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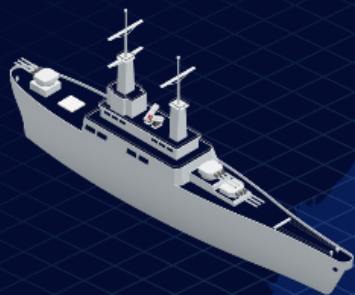
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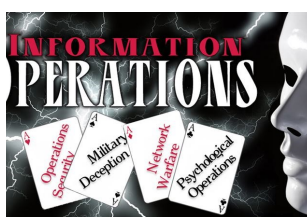
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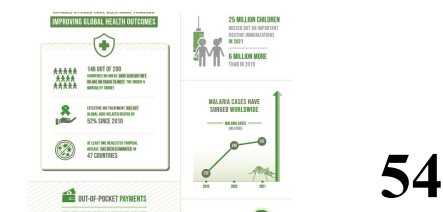


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EDITORIAL



Europe – at a Crossroads at the Organizational Level and Decision-Making Process

PhD. Eng. Stelian TEODORESCU (Romania)

„Always remember that your determination to succeed is the most important thing.”

Abraham Lincoln

The geopolitical hot spots that the entire world is now facing highlight a continuous and accelerated process of changing in the world order and, at the same time, the weakening of the political stability of nations and regions in their entirety.

In response to such an evolution, many states are now looking for new allies and joining new alliances, in the context of an intense hybrid campaign, significantly expanded by various international actors interested in fundamentally changing global value chains.

As a result, in the context of a geopolitical landscape in full evolution and irreversible change, we can say that 2025 marks a turning point for Europe and for the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO).

The USA, under a new administration, seems to diminish its importance and contribution, leaving the impression that it wants to withdraw from many traditional commitments to European security, forcing the European Union to reconsider its strategic autonomy. Under such circumstances, the very foundation of America's alliance with Europe - shared democratic values - is being questioned, with many political leaders revealing ideological rifts that have been taking shape for years.

Taking advantage of many developments that are difficult to predict, of the decrease in the intensity of the pro-active attitude at the level of most states in the world, but especially at the level of Europe, many other states such as Russia and China are recalibrating their roles in the global politics of the great powers, capitalizing on the dissensions between various and many other states of the world to the advantage of their policies that are imposed at the global level.



Source: <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/eu-army-pipe-dream-15865>

European demands and needs for greater defense autonomy have increased significantly, with proposals for a European army gaining momentum and generating, at the same time, numerous questions that await clear and reasoned answers in the shortest possible time: Can the EU overcome its internal divisions to create a coherent, effective and efficient defense force? Will NATO remain a cornerstone of European security in a context in which the North Atlantic Alliance is already in the midst of testing whether it can withstand the pressures of a multipolar world in which power is more diffuse and alliances more fragile?

As is well known, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte has called on member states to increase defense spending. However, without a clear and unified European strategy and without achieving consensus, decision-making and investment in the military and security fields risk being fragmented and inefficient. As a result, Europe could enter a difficult process of balancing and asserting its own defense and security capabilities, in the context of increasingly fragile transatlantic relations, such an evolutionary process could erode trust in NATO and accelerate Europe's pivot towards other structures or forms of ensuring defense and security.

An open question that is increasingly debated and for which an answer is sought in the current very turbulent geopolitical environment is whether European governments and the EU, collectively, will move from minimalist to maximalist versions of decision-making in the current historical turning point of the region in which the challenge of the moment is to stimulate hard-power defense and security capabilities. The notion of "soft power", introduced by Joseph Nye in 1990, refers to "the ability to obtain what is desired primarily through attraction, rather than through coercion, constraint, or payment". J. Nye explained the distinction between "hard power" and "soft power" and was the pioneer of the "soft power" theory. It became very clear that a country obtains its "soft power" mainly from three resources: culture, internal values and foreign policies - when these are seen as legitimate and lead to moral authority, prestige and, ultimately, to the creation of the image of a desirable partner.

The notion of "smart power" ("the ability to combine "hard power" and "soft power" in a successful strategy") became popular with the use of this expression by members of the Clinton and Obama administrations. In such a context, special attention must be paid, when appropriate, to identifying the fine connections between "soft power" and "hard power", especially if we realize that hard power is no longer defined only by the use of military means, but also by the use of other means, such as economic ones or, as has been demonstrated, recently, even the media, to influence behavior or impose interests in other environments, including the political one.

Despite many limitations demonstrated in the decision-making process, a stronger dynamic of decision-making in the field of defense and security is now prevalent in Europe. It has become very clear that there are more and more expectations that Europe should become more assertive in protecting its own interests, borders and territories, all of which have given rise to numerous debates and negotiations on what shape Europe currently has and what shape it should take.

There is intense debate in all international circles and it is considered that the beginning and accelerated and unpredictable development of a new era at the global level has given rise to the imperative need for deeper cooperation at the European level. A common view is that, as Europe engages intensely in transforming the way it must defend and protect itself, all the adopted decisions will also force a rethinking of the organizational nature and deeper integration of the EU.

In the context in which many European leaders have emphasized how necessary far-reaching changes have become in 2025, there are signals of confirmation and implementation of the desire to contemplate a redesign of the European project, making it more necessary than ever to consolidate consensus in the decision-making process for coordinating EU policies.

SECURITY AND RESILIENCE - SRI LANKA



Lack and Inadequacy of Information Literacy as a Threat to Sri Lanka's National Security

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Abstract

Information literacy has become a critical competency for individuals and nations alike in the modern digital age. In Sri Lanka, however, the lack of information literacy among the populace poses a significant threat to national security. Therefore, the researcher attempts to answer the problem of how the lack and inadequacy of information literacy in Sri Lanka escalates threats to its national security. To attain that researcher has come up with three research objectives. Namely, 1) to identify the current state of information literacy in Sri Lanka, 2) To discuss case studies on the lack and inadequacy of information literacy in Sri Lanka 3) to analyse the consequences of poor information literacy on national security in Sri Lanka. The researcher has utilised a qualitative methodology based on a critical analysis of secondary sources including research articles, government policy documents, and expert reports. With case studies on Easter Sunday Attack 2019 and its aftermath, the COVID-19 pandemic and "Aragalaya 2022" and its aftermath, the researcher's findings suggest that low digital literacy, media and political literacy coupled with information illiteracy, lack of government priority in this regard, lack of a separate definition, inadequate research and development priorities, poor coordination among stakeholders and lack of fact-checking initiatives are the key factors impeding information literacy in Sri Lanka. These factors in turn have led to the spread of disinformation, hate speech, false speech, misinformation, erosion of democratic values, and lack of citizen awareness which undermine national security. Therefore, the researcher has come up with a way forward.



Source: <https://ijmil.cherkasgu.press/>

Keywords: Information literacy, Sri Lanka, National Security, Threats

¹The opinions are expressed by the author and are not reflective of the institute or the Ministry of Defence*.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The importance of information literacy in the digital age cannot be stated enough. Unlike in past, at present society is wholly digitalized and most communications happen online. Even though information receipt and dissemination are easy, how people perceive, interpret and analyse information becomes challenging due to inherent complexities such as ambiguities, lack of language understanding, and lack of digital, media, political and information literacy. Where all these facets of literacy are inextricably interlinked one main matter to understand is that it is the knowledge regarding information and lack or inadequacy of it contributes to a national security threat. Explaining, that in a crisis such as economic turmoil, political instability, ethnic disharmony or terrorism, news reporting and other information-disseminating mechanisms become crucial matters. Needless to say, parties to a conflict always look into thriving their aims strategically. "Information" is one of the most important elements that can be utilized in a convincing way which could either exaggerate, aggravate or de-escalate the issue.

Sri Lanka's lack and inadequacy of information literacy has also caused significant drawbacks in the country. For example, behaviour during the *Easter Sunday Attack in 2019*, the *COVID-19 pandemic*, and *Aragalaya 2022* and its aftermath are a few of them. What makes it extra challenging is the low political, digital, media and information literacy coupled with less prioritization on information literacy. In addition, poor stakeholder coordination among government, journalists, tech companies and international bodies precludes information security.

1.2 Research Problem

Sri Lanka is a country battling with less and lack of information literacy due to information vulnerability. In a time where misinformation, disinformation, hate speech and false news are widespread people tend to make poor decisions which makes both individual and institutional weakened impacts such as erosion of trust, terrorism and extremism. In light of this, the researcher aims to look into how the lack and inadequacy of information literacy have become a threat escalator to the national security of Sri Lanka.

1.3 Research Objectives

To identify the current state of information literacy in Sri Lanka.

To discuss case studies on the lack and inadequacy of information literacy in Sri Lanka.

Analyse the consequences of poor information literacy on national security.

1.4 Research Questions

What is the current state of information literacy in Sri Lanka?

What are the case studies on the lack and inadequacy of information literacy in Sri Lanka?

What are the consequences of poor information literacy on national security?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Information literacy is an indispensable component of national security. It empowers the government as well as citizens in preventing misinformation as well as disinformation by ascertaining between fact and what is fake. However, Sri Lanka faces a significant gap due to its lack and inadequacy which has escalated terrorism, extremism, erosion of democracy and the law of order and social unrest. Therefore, addressing the lack and inadequacy of information literacy is extremely pivotal as well as strategic. In light of this, this study aims to look into realities and practical steps that can be equipped to achieve information security.

2. Literature review

(‘Www.Coe.Int’, n.d.) has stated that “Media and information literacy (MIL) is an umbrella concept that covers three often clearly distinguished dimensions: information literacy, media literacy and ICT/ digital literacy. As UNESCO highlights, MIL brings together stakeholders including individuals, communities and nations to contribute to the information society. Not only does MIL act as an umbrella, it also encompasses a full range of competencies that must be used effectively to critically evaluate the different facets of MIL.” This explicitly showcases how these concepts are inherently interlinked together and further how they are imperative to one another.

One of the ways where information lacks and inadequacy is demonstrated is by way of disinformation. According to (Branty, 2020), “Dezinformatsiya (disinformation, дезинформация) is the deliberate promulgation of false information by a person, entity or state. Disinformation is often combined in strategic or tactical configurations to engage in operations known as active measures (активные мероприятия). Active measures are comprised of activities that include disinformation, propaganda, forgery and in some cases assassination. Active measures and disinformation both originate within the Russian lexicon and made their way into the English vernacular only in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This researcher agrees with the author and has looked into disinformation in the Sri Lankan context. The author has showcased how Easter Sunday Attack and its aftermath, the COVID-19 pandemic as well as “Aragalaya 2022” and the aftermath of it.

(Kania, 2020) mentions the “The core concept in CCP/PLA political warfare is that of “disintegrating enemy forces” through non-kinetic measures...The 2003 Political Work Regulations incorporated public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare, which were the responsibility of the former General Political Department. These three warfare were described as including carrying out “the disintegration of enemy forces works,” anti-psychological warfare, and anti-instigation work.” The researcher has looked into how during the final phases of “Aragalaya 2022” violence took place and violence were advocated by public opinion warfare. Further, the researcher has showcased how it created social unrest and political disharmony which jeopardized national security.

(Aro, 2016) has stated that “Both Facebook and Twitter need to start ‘cleaning up’ the fake profiles that are coordinating nasty operations against citizens. Both companies are US-based and probably find it difficult to check the authenticity of suspected trolls, but this effort has to be made for the sake of freedom of speech and information peace. At the moment, an individual user is quite helpless against an orchestrated hate campaign. The same applies to YouTube, which provides a platform for propaganda videos and hate speech.” Further, has mentioned that “the normal news media should also take a stricter approach. Media news comment sections are filled with trolls questioning the news reports. Some international media have even closed the comment sections because of trolls. In this situation, a very simple solution is to ensure that comment sections are properly moderated.” The researcher agrees with Aro on the points made. In addition, the researcher also mentions the need for news media to be ethical especially when it comes to reporting. Researchers therefore highlight the imperativeness of having ethical practices which will facilitate best practices in reporting which will also contribute to preventing social unrest. Researchers have also looked into what are the strategies that can be utilized to counter and mitigation due to information vulnerability.

3. Methodology

It is well understood that Sri Lanka is a country which is facing information vulnerability in the digital age. As of that, the researcher as the research problem has attempted to analyse how lack of information literacy is contributing to these threats and endangering national security. In doing so, the researcher has utilized a qualitative approach. Unlike in quantitative research, in qualitative research, researcher aims to critically analyse and understand human perceptions, narratives and occurrences. Since information literacy is a skill humans possess, researchers have perused case studies and have ascertained the complexities associated with the lack and inadequacy of information literacy. To critically analyse data, the researcher has used secondary data such as books, journal articles and conference proceedings.

4. Results and Discussion

Lack and Inadequacy of Information Literacy is a grave threat to Sri Lanka’s National Security and since the world is now digitalized countering and mitigating information vulnerability is truly daunting. This chapter will look into interpretation and how types of literacies are interlinked, upon one failing the other becoming vulnerable, case studies to support the arguments, consequences of poor information literacy and drawbacks.

