership positions, both in the public and private sectors. Implementing positive measures, such as gender quotas in parliament and in public office, can help increase women's participation in political and economic life. Albania also needs to promote women's access to education and training, in order to provide them with equal opportunities in the labour market.

The EU plays a key role in supporting Albania to improve its human rights protection. Through various mechanisms, including human rights funds and technical assistance programs, the EU provides support for the implementation of the necessary reforms in Albania. These programs are designed to support the strengthening of

institutions responsible for the protection of human rights and to help train national authorities in the field of fundamental rights. In addition, the EU monitors Albania's progress and makes recommendations on human rights, and Albania will need to respond to these suggestions by implementing concrete measures.

Albania's integration into the EU requires not only internal reforms, but also an active approach to the country's external relations. Albania needs to develop a foreign policy compatible with the EU's values and objectives. In this regard, Albania will need to actively participate in the European Security and Defense Policy, promoting peace and stability in the Western Balkans. Albania also needs to strengthen its relations with its neighbors and play an active role in strengthening regional stability. Cooperation with Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro and other countries in the Western Balkans is essential to ensure a stable and cooperative region. An important point of this strategy is the continued dialogue with Serbia and the resolution of bilateral disputes, including those related to the status of minorities and historical issues. Albania can play a crucial role in promoting regional cohesion and facilitating a climate of trust between the Balkan states.

Another aspect of Albania's foreign policy will be to promote its bilateral relations with EU member states. Albania needs to build strong ties with the EU states, through cooperation in key areas such as trade, energy, transport and education. This also implies harmonizing Albania's foreign policies with those of the EU and supporting the Union's objectives in international organizations.

Albania's integration into the EU cannot be achieved only through internal reforms, but also by strengthening relations with its neighbors and actively engaging in promoting regional stability and security. Albania is part of a region marked by historical conflicts, territorial disputes and political tensions, and reconciliation and cooperation processes between the Western Balkan states are essential for ensuring a peaceful transition and meeting the EU accession criteria.

The relationship with Greece is by far one of the most important for Albania in the context of its EU integration. Greece is an important neighbor for Albania, with which it shares both a land and a maritime border, and their common history has been marked by periods of tension and cooperation. Despite differences and some conflicts related to the rights of the Greek minority in southern Albania and the dispute over the delimitation of the maritime border (Marrëveshja për Detin), relations between the two states have improved significantly in recent decades. Another sensitive point in bilateral relations is the implementation of an agreement on the respect of minority rights and the handling of economic and migration issues, which are of considerable importance in the context of Albania's EU integration. Greece has also been a constant supporter of Albania in its EU integration process, especially with regard to the opening of accession negotiations. As an EU member, Greece plays an important role in supporting Albania on its European path, and economic and trade relations between the two countries have been strengthened through the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), which has paved the way for greater cooperation in the areas of trade, infrastructure and education. Albania must continue to maintain these relations and resolve any remaining differences through diplomatic dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution.

Another crucial aspect of regional stability is Albania's relationship with Serbia, a neighbor that has historically been a source of major tensions in the Western Balkans, notably due to the Kosovo conflict and the war in the 1990s. Despite this turbulent past, Albania plays an important role in promoting better relations between Serbia and the rest of the Balkan states. On the other hand, Albania has maintained a foreign policy of supporting Kosovo's independence, which has led to a cooling of relations with Serbia, which does not recognize Kosovo's statehood. However, Albania has demonstrated that it can play a constructive role in regional negotiations, and EU integration represents an opportunity for both states to leave behind historical conflicts and build a future based on cooperation and mutual understanding. In the framework of the European integration process, Albania has supported policies that promote reconciliation and dialogue between the Western Balkan states, considering that stable regional cooperation is an essential factor for EU accession. Serbia, in turn, is in a negotiation process with the EU, and Albania can play a mediating role between Serbia and its neighbors, including on the normalization of relations with Kosovo. In this regard, Albania must remain committed to the European integration of the entire region, without deepening internal and external divisions.

Albania and Montenegro are two countries with good relations, characterized by cooperation in the economic, security and environmental fields. Montenegro is also a candidate for EU membership, and Albania and Montenegro have shared common interests in developing regional infrastructure and strengthening economic cooperation. One of the areas of common interest is environmental protection, given that both Albania and Montenegro are located on the Adriatic coast and face challenges related to the conservation of marine ecosystems and the management of natural resources. The two states have also collaborated in the field of tourism, given that both Albania and Montenegro are popular destinations for European and business tourists.

In terms of foreign policy, Albania and Montenegro have a shared commitment to the European integration process and are active participants in regional cooperation initiatives, such as the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP). In addition, both countries have adopted measures to strengthen regional security and have actively participated in resolving the crises in the Western Balkans, including by supporting a peace and reconciliation process.

In the current geopolitical context, Albania needs to continue to invest in strengthening regional relations and play its role as a mediator and facilitator of dialogue between the different countries of the Western Balkans region. The EU has consistently supported regional cooperation initiatives, and Albania, as a future EU member, has a duty to actively contribute to the stability and integration of the region. In this regard, Albania must promote the fundamental values of the EU: democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for diversity. Albania can play a crucial role in building a more stable and secure future for the entire region, by being an active actor in reducing tensions and promoting a climate of peace and cooperation.

Another key objective of Albania's integration strategy is to strengthen a common European identity, based on the fundamental values of the EU, such as democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and solidarity. Albania needs to foster a deeper understanding of EU values among its citizens and promote these principles in their daily lives. In this regard, European citizenship education will play a key role. Albania will need to develop an education system that supports the training of the younger generation in the spirit of a peaceful and prosperous Union, capable of actively contributing to the development of the EU.

Another important aspect of Albania's integration strategy is the continuous adaptation of its domestic legislation and standards to the *acquis communautaire*, i.e. to the body of EU rules, regulations and legislation. Albania needs to adopt and implement European standards in key sectors such as trade, agriculture, infrastructure, transport, environmental protection and energy policy. The country will also need to harmonize regulations on public health protection, education, employment policy and social protection.

Albania's EU integration strategy requires a sustained commitment to ambitious but necessary reforms in all key areas of governance and the economy. Albania needs to adopt European standards and strengthen external relations, given the importance of strengthening regional stability and a foreign policy coherent with EU objectives. Despite the remaining challenges, Albania's integration represents a key opportunity for its long-term development and for the stabilization of the Western Balkans region.

SECURITY AND RESILIENCE - ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY



Understanding National Security Part VII: The Component of Environmental Security

PhD Candidate Georgios KOUKAKIS (Greece)

[...] the state of the environment has only worsened. Three interconnected crises –climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution– are putting our economic and social well-being at risk, while undermining opportunities to reduce poverty, and improve lives and livelihoods, as demonstrated by the COVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, they also risk irreversibly changing our relationship with the natural world.

UNEP's Medium Term Strategy (2021)

Abstract

This article is the seventh 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 environmental security, a component of national security that is interconnected 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 content of this component, present its interconnection with other components of national security, analyze its impact on a variety of policy fields and finally highlight its importance for peace and stability. Its main conclusion is that environmental security is an important component of national security and must not be overlooked.

Introduction

The contemporary security environment has been characterised 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.) of 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 interests and the wellbeing of its citizens, since security and development are interconnected². One of the components of national security is *environmental security*, the importance of which has been highlighted in the past decades, as it affects several policy fields.

¹Koukakis, 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>.

²Stern, 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>

The article presents the content of environmental security, a significant component of national security. Its importance lies in the fact that safeguarding the environment is very important for every state, as it ensures the states' *proper function* and the well-being of its citizens. Moreover, a number of factors such as pollution and global warming have led states to re-evaluate their policy regarding environmental security in order to enhance their resilience and overall national security, thus the article complements the existing literature as it provides additional information that can help *citizens* understand the need for enhancing environmental security and *policy makers* plan respective policies in a more effective way.

Its purpose is to clarify the content of environmental security, present its interconnection with other components of national security and policy fields, and highlight its importance for peace and stability. The main conclusion is that environmental security is an important component of national security and must not be overlooked, as this will have major consequences to a large number of policy fields. As far as the structure of the article is concerned, it initially clarifies the concept of security and defines environmental security in the context of national security. After that it presents the main international collaborative scheme and several incidents in regard to environmental security, it then proceeds to a brief analysis of the interconnection between environmental security and other policy fields, and concludes by referring to future challenges and opportunities in regard to environmental security.

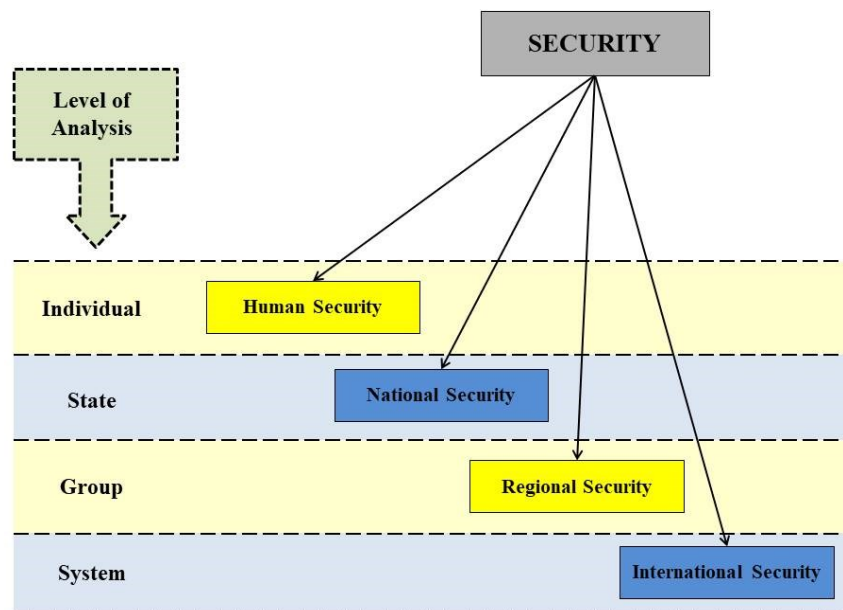


Figure 1: The 4 types of security
Source: Created by Georgios Koukakis

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 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 (**Figure 1**).

³Neocleous, M. (2000). *Against security*. *Radical Philosophy*, 100, 7-15. <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/against-security>

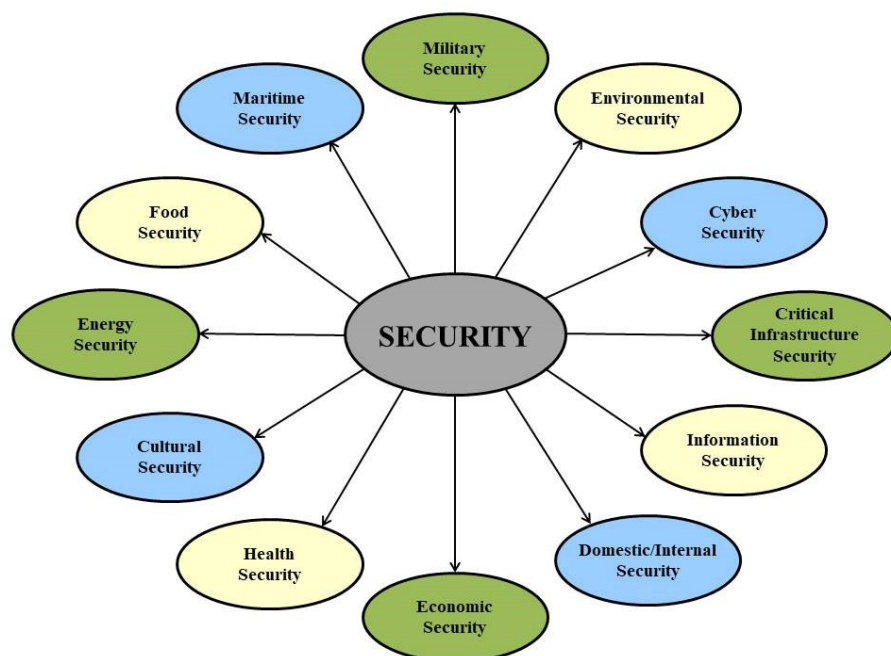


Figure 2: Indicative dimensions/components of security

Source: Created by Georgios Koukakis

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 1947⁴. This new paradigm focused on the internal structure of each state, reflecting its interaction with the security environment, a relation that is based on the state's perception of insecurity⁵. Later on, the United Nations (UN) related security to people and the eradication of poverty and underdevelopment⁶, introducing the concept of *human security* through the *Human Development Report* that was published in 1994⁷. 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 systems⁸. 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 terms⁹– leading to the establishment of several regional organisations such as the EU¹⁰.

Finally, *international security* is closely related to globalization¹¹, mostly dealing with global threats through international organizations such as the United Nations¹².

⁴Department 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\(NSC\)](https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/national-security-act#:~:text=The%20National%20Security%20Act%20of,National%20Security%20Council%20(NSC)).

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

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

⁷United Nations Development Programme. (1994). *Human Development Report 1994*. <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdr1994encompletenostatpdf.pdf>

⁸Graham, 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/>.

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

¹⁰Bailes, 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.

¹¹Cha, 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>

¹²United 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

Moreover, security –regardless the institutional level in which it is examined– encompasses several *dimensions/components*, depending on the specific policy field that is endangered and/or the origin of threats/risks (**Figure 2**). These include but are not limited to, the following components: (1) military security, (2) economic security, (3) energy security, (4) critical infrastructure security, (5) environmental security, (6) food security, (7) environmental security, (8) environmental security, (9) domestic/internal security, (10) cyber security, (11) cultural security, (12) water security, (13) demographic security, (14) information security, and (15) space security.

The Content of Environmental Security

Taking into consideration the aforementioned definition of security, it is understood that environmental security –as a component of national security– is the protection of a state's *infrastructure* and *citizens* from any threat/risk that is related to the environment¹³. Moreover, environmental security encompasses the prevention of *environmental degradation* –as far as a state's *natural resources* are concerned– which can be defined as:

*“[...] the deterioration of the environment through depletion of resources such as air, water and soil; the destruction of ecosystems and the extinction of wildlife. [...] any change or disturbance to the environment perceived to be deleterious or undesirable”.*¹⁴

Notably, the U.S. Department of State –acknowledging that environmental security is an element of both regional and national security– refers that environmental security:

*“[...] encompasses the mitigation and prevention of energy threats, including threats to sources and supply lines, and environmental risks and related stresses that directly contribute to political and economic instability or conflict in foreign countries or regions of importance to the United States. Moreover, it addresses selected energy, environmental, and related national security concerns that pose a direct conflict with United States foreign policy. [...] Environmental security concerns include those from nuclear contamination, spent fuel, and waste; threats to energy resources; contamination, degradation or depletion of essential environmental resources; or environmental problems from failing infrastructure as may threaten U.S. security or undermine foreign regional stability”.*¹⁵

In order though for the content of environmental security to be fully comprehended, the following environmental security factors need to be analysed.

1. **Threats/Risks:** As far as environmental security threats are concerned, it must be stressed that they include both *state actors* (mostly in terms of conflict over resources) and *non-state actors* (e.g. private enterprises that pollute the environment)¹⁶. Moreover, it needs to be noted that most natural phenomena – despite the fact that they do not target a specific state– are also considered as an environmental security risk, because their overall negative impact to the environment, affects in an indirect way several aspects of national security. In fact the United Nations has identified *climate change*, *nature*, *land & biodiversity loss*, and *pollution & waste* as the most pressing contemporary environmental security risks (**Figure 3**).