4.1 Interpretation of Interlinked Literacy Kinds Information Literacy

According to (Cantwell, 2010) “Information literacy is an area of constant growth and development. In the digital age, where the most valuable currency is often relevant information, there is a high demand for people who can efficiently and effectively locate, access, critically evaluate, and deploy information to solve the

problem at hand. Thus, librarians and other information professionals are often required to provide training in ‘information literacy’ in tertiary settings”. Explaining, equipping information literacy can be regarded as a basic yet superior trait since it allows significant strength in debunking what is fake while absorbing what is the truth. This information literacy goes beyond librarians and scholars, rather it can be perceived as a mandatory component which will ease the social order and progress. Lack of it causes political instability, and social unrest, erodes democracy, law and order, increases cyber vulnerabilities, escalates terrorism and extremism, makes it prone to manipulation and causes economic disruption.

Digital Literacy

Before understanding what digital literacy is, it is crucial to understand the era at present. Presently, the world is digitalized as it is the digital age. Likewise, due to digitalization information generation, dissemination as well as manipulations have become convenient. Even though the age is digital and people possess digital devices, the lack or inadequacy of digital literacy becomes a threat to national security. Explaining, digital literacy as cited by (Pangrazio, Godhe, & Ledesma, 2020) it was first defined back in the late 1990s, digital literacy refers to “the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide variety of sources when it is presented via computers” and, particularly, through the medium of the internet (Gilster, in Pool, 1997: 6)”. However, it is imperative to mention several facts which are, there is a rapid escalation in digital literacy and digital device possession. However, even though technology is advanced and rapid, the critical thinking skills of people are not escalating in the same strength due to varied reasons such as age, the digital divide and country priorities. Nonetheless, what is evident is that the lack or inadequacy of it is disastrous. As much as information literacy is important digital literacy too is important. Explaining, lack or inadequacy of it causes hate speech, erodes public trust, becomes manipulating, weakens democracy, gives rise to extremism, and terrorism and makes it hard to manage crises.

Media Literacy

(Boyd & Dobrow, 2011) has mentioned media literacy by perusing various sources. Accordingly, media literacy was once simply defined as “the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and create media in a variety of forms,” but with a constantly changing and expanding media landscape, this definition has also evolved (Thoman & Jolls, 2003, p. 21). A more elaborate definition set forth by the Centre for Media Literacy (CML), a pioneering organization in the area of media literacy education, is as follows: “Media Literacy is a 21st-century approach to education. It provides a framework to access, analyse, evaluate and create messages in a variety of forms—from print to video to the Internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy” (Thoman & Jolls, 2003, p. 21).” As per the definitions, the words “analyse and evaluate” showcase the gravity of media literacy which showcases ethical and responsible behaviour.

Common Elements and Information Literacy’s Prominence

All these types of literacies are interlinked and cannot be stated less. The three literacies showcase critical thinking, information handling, its societal impact, Adaptability in the digital age, and the need for prevention and manipulation. However, upon close examination information literacy’s prominence signals multiple facts. Firstly, information literacy is the foundation as it is the skill which underpins both digital and media literacy. It is the skill which allows locating, evaluating and utilising information for functioning effectively in both contexts of digital and media. Further, it has a direct impact on decision-making since it is what drives a choice. In addition, possession of information literacy enables to mitigation of complexities including misinformation, and hate speech.

4.2 Sri Lanka’s Predicament

(‘Sri Lanka - Literacy Rate 2022 | Countryeconomy.Com’, n.d.) has stated that as published by “UNESCO, an adult literacy rate of 92.49%. While the male literacy rate is 93.34%, for females is 91.76%.” The literacy of Sri Lanka has always been admirable. More specifically computer literacy in Sri Lanka is a survey by the Census and Statistics Department (CSD) conducted in 2021 mentions that, (*Annual Bulletin Computer Literacy-2021*, n.d.) “One out of three persons (aged 5-69) computer literate. (Computer Literacy Rate 34.3%) q One out of two persons (aged 5-69) is digitally literate. (Digital Literacy Rate 57.2%) q 22.9% of households owned desktop or laptop computers. The urban sector shows more literate on both computer and digital literacy.” As reported by (Ameresekere, 2024), CSD data further showed that compared with men,

women used more smartphones to connect to the internet/email. In this connection, CSD statistics show that at the end of 1H 2023, 79.3% of males and 80.4% of females were connected with the help of a smartphone to the internet/email, whereas the comparative numbers at the end of 2022 were 78.6% and 80.1%, respectively. However, a household that owned a desktop or laptop computer within the six-month review period declined from 21.9% to 20.5%. Meanwhile, CSD, through its statistics, was not able to reveal the percentage of households that own smartphones. Computer literacy showcases that only a few possess the comprehensive skills needed for computer usage. This disparity in both computer and digital literacy is particularly visible in urban areas, where literacy rates are higher, yet the overall digital divide remains a concern which is a wake-up call for the authorities to take necessary actions in this regard. However, there lacks a comprehensive and separate definition of information literacy as well as media literacy. Where media literacy is voiced in light of media empowerment and redress, information literacy is overlooked. This deficiency showcases that there is a drawback in priorities since information literacy is not given the attention it deserves, this also is suggestive of how feeble information literacy is which will give rise to security concerns.

4.3 Case Study Analysis with National Security Implications

Lack and inadequacy of information literacy is evident in Sri Lanka daily. This is evidenced by how people engage in conversations on politics and economic decisions. Not only the general public but information illiteracy is also seen in election speeches. However, for the research, the researcher has highlighted three important incidents which shook the country. In addition, the researcher has also shed light on the national security implications which have emanated due to the relevant incidents.

Easter Sunday Attack 2019 and Its Aftermath

As stated by the (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2021) annual report, “On 21 April 2019, the day of the Easter Sunday, three churches located in Negombo, Batticaloa and Colombo and three luxury hotels in Colombo were attacked in a series of coordinated suicide bombings planned by a local militant group that had declared allegiance to a foreign terrorist organisation. More than 250 civilians were killed due to this tragic event including foreign nationals, while more than 500 were estimated to have been injured.” The Easter Sunday Attack in 2019 was one of the most brutal incidents in the history of Sri Lanka where coordinated attacks by Islamist extremists caused the deaths of civilians. The brutal attack showcased the gravity of extremism, terrorism and more importantly it also alarmed about the changing threat dynamics. The Easter Sunday attack caused a lot of blood in the country but more than that it also showcased how information vulnerability is threatening. The conduct of social media users as well as news reporting authorities showcased how online platforms are also a battleground and not only weapons but also words are a threat. Soon after the attacks, Islamophobia took a rise and Muslims were perceived as a threat due to the collective consciousness and fear factors. Even though people’s fear is understandable, no authorities including tech companies were able to successfully mitigate and prevent the information war that took place. Post Easter Sunday showcased how ethnic tensions were fuelled by disinformation, where the main allegations consisting of the Sinhala daily paper carried a controversial article claiming that Dr Shafi Shihabdeen, a Muslim doctor in Kurunegala, had “forcibly sterilised more than 4000 Sinhala Buddhist women after caesarean surgeries”, another post claiming that Muslim-owned clothing stores were giving out free sweets to Sinhalese customers containing “Malic Acid (E296)” which can cause abortion in pregnant women, and damage children’s kidneys. They are also accused of embedding contraceptive gels in women’s lingerie. These false and unsupported claims are aimed at sowing fear among the majority ethnic group that Muslims are aiming to suppress their population growth as highlighted by (Patabendige, 2023).

The post-Easter Sunday attack’s disinformation campaigns and hate speech by extremist nationalists as well as certain political entities showcase how violence in social media transitions to the physical stage. This was evidenced when Muslim businesses were boycotted and violence encroached on them causing further agony. In addition, the Easter Sunday attack also showcased how the political environment became unstable in addition to information security. Further, the Easter Sunday attack was a blow to the economy. As indicated by (Central Bank Annual Report, 2019.) “Nevertheless, it can be concluded that the attacks impacted the already sluggish economic growth, and largely contributed to the slow growth of 2.3% in 2019.” What is imperative to highlight is the dark reality of information vulnerability. Neither the government nor tech companies were successful enough to mitigate and prevent disinformation campaigns irrespective of curfews and social media bans. It is also pivotal to further reiterate how violence of words, posts or images can cause repercussions in the tangible field. This further signals an urgent call to prioritise information security through information

literacy. There is also a dire need to have sufficient stakeholder collaboration and adequate research and development initiatives, which if in place could have debunked misinformation and disinformation successfully.

COVID-19 Pandemic

Not only in Sri Lanka but even in Western countries, during Covid-19 pandemic a lot of disinformation, as well as misinformation, were caused where it came to a point the word ‘infodemic’ became a point of discussion. (‘Infodemic’, n.d.) has mentioned that “an infodemic is too much information including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak.” Further, it stated that (‘Infodemic’, n.d.) It leads to confusion and higher levels of risk-taking behaviours that may have harmful health effects. In addition to this, it also leads to mistrust of health authorities and serves to undermine the public health response. An infodemic can intensify or lengthen outbreaks when people are unsure about what they need to do to protect their health and the health of the people around them. As digitization increases, use of the internet and social media grows; information can be over spilled. This helps in filling up gaps of information quickly, but it also puts exclamation marks on hurtful messages. As stated by (Nayakarathna, 2021), mainstream media intentionally spreads disinformation without critical evaluation. As a public impact, it causes insecurity, panic and fear among the public. (Nayakarathna 2021” further stated, “Some fact-checking websites in Sri Lanka (<http://www.factcheck.lk/>) are monitoring and rating the validity of published content. Misleading news does impact the proper identification and treatment of the patients.” This example also showcases the gravity of disinformation on health security which people may take a wrongful action or evade from doing the needful. In addition, this also highlights a grim reality which is how much people rely on social media without face-checking or fact-verifying. This denotes a strong need to have necessary fact-checking as well as verification initiatives rather than arriving at conclusions hastily. Thus, this also showcases the dire need for information security, which alarms the necessity of having the skill of information literacy.

“Aragalaya 2022” and Its Aftermath

“Aragalaya 2022” and its aftermath is another example which showcases the gravity of information literacy and the need for possession of it. The incident was an example of hate speech, misinformation as well as disinformation. (Sandamali, 2023) mentioned that media reports were indicating that the government was imposing a new disembarkation levy of USD 60, meaning anyone leaving from Katunayake Bandaranaike International Airport would be required to pay this as an additional departure tax. (Krishantha, 2024) further states how certain prominent personnel received fake campaigns. Accordingly, “some other individuals highly targeted through misinformation as well as smear campaigns on social media in 2023 included US Ambassador to Sri Lanka Julie Chung and Former President of BASL, President’s Counsel Saliya Pieris.” Another key example is the distorted food insecurity statistics circulated which misrepresented to severe food insecurity by “exaggerating the number of affected families. The reality was far less dire, with accurate figures contradicting the misinformation.” Furthermore, (Krishantha, 2024) stated that “the government’s decision to import eggs from India, misleading claims about plastic eggs continued to get widely shared in Sri Lanka”, were found to be untrue. The tax cut, targeting of prominent figures, false alert on food insecurity and plastic egg rumour showcase how false news is spread instantly without verification. However, Fact Crescendo a prominent independent digital journalism initiative found all the said news to be misleading and untrue upon verifying different sources. This initiative indicates how responsible media conduct is essential since it will empower citizens to know the truth. This also showcases that information literacy initiatives should not only be state-led rather they should involve all stakeholders. Further, this also showcase how it is critical to have basic life skills such as how to spot fake news and verify before believing them.

5. Conclusion

As elaborated and explained in the analysis it is clear how the absence and deficiency of information literacy impacts the national security of Sri Lanka in a relatively more significant way especially since society is digitalized. The paper has showcased several literacies, the interrelationship between them which are information, digital, and media all of which jointly emerge as important for societal stability and security. In such contexts, information literacy is undoubtedly at the centre as a core competence which helps in debunking false information that will reduce the created risks through digital and media illiteracy. Lacking it, political instability, social unrest, cyber threats, extremism, and the disruption of economies pose threats to societies jeopardizing national security. The paper has also explained the current status of literacy in Sri Lanka. Even though the general literacy rate may be high, there exists a considerable and significant digital divide. This gap

leaves the country open to manipulation by misinformation, and hate speech as well as subject to misinformation. Irrespective of the gravity of information literacy, the lack of attention towards it is considered to be one of the most critical omissions that can cause grave consequences for security. The researcher to prove the point has brought out three key incidents which are the 2019 Easter Sunday Attack, The Covid-19 pandemic and the “Aragalaya 2022” and its aftermath as case studies to support her argument which is how lack and inadequacy of information literacy caused national security threats such as fear and agony in public, hate speech, disinformation and misinformation. The Researcher has also pointed out lapses in existence which include the significant digital divide, no specific definition or attention awarded to information literacy lack of priority to information security and the need for stakeholder involvement.