¹³Selby et al. (2024). *The Many Faces of Environmental Security*. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 49, 395-418. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-112922-114232>

¹⁴ESCWA. (n.d.). *environmental degradation*. <https://archive.unescwa.org/environmental-degradation>

¹⁵U.S. Department of State. (2001). *Environmental Security Threat Report (Section I: What Is Environmental Security?)*. <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rpt/2001/5882.htm>

¹⁶Rowan University. (n.d.). *Environmental Security*. https://chss.rowan.edu/centers/inter_majors/interdisciplinary_programs/internationalstudies/global_security_resource/global-security-problems-folder/environmental-security.html

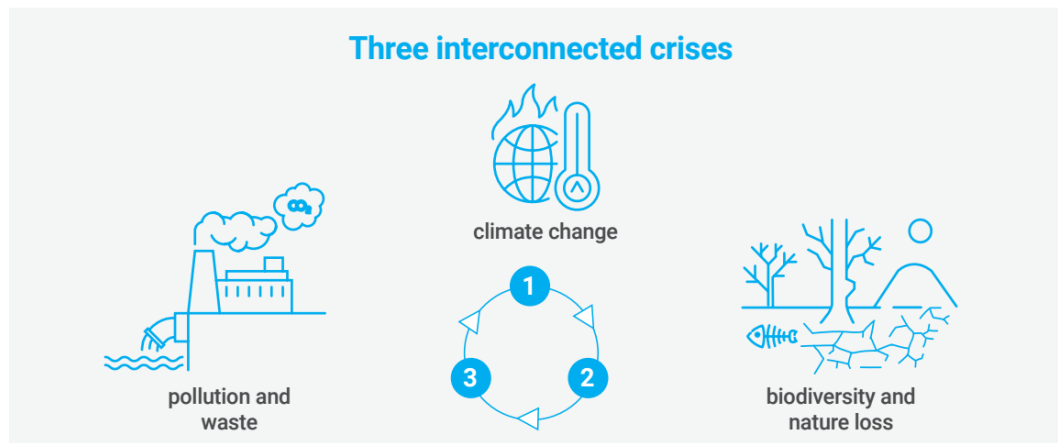


Figure 3: The most pressing contemporary environmental security risks

Source: https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/42683/medium_term_strategy_2022.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

2. **Means:** As far as the means that an actor may use to (intentionally) threaten a state's environmental security in terms of illegally exploiting or polluting its natural resources, they usually include physical, cyber, or administrative/operational means. Moreover, a state's environmental security can be threatened (unintentionally) by a technical deficiency/situation (malfunction) or accident, e.g. a vessel oil spill.

3. **Ways:** As far as the ways that the aforementioned means are used, the most common ones include cyber and (public or covert) physical activities against a state's natural resources or infrastructure/services related to the environment administration.

4. **Goals/Objectives:** The main goal that an actor aspires to accomplish by disrupting the functioning of a state's environment administration system and cause damage to its related infrastructure/assets in order to impose its will by coercion. As far as the objectives are concerned, they usually include the *deprivation* of its natural resources in order to cause malfunction in several aspects of its economy. Moreover, an actor might want to cause public unrest, thus putting pressure on the state's leadership in order to reach a favorable agreement.

4. **Strategic documents:** As far as the strategic documents related to environmental security are concerned, they include either specialised official documents –such as the *National Environment Strategy* of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia¹⁷, the *National Environmental Protection Strategy* of Republic of Lithuania¹⁸, and the *National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2035* of the People's Republic of China¹⁹– or grand strategy such as the *National Security Strategy* (NSS) of the United States²⁰, the *National Strategic Review* (NSR) of France²¹, and the *Integrated Review Refresh* (SRR) of the United Kingdom²², that include special chapters/sections regarding environmental security. Their main purpose is to provide the framework –by assessing the conditions (threats, risks, challenges and opportunities) in regard to the environmental security environment, defining the desired ends (goals), necessary means, and preferable ways of using them– in which the related departments of the public sector will implement their strategies (**Figure 4**).

¹⁷Ministry of Environment, Water & Agriculture of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2017). *National Environment Strategy* (Executive Summary for the Council of Economic and Development Affairs). <https://www.mewa.gov.sa/en/Ministry/initiatives/SectorStrategy/Documents/6.%20BAH-MEWA-KSA%20NES-CEDA%20Executive%20Summary%20v3%2020180221%20ENG.pdf>.

¹⁸Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania. (2016). *National Environmental Protection Strategy* [Official Document]. <https://am.lrv.lt/uploads/am/documents/files/National%20Environmental%20Protection%20Strategy.pdf>.

¹⁹National Center for Climate Change Strategy & International Cooperation of the People's Republic of China. (2022). *National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2035* [Official Document]. <http://www.ncsc.org.cn/SY/syqhbh/202206/W020221026516413083356.pdf>.

²⁰Koukakis, 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>.

²¹Republic of France. (2022). *National Strategic Review* [Official Document]. <https://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/files/files/rns-uk-20221202.pdf>.

²²HM 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>.

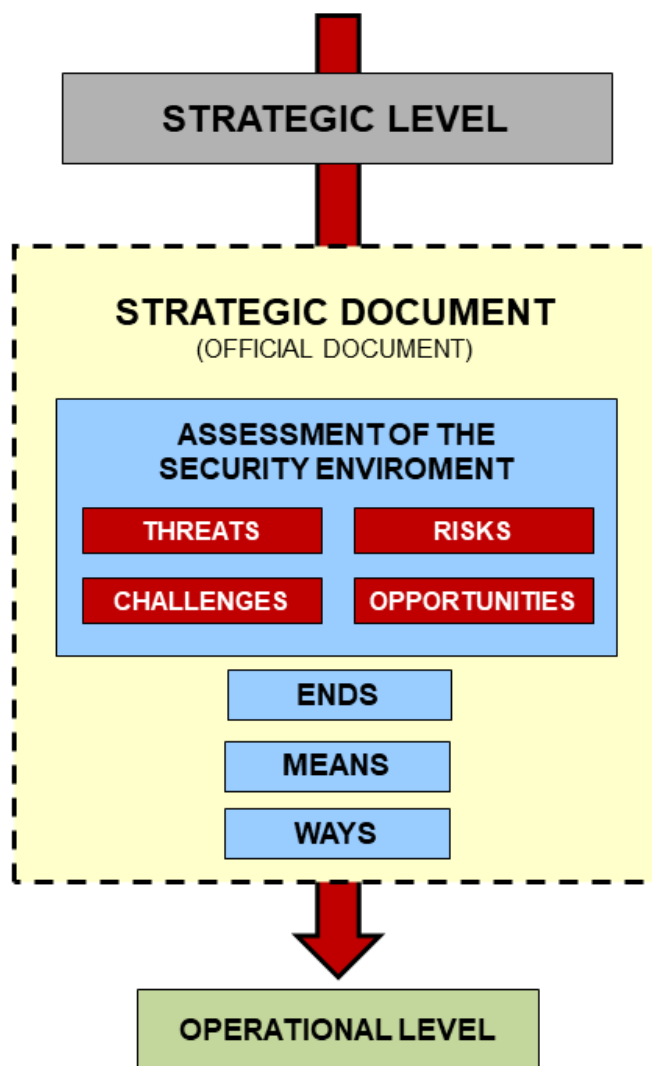


Figure 4: The function of Strategic Documents
Source: Created by Georgios Koukakis

6. **Decision-making:** As far as the decision making process regarding issues related to environmental security is concerned, due to the fact that it is a quite important policy field that must be coordinated with other actors, the decision for the implementation of a certain environmental security policy is usually taken in the higher strategic political level (Head of State/Government) by the respective *Ministry/Department of the Environment*. It must also be stressed that –due to its interconnection with other policy fields– environment security issues are usually addressed jointly with other relative issues. Some of these cases include inter alia the *Ministry of Environment and Energy* of the Hellenic Republic²³, the *Ministry of Tourism and Environment* of Maldives²⁴, the *Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism* of Namibia²⁵, the *Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs* of the United Kingdom²⁶, the *Ministry of Agriculture, Climate Change and Environment* of the Republic of Seychelles.²⁷

²³Ministry of Environment and Energy of the Hellenic Republic. (n.d.). Homepage (In Greek). <https://ypen.gov.gr/>.

²⁴Ministry of Tourism and Environment of Maldives. (n.d.). Homepage. <https://www.environment.gov.mv/v2/en/>.

²⁵Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism of Namibia. (n.d.). About us. <https://www.meft.gov.na/>.

²⁶Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs of the United Kingdom. (n.d.). Homepage. <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs>.

²⁷Ministry of Agriculture, Climate Change and Environment of the Republic of Seychelles. (n.d.). Homepage. <https://macce.gov.sc/>.

International Collaboration

Most states –acknowledging that their common national goals/objectives in several policy fields can be more quickly and easily achieved through cooperation– have established several cooperative schemes in regional and global level that specialize in certain policy fields. As far as environmental security is concerned, the most important one (due to its global character and institutional framework) is the *United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)* that was founded in 1972, serving as a neutral convener of state and non-state actors in order to address environmental challenges²⁸. According to its official webpage, UNEP:

*“[...] is the United Nations’ leading global authority on the environment, driving transformational change on the triple planetary crisis: the crisis of climate change, the crisis of nature, land and biodiversity loss, and the crisis of pollution and waste. [...] From protecting species to restoring the ozone layer, UNEP-facilitated international agreements have made global environmental action possible throughout the years”.*²⁹



Figure 5: The logo of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Source: <https://www.unwater.org/about-un-water/members-and-partners/united-nations-environment-programme-unesep?page=1%2C0>

Moreover, in 2015 the UN published the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* in which 17 *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) were defined (**Figure 6**) in order to facilitate the achievement of economic, social and environmental sustainable development globally. As far as the environmental security is concerned, the SDGs that are more directly related to it are:

SDG2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

SDG6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

SDG13: Climate Action.

SDG14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

SDG15: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

²⁸UNEP. (n.d.). About the United Nations Environment Programme. <https://www.unep.org/who-we-are/about-us>

²⁹Ibid



Figure 6: The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN 2030 Agenda

Source: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/about-us/sustainable.development-goals-sdgs-and-disability.html>

In the context of addressing environmental security threats/risks states have also reached several multi-lateral agreements, such as:

- ♦ The *Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* of **1972**³⁰.
- ♦ The *Regional Seas Programme* of **1974**, which provides for the cooperation of neighbouring states in order to reduce ocean pollution and protect marine life.³¹
- ♦ The *Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution* of **1979**, which provides for the reduction of noxious chemicals.³²
- ♦ The *Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer* of **1985**, which provides for addressing the negative impact of ultraviolet radiation caused by ozone depletion.³³
- ♦ The *Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer* of **1987**, which provides for the phasing out the chemicals that deplete the ozone layer.³⁴

³⁰UNESCO. (n.d.). *The World Heritage Convention*. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/convention/>.

³¹UNEP. (n.d.). *UNEP Regional Seas Programme*. <https://www.unep.org/topics/ocean-seas-and-coasts/regional-seas-programme#:~:text=The%20UNEP%20Regional%20Seas%20Programme,since%20its%20establishment%20in%201974.>

³²UNECE. (n.d.). *The Convention and its achievements*. <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/air/convention-and-its-achievements>.

³³UNEP. (2019). *Handbook for the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer*. https://ozone.unep.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/VC_Handbook_2019.pdf.

³⁴UNEP. (2020). *Handbook for the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer*. <https://ozone.unep.org/sites/default/files/Handbooks/MP-Handbook-2020-English.pdf>.

♦The *Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes* of **1989**, which establishes specific rules for the movement and disposal of hazardous waste.³⁵

♦The *Convention on Biological Diversity* of **1992**, which provides for the protection of biological diversity.³⁶

♦The *Convention to Combat Desertification* of **1994**, which provides for the protection and restoration of land degraded by drought.³⁷

♦The *Kyoto Protocol* of **1997**, which provides for the limitation and reduction of greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions on behalf of industrialised states.³⁸

♦The *Paris Agreement* of **2015**, which provides for the reduction of GHG emissions in order to limit global temperature rise, the assessment of the respective progress made by states, and the financing of developing states in order to mitigate climate change.³⁹

♦The *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework* of **2022**, which provides for the protection of biodiversity.⁴⁰

♦The *Resolution to End Plastic Pollution* of **2022**, which provides for the establishment of an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) on Plastic Pollution in order to address the full cycle of plastic.⁴¹

♦The *Global Framework on Chemicals* of **2023**, which provides for the proper use of chemicals in order to minimize their negative impact to the environment.⁴²

♦The *High Seas Treaty* of **2023**, which provides for the protection of the ocean and marine biodiversity.⁴³

Transnational issues & incidents related to environmental security

As far as transnational issues & incidents related to environmental security are concerned, some of them that highlight its importance are the following:

♦The *Cod Wars* between *Iceland* and *the United Kingdom* that took place between 1950s and 1970s⁴⁴.

♦The ongoing *Water Conflict* between *India* and *China* over the Brahmaputra River, between *Egypt* and *Ethiopia* over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and the Nile River, and between *Turkey* and *Iraq* over the Ilisu Dam and the Tigris River.⁴⁵

³⁵BASEL. (n.d.). Homepage. <https://www.basel.int/>.

³⁶Convention on Biological Diversity. (n.d.). The Convention on Biological Diversity. <https://www.cbd.int/convention>.

³⁷UN Convention to Combat Desertification. (n.d.). Overview. <https://www.unccd.int/convention/overview>.

³⁸United Nations Climate Change. (n.d.). What is the Kyoto Protocol?. https://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol.

³⁹United Nations. (n.d.). The Paris Agreement. <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/paris-agreement>.

⁴⁰UNEP. (2022, December 19). Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. <https://www.unep.org/resources/kunming-montreal-global-biodiversity-framework>.

⁴¹UNEP. (n.d.). Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution. <https://www.unep.org/inc-plastic-pollution>.

⁴²UNEP. (n.d.). Global Framework on Chemicals. <https://www.unep.org/global-framework-chemicals>.

⁴³United Nations. (n.d.). Agreement on Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction. <https://www.un.org/bbnjagreement/en>.

⁴⁴Imperial War Museums. (n.d.). The Cod Wars explained: The conflict between Iceland and Britain. <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-cod-wars-explained-the-conflict-between-iceland-and-britain>.

⁴⁵Geopolitical Monitor. (2024, October 10). Three International Water Conflicts to Watch. <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/three-international-water-conflicts-watch/>.

- ◆ The contemporary *Water Conflict* between *India* and *Pakistan* over the Indus River (**Figure 7**).⁴⁶
- ◆ The *Fish War* between France and the United Kingdom, that occurred as a consequence of BREXIT.⁴⁷
- ◆ The use of *Arda River* waters in the region of Evros, which was resolved by the signing of a Joint Declaration between Greece and Bulgaria on 2 May 2025.⁴⁸
- ◆ BP's Deepwater Horizon *Oil Spill* that occurred in the *Gulf of Mexico* in 2010.⁴⁹



Figure 7: Wildfire in Portugal during summer 2022

Source: https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/2023-among-five-worst-years-wildfires-europe-2024-provides-some-relief-2024-11-19_en

- ◆ The *Wildfires* (**Figure 7**) hat broke out in *Europe* in **2023**.⁵⁰
- ◆ The *Floods* in South Germany that occurred in **2024**.⁵¹

⁴⁶Wykurz, L. (2025, May 08). Water war – the conflict between India and Pakistan intensifies. *Water Issues*, 8. <https://wodnesprawy.pl/en/water-war-between-india-and-pakistan-intensifies/>

⁴⁷Gallardo, C. (2021, November 02). Why Britain and France can't stop fighting about fish. *Politico*. <https://www.politico.eu/article/uk-french-fishing-war-post-brexite-relations/>

⁴⁸Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic. (2025, May 03). Announcement on the signing of a Joint Declaration by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Greece and Bulgaria on the use of the Arda River Waters. <https://www.mfa.gr/en/announcement-on-the-signing-of-a-joint-declaration-by-the-ministers-of-foreign-affairs-of-greece-and-bulgaria-on-the-use-of-the-arda-river-waters/>

⁴⁹Rafferty, J.P. (2025, June 13). 9 of the Biggest Oil Spills in History. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/story/9-of-the-biggest-oil-spills-in-history>

⁵⁰European Commission. (2024, November 19). 2023 among the five worst years for wildfires in Europe, but 2024 provides some relief. https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/2023-among-five-worst-years-wildfires-europe-2024-provides-some-relief-2024-11-19_en

⁵¹Dittman, F. (2024, June 02). Floods in southern Germany: 40 hours of disaster. *Deutsche Welle*. <https://www.dw.com/en/floods-in-southern-germany-40-hours-of-disaster/a-69247346>

The Interconnection of Environmental Security with other Policy Fields

As far as the interconnection of environmental security with other policy fields is concerned, it must be noted that when the environmental security is threatened, both public and private sector malfunction as they cannot operate properly. In this context, environmental security is closely related to the following sectors:

1. **Economy:** The first sector that is usually affected by the lack of environmental security is the economy, due to the restrictions in the use of natural resources and the damage caused in critical infrastructure, thus affecting agriculture, trade and tourism.
2. **Security & Defence:** Another sector that is interconnected with environmental security is security & defence, especially due to the negative impact of climate change which affects the functioning of military systems, the equipment & clothing needed to conduct operations, transport routes, etc.⁵² To this end, NATO has been publishing since 2022 a *Climate Change and Security Impact Assessment* to provide insight to this important issue.⁵³
3. **Resilience:** Resilience is also affected by environmental security, as natural disasters not only put the *vulnerabilities* of a society to the test but also affect its ability to *recover*. That is why resilience is nowadays one of the most important capacities for actors.⁵⁴
4. **Technology:** Technology has also a great (both positive and negative) impact to environmental security, because it facilitates *innovation* as far as *countering* environmental security threats/risks is concerned but also because technological advancement usually requires a large number of resources and increases GHG emissions.
5. **Migration:** As far as migration is concerned, it needs to be stressed that severe environmental changes have led to a new type of migration entitled *Environmental Migration*.⁵⁵
6. **Public Administration:** The relation between public administration and environmental security mainly refers to public infrastructure and services, which are usually under the authority of a respective agency/department, such as the *Ministry/Department of Environment*. Moreover, it relates to the policies that a government implements in order to promote and ensure environmental security.
7. **Intelligence:** Last but not least, intelligence is another sector that is related to environmental security, as it not only enhances the overall environmental security threat awareness, but also provides information about the vulnerabilities of public critical infrastructure leading to the enhancement of resilience.

Concluding Remarks

Taking into consideration the information presented in this article, it is concluded that environmental security is an important component of national security and must not be overlooked as this will have negative consequences in many policy fields. In fact, in order for a state to achieve its overall objectives, it must be able to preserve its natural resources, safeguard its environmental infrastructure from natural disasters and hostile actors, and protect the environment in order to ensure favourable conditions, thus function in a proper way and protect its national interests. The main *challenge* that most states are facing in regard to environmental security lies in the ability to adapt their industries in order to minimize GHG emissions and at the same time keep up with the *technological advancement*. As for the main *opportunity* that lies ahead, states must take advantage of the existing technological means and enhance their collaboration in order to increase their resilience, resolve natural resources sharing issues, and ensure that the respective regulations are being followed.

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⁵²NATO. (2024, July 18). *Environment, climate change and security*. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_91048.htm

⁵³NATO. (2024). *NATO Climate Change and Security Impact. Assessment*https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/7/pdf/240709-Climate-Security-Impact.pdf

⁵⁴Koukakis, 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>

⁵⁵IOM. (n.d.). *Environmental Migration*. <https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/environmental-migration>

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Sri Lanka's Strategic Crossroads: Steering Through the Potential Threat of a (Broader) Regional Conflict

Abstract

This paper explores the likelihood of a regional conflict and examines the geopolitical perspectives and likely alignments of Sri Lanka. The authors pinpointed criticality as the probable geopolitical stance of Sri Lanka in a (broader) regional conflict. This paper develops the argument through a literature review on how small states are at a disadvantage in managing regional conflicts, how geopolitics create or worsen conflict, and what regional conflict in the Asia-Pacific region would look like through neo-realism. The research problem is related to the ability of Sri Lanka's non-aligned foreign policy and the principles of peaceful coexistence in light of its strategic location and competing interests, further growing the tensions of major powers in the Asia-Pacific region. This qualitative methodology is based on secondary data. It analyses the complex geopolitical dynamics of the Asia-Pacific region, the strategic importance of South Asia, and Sri Lanka's foreign policy approach, characterised by the principles of non-alignment, neutrality, and non-belligerency.



Source: <https://ceylontoday.lk/2024/01/11/sri-lanka-and-the-world-in-2024/>

Key words: Asia-Pacific, Geopolitics Non-alignment, Neutrality, Non-Belligerency, South Asia.

Introduction

Theoretical discussions regarding the prospects of regional conflicts often revolve around the potential catalysts for such conflicts, drawing on historical precedents and contemporary geopolitical tensions. Overy (2013,13) argues that the origins of the First and Second World Wars (WWI and WWII, respectively) provide

insights into how global conflicts can arise from a complex interplay of power dynamics, economic rivalries, and political alliances¹. Strachan (2010,04) believes that the contradictions and interesting facts emerge when considering the globalised nature of the early 20th century, which set the stage for the WWI to become a broader regional, that is, global, conflict². The interconnectedness of nations, then and now, means that localised disputes have the potential to escalate rapidly, drawing on multiple countries and possibly igniting worldwide conflagration. Jasinski (2011,129) states that additionally, the role of social trust and national identity in the onset of militarised disputes, as seen in the lead-up to the WWI, highlights the importance of these factors in international relations and their potential to contribute to large-scale regional conflicts³. The aftermath of WWII continues to cast a long shadow, and unresolved issues from this period could potentially lead to tensions that might escalate into new regional conflicts.

Unresolved territorial disputes due to the end of colonialism after WWII, such as the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine or border disputes between India and Pakistan and India and China, which were caused by British colonial mismanagement, remain unresolved. External forces can exploit these unresolved tensions to ignite wider wars. The rise of revisionist powers, such as Russia and China, which view the post-WWII world order established by the victors as unfair (despite the Soviet Union being a victorious power), can also lead to clashes with dominant powers. More importantly, the nations mentioned above are located in the Asia-Pacific region, which holds significant strategic importance in global geopolitics and economics. Its diverse economies, ranging from emerging markets to advanced industrial nations, have substantially contributed to global economic growth and innovation. Moreover, the region's complex network of alliances, territorial disputes, and growing military capabilities make it a focal point for international security concerns and diplomatic efforts.

Sri Lanka, a small island nation in the Indian Ocean in the Asia-Pacific region, has faced multiple regional conflicts, such as WWII. The country's strategic location made it an asset for various powers vying for control of the Indian Ocean. As a result, the British Empire maintained its dominance in the Indian Ocean due to its consolidated colonial rule in British Ceylon (the past name for Sri Lanka). Moreover, relevant to British colonial status, Ceylon's engagement with past major-scale broader regional conflicts was purely based on British interest, which made Ceylon a factional member in past conflicts. Ceylon, which received independence in 1948 and emerged as a republic in 1972 by renaming itself 'Sri Lanka', has changed its colonial *status quo* in terms of foreign policy and national interest. Sri Lanka's newfound independence allowed it to chart its own course in international affairs, free from British influence. Furthermore, in reference to Wickremesekera (2016,2), the island nation baffled a thirty years separatist conflict with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which impacted the island nation⁴. The prolonged conflict has significantly affected Sri Lanka's social structure and economy. Efforts to rebuild have been underway, focusing on reconciliation and economic growth. Nonetheless, challenges persist in addressing the conflict's underlying causes and ensuring equitable progress for all island communities.

Along with such development, with its *status quo* changing from the British Ceylon policies, it faces a new challenge in terms of navigating the intricacies of regional geopolitics. The Asia-Pacific region is a complex web of regional dynamics, with India and China emerging as key players vying for influence in the region. Nations such as Sri Lanka face challenges in maintaining their foreign and defence policies. Scholars have extensively examined the economic and strategic implications of these powers' involvement, highlighting both the opportunities and potential risks to Sri Lanka's sovereignty. Moreover, in relation to the following factors, the question of Sri Lanka's posture or confrontation in a large-scale regional conflict raises a new dilemma in terms of strategic and policy-wise implications, as it seeks to maintain positive relations with multiple nations while safeguarding its national interests. Moreover, due to its strategic location within the Asia-Pacific region, the geopolitical implication in this region raises questions that small states like Sri Lanka need to be aware of its role and capabilities in the hypothetical event of regional conflict confrontation

Methodological Considerations

The question of whether Sri Lanka can uphold such policies and stances regarding regional conflicts

¹R. J. Overy, *The Origins of the Second World War*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315834764>.

²Hew Strachan, 'The First World War as a Global War', *First World War Studies* 1, no. 1 (1 March 2010): 3–14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19475021003621036>.

³Michael P. Jasinski, 'The Outbreak of World War I', in *Social Trust, Anarchy, and International Conflict*, by Michael P. Jasinski (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2011), 127–58, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230118683_9.

⁴Channa Wickremesekera, *The Tamil Separatist War in Sri Lanka* (London: Routledge India, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315646053>.

forms the broader research problem. The geopolitical context and position of Sri Lanka are key factors that question its role in a potential regional conflict. Moreover, being a small island nation with unique geopolitical significance, Sri Lanka's potential for broader regional conflict is influenced by its understanding of the repercussions of such a conflict on the nation's surrounding Asia-Pacific region and the world. Having endured a protracted separatist war and concentrating on rebuilding and reconciling its diverse population and geopolitical surroundings, Sri Lanka faces the question of whether it can afford to participate or become involved in another regional conflict. Owing to the potential geopolitical consequences that could result in a regional conflict, Sri Lanka is keenly aware of the dire humanitarian, economic, and social ramifications that such a conflict would entail. For instance, when the former President of Sri Lanka Ramil Wickramasinghe "arranged to appoint three special committees as a preliminary measure to address the security and economic pressures that may affect Sri Lanka, considering the potential developments in the Middle East and globally, including the assassination of a Hamas political leader in Iran"(PMD, 2024)⁵. The country recognises the critical importance of preserving and promoting peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region. Given the potential impact of Sri Lanka's position and its geopolitical context in a regional conflict, it is crucial to carefully consider and evaluate the various possible scenarios that may arise.

Considering the aforementioned and the subject area of this article, the authors pose the following central research question: How might Sri Lanka position itself geopolitically in the event of a broader regional conflict in the Asia-Pacific, and what policies could it adopt to navigate its role in such a scenario? The authors also explore additional aspects, such as potential scenarios in the event of a regional conflict and relevant geopolitical layers and factors that could influence Sri Lanka's position. The research objectives are to identify Sri Lanka's policy in a broader regional conflict in the Asia-Pacific region and examine the potential geopolitical position Sri Lanka may adopt in such a scenario. The authors also hypothesise possible geopolitical scenarios and regional alliances to shed light on Sri Lanka's international status in this context. This study had several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the findings are based on the current situational context, as this study relies on existing conditions to consider hypothetical scenarios and events. Additionally, the study is limited to geopolitical conflicts and contextual factors surrounding the Asia-Pacific region from a Sri Lankan perspective. Therefore, its scope is selective and tied to Sri Lanka's perceptions, concerns, and interests. The authors constructed a qualitative methodology that utilised the existing literature instead of conducting a statistical analysis. Furthermore, the authors relied on secondary data, including journal articles, conference proceedings, and books. Owing to constraints in accessing resource personnel, certain limitations were encountered while classifying the data. Nevertheless, the authors have managed to conduct a critical and constructive analysis of the available data, leading to observations and recommendations. This study employs neorealism, a modern iteration of realism in international relations theory, as its theoretical foundation. Neorealism, also known as structural realism, highlights the importance of the structure of the international system, particularly how power is distributed among nations to influence their actions. By utilising a neo-realist lens, this research examines the dynamics between Sri Lanka and the key influential states affecting it, which also play significant roles in a regional conflict within the Asia-Pacific area. The focus is on how systemic pressures and limitations shape the decisions of the state.

Theoretical Considerations

Overly (2013, 32) states that it is important to note how geopolitics have shaped regional conflicts in the past, which eventually led to regional conflicts in the past⁶. For instance, World War II was mainly based on geopolitical ambitions and objectives that led to global conflict. The European and Pacific theatres in WWII paved the way for geopolitical reasons which strengthened war machines on all sides. Furthermore, the growing global unrest and persistent conflicts in various regions of the world based on geopolitics have sparked concerns regarding the increased possibility of regional conflicts. In light of the following scenarios, this research is a step beyond analysing Sri Lanka's stance in the Asia-Pacific region. The literature review for this study focuses on the neorealism approach and its application to the study of international relations, with particular emphasis on the potential threat of a regional conflict in Sri Lanka and how this geopolitical significance affects Sri Lanka's strategic interests and potential alliances in the context of a regional conflict scenario.

⁵Mithuran Ganesh, 'President Establishes Three Special Committees to Address Potential Global and Iranian Impacts on Sri Lanka', PMD, 31 July 2024, <https://pmd.gov.lk/news/president-establishes-three-special-committees-to-address-potential-global-and-iranian-impacts-on-sri-lanka/>.

⁶Overly, *The Origins of the Second World War*.

Sri Lanka, a small island nation in the Indian Ocean with significant strategic geopolitical importance at the crossroads of major shipping lanes, is becoming increasingly important for global trade. According to Premaratna and Thrishali (2020,01), Sri Lanka holds a singular strategic position in the Indian Ocean, drawing on the significant powers of China, the United States, India, Japan, and Australia⁷. According to Waltz (1988,619), neorealism theorises that state actions are driven by rational self-interest and strategic considerations⁸. According to this theory, nations interact with each other based on their foreign policy objectives and careful assessment of potential gains and losses. This approach suggests that states do not act impulsively but make decisions through logical deliberation. The fundamental concept of the neorealism model suggests that each nation pursues its own interests through a cost-benefit analysis, with the resulting actions categorised as either ‘bandwagoning’ or ‘balancing’.