6. Recommendations

The lack of a separate definition of information literacy signals how information literacy is not given the sufficient attention it deserves. As the world is digitalized and continues to be fast it is imperative to enhance information literacy in education. Sri Lanka battles with a significant digital divide therefore it is essential to bridge the digital divide by prioritizing the focus and engaging in research and development. National education curricula need to be revisited. Rural areas need to be empowered coupled with nationwide awareness campaigns which will facilitate and strengthen digital and media literacy. In doing so, it is essential to emphasise the ethical use of digital tools and instil information literacy in evaluating media content and verifying sources. As misinformation, disinformation and hate speech are not novel to a society it is essential to educate people on terminology and steps in verifying sources as basic life skills. Therefore, it is crucial to invest in and promote fact-checking platforms and technologies that can quickly identify and correct false information. This is extremely beneficial, particularly during crises such as pandemics or political unrest. It will also be worthwhile to mandate the inclusion of media and information literacy components in professional development programs for public officials, educators, and media personnel. As evidenced by the case studies, it can be seen that during a crisis government cannot work alone in tackling information insecurity. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen existing collaborations among stakeholders including government agencies, educational institutions, media organizations, civil society groups and tech companies to address the challenges of information literacy. This task force should coordinate efforts to improve public understanding of information security. Last but not least, it is crucial to monitor and evaluate the progress in government efforts to assess progress and identify areas for improvement by conducting periodic reviews of such policies.

*The opinions expressed are of the author and are not reflective of the institute or the Ministry of Defence**

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SECURITY AND RESILIENCE - BLACK SEA AREA



The Consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian War for the Black Sea. The Powers that Will Control the Post-War Pontic Space

Alexandru Bogdan STAN (Romania)

Eleven years after the annexation of Crimea and the start of the Russo-Ukrainian War, the Black Sea has once again become a key geopolitical pivot in Eurasia. Considered a peripheral region for decades, it has now assumed major strategic importance for Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The Importance of the Black Sea in the Current Context

As a bridge between Europe and Asia from the times of the Greeks, Romans, Genoese, Venetians, and Ottomans, the Black Sea has become a border of commercial importance. It was an area of conflict and dispute between the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire, with the waters of the Black Sea being stained with the blood of soldiers in the naval confrontations at Fidonisi, Tendra, and Kaliakra. In the Crimean War (1853–1856), the great European powers intervened in support of the Ottoman Empire to counter Russian expansion. In World War I, the fleets of the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire clashed, but in the end, both empires collapsed. In World War II, Nazi Germany fought the Soviet Union for control of the coastline and vital sea routes.

During the Cold War, the Black Sea became a space of naval rivalry between the Soviet bloc and NATO, dominated by the USSR's Black Sea Fleet and Turkish control of the straits.

At the beginning of the 21st century, but especially in the context of the war between Russia and Ukraine (supported by NATO), the region still represents an important geostrategic point in global maritime trade, being a corridor for the export of hydrocarbons and grains. In this article, we have addressed two possible geopolitical scenarios of what the post-war Pontic space and the positions of key actors could look like:



Source: Wikipedia Commons

1. The first scenario: The Black Sea remains accessible to all regional actors;
2. The second scenario: The Black Sea becomes a “Russian lake” in the event of an escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

The Role of the Region in Energy Security and Maritime Transport

According to the Montreux Convention on the Regime of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, signed on July 20, 1936 at the Montreux Palace, in Switzerland, in peacetime, all countries are guaranteed absolute freedom of passage in the Black Sea for all civilian ships. But according to Article 18 of the international agreement, it also provides for limits on the number, tonnage and armament of transport ships. In the event of war, according to Article 19, the belligerent countries must cooperate with Turkey - if the government in Ankara is not involved in a conflict in the Pontic region, all belligerent countries are obliged to provide prior notification to the Turkish authorities if they want NATO warships to enter the Black Sea. If it feels threatened, Turkey can make any decision regarding the passage of warships as it sees fit.

Due to its oil and natural gas reserves, the Black Sea plays a vital role in the energy architecture of Eurasia through key hydrocarbon transportation routes. Oil and gas fields, as well as oil and gas pipelines, are essential for the energy security of the riparian states, according to finabel.org. Whoever fully controls the Black Sea can control Eurasia.

Russia is the world's second largest oil exporter after Saudi Arabia: 22% of the total volume of deliveries goes through the Black Sea sea routes, especially through the port of Novorossiysk, according to rusi.org. The Black Sea is also vital for Turkey through the TurkStream pipeline. Through this, Russia ensures the gas supply of Turkey and some countries in southeastern Europe. After the escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022, the Black Sea has become a crucial maritime transport hub for Ukrainian and Russian grain to global markets. Through the ports of Odessa, Yuzhne and Mariupol, Ukraine exported massive quantities of grain to the Middle East and North Africa. Russia's temporary blockade of Ukrainian grain exports in 2022-2023 led to an increase in food prices in Europe, causing economic insecurity. The Ukrainian grain crisis had a significant impact on Europe, as did the energy insecurity caused by the cessation of Russian gas imports to Germany following sanctions on Russia after the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the destruction of the Nord Stream 2 pipelines in the Baltic Sea in September 2022.

Precarious Peace Scenario: Russia Stops at the Current Front Line, Ukraine Accepts Trump's “deal” and Territorial Concessions

The first scenario foreshadowed by the current context assumes the freezing of the conflict at the current front line in Ukraine. The line crosses the Kharkov region to the Donetsk and Zaporozhe regions, on the Dnieper, and ends near Kherson.

The freezing of the conflict would be caused by a change in approach in the West under the influence of isolationist political factors in the United States of America. In this scenario, Russia maintains control over the occupied Ukrainian territories (approximately 19% of Ukraine, including Crimea and parts of Donbas), according to the evolution of the map of Ukraine on the liveuamap.com website. The key element for the review of US policy after the presidential elections of November 5, 2024, with the return of Donald Trump to the White House. The 47th president's rhetoric indicates a desire to quickly end the war. He promised during the election campaign that he would conclude peace within 24 hours, even at the cost of territorial concessions by Kiev.



Source: Wikipedia Commons

The American president has hinted that he sees the annexation of Crimea and some regions in Donbas as a necessary compromise for peace, criticizing the firm position of President Zelensky, who has refused any surrender of sovereignty and still insists on integration into the Euro-Atlantic space, according to npr.org.

Vice President JD Vance has explicitly proposed freezing the conflict on today's territorial lines, emphasizing that both Ukrainians and Russians will have to give up some of the territories they currently hold. On April 26, 2025, Putin announced that he had recovered the Russian Kursk region, occupied by Ukrainian forces since August 2024. The status quo scenario would involve the resumption of economic agreements between the US and Ukraine regarding rare minerals, as well as economic concessions to the Kremlin through guarantees for Russian grain and fertilizer exports, according to rusi.org. The restoration of bilateral trade and energy agreements between the US and Russia would reposition the Black Sea as an arena for limited cooperation.

This scenario would imply a fragile, dubious peace, with big question marks over the sustainability of regional security in the long term. Ukraine could be left with lost territories, vulnerable in terms of security (Russia demands demilitarization) and with a frustrated and demoralized population after a precarious peace, similar to the post-Soviet situations in Georgia and the Republic of Moldova. For Volodymyr Zelensky, concessions and the withdrawal of Western support would invite more aggression from Russia, according to theguardian.com. Trump's peace could resemble a new tacit Yalta, in which the Black Sea would be informally divided into spheres of influence: Crimea and Donbas under de facto recognized Russian control and the rest of Ukraine would be defended in accordance with NATO's international guarantees. The "peace" could be temporary, only for four years if Donald Trump is not re-elected/will not be allowed to run for a third term or if JD Vance does not win the presidential election and instead a president from the Democratic Party will come to the White House. A hasty and imposed peace, however, risks not preventing the escalation of war at the European and even global level, but only postponing it. The first scenario brings cold peace to the Black Sea, but also numerous uncertainties regarding the future regional order.

Turkey, as a leading NATO member and partner of Russia, will continue to be the traditional guardian of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. Ankara has cultural ties to the Crimean Peninsula (a former Ottoman territory with a Turkophone Tatar community), and Erdogan's regime has consistently expressed its non-recognition of Russia's annexation of Crimea. But Turkey continues to play both sides: it sold Bayraktar drones to Ukraine, proving useful in the early stages of the war, but has intensified its trade with Russia. According to atlanticcouncil.orgfpri.org, Turkey will see the Black Sea in a possible post-war period as an opportunity to ensure its long-term energy security. Ankara has promoted regional security initiatives since the 2000s (BLACKSEAFOR, Operation Black Sea Harmony) and has been reluctant to NATO's presence at sea.

In the event of a ceasefire or a freeze in the war, the Black Sea will continue to be an opportunity for the riparian countries, including Romania. Our country is making remarkable progress in extracting offshore gas deposits from the deep sea to reduce energy dependence on Russian gas purchased through intermediaries. Transgaz data, cited by Economica.net from February 2025, show that Romania imports 10.8 million cubic meters of net gas. Most of the gas is of Russian origin, transported through Turk Stream.

The most notable project is Neptun Deep, located in the Romanian sector of the Black Sea, with the largest amount of gas deposits discovered in the last decades in this region. According to reuters.com, in 2023, after years of delays and legislative uncertainties, the OMV Petrom (omvpetrom.com)-Romgaz (romgaz.ro) consortium announced the final investment decision and started work with semi-submersible drilling platforms, underwater systems and a transport pipeline to the shore in Tuzla where the gas will be processed.

In March 2025, drilling of the first production wells began. By exploiting one of the largest gas deposits in the EU, with recoverable reserves estimated at approximately 100 billion cubic meters, Romania will double its gas production from 2027 through Neptun Deep. Our country will be able to cover more than its consumption needs (9-10 billion cubic meters annually). From 2028, Romania could become a gas exporter, decoupling the EU from Russian gas. Our country will build 3.5 GW of gas-fired power plants by 2030, with the potential to become a major energy player in Eastern Europe.

However, Romania will face two major challenges: the operating environment in the Black Sea can be affected by weather and depth conditions, and security, from Russian naval mines to the risk of conflict escalation due to a Russian missile that could hit offshore infrastructure.

Scenario 2: Russia Advances towards Odessa and Transnistria. "Novorossia" Is inevitable. The Risk of a NATO-Russia War Increases

According to ISW, the second scenario analyses the prospect of continued and expanded Russian aggression, in which Moscow destroys the Ukrainian status quo and pursues the realization of its maximum

territorial ambitions in the Pontic region. This scenario, although riskier and less likely in the short term (given Ukrainian resistance and high costs), remains a possibility in the strategic planning of the riparian states.

Specifically, it aims at a major Russian offensive in southwestern Ukraine to capture the port city of Odessa and create a continuous land corridor to the separatist region of Transnistria (Republic of Moldova). This “Novorossia variant” would fulfill the long-standing Russian imperial goal of controlling the entire northern Black Sea coast, transforming Ukraine into a landlocked state and implicitly placing the Republic of Moldova at Russia’s disposal (flanked to the east by Transnistria and to the west by the Carpathian rift). President Putin recently declared that “Novorossia is an integral part of Russia,” his spokesman explicitly defining this concept as including the provinces of eastern and southern Ukraine—Odessa, Mykolaiv, Zaporozhe, Kherson, Donetsk, Lugansk, and even Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk—that is, far beyond the territories already occupied, according to FPRI and euromaidanpress.com. These statements highlight that, in the Kremlin’s view, the conquest of Odessa and the entire Ukrainian coast remains a desideratum if the military-political context allows it. Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy chairman of Russia’s Security Council, went even further, claiming in 2024 that Russia would likely have to occupy Kiev “sooner or later” and called Odessa a “historically Russian” city - ISW - understandingwar.orgunderstandingwar.org.

An attack on Odessa could involve both a land offensive from the east (from occupied Kherson), and possible amphibious landings or special operations from the sea. Already in 2023, Russia has intensified missile strikes on Odessa and Ukrainian port infrastructure, with Putin repeatedly confirming that Odessa remains a military priority, according to foreignpolicy.com. The goal would be not only to strangle Ukraine economically, but also to create the prerequisites for advancing west. The connection with Transnistria could be used to directly threaten Chisinau and put an end to the pro-Western aspirations of the Republic of Moldova – in fact, Russian plans to destabilize Moldova have been signalled by Western services, and the stationing of 1,500 Russian soldiers in Transnistria provides Moscow with a strategic bridgehead.

If this scenario were to come true, the geostrategic effects would be major: the Black Sea would become almost entirely dominated by Russia (except for the territorial waters of Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, and a strip of Ukrainian waters in the northwest, which is unlikely to be maintained). NATO would face a much expanded maritime border with Russia, from the Danube Delta to the shores of Georgia, considerably complicating the defence of its south-eastern flank.

A revived Novorossiia would ensure Russia’s control over important economic resources: Odessa is not only a crucial port, but also an industrial centre and energy hub. The Odessa region hosts gas and oil infrastructure, including links to networks in Romania. In addition, such a territorial gain could be presented inside Russia as a strategic victory, justifying the propaganda of total war. However, achieving these objectives would require Russia to overcome considerable military obstacles.

Ukrainian forces, supported by the West, have heavily fortified the Odessa region, and a frontal attack would face vehement international opposition. However, the fear of such a scenario persists. Western chancelleries are taking preventive measures: for example, France signed a military cooperation agreement with Moldova in 2023 and promised unwavering support to President Maia Sandu, precisely to discourage an extension of the conflict to the banks of the Dniester (eurasiareview.com).eurasiareview.com).

If the city of Odessa is captured by the Russians, it would be tantamount to cutting off any immediate prospects for Ukraine to join NATO or the EU (being landlocked and vulnerable), but it would strengthen the cohesion of the Western alliance on the Black Sea, which would be forced to directly defend Romania and Bulgaria from a Russian neighbour on the border. Overall, scenario 2 would radically transform the configuration of power in the Black Sea basin: Russia would try to enshrine the creation of the “Novorossiysk” region, consolidating its status as a regional hegemon, and NATO would be in a position to manage a new maritime Cold War frontier, with the associated risks of escalation towards World War III.

In the event of an escalation of a war between NATO and Russia, the post-war prospects would be unpredictable. The Black Sea could become a Russian lake if Europe loses. If the US intervenes on the side of Europe, NATO warships would enter the Black Sea to confront the Russian fleet, becoming a “NATO lake”, but depending on two factors:

1. If Turkey, as a NATO member, is willing to cooperate and allow NATO warships to enter the Black Sea and an undesirable situation will not be reached - Ankara ally with Moscow in this world war;
2. If the Third World War will be conventional and will not resort to the use of weapons of mass destruction.

In the first phase of the Russian advance towards Odessa, NATO must recalibrate its military presence in the Black Sea area, with an emphasis on naval forces and allied strategic infrastructure in Romania and

Bulgaria. On the one hand, Russia, faced with unexpected challenges (Ukrainian attacks on its base in Sevastopol and the ban on bringing additional ships through the straits), has been looking for solutions to preserve and strengthen its Black Sea Fleet. A signal in this regard is Moscow's decision in October 2023 to sign an agreement with the separatist authorities of Abkhazia (Georgia) to establish a new permanent naval base in Otsiamtsira (the Abkhazian Black Sea coast). Abkhazian leader Aslan Bzhania confirmed that "in the near future there will be a permanent Russian Navy base in the Otsiamtsira district," aimed at "increasing the level of defense capability of Russia and Abkhazia," according to reuters.com.

The Russian fleet remains a force to be reckoned with, especially because of its submarines equipped with Kalibr and Zircon cruise missiles, which can strike distant land targets from safe positions, according to iss.europa.eu. In addition, Crimea has been transformed by Russia into a citadel with a dual role: defensive bastion (S-400 systems, anti-ship bastions) and offensive springboard from which forces can be projected into the Mediterranean, the Middle East or the Balkans.

On the other hand, NATO has reacted with a historic effort to strengthen the military infrastructure in its riparian states, especially Romania and Bulgaria, recognizing the vulnerabilities of the eastern flank on the Black Sea. Romania, in particular, has become an allied strategic hub in the region. At the Mihail Kogălniceanu air base (near the port of Constanta), massive expansion works began in 2023, aimed at transforming it into the largest NATO military base in Europe, surpassing the Ramstein base in Germany in terms of area and capacity (balkaninsight.com). The investment, estimated at \$2.7 billion, will allow hosting up to 10,000 military personnel (if they are not withdrawn by the Trump administration) and civilian personnel by 2030, giving Romania an increased role in the Alliance's security architecture.

Kiev has been insistently asking the Western community for weapons, ammunition, equipment and political support to balance the gap with Moscow's forces. This call has become even more acute in the context of the Black Sea, where the Russian naval blockade and the destruction of infrastructure have threatened the Ukrainian economy and global food security.

President Volodymyr Zelensky has consistently requested increasingly sophisticated weaponry as the war has progressed: initially, portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft systems; then heavy artillery and HIMARS systems; later modern Western tanks (delivered starting in 2023) and advanced air defence systems (Patriot, IRIS-T); and in 2024, the focus shifted to fighter jets (F-16) and long-range missiles. Each threshold has been gradually exceeded, amid Ukrainian pressure and the allies' conviction that support must be intensified.

Romania and Bulgaria, as NATO member states bordering the Black Sea, have a key role in shaping the Alliance's security architecture in this region. If until a decade ago the southeastern flank was considered secondary to the north-eastern (Baltic) one, recent developments have placed Bucharest and Sofia at the forefront of NATO's efforts to strengthen collective defence.

Bucharest has invested in its own security: it has modernized the Mihail Kogălniceanu air base (where NATO aircraft for air policing have been stationed on a rotational basis since 2014) and hosted the Aegis Ashore anti-missile system (operational since 2016 at Deveselu), part of the NATO shield. Militarily, a NATO Multinational Battle Group has been deployed on Romanian territory since 2022 (with France as the framework nation, including troops from Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Poland). Romania has also co-opted other allied presences: the US 101st Airborne Brigade was temporarily deployed to the base in 2022-2023, and US rotational forces are constantly present at the Cincu training ground.

In conclusion, Romania and Bulgaria have moved from a peripheral position on the NATO map to a central one for European security. By investing in their own defence and hosting allied forces and infrastructure, they today constitute the demarcation line between the Euro-Atlantic space and Russia's sphere of influence on the Black Sea. Challenges persist – both countries are exposed to hybrid threats (cyber-attacks, Russian propaganda, energy blackmail, as seen in the case of the cut-off of Russian gas supplies to Bulgaria in 2022.

Conclusion

The Black Sea region is going through a defining period, in which old dilemmas of power and influence are re-emerging in a new context, marked by open confrontation and strategic reconfiguration.

In terms of power dynamics, we find ourselves in a fragile and contested balance. Russia, although militarily weakened by Ukrainian resistance, remains determined to maintain its presence and advantage in the Black Sea, resorting to conventional and hybrid strategies to transform the area into a "lake" of its influence (iss.europa.eu). NATO, for its part, has overcome past hesitations and adopted a posture of active engagement:

it has strengthened its south-eastern flank, fully integrated Romania and Bulgaria as regional security pillars, and begun to develop a specific strategic vision for the Black Sea.

The future of the Black Sea will be written depending on the outcome of the confrontation in Ukraine and the ability of the actors involved to find a *modus vivendi* that ensures the security, freedom of navigation, and shared prosperity of this basin.

After the funeral of Pope Francis on April 26, 2025, Donald Trump spoke for 15 minutes with Volodymyr Zelensky. It seems to be progress compared to the meeting that ended catastrophically in the Oval Office of the White House on February 28, 2025 (Kyiv Independent).

Trump said that the missile attacks on cities in recent days make him believe that Putin does not want to stop the war and is constantly dragging his feet, which is why he should be treated differently, through secondary and banking sanctions.

“Too many people are dying” Trump wrote on the social network Truth Details.

According to TASS, Russian President Vladimir Putin told Donald Trump’s envoy, Steve Witkoff, that he is ready to negotiate a solution to the conflict in Ukraine “without any preconditions.”

The Russian president said at a meeting with Donald Trump’s envoy, Steve Witkoff, that “the Russian side is ready to resume the negotiation process with Ukraine without any preconditions,” said Dmitry Peskov, the spokesman for the Russian presidency.

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SECURITY AND RESILIENCE - BRAZIL



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Influence and Psychological Operations Within the Context of Wargames: Focus on Brazil¹

Abstract

The presence of influence operations in wargames constitutes this article's central core, covering aspects pertaining to the information environment as well as to cognitive / psychological operations. To this end, tactical, operational and strategic levels are addressed.

On top of bibliographical research, this piece is also the result of an exclusive interview with Navy Captain Alexandre Tito Xavier (Ret. / Brazilian Armed Forces). This way, the article particularly highlights Brazil's current situation, as concerns wargames in general, and, specifically, in relation to the use of psychological operations.

Keywords: Brazil; cognitive / psychological operations; influence operations; information operations; war-games.

Introduction

This article is the result of bibliographical research and of an exclusive interview with Navy Captain Alexandre Tito Xavier* (Ret. / Brazilian Armed Forces). He is a distinguished expert and

pioneer, in Brazil, in the sphere of wargames, with a wealth of experience in the field of Intelligence (*Quem Sou*), relative to whom the following aspects are noteworthy, among others (*Alexandre Tito Xavier*):

- from 2021 to the present – Defense Ministry researcher (Brazil)
- from 2020 to the present – Wargames Center instructor at the Naval Warfare School (Brazil)
- 2018-2020 – Deputy Director of the Navy Technological Center (São Paulo, Brazil)
- 2015-2017 – Commander of the Rio de Janeiro Naval Base (Brazil)

This article is developed around wargames concerning which there is no single commonly accepted



Source: <https://airpowerasia.com/2020/04/20/cyber-space-tool-for-influence-operations/>

¹The article is published with the consent of the authors after it was previously published in <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/influence-and-psychological-operations-within-context-wargames> (20.03.2025) and in <https://ia-forum.org/Files/Influence%20and%20Psychological%20Operations%20within%20the%20Context%20of%20Wargames.pdf>

definition (*Wargaming Handbook* August 2017, p. 5). Thus being the case, as part of this work, a wargame is considered to be a model where people make decisions, in a synthetic environment marked by conflict or competition, and where they become aware of the consequences of their decisions, and they can react according to such changes (Perla September 19, 2022). This definition comprises two keywords: people and decisions (Perla September 19, 2022).

An essential aspect of warfare involves decision-making in an adversarial environment, facing stress, danger, unpredictability and uncertainty (Work, Selva December 8, 2015). The efficacy of wargames basically goes by way of including human players who make decisions relative to their best actions, considering their circumstances and what the adversary's reaction is expected to be (Work, Selva December 8, 2015). On top of hostile actors, wargames should also include every 'oppositional' factor that creates resistance to a plan (*Wargaming Handbook* August 2017, p. 5). Wargames consist of the following elements: aims and objectives; setting and scenario; players / decisions; simulation; rules, procedures and adjudications; data and sources; supporting personnel and subject matter experts; analysis (*Wargaming Handbook* August 2017, pp. 7-8).

Wargames are suitable for investigating their players' decision-making processes, those aspects which they feel determined their decisions and the way such processes are interrelated (Perla September 19, 2022). The game unfolds in these players' minds (Perla September 19, 2022). At their essence, wargames are regarded as acts of communication that take place, in a structured manner, among experts (Vatne, et alii September 19, 2022).

As part of wargames, this article particularly focuses on some that are integrated in information operations, namely cognitive operations / influence operations (Panwar 2024, p. 4). In this sphere, psychological operations (Psyops) will also be highlighted (Panwar 2024, p. 4). With regard to the kinds of warfare at issue, there is a certain conceptual uncertainty, due to a number of reasons, such as the difficulty in placing said spheres in airtight compartments.

In a democratic society, decision makers should be aware that they find themselves in an environment that neutral, friendly and hostile (civilian and military) actors seek to shape (*German Wargaming Center*). All said actors are bent on wielding influence (*German Wargaming Center*). In reality, as part of a military conflict or even in periods deemed to be peacetime, military operations can be conducted comprising several kinds of targets, such as the following: individual (military and political decision makers); groups; vast swaths of a country's population. All of these targets, in principle, can be directly or indirectly influenced through various means (e.g. interpersonal communication and media). All this can be present in wargames. Within the sphere of wargames, influence operations constitute the centerpiece of this article. In the current context, influence means the ability to produce an effect on one's character or behavior or the effect *per se* (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, p. 123). (This definition can be found in the *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries (Influence)*).

There are various kinds of wargames, such as the following: computer-supported exercises; scenario exercises; tabletop map exercises (*Wargaming*). Wargames can be found at tactical, operational and strategic levels (*Wargaming*). At all these levels, decision-making is a pivotal aspect. It should be added that tactical, operational and strategic levels are not fully separate (*Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* July 12, 2017, p. I-7). In the current global environment, said levels are interconnected in complex ways (Perla, Markowitz 2009, p. 1). In this regard, experts even speak of multi-level gaming (Perla, Markowitz 2009, p. 1). This is a topic for which NATO, for example, has shown interest (Dobias, Nelson 2023).

At the strategic level of decision-making, the objectives of the conflict and the end state are determined (Perla, Markowitz 2009, p. 14). At the tactical level of conflict, opposing forces interact directly (Perla, Markowitz 2009, p. 14). Here, we have what is known as the engine of change (Perla, Markowitz 2009, p. 14). The operational level, which is above the tactical one and below the strategic one, links the goals of change to the engine of change (Perla, Markowitz 2009, p. 14). The operational level is where decision makers evaluate the changes that have occurred, while determining which means can contribute to the tactical outcome and how all this can contribute toward bringing about the changes specified by strategists (Perla, Markowitz 2009, p. 14).

Wargames are currently viewed as instruments of considerable importance, in both the military and civilian spheres, namely as concerns policymakers (*The Crucial Role of Wargaming in Defence* November 17, 2023). Wargames are part of the curricular structures of various civilian and military universities (Bae December 16, 2020) as well as Professional Military Education (PME) programs (Walters 2021). This type of games is a proven credible method for developing leadership, in the military domain, from tactical to strategic levels, at a relatively low cost, compared to exercises involving hundreds or thousands of troops (Arias, Klay December, 2017, p. 7).

Monk (October 7, 2024) maintains that military organizations should heighten their interest in strategic-level wargames whose participants comprise not only military personnel, but also other persons, with key functions, such as intelligence service professionals, diplomats and economic policymakers. In said game type, players are called upon to make decisions which, while overcoming battlefield maneuvers to a great extent, cover the following, *inter alia*: shaping international perceptions; negotiating alliances; and managing economic sanctions (Monk October 7, 2024).