Balancing refers to “allying with others against the prevailing threat”. In contrast, “bandwagoning refers to “aligning with the source of danger”⁹. Smaller nations face various obstacles in the global political landscape. Soni (2024, 28) highlights that one such challenge confronting these states is the dilemma of whether to bandwagon with or balance with more powerful nations. Sri Lanka has typically pursued a non-aligned foreign policy, focusing on peace, stability, and economic advancement¹⁰. In response to the looming threat of broader regional conflict, Sri Lanka advocates diplomacy, peacebuilding, and neutrality. Sri Lanka’s foreign policy has consistently adhered to the principles of non-interference in other nations’ internal affairs and the promotion of peaceful coexistence. This approach is reflected in the country’s long-standing advocacy for the peaceful resolution of conflicts through dialogue, diplomacy, and multilateral negotiations. Nevertheless, this position is debatable, as Sri Lanka’s strategic geographical location makes it more susceptible. The small island nation holds considerable importance and sway for numerous powerful countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

According to Abbas, Masood, and Saqib (2024,67) the Asia-Pacific region is experiencing a significant period in its geopolitical landscape, marked by China’s expanding influence and its disceptation of the United States’ enduring regional supremacy¹¹. This shift has led to a complex interplay of power dynamics, alliances, and strategic considerations among regional states, aligning with the realist theories of power maximisation and survival within an anarchic global system. Moreover, according to Abbas, Masood, and Saqib (2024, 87), the Sino-American rivalry is central to this geopolitical landscape, with both countries seeking to expand their influence and control in the region¹². This competition has led to heightened military activity and alterations in the area’s security dynamics. In response to these shifting power relations, nations in the region are re-evaluating their strategic partnerships and alliances. This behaviour aligns with neorealist theories regarding the balance of power and the formation of alliances. More importantly, as Abbas, Masood, and Saqib (2024, 84) note, the complex labyrinth of military alliances and modernisation initiatives further undermines the strategic equilibrium in the region¹³. This increasingly exposes Sri Lanka to the conflicting interests, policies, and activities of major international actors. From a realist perspective, it is in Sri Lanka’s best interest to fully leverage its international position while striving to maintain its national stability, security, and independence. This is particularly relevant not only because of the country’s strategic position but also because of the prolonged periods of instability and inter-ethnic violence in its recent history. The country’s primary interest is to ensure its survival¹⁴. In Sri Lanka, such an aim is shaped not only by international influences but also by stability and security concerns stemming from the country’s recent past and present challenges.

According to Korobko and Musa (2014,345), geopolitics is widely believed to play a crucial role in world wars, and contemporary geopolitics could be a leading cause of potential broader regional conflict¹⁵.

⁷S. P. Premaratna and Asha Thrishali, ‘Sri Lanka and the Geopolitics of Indo-Pacific: Perceptions, Opportunities and Challenges’, *Journal of Polity and Society* 12, no. 1 (2020), <https://journalspoliticalscience.com/index.php/i/article/view/19>.

⁸Kenneth N. Waltz, ‘The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (1988): 615, <https://doi.org/10.2307/204817>.

⁹Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987), <http://web.stanford.edu/class/ips198/docs/Walt.pdf>.

¹⁰‘Sri Lanka’s Ongoing Engagement with the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (UNCLOS) and the International Seabed Authority (ISBA) – Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Sri Lanka’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Sri Lanka: Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Sri Lanka, 8 July 2024), <https://mfa.gov.lk/unclos/>.

¹¹Syed Ali Abbas Syed Ali Abbas, Maryyum Masood, and Amna Saqib, ‘US Military Posture in the Asia-Pacific and Its Impact on Regional Stability’, *BTTN Journal* 3 (31 July 2024), <https://doi.org/10.61732/bj.v3i1.88>.

¹²Abbas, Masood, and Saqib.

¹³Waltz, ‘The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory’, 19.

¹⁴Abbas, Masood, and Saqib.

¹⁵Dr Yana Korobko and Mahmoud Musa, *The Shifting Global Balance of Power: Perils of a World War and Preventive Measures* (Xlibris Corporation, 2014).

Small nations that possess unique geopolitical aspects, such as Sri Lanka, face strong difficulties in facing such scenarios. Sri Lanka is a small island nation in the Indian Ocean, which is an important subregion of the Asia-Pacific region. With reference to Kawshalya (2020,171), the importance of researching Sri Lanka's interactions with major powers such as India, China, and the United States cannot be overstated¹⁶. Research on the Indian Ocean region's geopolitics, which is an important region in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Kapur's (2019) work, is essential¹⁷. As the study refers to the South Asian region and the Indian Ocean, it can be easily considered a potential broader regional conflict, which thereby brings Sri Lanka into the fold. Sri Lanka's risk is not limited to India's influence; thus, it also grapples with the power competition between China and the USA. Moreover, the regional security concerns of India and China, such as Seneviratne, Nalawatta, and Weeraratne (2017,02) state that how Sri Lanka falls into spheres of regional security concerns plays a vital role in the possibility of conflict¹⁸. Moreover, with the following geopolitical aspirations, considerations, and concerns, the need to investigate whether Sri Lanka could become a battleground or target during regional conflicts due to its strategic location should be considered. Researchers have clearly understood that, as a small state, Sri Lanka is not immune in such a case, which tends to view possible scenarios from a neo-realist perspective. In addition, owing to Sri Lanka's imperative strategic location, it often falls into tensions. Therefore, these researchers have utilised geopolitical occurrences and analysed them thoroughly through a neo-realism framework; however, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, there is no separate scholarly work which has mentioned such a possibility. Therefore, these researchers attempted to bridge this gap by examining how Sri Lanka would act in such a situation. Rather than focusing on hypothetical scenarios, this study attempts to prove its points by highlighting cardinal themes such as neutrality, non-belligerency, and the principle of non-alignment. In addition to the principles of non-alignment, researchers have examined other principles, such as non-belligerency and neutrality, to gain a holistic view of the probabilities. Therefore, this research is a testament to how Sri Lanka should be proactive and reactive in a broader regional conflict.

Identifying Geopolitical Scenarios and aAlliances in the Asia-Pacific Region

The distribution of power among major world powers is expected to play a crucial role in the event of a regional conflict. Bert (2004, 322) argues that global politics are currently dominated by the United States, China, Russia, and the European Union, which have a significant impact on international affairs¹⁹. For instance, according to the United Nations (UN) Security Council (2024), the United States of America, China, Russia, France (the only European Union country), and the United Kingdom are permanent members of the UN Security Council, as this body "fosters negotiations, imposes sanctions, and authorises the use of force, including the deployment of peacekeeping missions"²⁰. Any large-scale conflict would likely involve these nations, and their geopolitical interests, alliances, and rivalries would significantly influence the dynamics of the war. Moreover, he states that alliances and treaties are critical factors to consider in the event of a regional conflict. In numerous countries, treaties and alliances govern their responsibilities in the event of conflict. From a neorealist perspective, the geopolitical environment of the Asia-Pacific region is characterised by intricate power relationships and strategic partnerships. For several decades, the United States has maintained a significant geopolitical presence in the area through a system of bilateral security agreements and collaborations. China's emergence as a dominant global force has prompted a strategic reaction from the United States, intensifying competition between the two nations. According to Delovarova and Yermekov (2021,38-39), this has led the US to embrace the concept of a "free and open Indo-Pacific" region while categorising China as a revisionist power²¹. The principles of neorealism have compelled both countries to incorporate the balance of power into their foreign policy considerations, transforming their relationship from collaboration to rivalry.

¹⁶HY Kavindi Kawshalya, 'Sri Lanka's Strategic Location and Indian Ocean Hegemony: Special Reference to the New Maritime Silk Road', *Journal of International Studies*, 2020, 157.

¹⁷Ashok Kapur, *Geopolitics and the Indo-Pacific Region* (London: Routledge, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429425615>.

¹⁸A. Seneviratne, W. Nalawatta, and S. Weeraratn, 'Sri Lanka between Geopolitical Interests of China and India', 2017, <http://ir.kdu.ac.lk/handle/345/1716>.

¹⁹Wayne Bert, 'Global Dominance and International Relations Theory', ed. Thanh Duong, *International Studies Review* 6, no. 2 (2004): 321–23.

²⁰The UN Security Council | Council on Foreign Relations', *The UN Security Council*, 26 February 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/background/un-security-council>.

²¹L. Delovarova and A. Yermekov, 'Some Aspects of China's Foreign Policy Securitization through the Prism of Geopolitical Rivalry with the United States in the Asia-Pacific Region: Main Aspects and Dynamics of Relations', *KazNU BULLETIN. International Relations and International Law Serie 94* (1 June 2021), <https://doi.org/10.26577/irilj.2021.v94.i2.04>.

For instance, “the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) serves as a military alliance between several North American and European nations”²², where any aggression towards one member is deemed an attack on all, “as NATO marks its seventy-fifth birthday, the alliance is beginning to explore a larger role for itself in the Indo-Pacific”²³. Similarly, security arrangements in the Asia-Pacific region, such as the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty and the US–South Korea Mutual Defence Treaty, would be activated in the event of a conflict in that area. The crucial issue of territorial disputes and regional conflicts in the Asia-Pacific has significantly shaped the geopolitical landscape of regional conflicts. Based on the independent think tank program Global Conflict Tracker 1 Council on Foreign Relations (2024), several regions around the world are characterised by tensions and unresolved disputes, as most conflicts stem from the Asia-Pacific region, such as the South China Sea, the Korean Peninsula, and ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. These hotspots have the potential to escalate into wider conflicts, drawing in not only the immediate parties involved but also their allies and partners. Control and access to valuable resources are crucial aspects of geopolitics in the context of regional conflict.

In any regional conflict, access to essential resources such as oil, natural gas, and strategic minerals plays a crucial role in driving the actions of the nations involved. Additionally, Sweijs et al. (2010, 17-18) refers to the control over critical trade routes and strategic chokepoints, such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Malacca Strait, which are in the Asia-Pacific region, as a contentious issue, as it is vital for the transportation of goods and resources²⁴. Furthermore, non-state actors, including terrorist organisations and insurgent groups, cannot be disregarded in the context of regional conflict. Aina (2023, 177-178) argues that these actors often operate beyond the boundaries of traditional geopolitical structures and can significantly affect the trajectory of events²⁵. Their capacity to engage in asymmetric warfare and unconventional tactics could present a substantial challenge to conventional military forces and further add to the complexity of the geopolitical environment. The neorealist perspective offers a lens through which to examine these interactions, emphasising the crucial role of equilibrating power and forming strategic partnerships to preserve stability and security within the Asia-Pacific region.

Given its potential for regional conflict, Rumley (2003,321) refers to the importance of the Asia-Pacific region because of its geopolitical significance and the presence of major powers²⁶. As an island nation situated in the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka occupies a strategic location that may prove crucial in any conflict. This focus article explores Sri Lanka’s role in the Asia-Pacific arena of regional conflict, considering its strategic position, political dynamics, and potential impact on global security issues. Sri Lanka’s strategic location at the intersection of major sea lanes connecting the East and West makes it a crucial point in the Asia-Pacific region. The country’s ports, particularly the Hambantota Port, have garnered the attention of global powers such as China and India because of their significance in global maritime trade and security issues. In times of conflict in the Asia-Pacific area, Sri Lanka’s ports could prove to be vital assets for the mobilisation of naval fleets and logistical support, making the country an essential focal point for military operations and alliances in the Indian Ocean. ‘The South Asian region which is a sub-terrain in the Asia-Pacific region, has historically been a significant geopolitical area owing to its strategic location and the presence of major powers such as India, Pakistan, and China’²⁷. In the event of a hypothetical regional conflict, this region would undoubtedly become a critical and fiercely contested battleground. This assessment examines the geopolitical importance of South Asia in the context of regional conflict and its potential consequences for the region and the world as a whole. South Asia’s significance stems from its proximity to significant global trade routes, abundant natural resource reserves, and geopolitical position as a link between the Middle East, Central Asia and East Asia²⁸.

²²‘NATO vs SCO: A New Multipolar Order’, Synergia Foundation, 21 June 2019, <https://www.synergiafoundation.org/insights/analyses-assessments/nato-vs-sco-new-multipolar-order>.

²³David Sacks, ‘Does NATO Have a Role in Asia? | Council on Foreign Relations’, 30 May 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/does-nato-have-role-asia>.

²⁴Tim Sweijs et al., ‘The Maritime Future of the Indian Ocean’, *The Maritime Future of the Indian Ocean* (Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2010), A.

²⁵Folahanmi Aina, ‘“Phantom Operators”: Special Operations Forces and Asymmetric Warfare in Northern Nigeria.’, *Defence Studies* 23, no. 2 (3 April 2023): 177–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2023.2206958>.

²⁶Dennis Rumley, ‘The Asia-Pacific Region and the New World Order’, *Ekistics* 70, no. 422/423 (2003): 321–26.

²⁷Stephen Nagy, ‘The Maritime Silk Road and Japan’s Indo-Pacific Engagement: The Utility of a Sri Lanka-Japan Strategic Partnership’, *Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka, INSSL DEFENCE Review* 2018, II (2018): 23–36.

²⁸Stephen Nagy, 2018. ‘The Maritime Silk Road and Japan’s Indo-Pacific Engagement: The Utility of a Sri Lanka-Japan Strategic Partnership’. *Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka, INSSL DEFENCE Review* 2018, II: 23–36.

Furthermore, the region is home to two nuclear-armed nations, India and Pakistan, which add a layer of complexity to the political landscape. In the event of a regional conflict, Das (2023) argues that major powers would likely aim to assert dominance and control over South Asia. Furthermore, “South Asia is the only region that consists of a nuclear trijunction border held by India, Pakistan, and China, who are referred to as nuclear power”²⁹.

India, with its expanding economy and military prowess, would be a crucial participant in this hypothetical conflict in the future. Its enduring alliances with the United States and other Western nations could exacerbate the situation, possibly entangling them in hostility. India mostly focuses on a “neighbourhood-first foreign policy”³⁰. India primarily utilises soft-power diplomacy to foster friendly relationships with its neighbouring countries, excluding Pakistan. However, recent developments in India, such as the rise of geopolitical and territorial expansionist movements and Hindutva fascism, have prompted controversy among neighbouring states. For instance, in recent times, these movements have gained significant traction, posing a challenge to India’s secular democracy and its multicultural nature. The Hindutva ideology has been criticised for promoting Hindu nationalism at the expense of minority rights and religious diversity. As a result, tensions have escalated among various religious and ethnic groups, leading to concerns about social cohesion and the future of India’s diverse society³¹. These developments have been fuelled by political parties and dialogues in India, “leading to anti-Indian political movements, such as ‘India Out in Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, and Bhutan’”³². Additionally, these developments have prompted neighbouring states to seek alternative geopolitical corporations. “To replace India as a geopolitical corporation partner, South Asian states often seek to establish partnerships with China”³³. China’s influence in the South Asian region includes the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Moreover, Pakistan’s robust partnership with China and its nuclear stockpile would render it a formidable force in any conceivable regional turmoil. China’s close relationship with Pakistan has raised concerns among other major powers, such as India and the United States. The ongoing South China Sea dispute and China’s expanding military presence in the Indian Ocean emphasise the region’s strategic significance in global power dynamics.

Identifying Sri Lanka’s Position in a Hypothetical Regional Conflict

Sri Lanka’s approach to broader regional conflicts is complex and multifaceted, informed by its strategic location in the Indian Ocean and a range of internal and external factors. Traditionally, the country has followed a non-alignment policy, seeking to maintain equitable relations with major regional powers. Abeyagoonasekera (2021) argues that this approach has been transformed into a “multialigned” foreign policy, particularly during the presidency of Mahinda Rajapaksa, as Sri Lanka sought to balance the competing interests of regional and extra-regional powers, including India, China, and the United States³⁴. The previous ruling government during 2022-2024 aims for an ‘equidistant’ foreign policy, striving to maintain neutrality amidst global power struggles. Furthermore, Wijekoon, Pramono, and Hadisancoko (2023, 336-337) argues that the role of [certain] South Indian political parties in shaping Indian foreign policy towards the separatism issue in Sri Lanka demonstrates the intricate interplay of [regional dynamics in determining foreign policy outcomes]³⁵. Sri Lanka’s foreign policy in global conflicts is marked by a strategic balancing act shaped by its geostrategic location and the need to achieve development objectives. Although the country has displayed a preference for non-alignment and broader alignment, its domestic political changes and interactions with major powers

²⁹Debak Das, ‘The State of Nuclear Instability in South Asia: India, Pakistan, and China | Lawfare’, *LAWFARE*, 3 September 2023, <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/the-state-of-nuclear-instability-in-south-asia-india-pakistan-and-china>.