Wargames and the Information Environment

Essentially, military information power amounts to the ability to exert one's own will or influence over an adversary, by generating, preserving, denying or projecting information (Reese August 2020, p. 32). In the United States (U.S.), the Defense Department has paid ever closer attention to the information environment, with the same taking place in competitor countries such as China and Russia, most notably the latter (Paul, et alii 2020, p. x). The importance of the information environment in warfare should justify its prominence in wargames (Paul, et alii 2020, p. 27).

Wargames, for instance, as part of the U.S. Marine Corps, need to cover a variety of information-related capabilities, *inter alia*, the following: civil-military operations; cyber operations; defense support to public diplomacy; intelligence; military deception (Paul, et alii 2020, p. xi). Also regarding Marine Corps wargames, we should point out mechanisms that enable integrating effects of operations in the information environment on noncombatant populations (Paul, et alii 2020, p. xi). Among others, we see the following operations in the information environment functions: influence foreign target audiences; deceive foreign target audiences; inform domestic and international audiences (Chawk April 2020, p. 10).

Wargaming operations in the information environment endow the Marine Corps with a holistic perspective of the information environment (Paul, et alii 2020, p. 11). This, despite being relevant for the war's physical sphere, is chiefly related to the mental and morale spheres (Paul, et alii 2020, p. 27). These two latter spheres are predominantly present in the information environment and, thus, are influenced through operations therein (Paul, et alii 2020, p. 39).

The three previously mentioned spheres are, to a greater or lesser extent, present in wargames; however, the most important one is morale (Paul, et alii 2020, p. 35). To be able to learn the impact of operations in the information environment through wargames, we need to take into account the three spheres: especially, unlike physical movement and combat, actions should enable producing non-physical effects (Paul, et alii 2020, p. 35).

While information warfare can be regarded as a subpart of operations in the information environment, it takes place in periods of competition, without being an armed conflict, as well as during warfare, with the aim of dominating the information environment within a given space and time (Theohary November 29, 2024). Currently, in our society, practically everyone is part of the digital information environment (Havel March, 20, 2023). Within the context of the digital age, information warfare is of concern to several experts who warn of malicious actors tampering with public opinion, through the media, and of their destabilizing governments, among other reasons for concern (Saari, et alii June 2024, p. 439).

To offset information influence activities, suitably trained and educated communicators need to be in place (Saari, et alii June 2024, p. 439). For instance, in January 2024, 27 Finnish officials from various ministries and agencies took part in an information warfare exercise (Saari, et alii June 2024, p. 439).

For those studying the fields of Defense and Security, planning information operations, as part of wargames, improves learning (Emmel May 2020, p. 60). Also by way of example of what can be achieved in wargames, in order to thwart adversarial narratives, teams use social media to reach certain target audiences while adapting to changes occurring in the information environment (Emmel May 2020, pp. 60-61). Specifically, in 2019, a wargame was conducted at the National Defense Academy (Riga, Latvia), in which training, projecting and receiving narratives were looked at, to create resilience against malign influence (David, DeRosa January 16, 2020).

Wargames can also serve to delve into the way States use lawfare in the information space, acting below the threshold of an armed conflict, with a view to obtaining some advantages (Emmel May 2020, p. 61). (According to Starling (February 2022), the gray zone amounts to a set of activities, *inter alia* influence operations, which occur between peace and war. These activities can be carried out by both state and non-state actors (Starling February 2022). Specifically, there are gray zone wargames that encompass information actions (Pettyjohn, Wasser 2019, pp. 3 / 49)).

Influence in Wargames

The purpose of the German Wargaming Center is to understand influence and come up with ways for democratic societies to become more resilient vis-à-vis hostile or harmful influence (*German Wargaming Center*). Foreign influence on democratic societies constitutes the basis for military and non-military coercive campaigns, with an impact on the attitudes and behaviors of various audiences (*German Wargaming Center*).

Nick Joad, Director of Science and Technology / United Kingdom (UK) Ministry of Defence, believes that, with regard to many activities in the fields of Defense and Security, human behavior is of significant importance (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, p. iii). This expert stresses that operational success goes by way of influencing the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of a variety of audiences (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, p. iii). Joad asserts that we are witnessing a rapid change in the character of warfare, due to the evolving technological progress and the dissemination of information (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, p. iii).

Concerning military operations, the information environment is the most accelerated of all the environments (Katolin, George April 2020, p. 85). According to NATO, the information environment, on top of the information *per se*, also includes individuals, organizations and systems that receive, process and issue information as well as the cognitive, physical and virtual space where all this unfolds. (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, p. 124) The information environment has means at its disposal that can produce lethal or non-lethal effects (Reese August 2020, p. 36).

Nick Joad considers that the UK's adversaries and competitors seek to weaken political cohesion as well as social and economic resilience, through information-centered activities that aim to affect audiences' beliefs, attitudes and behaviors on a global scale (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, p. iii). Wargaming is especially appropriate for investigating influence; still, to bring this about and prevent certain risks, everything has to be conducted correctly (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, pp. v-vi).

Regarding the UK Defence Doctrine, acknowledgment of audiences' importance is linked to the inclusion of integrated action (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, p. 1). Such action amounts to orchestrating military activities in every operational domain, geared to audiences, in sync with non-military activities, to influence the attitudes and behaviors of certain audiences, in order to attain positive results (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, p. 1).

Influence is achieved by creating effects in every dimension of the information environment (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, p. 1). The effects of influence cover and relate, among themselves, operations' tactical, operational and strategic levels (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, p. 4). It should be underscored that the activities that bring about influence and behavioral effects are more extensive than solely kinetic military operations (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, p. 7).

Compared to conventional wargaming, influence wargaming goes by way of different factors, such as the following: attitudes; behaviors; non-negotiable beliefs and cultures; motivations in decision-making; governance; national constraints; permissions and policies; the media's inroads-making capability; information and disinformation (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, p. 16). It is not feasible to include all of the aforementioned factors in a wargame, which is why a wargame needs to focus only on those deemed vital for attaining certain aims and objectives (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, p. 16). In influence wargames, each party will likely comprise players that have never interacted before and which come from diverse domains, as can occur with military personnel, diplomats, social influencers and finance ministers (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, p. 27). Although influence wargames can occur within a war context, most unfold over extended periods of constant rivalry interspersed with conflicts (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, p. 28).

In influence warfare, it's particularly important to know audience perspectives, as obtaining credible data regarding this is not easy (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, p. 33). With regard to what is at issue, even if databases are in place, attitudes and behaviors can change rapidly, making it difficult to assess the impact of actions undertaken in the wargame (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, p. 33).

A wide range of actors can take part in influence wargames, with activities that blur the differences between tactical, operational and strategic levels (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, p. 37). It should be pointed out that, in influence wargames, a single individual or entity can affect entire economies or audiences, as well as the effectiveness of an enemy brigade, for example, through disinformation (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, p. 37).

There is uncertainty in the field of communication, to the extent there is no absolute guarantee that the effects produced by the messages with the intended audience amount to what the emitting party desires (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, p. 39). To create intended effects in influence wargames, players can

have several legal or illegal means at their disposal, such as changing public opinion through disinformation, as well as hacking and deep-faking social media accounts through software piracy (*Influence Wargaming Handbook* 2023, p. 41). The effects can be produced in the short, medium or long term.

Cognitive / Psychological Operations

Even though this is not a new phenomenon, given that it was somehow addressed some 2,500 years ago (Kuo March 26, 2007, p. 5) in China by Sun Tzu (Panwar 2024, p. 1), cognitive warfare is considered an emerging concept in military and academic spheres (Deppe, Schaal November 1, 2024). NATO, among other organizations, reflects on the impact of the aforementioned type of warfare in wargames (*Allied Command Transformation Develops the Cognitive Warfare Concept to Combat Disinformation and Defend Against "Cognitive Warfare"* July 3, 2024).

Schaal November 1, 2024). However, this kind of warfare can be envisaged as a strategic approach to conflicts without resorting to physical violence, in order to change perceptions and to influence thought processes (Putter December 15, 2024). As part of this, there is a weaponization of content taken in by people (Putter December 15, 2024). The purpose of cognitive warfare is to shape adversaries' behaviors and, to such end, to set certain cognitive elements as goals (for instance: attitudes, beliefs and understandings) (Putter December 15, 2024). Cognitive warfare operates in the spheres of society and politics, making use of psychological tactics, with the aim of attaining strategic objectives (Putter December 15, 2024).

In the military domain, cognitive operations include various capabilities, such as the following: Psyops; Public Information (in order to influence domestic and foreign audiences); civil-military operations (for the purpose of having influence over the civilian populace) (Panwar 2024, pp. 3-4). Cognitive warfare can be waged through the media, in general, including social media (Cao, et alii May 20, 2021).

According to Schrijver (November 3, 2024), Psyops can be understood as activities which, in times of conflict, use communication methods as well as other means; in relation to certain target audiences, this is to influence perceptions, attitudes and behaviors so as to attain certain political and military objectives. Psyops, which may include targets such as enemy forces and civilian populations, among other audiences, can weaken the enemy's will or enhance backing from allies (Schrijver November 3, 2024).

In the late 20th century, with regard to the U.S. Armed Forces, there were those who advised making Psyops part of computer-assisted wargames and simulations (Goldstein, Findley September 1996, p. 46). Currently, and in reality, Psyops are present in wargames that contribute toward training the U.S. Army Special Operations Forces (Plotkin, Plotkin December 2021, p. v).

Psyop players examine relevant populations, create and send messages to certain targets, for the purpose of favorably modifying their behavior (Plotkin, Plotkin December 2021, p. 20). Headquartered at the University of Maryland (U.S.) is a company specializing in political-military gaming that aims, among several aspects, to assess the impact of Psyops (*Customized Wargames. Expert Access*).

In the 21st century, India's capability in the sphere of wargames is strengthened by integrating Psyops (Jain May 8, 2024). This provides troops with instruments that are vital for them to understand and face opposing propaganda and manipulation operations (Jain May 8, 2024).

Perspective of Navy Captain Tito Xavier Concerning Brazil

In an exclusive interview for this piece, Navy Captain Tito Xavier asserts that Brazil's Defense Ministry, under which the Armed Forces operate, has recently assigned greater importance to wargames; this can be seen in the considerable rise in the number of analytic wargames carried out. To this end, the interviewee underscored the fact that the Navy has pioneered organizing the first course on wargames, as part of the Defense Ministry. As regards said course, this officer recalls that he was one of the instructors and creators, together with Commander William, head of the Brazilian Navy War Games Center / School of Naval Warfare, which has contributed toward heightening the importance of this methodology in the Naval Forces. As noted by Navy Captain Tito Xavier, this course has raised interest among various sectors of Brazil's Defense. From this expert's standpoint, the wargame concept needs to be standardized in the Brazilian Armed Forces, since there are lines of thought that differ among them, thus hampering interoperability.

The interviewee considers that, in his country, with regard to wargames, Psyops are increasingly important, despite currently being limited at tactical and operational levels. (This officer adds that conditions are right for conducting wargames at higher decision-making levels.)

Progress (Progresso): one of the words appearing on Brazil's flag can also apply to wargames.

Navy Captain Tito Xavier points out that, within Brazil's context, Psyops are present in educational wargames, consolidating knowledge of the joint planning process among Brazil's Armed Forces, as well as in analytic wargames, analyzing certain operation or strategy plans.

This interviewee provides the example of Psyop-simulating wargames that attempt to influence a target audience's opinion so that said audience is for or against a given party made up of players, while seeking to weaken the opposing party's will to fight. Relative to the type of games under analysis, he stresses the role of intelligence services, by advising in selecting opponents' profile as well as in picking out a public that is sought to be influenced.

Navy Captain Tito Xavier believes that operational success increases when influence can be wielded over the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of certain target publics. This expert adds that, in the world we currently live in, opponents seek to affect political cohesion while diminishing the target country's economic and social resilience. He maintains that government representatives should take part in political wargames, in order to make the simulation more realistic. This officer further states that, since wargames are simulations of actual, hypothetical and, at times, fictitious situations, it would be wise to consider updated geopolitical / geo-strategic aspects, with the purpose of providing the game with greater authenticity and legitimacy while endowing players with greater immersion / engagement, as concerns the presented scenario.

The interviewee bemoans the fact that political decision makers in Brazil, in practically every sphere, including Security, Defense and Foreign Relations, are unaware that the methodology of wargames is important and effective for analyzing complex problems, strategies and policies of areas which they head. Still, this officer is convinced that this situation will be changed in the medium term.

This interviewee asserts that Brazil's academic community could lend its contribution toward creating/ designing wargames while improving their results; however, this topic is still in its very early stages at Brazilian universities. According to Navy Captain Tito Xavier, this difficulty has been mitigated by the contribution from the School of Naval Warfare's Scenario Simulation Laboratory; still, the way this expert sees it, much remains to be done. In this regard, he further points out that he created Brazil's first and, at the time of this interview, the only wargame course for people outside the remit of the Defense Ministry, as he has been lecturing to military and civilian security forces personnel. As noted by the interviewee, interest in this topic is growing in Brazil.

Conclusion

At present, wargames in general are the subject of interest in both the military and civilian spheres. Specifically, the currently growing importance of cognitive / influence operations and Psyops, as part of information warfare, is reflected in wargames, at tactical, operational and strategic levels. In reality, within the context of either peace or war, the aforementioned types of operations can comprise various targets, such as individuals (military and political decision makers), groups and vast swaths of a country's population. To such end, several means can be used, most notably traditional media and, nowadays, social media, to keep up with technological progress. All of these instruments serve to disseminate messages duly formulated by competent professionals, with multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary teams often being desirably necessary. All this should be present in influence wargames. In these, chiefly at strategic level, not only military personnel should take part, but also civilians, *inter alia*, diplomats, (counter) intelligence services professionals and certain government members. Wargames can serve to simulate how to influence foreign decision makers and how to protect domestic decision makers from international influences, within contexts involving competition or armed conflict.

Brazil's Armed Forces keep up with the international trend of increasingly valuing not only wargames in general, most notably the Navy's pioneering, but also, specifically, the presence of information / psychological operations in wargames. This latter aspect is mainly seen at tactical and operational levels, but not so much at a higher decision-making level, even though conditions are now favorable for this to take place.

In Brazil, we need to make decision makers increasingly aware of the importance and efficacy of the methodology of wargames, in relation to the analysis of complex problems, strategies and policies, namely in the spheres of Foreign Relations, Defense and Security. This situation can improve in the medium term.

Although this has yet to occur, as one would hope, Brazil's academic community could contribute toward developing wargames, for starters, for instance, by taking part in creating/designing them. In this regard, we need to underscore the role of the School of Naval Warfare's Scenario Simulation Laboratory.

All of this and much more should be accompanied by an in-depth reflection on the relationship between simulation and reality.

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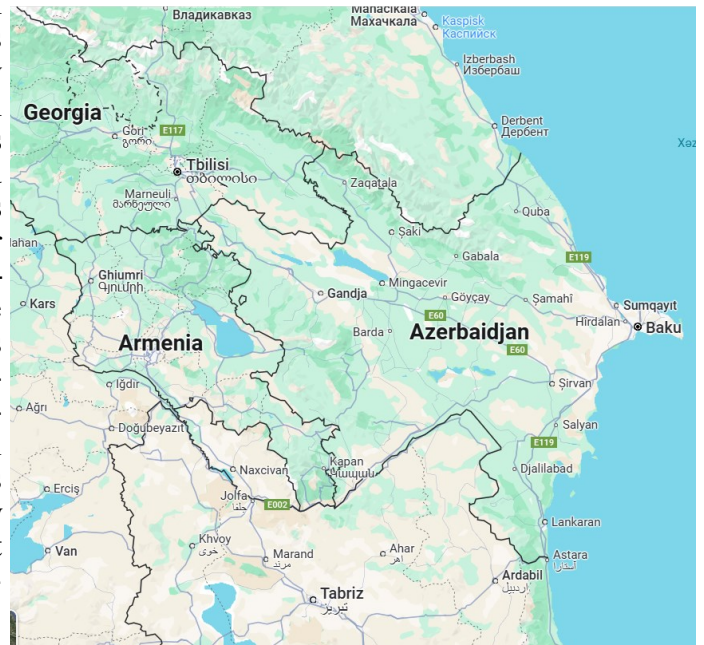
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Negotiating War and Peace: The Strategic Role of Military Diplomacy in the South Caucasus

Abstract

Military diplomacy plays a pivotal role in contemporary international relations, intertwining military power with diplomatic negotiations to achieve political objectives, manage conflicts, and build alliances. This paper explores the significance of negotiations in military diplomacy, particularly in preventing conflict escalation and shaping post-war settlements. The study then shifts its focus to the South Caucasus, analyzing the protracted Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and the role of negotiations before, during, and after the Second Karabakh War (2020). It examines Azerbaijan's strategic use of diplomacy, particularly in energy geopolitics through the "Contract of the Century", and its military preparedness leading up to the 2020 counteroffensive. The paper highlights the interplay of regional and global actors, including Turkey, Russia, Iran, China, the US, and the EU, in shaping regional security dynamics. It further emphasizes the importance of trust, leverage, timing, and third-party mediation in conflict resolution. The study concludes that while military force can alter the balance of power, sustainable peace ultimately hinges on effective negotiations.

Keywords: military diplomacy, military power, negotiation, Armenia, Azerbaijan.



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Introduction

Amid the ongoing wars in the Middle East and Ukraine, negotiations play a pivotal role in mediating regional conflicts. Such diplomatic efforts help prevent local disputes from escalating into military interventions on large-scale wars. Through these initiatives, major powers negotiate terms to limit their involvement in proxy wars, which could destabilize entire regions and heighten military risks. As the following quotes

suggest, Sun Tzu had a profound understanding of the necessity of shaping the environment and conditions to achieve the desired objectives. A skilled and competent leader leverages all available means to influence the environment—whether to avoid war entirely or, if war is inevitable, to secure victory (Iskandarov et al., 2024). The essence of military diplomacy lies in shaping conditions that favor future outcomes. In this context, effective negotiations are undeniably crucial.

A number of academic studies focus on bargaining and strategic behavior, the evolving nature of strategy and diplomacy, the effectiveness of negotiations, and the concept of military diplomacy. For instance, Schelling (1960) introduces concepts such as bargaining and strategic behavior, offering a foundational understanding of how military capabilities and diplomatic negotiations influence conflict outcomes. Min (2020) analyzes the frequency and effectiveness of negotiations during post-World War II conflicts, providing insights into how diplomacy intersects with ongoing military engagements. Wolford (2020) explores the dynamics of crisis bargaining, highlighting how diplomatic opposition can raise the costs of war and influence negotiation outcomes during international crises. Prantl and Goh (2022) discuss the evolving nature of strategy and diplomacy, emphasizing the necessity of integrating military and diplomatic efforts to effectively address contemporary security challenges. Segura and Haros-Pérez (2023) examine how diplomacy and negotiation serve as integral components of military economic strategy, emphasizing the impact of soft power and cultural diplomacy in modern conflicts. Ping and Wise (2024) explore the concept of military diplomacy, highlighting its role in influencing foreign governments and populations through dialogue and negotiation, and its significance in achieving national interests without resorting to violence.

In the context of our research on the South Caucasus, German (2012) examines Russia's military strategies in the South Caucasus, focusing on Moscow's attempts to counterbalance Western involvement and maintain influence in the region. Sadiyev et al. (2019) analyze the historical and contemporary aspects of military diplomacy in the South Caucasus, discussing how regional powers communicate and project their military influence. Ismayil and Yilmaz (2022) examine the complex factors that shape political and military alliance formation in the region, analyzing how regional dynamics impact the development of these alliances. Neset et al. (2023) provide an analysis of the geopolitical changes in the South Caucasus following the Second Karabakh War, highlighting the role of military diplomacy in the evolving regional order. Iskandarov et al. (2024) discuss Azerbaijan's use of military diplomacy, particularly in the context of the Second Karabakh War, and how it influences the country's foreign policy. Melvin (2024) examines Russia's military, diplomatic, and economic strategies in the South Caucasus, providing insights into how these approaches influence regional security and political dynamics.

The novelty of this paper lies in its comprehensive analysis of the role of military diplomacy in shaping the outcome of the Second Karabakh War, particularly the intersection of military strategy, negotiations, and regional geopolitics. Unlike previous works that focus primarily on military tactics or the historical context of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, this paper emphasizes the critical role of negotiations and diplomatic strategies throughout the conflict and its aftermath. It explores not only the direct impact of military confrontations but also the importance of strategic dialogues involving regional and global actors such as Russia, Turkey, Iran, the US and the EU.

The hypothesis of this thesis posits that military diplomacy, when strategically employed alongside military operations, plays a decisive role in achieving political objectives, managing regional conflicts, and shaping the long-term outcomes of territorial disputes. The research questions for this thesis are as follows:

How did military diplomacy influence the outcomes of the Second Karabakh War (2020) between Armenia and Azerbaijan?

How did Azerbaijan's military strategies, including the use of drones and technological advancements, contribute to the success of its diplomatic efforts during the conflict?

What role did key global and regional actors play in the negotiation process during and after the Second Karabakh War?

The paper employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing the methods, such as comparative analysis, synthesis and case study analysis.

Military Strategy Meets Diplomacy: The Role of Negotiations in Modern Warfare

Military diplomacy combines the use of military power with diplomatic negotiations to achieve political objectives, manage conflicts, and build alliances. Sun Tzu was one of the first theorists to emphasize the inseparable connection between military power, diplomacy, and other elements of national strength. His work *The*

Art of War reflects not only the interplay between military strategy and diplomacy but also their relationship with economic and informational aspects. In his writings on offensive strategy, Sun Tzu indirectly highlights the role of both information and diplomacy: *“To win a hundred battles is not the acme of skill. Subduing the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill”* (Willard, 2006). In this context, effective negotiations are crucial for maintaining international peace, stability, and security. In the modern era, given the complexity and interconnectivity of global security challenges, the role of negotiations in ensuring a state’s military security has become even more significant. Firstly, in a multipolar world, amid the competition of global powers, the role of negotiations in preventing escalation is undeniable. In a time when power is distributed among several great states (such as the US, China, Russia, NATO, the EU), negotiations are vital for managing competition and preventing misunderstandings that could lead to conflict. High-level dialogues between powerful states help maintain communication channels, particularly to avoid strategic miscalculations concerning nuclear weapons and advanced military technologies. A famous historical example of this can be cited. The Cuban Missile Crisis, during which the US and the Soviet Union came close to nuclear war, can be considered one of the most critical moments of the Cold War. During the crisis, negotiations played a decisive role in resolving the conflict and preventing catastrophic consequences. As a result, the US agreed to withdraw missiles from Türkiye in exchange for the Soviet Union removing missiles from Cuba. The two superpowers were able to reduce tensions without resorting to military operations, demonstrating the power of negotiations in resolving even the tensest situations. Had the negotiations failed during the Cuban Crisis, the results could have been disastrous. The Kennedy administration had even considered airstrikes on missile sites in Cuba and potentially a large-scale invasion of the island. If negotiations had failed, the US could have pursued these military options to eliminate the threat. An attack on Cuba or its occupation might have led the Soviet Union to respond with military force, likely in Europe or directly against the US, as tensions and distrust were high, which would have increased the likelihood of nuclear weapons being used. This could have led to a devastating nuclear war between the two superpowers. Even without a full-scale nuclear war, a prolonged conflict or limited nuclear strikes could have had severe consequences for global stability (Iskandarov & Aghayev, 2024). This fact highlights the importance of open communication and negotiation in resolving conflicts.

Negotiations can take various forms depending on the context, goals, parties involved, and desired outcomes. Numerous examples of this can be found in open sources. However, in a military context, negotiations are often high-risk, involve complex power dynamics, and can significantly impact national security, international relations, or conflict resolution. Therefore, the forms and types of negotiations are a subject of separate research, and are not covered in this article.

This paper will examine the negotiations that have shaped present-day Azerbaijan, particularly in the context of the decades-long Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. To provide clarity on this issue, it is essential to examine the origins of the conflict. The history of conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan dates back to the early 20th century. Following their incorporation into the Soviet Union, Stalin’s autonomist plan, based on Lenin’s concept of federative states, was implemented. As part of this plan, the mountainous region of Karabakh within Azerbaijan’s borders was granted the status of autonomy in 1923, under the name “Nagorno-Karabakh”. Despite this, there were several attempts by Armenians to annex Karabakh to Armenia, some of which were thwarted by Heydar Aliyev, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan (1969-1982) and First Deputy Premier of the Soviet Union (1982-1987). However, with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the long-standing dispute was reignited. Tensions reached a peak between 1988 and 1994, culminating in the occupation of 20% of Azerbaijani territories. In response, the UN Security Council adopted four resolutions in 1993 – 822, 853, 874, and 884 – demanding the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied Azerbaijani lands. These resolutions remained largely unfulfilled until Azerbaijan took matters into its own hands, launching a large-scale counteroffensive. Meanwhile, the Minsk Group co-chairs – France, Russia, and the US – spent 28 years attempting to broker peace talks, emphasizing the need for confidential negotiations (Piriyev et al., 2023).

Following the 1994 ceasefire, Azerbaijani leadership initiated successful negotiations to advance its long-standing objectives, a strategy clearly reflected in the diplomatic maneuvers of then-President Heydar Aliyev. For instance, in 1994, Russia and Iran tried to use various pressure mechanisms to prevent Azerbaijan and its partner states from signing the “Contract of the Century” with foreign oil companies. Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs argued that the status of the Caspian Sea had not been determined and sent an official note to the UK’s Foreign Ministry on April 27, 1994, stating that even if the contract was signed, it would not be considered a legal document. A similar note was sent by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Azerbaijan on September 12, 1994. However, Heydar Aliyev’s negotiations within the “Contract of the Century” strengthened

Azerbaijan's geopolitical position and transformed it into an energy hub in the region. The political professionalism and experience of the then government led to the involvement of Russia's largest oil corporation, LUKOIL, in the "Contract of the Century". As a result, all obstacles created by Russia were removed, and on September 20, 1994, the "Contract of the Century" was signed in Baku, although LUKOIL sold its share to Japan's IPEX Corporation in 2003 and withdrew from the project. In total, 13 of the world's most prominent oil companies from 8 countries participated in the "Contract of the Century". In his speech at the signing ceremony, Heydar Aliyev stated, *"By signing this contract, we demonstrate to the entire world once again that the sovereign rights of the Republic of Azerbaijan have been restored, that Azerbaijan is fully independent, and that our people are the rightful owners of their wealth"* (Iskandarov et al., 2020). By involving Iran's NICO company in the Shah Deniz project, Heydar Aliyev managed to neutralize the threat from the south, ensuring the stability of oil and gas pipelines and securing Azerbaijan's energy policy. Undoubtedly, professional negotiations played a significant role in the realization of these historical events. It should be noted that with the "Contract of the Century", Azerbaijan became the first post-Soviet country to allow Western oil companies into the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) area and to implement trans regional projects outside of Russia's territory. This also created a precedent in the post-Soviet space by stimulating the sale of hydrocarbon resources from the Caspian states (Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan) to the West (Iskandarov & Aghayev, 2024).