³⁰Pradipta Roy, ‘Decoding India’s ‘neighbourhood First’ Policy’, *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 76, no. 4 (2015): 1024–29.

³¹□ Hindutva Fascism Threatens the World’s Largest Democracy - The Loop’, accessed 27 February 2024, <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/hindutva-fascism-is-threatening-the-worlds-largest-democracy/>.

³²Faisal Mahmud, ‘“India Out” Campaigns Simmer in Bangladesh amid Election Fallout | Business and Economy News | Al Jazeera’, 7 February 2024, Xav.

³³Darshana Baruah, Tanvi Madan, and Constantino Xavier, ‘How India and China Compete in Non-Aligned South Asia and the Indian Ocean’, accessed 18 October 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-india-and-china-compete-in-non-aligned-south-asia-and-the-indian-ocean/>.

³⁴Asanga Abeyagoonasekera, ‘Sri Lanka’s Foreign Policy: Past, Present, and Future: Infrastructure Diplomacy and Contemporary Chinese Affairs’, in *Routledge Handbook on South Asian Foreign Policy* (Routledge, 2021).

³⁵Whmck Wijekoon, B. Pramono, and R. E. Hadisancoko, ‘South India Political Parties Influence on India’s Foreign Policy of Tamil Separatism in Sri Lanka | Technium Social Sciences Journal’, 8 February 2023, <https://techniumscience.com/index.php/socialsciences/article/view/8373>.

continue to impact its foreign policy. Abeyagoonasekera (2021) stated that Sri Lanka's main challenge is to preserve its sovereignty and national interests while engaging with powerful states and dealing with the pressures of global conflicts.³⁶

Neutrality as a geopolitical posture

In the hypothetical scenario of a Global North and Global South confrontation leading to war, Sri Lanka would find itself in a difficult position when it comes to a neutral stance, since it also adopts a non-aligned foreign policy. According to Borchard (1941, 619-621), neutrality is the state of not supporting or helping either side in a conflict³⁷. This stance is within the realm of non-aligned foreign policy, since non-aligned foreign policy essentially means that nations choose to remain unattached to a particular great power or power bloc. This is especially true when key economic and strategic partners are involved in global conflicts. Both factions in the above context contribute to the Sri Lankan economy, and their invested assets are in Sri Lanka. It would take a lot of effort to be neutral in this conflict, as most of its key partners and conflict-engaged states are in the Asia-Pacific region. Sri Lanka might draw inspiration from Switzerland's armed neutrality experience during World WW2³⁸. However, the authors stress that the Swiss neutrality experience represents a long-standing and very specific case, and that analogies between WW2 and some hypothetical future regional conflict could be drawn in very selective and targeted aspects (for the purpose of examining potential lessons for Sri Lanka's decision-makers, notwithstanding the vast geographical, temporal, and other differences between the two observed situations). Based on Switzerland's policy, Sri Lanka can refrain from engaging in conflict by promoting the notion of "economic value"³⁹. This approach could be beneficial to both sides, as Sri Lanka's status as a financial hub and its industrial capabilities make it valuable to both factions, considering the current economic objectives and aspirations that are applicable now and will continue to be relevant in the future. Furthermore, Sri Lanka should build a strategy inspired by Switzerland's 'National Redoubt Strategy' by banning any foreign military presence in the country.

In addition to the possible scenario of a regional conflict as a result of a broader regional conflict between China and India, understanding the endeavour to maintain neutrality in the India-China conflict is an exceedingly challenging task for Sri Lanka, given its longstanding and unique relationships with both nations. Furthermore, Sri Lanka's geopolitical proximity to the conflict zone complicates the preservation of neutrality. Although Sri Lanka managed to maintain neutrality during the 1962 India-China conflict under the leadership of Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike, when the country played a mediating role in the conflict as the leader of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the current situation is markedly different. The intricate nature of the conflict has evolved, with both China and India making significant investments in Sri Lanka, which they are determined to protect. The Chinese-funded Hambantota Port and Indian-owned oil refinery tanks in Trincomalee are prime examples of these strategic investments, which might have a potential wartime role for these countries. However, it is still possible to preserve neutrality by diversifying the economy and security apparatus and engaging with other regional and global powers. For instance, deepening ties with Japan and the United States to counterbalance and appease Indian influence and deepening ties with Iran, ASEAN, and Russia to counterbalance and appease Chinese influence through "broader alignment" can help preserve neutrality.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, undertaking a strategic course of geopolitical positioning amidst a global conflict will prove to be arduous, as Sri Lanka's diplomatic manoeuvring must be executed effectively and managed prudently.

Non-belligerency as a geopolitical posture

However, non-belligerency is a contentious and challenging aspect of conflict. In reference to Borchard (1941, 624), non-belligerency in war is referred to as a state that is not actively engaged in war by choosing a side, but rather engaging in war as a bystander and helping both sides as per their preference. Sri Lanka is actively engaged in both the East and the West. It has the potential to become a non-belligerent partner in broader regional conflicts. One of the avenues Sri Lanka could take during a hypothetical regional conflict might be to draw inspiration from Sweden's non-belligerent policy⁴¹.

³⁶Abeyagoonasekera, 'Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy'.

³⁷Edwin Borchard, 'War, Neutrality and Non-Belligerency', *The American Journal of International Law* 35, no. 4 (1941): 618-25, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2192562>.

³⁸G. Kreis, *Switzerland and the Second World War* (Taylor & Francis, 2000), Ali.

³⁹Kreis.

⁴⁰Ameer Ali, 'The Sri Lankan Ethnic Morass and China-India Geopolitical Manoeuvres', *Economic and Political Weekly* 46, no. 34 (2011): 39-45.

⁴¹Why Didn't the Nazis Invade Sweden? DOCUMENTARY (Kings and Generals, 2023), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8UsQnaKIw8k>.

Like Switzerland, Sweden had a long-standing tradition of neutrality, including during World WW2. Its experiences, as well as analogies, could only be partially addressed, as in the case of Switzerland. Despite being closer to Nazi Germany during WWII, it managed to conduct economic diplomacy and activities with the Allied powers while adhering to and appeasing Berlin with their demands. Furthermore, in the context of the China-India conflict, maintaining a non-belligerent stance would represent a potentially optimal solution, albeit with some challenges. Sri Lanka has historical relationships with both China and India. Therefore, utilising diplomacy within the two states and providing services both fair and square in terms of logistics and supply chains would preserve the chance of securing the sovereignty and non-aligned status of the country. However, this would need to be achieved through strong political stability and diplomacy. In the past, Sri Lanka adopted a stance of non-belligerency in the 1971 India-Pakistan War, which Nalawatta and Weeraratne (2016, 1-2) states that Sri Lanka provided logistic facilities for the Pakistani war effort while maintaining good diplomatic relations with India⁴². Therefore, Sri Lanka might follow a geopolitically non-belligerent course in the event of a potential India-China conflict. Sri Lanka might have the potential to look into such policies and appeal to both sides through proper diplomacy and concession. However, in a potential non-belligerent status, it is important to manoeuvre geopolitical relations strategically, as “Non-belligerency considered a double-edged sword” which can potentially provoke any alliance or state, resulting in a confrontation with the pertinent state.⁴³

The analysis of a geopolitical alliance posture in a regional conflict

Geopolitical considerations play a significant role in determining which alliances are formed. This historical record attests to the significance of geopolitics in maintaining alliances over time in the region. For instance, some Central European countries were closer to the Axis during WWII not only because of territorial and other pretensions but also because of traditional ties with Germany and the strong geopolitical alignment. As mentioned in this research article, there is a potential broader regional conflict between the Global South and Global North states. It is imperative to consider that Sri Lanka's precarious conflict position must address the geopolitical element, which could potentially result in appeasement towards the eastern faction, given that its eastern partners are the most proximate states to its area.

For instance, India, Pakistan, China, and Iran are the closest states to Sri Lanka, thereby ensuring that Sri Lanka's strong application to join the Eastern states led the faction through geopolitical reasoning. Even though this geopolitical posturing destroys Sri Lanka's ties built with utmost commitment to the West, it further strengthens Sri Lanka's geopolitical security and its relations with the East.

However, the deterrence of diplomatic Western partners in Sri Lanka may lead to repercussions and challenges for the country. Based on the China-India conflict, geopolitical configurations are very complicated for Sri Lanka. Owing to the strong bilateral relationship between Sri Lanka, India, and China, the geopolitical posturing of an alliance considering the conflict will be a compressive option with its benefits and repercussions. Sri Lanka's close geopolitical proximity to India and China places it in a precarious position. India and China are crucial partners in Sri Lanka's economic development and future prosperity. However, considering the geopolitical context, joining an Indian-led alliance may be a better choice for the country. Nevertheless, the increasing Indian influence and the possibility of it leading to the implementation of the Akhand Bharat Plan pose a potential security threat to Sri Lanka's sovereignty. Additionally, alignment with China could damage the country's diplomatic status and impact its position in the international community. This could lead to the potential antagonisation of India and other states, particularly those in the US-led NATO alliance. Therefore, a geopolitical alliance posturing in this conflict will face difficulties which will create a dilemma for Sri Lankan foreign state relations.

Conclusion

Conclusively, Sri Lanka's strategic positioning in the Indian Ocean underlines its potentially significant role in global geopolitics with regard to large-scale wars that might take place sometime in the future. Therefore, the country must be carefully considered within the complex power game between India and China and the possibility of East-West confrontation in the Asia-Pacific region. The action for Sri Lanka should do with a view to protecting its interests and ensuring security would be to follow a balanced foreign policy, develop an integrated national strategy aimed at preparing the country for any probable conflict, and diversify

⁴²Wasana Nalawatta and Shalini Weeraratne, 'India- Pakistan War of 1971: A Sri Lankan Perspective', in *Defence & Strategic Studies (9th International Research Conference-KDU, Sri Lanka, KDU, Sri Lanka: KDU, Sri Lanka, 2016)*, 25–29.

⁴³Borchard, 'War, Neutrality and Non-Belligerency'.

economic and security relationships with more partners. Through these measures, Sri Lanka would be able to assert its sovereignty, reduce its vulnerability to external pressure, and gain a neutral position in regional affairs. Only then would it be possible to develop a thought-out strategy for Sri Lanka's development, represent its national interests, and participate in the stabilisation of the already complex geopolitical region.

This research opens new avenues for exploring the roles of small states in multilateral forums and regional organisations to enhance their global influence and build alliances, while also investigating geopolitical dynamics in the Indian Ocean and strategies for reducing dependence on powerful nations through concepts such as multi-alignment.

***Opinions expressed by the authors are independent and do not reflect any institute, Ministry or University they are affiliated with.**

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SECURITY AND RESILIENCE - CHINA AND RUSSIA

The China-Russia Strategic Alliance in the Arctic – A Strategic Cooperation or an Uneasy Tango

Gargi AWASHTI (India)

On March 12, the 14th meeting of the Arctic Council marked the conclusion of Norway's term its chair. The Arctic Council serves as the apex intergovernmental forum fostering regional cooperation and promoting governance in the Arctic region. The forum comprises eight permanent members – Canada, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, United States, and Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands).

US President Donald Trump's claim to seek control over the territory of Greenland has complicated matters further. Since assuming office in January 2025, Trump has maintained that American control of Greenland's territory would be essential for Washington's national security, as well as international security. Importantly, US interests in the region are not limited to matters of hard security but also remain anchored on the vast natural resources available in the region. Given the escalating strategic race for critical minerals and rare earth elements, the Arctic region is likely to emerge as an important area. Given the need for Russia to find alternatives for enhancing cooperation in the Arctic, China has emerged as a crucial partner. Chinese ambitions in the Arctic have also seen a rise. In 2014, President Xi Jinping made China's ambitions to emerge as a "Polar Power" public. Since then, China has called itself a "near-Arctic state", signaling a push for greater involvement in Arctic affairs.

China does not have any coastal exposure to the Arctic nor does it claim control over any sovereign territory within the Arctic region. Russia-China naval cooperation in the Arctic region has, therefore, ushered in a new strategic dimension into the evolving geopolitical matrix in the region. This emerging axis must serve as a reminder to the Arctic countries of the need to sustain continued cooperation in the region. Given these evolving developments, the Arctic Council is faced with critical challenges. Arctic exceptionalism is withering. With competing interests in the region, the lack of effective governance mechanisms therein, the



Source: https://www.drishtiiias.com/images/uploads/1661845224_Arctic_Regions_Drishti_IAS_English.png

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Arctic runs the risk of rapidly emerging as a strategic flashpoint. Notably, these developments will have severe consequences at a global scale.

Growing climate concerns in the Arctic resulting in the melting of ice poses the risk of rising sea levels. The melting of Arctic ice has also opened new avenues for expanding networks of shipping routes. This is likely to result in the entry of new players and stakeholders in the region. While this provides opportunities to expand global supply chains and enhance global trade, effective governance will become a major imperative for the region. Will the potential entry of new players into the Arctic require a wider reimagining of the Arctic governance architecture? How will the Arctic governance mechanism confront the changing geopolitical calculus in the region? The Arctic Council will need to delicately balance these pressing questions. However, for this, a normative acknowledgement of withering Arctic exceptionalism will need to be a starting point.

Over the past three years, Russia's cooperation with China has reached unprecedented levels. Still, there is one area where the two countries have been unable to find common ground: the Arctic. Even in the current geopolitical climate, the differences between Moscow and Beijing's approaches to the Arctic have so far proven too great to overcome, limiting China's advances in the Far North. Publicly, Russia and China maintain they have a "comprehensive strategic partnership," which ostensibly extends to Arctic issues. Yet their interests in the region can be quite disparate. China first took a serious interest in the Far North in the early 2010s, initially seeking a seat on the Arctic Council, the region's most important multilateral organization. Russia did not immediately agree to admit China, setting two conditions: that China respect the sovereignty of regional powers and abide by freedom-of-navigation rules. In 2013, China was finally granted observer status, and with it, a platform to articulate its regional objectives. In 2018, China's State Council published the country's first-ever white paper on Arctic policy.

The document described China as a "near-Arctic state" with a vested interest in the region's affairs. It argued that the Arctic belonged to all mankind, and so China had the right to enter its waters and airspace, just like other "constructive" parties. The Arctic was easily integrated into China's global Belt and Road Initiative—in the form of a proposed "Polar Silk Road"—and its vision of a "Community of Common Destiny." Indeed, all of China's statements and documents on the region reiterate its willingness to engage in multilateral cooperation for the benefit of the Arctic. Meanwhile, the military-political dimension always goes unmentioned, with neither the 2018 white paper nor any subsequent pronouncements hinting at the expansionist designs about which then U.S. secretary of state Mike Pompeo warned in 2019. Russia's Arctic policy is based on altogether different principles. For Moscow, it is all about unlocking the region's economic potential and defending sovereignty. Essentially, Russia wishes to commercialize the region—with an emphasis on oil and gas exploration and the creation of a transportation corridor—and militarize it, too. Furthermore, Russia would do this unilaterally, all references to dialogue and cooperation with regional partners having been removed from the country's main documents on the Arctic amid the breakdown in its relations with the West. However, this partnership could not be extended to other areas of cooperation.

Take infrastructure: in 2016, the state-owned China Poly Group signed a memorandum of understanding with the Arkhangelsk region administration on the construction of a deep-sea port in Arkhangelsk. China was expected to invest \$78 million in the project and connect the port with the proposed Belkomur railway line. But the project never transpired. Working together on infrastructure is difficult when Russia sees every new project through a national lens while China views it as a building block in a Polar Silk Road, an initiative Russia cannot help but be wary of in its multilateralism.