Excluding minor skirmishes, the Republic of Azerbaijan has fought two large-scale wars since regaining independence for the second time. During the First Karabakh War (1992–1994), the Armenian forces, supported by foreign backers, occupied approximately 20% of Azerbaijan's territory. In the Second Karabakh War (September 27 – November 10, 2020), the Azerbaijani Armed Forces launched a counteroffensive and successfully liberated the occupied territories. The long-ignored Karabakh conflict reignited in September 2020, drawing global attention once again. Despite Azerbaijan's commitment to a peaceful resolution, negotiations following the 1994 ceasefire failed to yield tangible results, ultimately culminating in full-scale war. A time gap of approximately 27 years separates these two wars, during which both sides implemented military reforms. The transformations introduced over this period were put to the test during the Second Karabakh War. The Azerbaijani Army secured a decisive victory, showcasing superior strategic planning, operational effectiveness, and resilience on the battlefield. This war also tested Azerbaijan's military strength, the dedication and determination of its soldiers, and the unity of its people (Piriyev et al., 2023). The conflict escalated when Armenian forces provoked hostilities along the front line, prompting Azerbaijan to launch Operation Iron Fist on September 27, 2020, decisively ending the status quo. Some may inquire why the war escalated in 2020 rather than during previous confrontations, such as the clashes in 2016. However, Azerbaijan's military strategy was never predicated on initiating conflict without comprehensive preparation. Its approach entailed a meticulous assessment of not only Armenia's military capabilities but also the influence of external actors, whose support was instrumental in enabling Armenia to sustain its territorial claims against Azerbaijan (Iskandarov & Gawliczek, 2021a). The counter-offensive operation launched by the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2020, was the largest military campaign in the South Caucasus since the 1990s. In addition to its advanced technological capabilities, the military tactics employed by the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan garnered attention from military experts and researchers for their uniqueness. The Azerbaijani Army's offensive was characterized by meticulous reconnaissance, artillery, and UAV strikes. The analysis demonstrates that the Azerbaijani Armed Forces did not defeat a weakened army, as some experts suggest, but rather an army that had been preparing for years and received substantial support from foreign backers (Iskandarov & Gawliczek, 2021b).

A number of papers highlight the significance of technology, particularly drones, in the Second Karabakh War (Iskandarov et al., 2022; Iskandarov & Gawliczek, 2021a, 2021b). However, despite the advancements in military technology, the importance of military-geostrategic calculations remains paramount. During the Second Karabakh War, the Azerbaijani Army liberated five cities, four settlements, and 286 villages from occupation. This accounted for approximately 20% of the total occupied territory. However, with the signing of the November 10 declaration, President Ilham Aliyev successfully secured the liberation of the remaining occupied districts. This stands as a striking example of Sun Tzu's principle: *"Subduing the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill"* (Iskandarov et al., 2024). While the South Caucasus occupies a relatively small area on the world map, its geopolitical significance far exceeds its geographical size. In this context, it is crucial that not only the parties directly involved in the conflict but also various foreign powers adopt a constructive approach to resolving the regional disputes (Iskandarov & Gawliczek, 2021b). Therefore, to analyze the role of negotiations in the Second Karabakh War, it is crucial to examine the key actors involved in the region. There are three major powers surrounding the South Caucasus: Turkey, Iran, and Russia. Turkey, a

strong NATO ally and main player in Central Asia and the Caucasus, is a driving force behind many regional cooperation initiatives. In contrast, Iran opposes the integration of the region into the Western community and disagrees with Turkey's active involvement, seeking to exclude non-regional powers from the South Caucasus processes. As the former dominant power in the post-Soviet space, Russia remains heavily involved in the South Caucasus, exerting significant influence despite not having absolute control and has been working to reassert its authority in the region (Iskandarov & Gawliczek, 2020). In addition to regional powers, global actors and organizations such as the US, China, and the EU also play significant roles in the region, each pursuing their own interests. The US views the South Caucasus as a strategic area to align with the West, aiming to integrate these countries into European institutions. Through the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative, the EU has become a key investor and player in the South Caucasus, aiming to promote stability, development, and stronger connections. The EU, Turkey, and the US share overlapping interests, particularly in ensuring the continuous and unobstructed flow of oil and gas from Central Asia and the Caspian Sea to the West, bypassing Russia and Iran (Guner et al., 2022). China, on the other hand, is mainly an economic actor in the region. Its influence is confined to economic engagement rather than involvement in the domestic affairs of South Caucasus countries, enabling it to avoid challenging Russia's dominance in the region—particularly given that, unlike the West, China lacks a political presence there (Iskandarov & Sadiyev, 2020). China's involvement in the region is largely driven by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which seeks to enhance connectivity between China and Europe. China has maintained a neutral stance on regional conflicts, including the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. However, China's investments in critical infrastructure could gradually increase its political leverage in the region (Sigurdh, 2024).

Negotiations play a crucial role at all stages of a conflict – before, during, and after the war. Pre-war negotiations aim to prevent conflict by addressing the key issues, grievances, and tensions between the parties, while negotiations during an active conflict seek to limit the scale of violence. Post-war negotiations are essential for creating lasting peace. These typically involve official peace treaties or agreements that clearly reflect the terms for both parties. This can be examined in more detail with the example of the Second Karabakh War. After the First Karabakh War (1992-1993), the OSCE Minsk Group, led by Russia, the US and France, was established to mediate peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, the negotiations led by this group yielded little success. Several framework documents, such as the Madrid Principles (2007) and the Kazan Document (2011), failed to reach a common consensus. In the early stages of the Second Karabakh War, Russia and the US made attempts to broker a ceasefire, but these efforts proved unsuccessful. For instance, on October 10, 2020, Russia mediated the first ceasefire agreement in Moscow, but this ceasefire did not last long. Subsequent ceasefire attempt was made on October 25, 2020, with the mediation of the US, but instead of peace, the fighting intensified. On November 8, with the liberation of Shusha by the Azerbaijani Army, Armenia's position became critical, and defeat became inevitable, leading to the signing of a trilateral ceasefire agreement between Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia on November 10, 2020. These negotiations fall under the category of a “ceasefire”. Ceasefire negotiations involve the temporary cessation of active hostilities between warring parties to enable further discussions. While Azerbaijan achieved substantial territorial gains, the ceasefire marked a crucial moment in the conflict, with both Armenia and Azerbaijan agreeing to halt hostilities. The negotiations that led to this agreement were highly complex, as they involved not only the direct parties but also external actors with strategic interests in the region. Therefore, in the post-war period, subsequent negotiations should logically take the form of “peace treaty” negotiations. Peace treaty negotiations involve official discussions aimed at bringing the conflict to an end and establishing long-term peace. Depending on various factors, negotiations may also take the form of “surrender”, “demilitarization”, “disarmament”, “humanitarian”, “withdrawal”, “prisoner exchange”, “integration and reconstruction”. In the post-war period, the primary subjects of negotiations were the delimitation and demarcation of the Armenia-Azerbaijan border and the opening of transportation links. Although significant work has been done on delimitation and demarcation, no progress has been made on opening transportation links (the Zangezur Corridor), which continues to necessitate ongoing negotiations.

Despite incremental progress, the negotiations on a peace deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan have yet to yield concrete results. However, it is important to recognize that negotiations, especially in complex scenarios like military diplomacy, can be inherently time-consuming. Patience and perseverance are vital for maintaining focus and energy throughout prolonged discussions. Rushed negotiations can result in poor decisions, whereas persistence often yields results when tackling difficult or contentious issues. Timing is also a critical factor in negotiations. Knowing when to advance, when to retreat, and when to introduce new proposals can make a significant difference. President Ilham Aliyev's widely recognized assertion, *“I know what,*

how, and when to do it”, which has been prominent in global discourse since the Second Karabakh War, exemplifies this argument (President.az, 2020). Choosing the right moment for concessions or compromise proposals can maximize their positive impact and break deadlocks in stalled negotiations.

Azerbaijan’s diplomatic positioning, led by President Ilham Aliyev, was key in ensuring that its territorial gains were recognized and in preventing any significant external intervention on behalf of Armenia. The negotiations reflected the delicate balance of power in the region and underscored the importance of diplomatic engagement even amid active military operations. Ultimately, the 2020 ceasefire demonstrated the limits of military confrontation and highlighted the significance of negotiations in resolving the conflict, at least temporarily.

Conclusions

This study underscores the indispensable role of negotiations in military diplomacy, demonstrating that while military force can shift the strategic balance, sustainable peace is ultimately forged at the negotiation table. Azerbaijan’s case illustrates how military success, coupled with well-calibrated diplomatic engagement, can redefine geopolitical realities. The country’s proactive diplomatic initiatives – ranging from energy diplomacy to strategic alliances – enabled it to secure favorable negotiation outcomes post-2020. Furthermore, the involvement of global and regional actors such as Russia, Turkey, Iran, the US, and the EU demonstrates that military diplomacy extends beyond bilateral interactions, evolving into a complex interplay of interests where soft power, economic leverage, and military deterrence coexist. As contemporary conflicts grow increasingly hybrid in nature – incorporating information warfare, cyber strategies, and economic pressure – military diplomacy must adapt to these multidimensional challenges. Ultimately, this paper reaffirms that military victories alone do not guarantee long-term stability, rather, the ability to navigate complex negotiation processes determines the durability of peace. For Azerbaijan and other states engaged in protracted conflicts, a strategic fusion of military capability and diplomatic acumen remains the key to securing national interests while fostering regional stability.

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SECURITY AND RESILIENCE - EUROPE AND MIDDLE EAST



Unit 840 of the IRGC: Iran's Covert Action Arm and Its Global Footprint in Europe and the Middle East

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An extensive and in-depth analysis of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' most clandestine operational arm, exploring its evolving tactics, overarching strategy, command leadership, and far-reaching consequences for regional and global security ecosystems.

Abstract

This expanded study explores in exceptional depth the strategic purpose and operational mechanisms of Unit 840, a secretive and elite sub-division of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps–Quds Force (IRGC-QF). The unit functions as a core pillar of Iran's extraterritorial covert operations, specializing in orchestrated assassinations, infrastructure sabotage, psychological warfare, unconventional proxy-based conflict, and the exploitation of international criminal networks. Focusing particularly on its activities across Europe and the Middle East, this article draws upon official government releases, intelligence leaks, defense think-tank reports, and investigative journalism to assess the scale and intent of its operations. The analysis illustrates how Unit 840 integrates into Tehran's broader hybrid warfare doctrine and evaluates the extensive implications of this for Western counterintelligence, diplomatic security, and regional stability.



Source: <https://iranpress.com/iran-s-army-to-protect-iranian-nation-hand-in-hand-with-irgc>

1. Introduction

Since the consolidation of power by Iran's clerical establishment in 1979, the Islamic Republic has consistently favored asymmetric approaches in both foreign and domestic policy enforcement. At the operational heart of this doctrine is the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps–Quds Force (IRGC-QF), the elite expeditionary and covert action division of the IRGC, mandated with exporting the revolutionary ideology of the state and undermining adversarial regimes. Within this already secretive apparatus, Unit 840 emerged as a covert cell devoted exclusively to clandestine, extraterritorial lethal actions.

While the unit remained hidden from public discourse for years, Israeli intelligence disclosed its existence in 2020, following operations that foiled bomb placements along the Golan Heights. Since then, investigations have exposed the global footprint of Unit 840, uncovering numerous assassination plots, logistics and recruitment efforts, and proxy-based operations in partnership with organized criminal entities. This analysis thoroughly deconstructs the unit's role within Iran's statecraft and strategic culture, detailing its mission objectives, key personnel, modes of operation, and the inherent challenges it poses to Western intelligence and international law.

2. Organizational Profile of Unit 840

2.1 Structure and Command Hierarchy

Unit 840 operates under the direct oversight of the Quds Force's command structure. While the Quds Force is broadly responsible for organizing and supporting Iran's network of proxy actors abroad, Unit 840 is distinguished by its capacity for executing direct-action missions—assassinations, sabotage, and targeted acts of terror. Its personnel operate under non-official cover, often embedded within diplomatic institutions or disguised as civilians in hostile or neutral territories.

Unit 840 reportedly receives its directives from senior IRGC-QF leaders and the Supreme National Security Council, with some missions believed to require approval from Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei himself. This vertical integration ensures political alignment and strategic coherence with the broader goals of the regime.

2.2 Doctrine of Hybrid and Asymmetric Warfare

The operational doctrine of Unit 840 fuses classical intelligence tradecraft with irregular warfare techniques. It operates under the framework of Iran's "Forward Defence" policy—projecting threats far from Iranian borders in order to prevent domestic vulnerability. The unit employs deniability, layering of intermediaries, and digital obfuscation. Its targets are carefully selected to advance state interests while complicating attribution: political dissidents, foreign journalists, Israeli or Jewish public figures, and adversaries of the regime's regional agenda.