Russia's break with the West and increased economic dependence on China has not smoothed over these tensions, even after repeated commitments by Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping to strengthen cooperation in the Arctic, and the establishment of a bilateral Sub-commission on Cooperation on the Northern Sea Route. Since 2022, Beijing has taken the same stance on the Arctic as it has on the war in Ukraine as a whole: neither condemning nor supporting Moscow. Following the invasion, the seven other members of the Arctic Council refused to attend any meetings chaired by Russia, leading China to declare that it saw no point in excluding Russia and suspend its own participation in the organization. Russia and China play up their scientific and cultural cooperation on Arctic issues, but their practical use has been doubtful. While academic contacts are often cited as a success story for Russia and China, they grew less frequent after February 2022.

Chinese students still attend academic conferences in Russia, and joint expeditions to the Arctic continue, but these initiatives do little to meaningfully deepen Sino-Russian cooperation on regional issues. China genuinely values its relationships with the Arctic's other powers, and does not want to risk alienating them by getting overly close to Russia. Since becoming an Arctic Council observer, Beijing has looked for opportunities to work not only with Moscow but also with others in the region, including Iceland and Norway.

Admittedly, its proposals are given less and less consideration nowadays, with national security concerns usually cited as the reason.

Claiming neutrality while simultaneously developing relations with Russia, China has taken a wait-and-see position toward its strategic partner, with respect to the Arctic as well as in general. And as Beijing waits for the resolution of Russia's conflict with the West, it continues to take what it can from Moscow, starting with its know-how—by now a familiar dynamic in their relationship.

SECURITY AND RESILIENCE - NATO

Cyber Geostrategy: NATO's Digital Frontiers in the Era of AI and Quantum

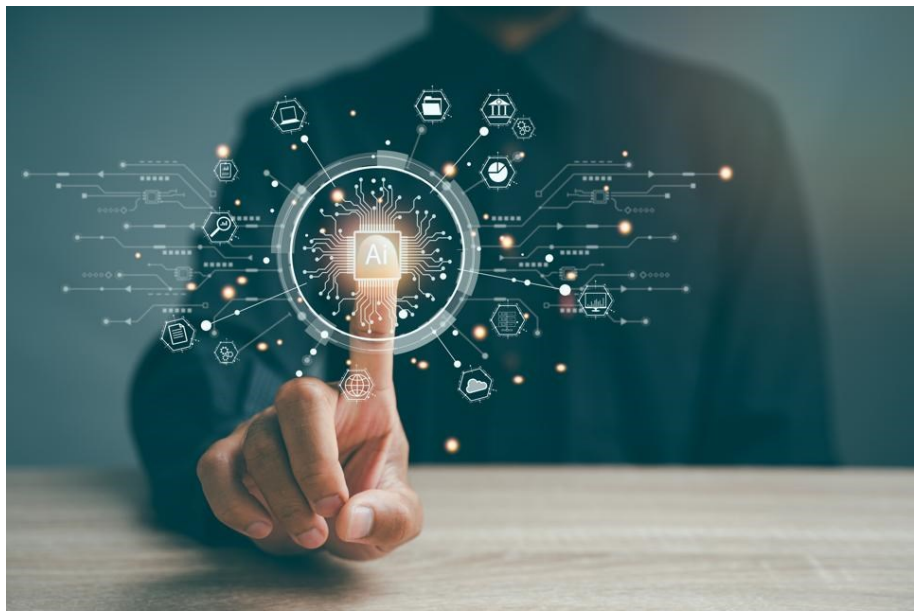
Momodou Ted MCEWAN (Great Britain)

Introduction: The Rise of Digital Warfare

In an era defined by accelerating technological change and increasing geopolitical instability, the security architecture of the world's most powerful military alliance is being tested not only on the battlefield but in code.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), long known for its conventional military supremacy, is navigating a pivotal transformation. As the Alliance confronts rising tensions with Russia, cyber threats from hostile actors, and the disruptive power of artificial intelligence (AI) and quantum computing, it is being forced to redefine its geostrategic priorities and defensive doctrines.

Today's conflicts are no longer bound by physical borders. The front-lines extend into servers, satellites, and social media feeds. The age of digital warfare has arrived and NATO's ability to adapt will shape the balance of global power in the decades to come.



Source: <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbestechcouncil/2025/01/21/the-state-of-ai-cybersecurity-in-2025-and-beyond/>

I. Cyberspace as a Theater of War

NATO formally declared cyberspace an operational domain in 2016, alongside land, sea, air, and space. This recognition was not symbolic. It reflected a growing awareness that military advantage can be gained or lost within milliseconds.

In recent years, adversaries have targeted NATO member states with increasingly frequent and coordinated cyberattacks. From ransomware¹ campaigns and disinformation operations to the infiltration of energy grids and defense systems, the scale and scope of digital aggression is intensifying.

¹A type of malicious software designed to block access to a computer system until a sum of money is paid.

The war in Ukraine has underscored this trend. Prior to the 2022 invasion, Ukrainian networks were hit by waves of Russian-linked malware designed to destabilize communications, sabotage infrastructure, and sow confusion. These attacks continued throughout the war, often timed to precede physical offensives.

Cybersecurity experts now speak of a “perpetual battlefield” where attacks are continuous, attribution is murky, and the rules of engagement are dangerously ill defined.

I have spoken with senior cyber officers and policy analysts from Brussels to Washington, and the consensus is unanimous: the Alliance is operating in a new domain where deterrence is not measured by tanks and troops, but by resilience, redundancy, and real-time response.

II. The Strategic Implications of AI

Artificial intelligence is reshaping military power at a foundational level. NATO’s defense ecosystem already layered with legacy systems and diverse national capabilities is now integrating AI for surveillance, targeting, threat detection, logistics, and autonomous systems.

AI has already proven its utility in analyzing satellite imagery, tracking troop movements, and detecting anomalies in network traffic that might indicate cyber infiltration. In operational environments, AI can assist in dynamic resource allocation, battlefield simulations, and autonomous drone coordination delivering strategic decisions faster than human command chains can match.

Yet, with capability comes complexity. Military analysts warn that as NATO increasingly incorporates AI into command-and-control systems, ethical and doctrinal questions will become more urgent. Who is accountable when an autonomous system makes a mistake? Can AI-driven decisions be trusted in high-stakes nuclear or kinetic scenarios? And perhaps most crucially: how do member states ensure AI does not widen the technological gap between larger and smaller allies?

In 2021, NATO released its Principles of Responsible Use for AI in Defence a set of guidelines promoting reliability, transparency, and accountability. But these remain aspirational. In practice, the rapid adoption of AI, especially in bilateral or national procurement programs, often outpaces the establishment of interoperability or shared standards.

As one senior advisor at NATO’s Communications and Information Agency in The Hague told me, “We are building the plane while flying it. The challenge is making sure it does not crash mid-air.”

III. Quantum Computing: The Next Digital Arms Race

While AI dominates current defense debates, another, potentially more disruptive force looms on the horizon: quantum computing.

Quantum computers, unlike traditional binary machines, use qubits to perform calculations at exponential speeds. This technological leap has the power to break most existing forms of encryption, including the cryptographic systems that protect NATO’s communications, financial systems, and intelligence sharing platforms.

Several NATO members are heavily investing in quantum technology. The United States leads in hardware development, while countries like the UK, France, and Germany are building national quantum strategies. NATO, for its part, has recognized the threat and opportunity posed by quantum. Its Emerging and Disruptive Technologies (EDT) agenda lists quantum among its top priorities.

But defense experts remain cautious. NATO lacks a unified quantum roadmap. Research funding is fragmented, and collaboration between allies is often siloed by national security constraints.

The potential risks are staggering. If a hostile actor state or non-state achieves quantum superiority, they could theoretically intercept and decrypt NATO’s classified data in real time. Secure satellite communications, defense logistics, nuclear command systems none would be safe.

Recognizing this, NATO has initiated early-stage coordination on post-quantum cryptography. But full implementation across all systems could take years. And time may not be on NATO’s side.

IV. Hybrid Warfare and the Rise of the “Digital Soldier”

One of the most under-discussed impacts of AI and quantum innovation is their role in shaping hybrid warfare an approach that blends conventional tactics with cyber, economic, and information based operations.

We are witnessing the emergence of what some military theorists call the “Digital Soldier.” This is not simply a human enhanced by wearable tech or advanced weaponry. It is a soldier operating within a digital ecosystem connected to data streams, guided by predictive algorithms, and potentially backed by autonomous systems.

NATO is testing several such capabilities. Smart helmets equipped with augmented reality, biometric surveillance platforms, and AI-powered language translation are already in prototype or deployment phases. Training regimes are being updated to reflect the reality that future conflicts may be fought with as much bandwidth as bullets.

Yet this evolution carries risks. Increased digital dependence creates vulnerabilities. If battlefield systems are compromised whether by a quantum decryption event, a malware attack, or GPS spoofing the consequences could be catastrophic. NATO is investing in “digital hardening,” but it is unclear whether current systems are ready for the scale of disruption that future technologies may unleash.

V. The Geopolitical Stakes: Leadership or Lag

The broader geopolitical implications of NATO’s digital evolution cannot be overstated. China, Russia, Iran, and other strategic competitors are developing their own versions of AI enabled warfare and quantum research. Beijing’s “civil military fusion” strategy, for example, is blurring the line between tech sector innovation and state security goals.

In this environment, NATO must not only defend its networks it must lead the global conversation on responsible use, technological ethics, and multilateral cyber governance. Failure to do so risks ceding narrative control to authoritarian actors who see digital dominance as a shortcut to global influence.

The establishment of NATO’s Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA) and the NATO Innovation Fund are positive steps. But they must be matched by real-world operational capabilities, joint doctrine reform, and cultural change within the Alliance.

Cybersecurity cannot remain the exclusive domain of IT departments. It must become a command priority at every level of NATO’s operational hierarchy.

Conclusion: Strategic Vigilance in a New Domain

We are witnessing a profound transformation in how war is waged, power is projected, and peace is preserved. The convergence of artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and hybrid threats is redrawing the map of strategic deterrence. For NATO, this moment is not merely about upgrading digital infrastructure it is about rewriting the very logic of defense.

The Alliance faces both an existential threat and an historic opportunity. If it embraces innovation, invests in collective cyber resilience, and leads the ethical governance of emerging technologies, it can continue to serve as the backbone of global security.

But if it fails to act, the next great conflict may not be fought on the ground or in the air but in the silent spaces between data packets and decision points.

In the digital age, vigilance is victory.

MILITARY DECEPTION AND MEDIA



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Military Deception and Media: A Romanian Perspective

Abstract

This article addresses military deception, as part of information operations, while targeting the military decision maker. To this end, particular focus is given to the role of traditional and social media.

In this piece, bibliographical research is combined with an exclusive interview with a Romanian expert who requested not to be identified. This interviewee reflects on military deception conducted through media as well as pressure exerted on decision makers by both public opinion and politicians. He also examines the Romanian context, including aspects related to applying Artificial Intelligence to military deception and to counter-deception.

Keywords: counter-deception; information operations; media; military deception; Romania.

Introduction

This article, which focuses on military deception (MILDEC), most notably on information/media-related aspects, combines bibliographical research with an exclusive interview with a Romanian expert who requested anonymity.

Throughout history, deception has been a human trait and, though informally, deception has always been used in warfare (Hutchinson 2006, p. 217). From the 20th century onward, when it was first being formally used by governments and the military, the theoretical basis for deception started being developed (Hutchinson 2006, p. 217).

Simply put, deceiving means leading someone to believe in something that isn't true (*Marine-Air Ground Task Force Information Operations* April 4, 2018, p. 1-5). In general terms, deception consists of a deliberate distortion of reality that one person imposes on another: the deceiver's goal is to gain an advantage (*Deception* 2024, p.1-1). Specifically, military deception amounts to actions deliberately carried out in order to mislead military and paramilitary decision makers, or those in violent extremist organizations, leading the adversary to act or not to act, according to the deceiver's wishes, thereby contributing toward the success of the friendly forces' mission (*DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* March 2017, p. 154). For this to occur, it is vital to be able to influence the targeted adversary decision maker's behavior, shaping their perceptions and attitudes (*Allied Joint Doctrine for Operations Security and Deception* March 2020, p.4). MILDEC seeks to confound the enemy, who is thus rendered vulnerable to surprise (Swift April 2024).

Planning for MILDEC needs to be part of an operation's preliminary stages, aimed at increasing the likelihood of achieving an advantage (*Information in Air Force Operations* February 1, 2023, p. 15). According to Scholes (February 28, 2024), in deception planning, the most important aspect involves stating the goal of deception, that is, what planners want the adversary to do. It is also significant to know how said adversary makes decisions (Scholes February 28, 2024). Deception entails a psychological process where the idea is to achieve a given behavioural response (inaction or action) (*Allied Joint Doctrine for Operations Security and Deception* March 2020, p. 2). This is why, as part of information operations, psychological operations (PSYOPS) are often combined with deception (Muntz 2023). The latter can be envisaged as a mind game taking place between the deceiver and the target (Panagiotis August-September 2016, p. 26). The way the target interprets the information received is of particular importance (Panagiotis August-September 2016, p. 26).

We need to consider that decision makers can be in any environment and at any level (tactical, operational or strategic) and that they can be indirectly targeted, through sensors and influencing groups, for instance (*Allied Joint Doctrine for Operations Security and Deception* March 2020, p. 5 / 7). This calls for an in-depth analysis of the target's information preferences, likely responses and preconceptions (*Allied Joint Doctrine for Operations Security and Deception* March 2020, p. 5). We should point out the importance of analysing the deception target's information environment.

A pivotal aspect of any deception operation is the deception story, consisting of a scenario describing the friendly actions that will be presented in order to lead the deception target to take on the desired perception (*Military Deception* January 26, 2012, p. I-5). As for its makeup, the deception story is both a creative and analytical process covering a wide range of information on enemy data acquisition and processing (*Military Deception* January 26, 2012, p. I-5).

As part of MILDEC, conduits are understood to be intelligence or information gateways to the deception target, including foreign and domestic media (*Army Support to Military Deception* February 2019, p. 2-8). In this regard, it is significant to perform a conduit analysis, with detailed mapping of individual conduits, that is, information pathways to the potential deception targets (*Army Support to Military Deception* February 2019, p. 2-8). We should bear in mind that the deceptive message is not always sent directly to a deception target; it's quite the contrary (*Military Deception* January 26, 2012, p. I-4). Thus being the case, the message is sent to, for example, intelligence collectors or individuals, in hopes that the deceptive message ends up arriving at the deception target (*Military Deception* January 26, 2012, p. I-4).

Over the course of recorded warfare history, military commanders and planners, seeking to decisively gain the upper hand, have sought to deceive their adversaries, as concerns various aspects such as an attack's timing, size or location (Rein 2018, p. 1). Deception was and still remains a crucial aspect of military operations (Rein 2018, p. 1). For a future leader, MILDEC is a vital instrument (Rein 2018, p. 1).

Deception can take on a variety of forms, including the following, among others: feints (*Military Deception* January 26, 2012, p. I-9); disclosing misleading or false information, to generate ambiguity or confusion regarding future actions; decoys to draw attention away from real assets; camouflaging real assets (Hood August 22, 2023).

Information Operations and MILDEC

The ease with which common individuals in today's society can access information has changed the military's perspective on deception (Lawrence July 10, 2024). We can consider that deception is a discrete information-related activity (*Allied Joint Doctrine for Operations Security and Deception* March 2020, p. 2), and that it is even integrated into information operations (*Allied Joint Doctrine for Information Operations* January 2023, p. 43). The practice of deception entails accepting information as the most significant aspect in achieving a competitive advantage (Hutchinson 2006, p. 215). [With a more comprehensive vision, information operations (covering military information support operations (MISO), deception, electronic warfare, cyber operations and information-related capabilities) constitute the basis for arriving at a decision advantage (Cowan July 4, 2025). In reality, information-related capabilities are crucial for effective deception, which comprises a critical aspect of multi-domain operations (MDO) (Cowan July 4, 2025)].

In deception activities, there is information projection, that is, disclosure of information, for the purpose of informing, influencing or deceiving a targeted system or an observer, and information denial; this latter case seeks to destroy or disrupt the information that the opponent needs (*Deception* 2024, p. 1-3). A talented deception planner can creatively combine information denial with information projection and, thus, manage to obtain a few information-based advantages, as is the case with surprise (*Deception* 2024, p. 1-3). However, according to Grohe (November 6, 2007, p. 16), in reality, in the Information Age, the adversary, with access to

multiple information / intelligence sources, including satellites, will be able to predict, with some degree of accuracy, that an attack will take place. As for the other part, the Operational Commander's best use of deception can go by way of not revealing to the adversary the exact time and main point of attack (Grohe November 6, 2007, p. 16).

According to Martin (June 2008, p. 2), deception amounts to a set of actions seeking to manipulate the adversary's information network. This can include the adversary's intelligence system. This expert feels that, as part of a deception campaign, to achieve an information advantage, adversary information and information systems constitute critical targets (Martin June 2008, p. 8). It should be pointed out that deception can even involve manipulating information itself (Lawrence July 10, 2024). [There is a lot in common between MILDEC and operations security (OPSEC), as the latter aims at the following aspects in relation to the adversary: denying information; preventing that which is real from being known; limiting the ability to detect and observe friendly activities, from which useful information can be derived (*Marine-Air Ground Task Force Information Operations* April 4, 2018, p. 3-2).]

Information channels, which are part of deception planning, are used by the deceiver to relay information to the enemy (Panagiotis August-September 2016, p. 32). Obviously, intelligence channels serve to convey information to the targets (Panagiotis August-September 2016, p. 32). In this scenario, there are technical channels (TECHINT), for instance, satellites and computers, as well as human channels (HUMINT), such as agents and double agents (Panagiotis August-September 2016, p. 32).

Propaganda can also be another information channel, as it seeks to influence the populace in general as well as the target's beliefs (Panagiotis August-September 2016, p. 32). In this sphere, in order for the deceiver to attain their objectives, they can use instruments that include the following: traditional media, social media and e-mails (Panagiotis August-September 2016, pp. 32-33).

Diplomacy can be regarded as a channel that the deceiver may use for conveying certain pieces of information to the intended target (Panagiotis August-September 2016, p. 33). The respect and credibility attributed to diplomats in general does not prevent diplomacy from being used for passing on false information to the adversary (Panagiotis August-September 2016, p. 33).

It should be added that the "agents-of-influence" are also considered information channels, while pointing out their ability to be in close contact with government members and, under such circumstances, influence their perspectives and decisions regarding noteworthy topics (Panagiotis August-September 2016, p. 33). This can happen without being aware that those agents are working for foreign governments (Panagiotis August-September 2016, p. 33).

An Operational Commander, in their plan of deception, needs to take into account the information sources used by the adversary as well as the information that is readily available to the latter (Grohe November 6, 2007, pp. 2-3).

In the information age, progress in the field of information and communication technologies has benefited both deception and counterdeception (Panagiotis August-September 2016, pp. 51-52).

Media and Military Deception

Malik (October-December 2009, p. 125) attributes a high degree of importance to news media, within the context of contemporary warfare. This author states that military commanders currently can take considerable advantage of working together with media (Malik October-December 2009, p. 125).

The media's relationship with the military depends on the extent to which their civil status can be affected by working with the armed forces (Payne Spring 2005, p. 84). In the midst of a conflict, said relationship will always be noted for some tension between impartiality and balance in journalists' work and the military objectives of those fighting (Payne Spring 2005, p. 84).

In the West, the military shows considerable interest in knowing how it is possible to influence contents disseminated by media (Payne Spring 2005, p. 84). One such way involves deception (Payne Spring 2005, p. 84).

Through the media, deceptive information can be passed on to enemy commanders (Heckman February 2000, p. 9). Deception in the media goes by way of publicly disclosing false information, using, for instance, articles, reports and photographs (Napora December 31, 2023). Currently, using Artificial Intelligence (AI), (deep fake) images can be generated, as part of MILDEC (Mirghahari July 17, 2023). We live in a time when there are several types of deceptive digital influence, such as the following: identity deception; information source deception (Forest Spring 2021, p. 22).

According to Heckman (February 2000, p. ii), in order to deceive the enemy, we need to manipulate the media. Lying to the media can eventually become counterproductive and, as such, this should be properly evaluated (Heckman February 2000, p. ii). This is why (not to mention that disseminating information could affect operational security), an alternative to lying that can be considered involves manipulating the media by controlling the dissemination or access to the truth (Heckman February 2000, p. ii).

As concerns deceptive information, the media are highly effective channels, due to their assigned credibility and the ease with which they are accessed, even in real time (Heckman February 2000, p. 2). When the enemy thinks that their opponent's media are independent, the former feels they are credible intelligence sources (Heckman February 2000, p. 2).



1. Television can be used to convey deceptive information

Media manipulation, when necessary, could be carried out using both active and passive methods (Heckman February 2000, p. 5). The latter is tantamount, for instance, to highlighting certain aspects related to military activities while not mentioning others, during press conferences (Heckman February 2000, p. 5). By way of example, active media manipulation can include certain information leaks from the military, to certain domestic and foreign journalists, or disseminating misinformation on the Internet (Heckman February 2000, p. 6). Social media are also regarded as instruments of deception (Malhotra 2016, p. 61).

In the sphere of active manipulation, we should point out the military's imagination, given their importance in coming up with new and effective forms of manipulation (Heckman February 2000, p. 6). It is certainly of interest to manipulate the media to which the enemy has access (Heckman February 2000, p. 6).

On the one hand, in order to protect operations without resorting to lying, we have the military managing the information by not allowing certain pieces of information to be disseminated, up until the time, later on, when they can become public knowledge (Heckman February 2000, p. 6). On the other hand, we have the media wanting to obtain exclusive information in order to disseminate it as quickly as possible; this way, they might even reveal the military deception (Heckman February 2000, p. 6). There is a greater likelihood of this happening within a context of intense competition among the media (Heckman February 2000, pp. 6-7). From the standpoint of Heckman (February 2000, p. 7), in a few circumstances, the military should control the media to prevent critical information from being disseminated, either accidentally or on purpose. While this is deemed by the media to be censorship, the military calls this operational security (Heckman February 2000, p. 7). The military commander and staff should reflect in depth on MISO's backing of MILDEC operations, while seeking to determine to what extent the possible benefits of deception outweigh any loss of credibility,

in either the short or long term, in relation to the media and to audiences, both locally and regionally (*Military Information Support Operations* November 21, 2014, p. II-7).

The relationship between the success of deception and the media's access to ongoing operations is highly sensitive (*Information in Air Force Operations* February 1, 2023, p. 16). This access is necessary, as it becomes part of an overall strategy, in the field of Operations in the Information Environment; however, if not properly planned and coordinated, deception efforts can also be hampered (*Information in Air Force Operations* February 1, 2023, p. 16).

The Interviewee's Perspective

In an exclusive interview, the Romanian expert feels that, in the gray zone, that is, in a situation where the boundary between war and peace is deliberately blurred, deceptive information plays a critical role. He stresses that, within the said context, deception is a strategic asset, given that it serves to shape the adversary's perceptions without triggering a conventional conflict. The interviewee adds that one of the forms of strategic deception consists of conveying a false image of the military capabilities, concealing weaknesses or hyping up strengths. To this end, he underscores the possible considerable importance of deception on deterrence.

In peacetime, this expert believes that we need to be aware of the need to keep the narrative consistent for a longer period of time, to be able to create the desired perception in the adversary.

The interviewee states that traditional media and the Internet, including social media, as both channels of influence and sources of ambient information, can manage to shape perception. He explains that leaks, official statements, strategic messaging and visual signalling can be used in order to project false narratives. With regard to visual signaling, he provides a few examples: online videos, military parades and exercises. He feels that all of the said instruments are useful for generating ambiguity and leading the adversary to commit miscalculations, as this is a vital objective of deception in the gray zone.

The interviewee considers that an invaluable counterdeception technique consists of examining discrepancies between what a country's media broadcast to domestic audiences and messages geared to foreign target audiences. Still, he acknowledges that, to prevent said contradictions from being detected, in reality, deceptive narratives are often replicated, even domestically. According to him, this occurs particularly in countries with authoritarian regimes or in contexts where information is highly controlled. This specialist points out that, to maintain the deception's credibility, at a strategic level, even domestic audiences need to be misled.

Concerning the dissemination of deceptive information, domestically, through both traditional media and social media, the interviewee states that, as a result of a skillful shaping, public perception can indirectly pressure military leaders. According to him, this pressure can especially occur in democracies or societies with a strong civil oversight in relation to the military. He recognizes that military decision makers, who have classified information at their disposal, seek to shelter themselves from public opinion and be objective; however, actually they are not completely uninfluenced, namely as concerns strategic-level decisions related to expenses in the sphere of defense, national will and conscription.

As pertains to political pressure, the Romanian expert adds that political leaders are often key conduits to military influence. According to him, this is why an effective strategy could include directing deceptive information specifically designed for said politicians, as targets. He underscores that, within a context of political supervision of the military, as is particularly the case in NATO systems, military decisions are not altogether free from political pressures. Taking this into consideration, the interviewee maintains that counterintelligence services should monitor influence operations with political decision makers as targets. He recommends that every intelligence service, both military and civil, join forces and share information, in order to arrive at common intelligence and a precise idea of what is happening in this sphere. To this end, according to him, it becomes necessary to identify channels of communication, such as lobbyists, think tanks, foreign media narratives or misrepresented intelligence. In this case, the interviewee points out that counter-deception, on top of detecting content, should also include understanding who is influencing whom and using what means.

This specialist states that, as part of MILDEC, covert online operations are on the rise, through, for instance, blogs, social media personas and fake websites. He adds that the strategic impact of said operations is significant when coordinated with kinetic or diplomatic activities. With regard to counterdeception, he considers that detecting the operations in question entails combining the following aspects: open-source intelligence (OSINT), content forensics, behavioural analytics and pattern analysis. He further states that, after detecting said covert online operations, responses can include digital takedowns, exposure, attribution efforts, narrative inoculation strategies aimed at minimizing the impact, or potential exploitation conditions, that is, deceiving the deceiver.

The interviewee feels that, currently, as part of Romania's national defence and military doctrines, deceptive information is not explicitly found at as high a level as with other doctrines, such as the U.S. Joint Doctrine on MILDEC. He asserts that, in Romania, there is an adaptation of NATO's AJP 3.10.2. However, according to him, it is through references to stratagems, information operations and influence activities that deception is implicitly acknowledged. He reveals that, in Romania, there is training in deception, but formally this does not constitute a dedicated specialty. This expert acknowledges that a dedicated deception operations curriculum, in harmony with NATO standards, would improve Romania's capabilities in this sphere.

The interviewee states that Romania is taking its first steps in integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) in military applications in general, covering information operations. He maintains that AI, despite not being fully operationalized within the Romanian context, can now constitute support for some domains. He believes that, as part of counterdeception, AI can contribute toward automating the detection of foreign deception campaigns. According to this specialist, AI can also be used for examining the adversary's information ecosystem, in order to detect their vulnerabilities. He feels that AI can generate deceptive content at scale and, in this regard, he refers to deepfakes and synthetic media. Lastly, he adds that AI can improve behavioral prediction for tailored deception. He considers that it constitutes a challenge to strike a balance between every possibility and its ethical use, operational security and doctrinal control.

From the interviewee's standpoint, a military expert in information deception should possess the following features:

- Strong analytical and critical thinking skills
- Understanding of operational art and planning
- Familiarity with psychological operations, intelligence analysis, and cognitive biases
- (In-depth) knowledge of narrative construction, perception management, and adversary decision-making models".

Conclusion

Deception should take up a prominent place in military operations. As part of this work, we assume that, in the military sphere, actions are preceded by corresponding decisions, at tactical, operational and strategic levels. Thus being the case, it becomes significant to be able to influence adversary military decision makers, using one or various means to relay deceptive information to them, so that they make wrong decisions that will impact actions, thereby benefiting the other party. Said means can be human and/or technological. It is vital to get to know adversary military decision makers in depth, including their information environments, so as to arrive at the best way to directly or indirectly influence them. In this regard, intelligence services are particularly significant. To prevent this from happening, we need to highlight the role of counterintelligence services.

All of this points to the crucial importance of information in the military sphere. Deception is part of information operations and, in this domain, it is also related to PSYOPS. The efficiency of MILDEC goes by way of its ability to shape the target's perceptions and attitudes. Within the context of the gray zone, where the boundary between peace and war is blurred, deceptive information is highly significant, even in terms of deterrence, and so it can also be regarded as a strategic asset.

In the field of MILDEC, traditional and social media can be used for disseminating deceptive information to adversary military decision makers. The credibility and ease of access to said means by recipients are aspects that deceivers will try to manipulate in order to influence adversaries. We should not altogether rule out that, to avoid detection of contradictions by the adversary's counterintelligence services, the same deceptive narrative is frequently disseminated not only to foreign target audiences but also to domestic ones.

The media's relationship, including in the field of journalism, with the military should be carefully evaluated. If audiences find out that the military has manipulated the media, with its professionals being aware of this or even in connivance with this, the media's credibility could be affected, to the extent that their independence and impartiality are called into question. This can also hamper future information operations involving the media.

Especially as concerns strategic aspects, military decision makers are not completely uninfluenced even by indirect pressures from public opinion, due to the media's influence. This can happen chiefly in democratic societies and in contexts where there is civil oversight of the military. Said decision makers can also be influenced by politicians: the latter can also be the targets of (deceptive) information operations. This should warrant the attention of counterintelligence services.

It should be pointed out that, within the sphere of MILDEC, there is a growing number of covert online operations, in relation to which, once they are found out, a variety of measures can be taken.

In Romania's national defense and military doctrines, deceptive information is not explicitly found on as high a plane as in other countries, such as the U.S. However, as concerns MILDEC, in Romania, NATO is a benchmark in terms of evolution. Certainly educating and training MILDEC professionals are essential for endowing them with suitable capabilities to fulfill their missions.

Within the Romanian context, we recognize AI's potential for developing information operations and several aspects related to deception and counterdeception, thus constituting a challenge to balance all this with demands in terms of ethics, operational security and doctrinal control.

Currently, in the world of information / communication, it is vital to be able to influence other people, even through both traditional and social media.

Interview

**This interview was conducted, via email, on May 26, 2025*

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FISCAL SOVEREIGNTY**Defending Fiscal Sovereignty: Why Micro-Jurisdictions Are Not an Anomaly, but a Global Necessity**

Juri FERRARIO (San Marino)

In today's hyper-regulated economic landscape, where any deviation from dominant thought is viewed with suspicion and anomalies are often demonized, the role of micro-jurisdictions has been systematically misunderstood and frequently, deliberately distorted. These small states, equipped with agile legislation, sustainable taxation, and intelligent regulation, are not the problem: they are one of the last frontiers of economic stability.

Labeling these realities as tax havens is a rhetorical shortcut. Behind those sensationalist headlines, often driven by entrenched economic powers resistant to change, lies a virtuous model: states that have chosen not to sink under suffocating bureaucracy and compulsive tax schemes, but instead offer a competitive, privacy-respecting environment open to enterprise and productive capital.



Fig. 1 - <https://medium.com/@juriferrario/sovereignty-and-intelligence-why-offshore-jurisdictions-are-not-the-problem-theyre-part-of-the-0094d3f10b4d>

According to the OECD, over 40% of global foreign direct investment flows through jurisdictions with favorable tax regimes. This is not about evasion or abuse, but about strategic choices that companies make to remain competitive on a global scale, safeguard liquidity, and reduce regulatory uncertainty. Studies by the Tax Foundation show that simpler, more transparent, and competitive tax systems correlate with higher capital attraction, innovation, and job growth.

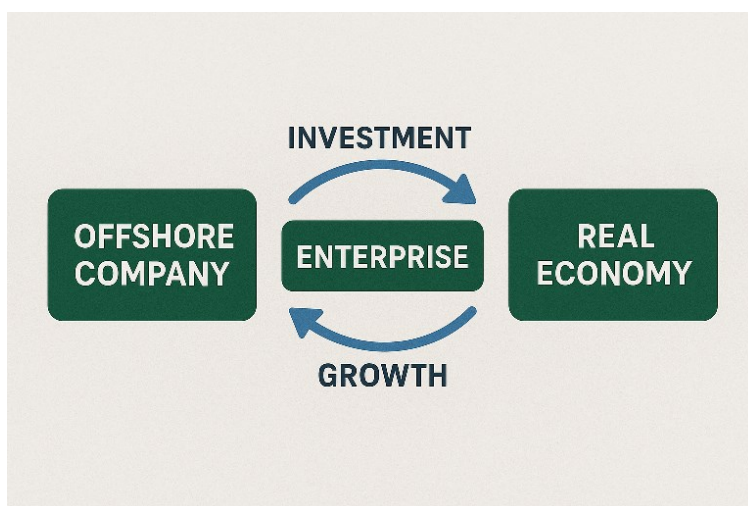


Fig.2 - <https://medium.com/@juriferrario/sovereignty-and-intelligence-why-offshore-jurisdictions-are-not-the-problem-theyre-part-of-the-0094d3f10b4d>

It's easy to point fingers at those who give entrepreneurs room to breathe. Harder to admit is that, in many cases, these more streamlined and fiscally evolved legal systems enable thousands of companies to survive, invest, and avoid relocating to areas where labor is cheaper simply because it is worth less. More interestingly, much of the profits flowing through these jurisdictions are eventually reinvested in "onshore" countries through capital, consumption, and jobs.

Micro-jurisdictions do not pose a threat; they offer a legitimate escape route from a system too rigid to adapt to real-world economics. And at the heart of this issue lies sovereignty. Every country has the right to determine its own tax model, legal culture, and strategies to protect assets and attract investment. Unilateral impositions disguised as "international cooperation" are often little more than centralized power grabs cloaked in the language of fairness.

Consider the case of San Marino an emblematic example that cannot be ignored. Once regarded as a beacon of fiscal efficiency and regulatory stability, it has progressively dismantled its own model under international pressure. The abolition of corporate secrecy in 2010, followed by banking secrecy in 2017, and its exit from the OECD grey list marked the beginning of a slow but evident decline. Banking deposits plummeted from €13.8 billion in 2008 to €6.5 billion in 2024. The state had to nationalize Cassa di Risparmio. Asset Banca was liquidated. Non-performing loans soared to 114% of GDP. In attempting to conform to externally imposed rules, the country lost its economic identity.

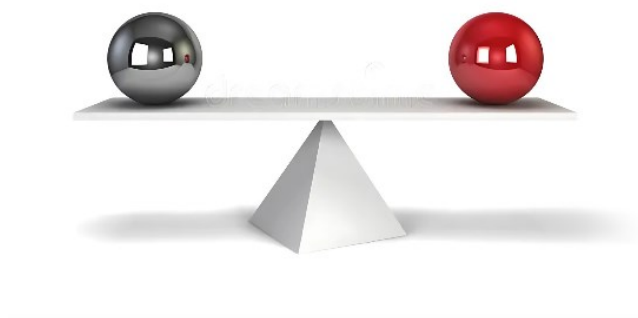


Fig. 3 - <https://medium.com/@juriferrario/sovereignty-and-intelligence-why-offshore-jurisdictions-are-not-the-problem-theyre-part-of-the-0094d3f10b4d>

And for what? To earn a compliance stamp that brought neither investors, nor renewed relevance, nor growth. The cost of that alignment was not only economic it was reputational, social, and strategic.

In stark contrast, Anguilla chose a different path. Still on the EU blacklist in 2025, it preserved its fiscal identity, refusing to adopt measures that would have undermined its economic model. Anguilla enforces a zero tax policy: no income, capital gains, inheritance, or other direct taxes for individuals or businesses. Yet it complies with key international standards, such as FATCA and CRS, proving that fiscal sovereignty and global cooperation can coexist.

This choice has yielded real benefits: in 2025, Anguilla saw sustained economic growth, an upsurge in luxury real estate investment, and expansion in tourism. Inflation decreased by 0.4% in Q1 2025 a sign of macroeconomic stability driven by intentional, sovereign fiscal governance.

Defending micro-jurisdictions is not about defending privilege. It means acknowledging that the complexity of today's world demands a variety of tools and approaches. Where macro-regulation fails, it is often local flexibility that restores balance. Regulatory diversity, freedom of choice, and tax competition are what keep the global economy dynamic.

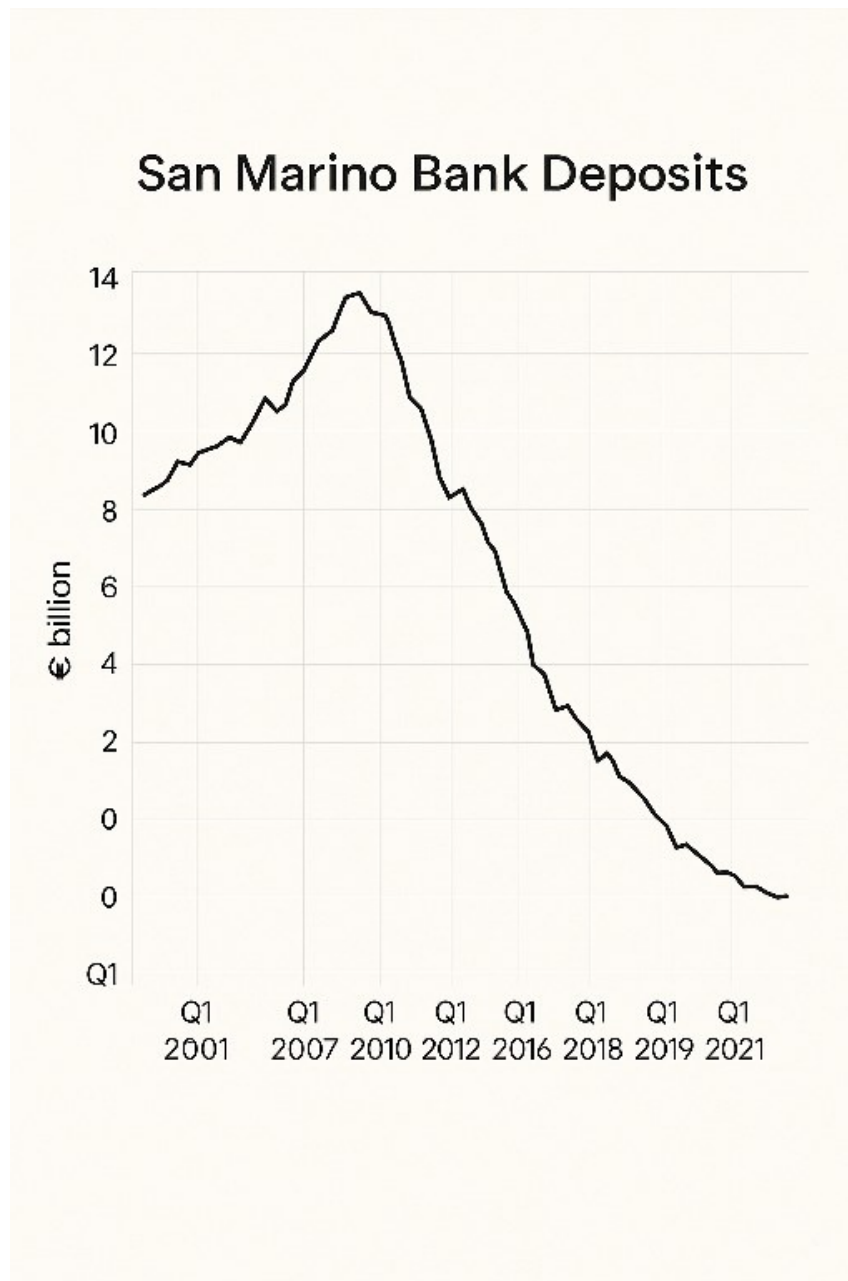


Fig.4 - <https://medium.com/@juriferrario/sovereignty-and-intelligence-why-offshore-jurisdictions-are-not-the-problem-theyre-part-of-the-0094d3f10b4d>

In 2023, the World Economic Forum highlighted how micro jurisdictions and island economies play a critical role in sustaining global value chains and financial resilience, precisely due to their rapid decision-making, independence, and adaptability to real-time change.

To impose a single standard, centralize every decision, and strip free nations of the right to choose how to attract resources is to sterilize the world economy. It means stifling legal innovation, killing virtuous competition, and suppressing entrepreneurial creativity.

I do not believe the future lies in multilaterally imposed doctrines cloaked in elegant language. I believe the future if we are to build it with vision and responsibility must begin with a simpler truth: fiscal sovereignty is a right. And jurisdictions that know how to exercise it with intelligence, respect, and foresight deserve not only to be defended, but to be valued.

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Charani L Charithma M Patabendige is the Acting Research Analyst and Research Assistant at the Institute of National Security Studies, Ministry of Defence. Charani earned the only distinction by topping her batch in the Master's in Conflict and Peace Studies (2022–2023) from the University of Colombo, achieving the Gold Medal for Outstanding Academic Excellence. She also holds a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) degree with a second class from General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University and a Distinction in the Advanced Diploma in Transitional Justice from the Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies. She has also completed her Attorney-at-Law final examinations, and she will be called to the bar this year. She is a member of the committee for the “Review and Finalize Proposed Sri Lanka’s National Defence Policy Sri Lanka” and serves as a member of the National Authority to Prevent Violent Extremism. As a The Near East South Asia (NESA) Centre for Strategic Studies, Washington DC alumna, she has represented Sri Lanka multiple times on international platforms. A highlight of her career was presenting the paper “Analyzing the Polluter Pays Principle: Enhancing Environmental Governance and Fostering Corporate Accountability in Sri Lanka” at the Environmental Security Workshop by NESA Center for Strategic Studies in Washington, DC, in April 2024. Charani has excelled in academic conferences, winning the Best Paper Presentation Award at the First International Conference on Business Sustainability by the University of Colombo in collaboration with ZPMC in November 2024 and the Best Poster Presentation Award at the 17th International Research Conference 2024 by General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University under the track Defence and Strategic Studies. Charani also serves as a research supervisor for undergraduate students, a resource person, visiting lecturer, and as an independent reviewer, she has more than 55+ publications ranging from disinformation, misinformation, extremism, cybercrimes, digital literacy, human rights, counterterrorism, international law, national security and peace and conflicts.



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Christos Bezirtoglou was born in Athens (Greece) in 1966. He studied Physics with specialisation in Electronics and Computers. He worked in Greece as a trainer and consultant in Information and Communication Technologies for ten years. In 1994 he moved to Brussels (Belgium) to join the European Commission, where he occupied different posts both in policy Directorates-General (Environment, Competition, Regional Policy & Trade) as well as in policy coordination (Secretariat-General & Cabinet of Commissioner Diamantopoulou for Employment and Social Affairs).



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Momodou Ted McEwan is a visionary leader and Principal Consultant with over 15 years of expertise in multinational leadership, specializing in transformative strategies across public and private sectors. Known for his results-driven approach and proven track record in overcoming complex challenges, Ted is a key player in fostering business growth and sustainable development. With deep experience in strategic partnerships, business transformation, and intercultural engagement, particularly within emerging markets like Sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe, he has a unique insight into the geopolitical shifts taking place in these regions. Ted's passion for social impact and small business development has led him to spearhead initiatives like The Baobab Foundation Gambia and SoGa-Impact. Through these efforts, he facilitates collaboration among governments, NGOs, and commercial enterprises to drive meaningful change and economic growth. His expertise in navigating complex environments and his dedication to sustainable development make him a leading voice in understanding the evolving power dynamics in West Africa, particularly regarding the region's rejection of French influence.



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He is a consummate entrepreneur and exceptional communicator who has achieved remarkable success throughout his career. With a strong educational background and strong business acumen, Juri has consistently demonstrated outstanding leadership skills and strategic thinking. In 2001, Juri founded Ibusiness International, an innovative company specializing in outsourcing, software and web services. Through his exceptional communication skills and visionary leadership, Juri has propelled Ibusiness International to become a prominent player in the Latin American and European markets. Juri Ferrario's exceptional communication skills have garnered widespread acclaim, with his LinkedIn profile being one of the most visited and respected in the business community. Through his eloquence and ability to articulate complex concepts, Juri has earned praise and recognition from industry experts. Furthermore, Juri's outstanding leadership and strategic thinking have been recognized through high-profile projects such as the "Made in Italy" promotion for La Lega Della Terra. Juri Ferrario's outstanding achievements, combined with his educational background and exceptional communication and management skills, position him as a visionary leader and valued influencer.





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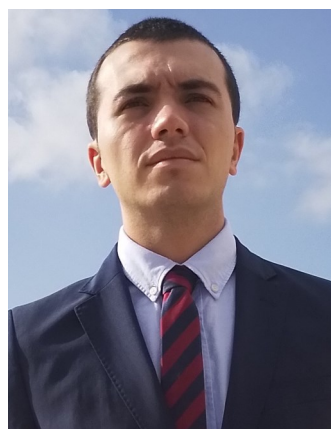
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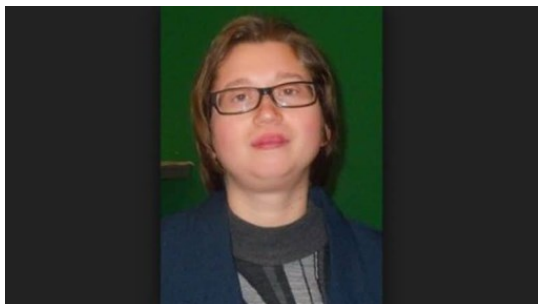
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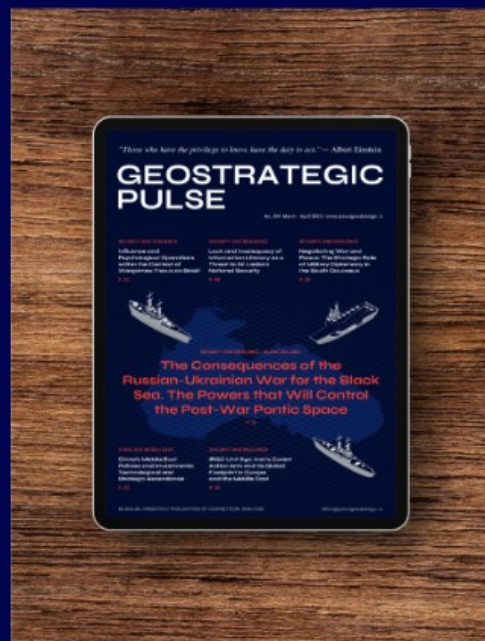




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