3. Leadership and Strategic Operatives

Yazdan Mir (aka Sardar Bagheri) currently heads Unit 840 and is believed to report directly to Quds Force Commander Esmail Qaani. Mir is credited with expanding the unit's European and Levantine operations, especially through relationships with Balkan and Middle Eastern criminal groups.

Mohammad Reza Ansari (aka Barkirsaghi or Mostafa Naseri) is identified as a strategic planner involved in complex European assassination operations. His role includes building human networks, organizing logistics, and facilitating communication between Tehran and operatives abroad.

Colonel Hassan Sayyad Khodaei, assassinated in Tehran in May 2022, was a critical figure in managing Unit 840's external activities, especially involving Israeli and Jewish targets. His assassination, believed to be carried out by Israeli Mossad operatives, disrupted multiple ongoing operations and caused an internal restructuring of the unit.

4. Middle Eastern Operations: Case Studies and Operational Footprint

4.1 The Golan Heights Incident (2020–2021)

Israeli intelligence intercepted an operation involving four agents planting IEDs along the Golan Heights. This mission, directly attributed to Unit 840, was designed as a pilot operation for establishing a new pressure front against Israel. The sophistication of the devices and the logistical trail linking the operatives to Syrian and Lebanese safe houses highlights the unit's capability to launch attacks under deep cover.

4.2 Collaboration with Hezbollah and Militia Forces

Unit 840 maintains long-standing links with Hezbollah's military command, providing training in urban sabotage, cyber-espionage, drone operations, and surveillance countermeasures. It plays a key role in harmonizing operations between Iranian-backed militias in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon—ensuring synchronized hostile activity against Israeli, American, or Saudi-aligned interests.

4.3 Strategic Arms Smuggling Through Jordan

Intelligence intercepts in 2023 exposed Unit 840's role in facilitating the movement of advanced weaponry from southern Syria through Jordanian territory into the West Bank. These supply chains also support narcotics trafficking, which is used to fund further operations and destabilize regional order.

5. European Operations: Hybrid Intelligence and Criminal Collaboration

5.1 Assassination Plot in the UK

Unit 840's most publicized European operation was a foiled attempt to kill two Iran International¹ journalists in London. The hit, arranged via a Pakistani-British intermediary, was to be executed with knives and disguised as a street crime. The plot, code-named "The Wedding", was uncovered through cooperative intelligence work and exposed the unit's reliance on criminal proxies to bypass traditional security systems.

5.2 Surveillance and Operational Planning in Germany

Germany's Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) reported in 2023 that Iranian operatives linked to Unit 840 conducted surveillance and recruitment efforts aimed at Iranian and Israeli targets. Arrested suspects were in possession of encrypted phones, forged documents, and instructions relating to surveillance of Jewish cultural centers.

5.3 Operations in France and Eastern Europe

In France, authorities thwarted attempts to conduct reconnaissance on prominent Jewish institutions. In Poland, a failed drone assassination plot—intended to target an Israeli figure—was linked back to Unit 840 handlers and facilitated by local organized crime rings. These cases underscore Unit 840's capacity to operate within European borders using multi-layered subcontractor networks.

6. Tactics, Technology, and Methods of Execution

Unit 840 integrates traditional espionage techniques with modern technologies. Its methodology includes:

- Contracting criminal elements for plausible deniability.
- Use of burner phones, encrypted messaging apps, and VPNs.
- Movement of funds through cryptocurrency and black-market channels.
- Use of diplomatic pouches, cultural delegations, or religious pilgrimages as covers.

Training is often conducted in remote Quds Force training camps in Lebanon and Syria. These facilities simulate urban combat, evasive maneuvers, and infiltration exercises tailored to Western security environments.

7. Countermeasures and Global Response

7.1 Israeli Intelligence Counter-Offensives

Israel has led a comprehensive and aggressive campaign to undermine Unit 840. It includes precision assassinations of its leadership, disruption of financial networks, cyber intrusions, and publication of operatives' identities to the international press.

7.2 Sanctions and Legal Instruments

The U.S. Department of the Treasury and its European counterparts have sanctioned IRGC personnel and affiliated shell companies. Multilateral initiatives, including Europol collaboration, have intensified tracking of suspected Iranian intelligence proxies within Europe.

¹*Iran International is a Persian-language satellite television channel and multilingual digital news operation established, in May 2017, and headquartered in London aimed at Iranians and people interested in Iranian news, culture, society and sports. In February 2023, threats from the Iranian government against its UK-based journalists led the network to move headquarters temporarily to Washington, D.C.*

8. Strategic Forecast and Security Implications

Unit 840's hybrid structure and covert posture represent a shift in how authoritarian states extend power without direct military confrontation. It epitomizes the use of outsourced, compartmentalized, and deniable violence to advance political objectives.

The Western response must include legal innovation (e.g., terrorism attribution laws), strengthened security for journalists and dissidents, and institutional resilience to infiltration. Intelligence agencies must enhance human intelligence (HUMINT) networks and form dedicated task forces to counter transnational assassination cells.

9. Conclusion

As geopolitical rivalry intensifies, Unit 840 serves as a case study in the future of covert influence operations. It fuses ideology, state power, and criminal infrastructure into an operational model designed for maximum impact with minimum exposure. Neutralizing this threat requires sustained international cooperation, legal modernization, and a resolute defense of democratic sovereignty.

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SECURITY AND RESILIENCE - EUROPE



The European Future in Light of the Determinants of the Coming Global Situation

Asmaa ABOULELA (Egypt)

The Ukrainian war, which has entered its fourth year and cast a shadow over Europe economically and security-wise, is taking a new turn with the arrival of Trump and his vision for this war.

Trump seeks to end this war with a Russian-American agreement, far from Europe and neutralizing it from the scene. In light of a fundamental issue such as the Ukrainian crisis, which directly affects its security and that of the EU countries, Trump is reaching an understanding with Putin to persuade him to end this war.

He is also trying to persuade the Ukrainians to end the war and move towards an unfair deal for Ukraine, by seizing its minerals, participating in Ukrainian energy investments and future contracts, and converting the financial aid approved by the US Congress during the Biden era into interest-bearing loans during the Trump era, under which he will seize its minerals in a binding deal.

Trump operates with the mentality of a businessman, deals, and corporate control in handling the Ukraine and even global issues. Unconcerned with the political consequences, Trump is trying to deal with the United States' problems and financial crises. This has led to the USA being blamed by the outside world, of exporting crises around the world, including in Ukraine - through a deal dictated to the Ukrainians or by abandoning them to their fate. The Europeans are confronting this abandonment by moving in several directions, ranging from increasing defence spending and increasing arms and military investments for the sake of European security in general and its interests for Ukraine in particular, in defiance of both the Russian and American sides and imposing their equations.

The European Union's previous strategy, led by Merkel, to reach out to Russia, win over Putin, and attempt to make him a neutral party for the EU, has failed. They are now in a difficult position between fear of



Source: <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0296-europe-and-globalisation-dangers-and-assets>

Putin's ambitions, which are reinforced by the arrival of Trump, the American rapprochement, and the abandonment of Ukraine and between the European role, which is now at stake in light of the new American strategy for Eurasia. Putin and the Russians are facing Trump's deals and their concerns about the continuation of the war, while trying to maintain a precarious balance. This is all favouring Russia as it means more American concessions and direct investment for him, and no deals with Ukraine.

This would negatively impact Ukraine as a whole and its existential future, leading to a division between the territories under Russian control and Ukrainian territories that would lose sovereignty and even hand over their fate directly to America. With such a deal, Europe faces this absurd scene with a strong challenge to unite its European Union countries to confront the upcoming challenges. In light of this situation, a general European question arises that European leaders are looking forward to.

Is this the time for Europe to become a superpower with its own defences and policies? Europe is today taking tactical steps to confront Trump's chaos and Putin's ambitions to become independent in its security and the reality imposed by the US abandoning its primary ally, Europe. Their shared interests include increasing defence spending and investing in the production of military forces that guarantee security. However, what Europe lacks is an organized defensive, an army to protect its strategic interests and through which it can impose its own equation. Despite this, Europe's actions are part of the individual efforts of the major EU countries, Germany and France, to preserve their interests as much as possible. The smaller EU countries share their concerns.

However, it is an unreliable partnership. Germany is increasing its defence and military budget this year, its largest ever, at one trillion euros. This is the largest budget since World War II. France is moving toward activating the nuclear umbrella as part of deterrence and the sharing of nuclear weapons. However, each country's nuclear doctrine remains different. It cannot replace the American umbrella, which is already in place despite Trump's arrival. EU countries are currently suffering from financial crises, including France, which is experiencing a 5% budget deficit this year. Smaller EU countries, such as Poland and Sweden, have taken a hard line stance toward these challenges. In addition to the German recession resulting from this war and its negative effects, Trump's policies toward Europe and the imposition of tariffs on it, which will negatively impact Europe. America is pursuing a new strategy toward Europe, increasing economic pressure on it and moving toward Russia.

In addition to Putin's military pressure on Ukraine, this is the new American strategy championed by Trump. His Republican administration is achieving strategic gains for Putin politically, militarily, and economically, undermining Europe's efforts to define Russia's role. This partnership, which takes the form of a new partnership between America and Russia, is not limited to the Ukrainian crisis. The Kremlin leader wants to expand it to other issues, including energy, minerals, and open new global trade corridors, including the Arctic. This will give Moscow a strong strategic momentum and give it leverage over its European rival. Russia seeks to bring America into this partnership and benefit from Trump's presence in the White House to break out of the blockade previously imposed on it by the United States and NATO countries with the help of Europe. This partnership between America and Russia coincides with Russia's efforts to revive the Arctic and attract American investment giants and giant American companies as a kind of strong new beginning. This will yield significant benefits for both parties. This Russian endeavour aligns with Trump's efforts to promote the annexation of Greenland, the disputed Danish island, which would provide America with a strategic dimension in the Atlantic Ocean.

Moscow seeks to exploit this American trend by linking it to its dreams of reviving and cooperating with the Arctic. This will provide strategic interests for both countries, far removed from Europe. Russia possesses energy, rare minerals, and vast lands, but lacks the technology possessed by the United States. This will strengthen its position as a global energy and trade hub, and this is what Russia seeks to achieve - a corridor for energy and minerals by exploiting the United States' thirst for these minerals, investing in these vast resources possessed by Russia, which Russia seeks to exploit to create a new position for itself.

In the world of economics, this is the primary driver of superiority. Russia now wants to present itself as a significant economic player, with its rich, under-invested resources, rather than a military player as it was in the former Soviet era and exploiting the energy issue that dominates the global scene and threatens the world's major industrialized countries, to maintain their superiority.

Europe is one of these powers that has been greatly affected by the energy issue and the rise in energy prices after its shift away from Russian gas. Europe must recognize this new situation between Moscow and the United States and prepare for it, and not remain trapped in the Ukrainian crisis alone. Rather, it must focus its attention on the world, first securing its energy sector. Securing its defences second, investing in a global

role and partnership with Middle Eastern countries, and securing economic influence and energy corridors. For Europe to become an influential force, separate from other defence powers, this requires massive arms investments. However, European countries do not have a specific project or a unified plan to address these economic challenges from Trump and military challenges from Putin. This negatively impacts Europe as a whole. After the American failure, will Germany, the largest country in the European Union, rely on neighbouring countries to protect its security, as a result of some Western decisions related to Germany and its defence since World War II?

Neither Germany nor any other EU country can make the decision to arm itself independently of its neighbours. Considering that Germany can finance the European Union's defence policy to remain the leader in this regard, and to finance the nuclear program, the economy needs security, and security always requires strength. Today, Europe is adopting the theory of "peace by strength". International challenges in general, Trump's economic pressure on European countries in particular, and Russia's military pressure on Ukraine, the convergence of Russian and American interests in many areas is pushing Europe to adopt a different approach to these challenges.

Perhaps the equation will change after Trump's departure. But the idea has become a possibility should Europe always remain linked for its security to another country outside Europe, such as the United States?

SECURITY AND RESILIENCE - MIDDLE EAST



The Middle East's Security Dilemma in the Era of Multipolarity: Regional Responses to Global Strategic Realignments

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Abstract

The evolving multipolar structure of the international system has intensified the security dilemma in the Middle East, a region long defined by strategic volatility and geopolitical rivalries. This paper explores how the transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world marked by the resurgence of Russia, the rise of China, and the relative retrenchment of U.S. influence has redefined threat perceptions, alliance formations, and security doctrines across Middle Eastern states. The analysis pays particular attention to regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey, examining how each has adapted its security posture in response to shifting global alignments. Furthermore, the paper investigates Lebanon's unique position within this complex security landscape, highlighting its internal fragilities and external dependencies that have made it both a reflection and a casualty of broader strategic dynamics. By integrating geopolitical, economic, and military dimensions, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities that multipolarism presents to regional security and future conflict resolution mechanisms in the Middle East.



Source: <https://debuglies.com/2025/02/20/the-evolving-geopolitical-order-connections-between-the-war-in-ukraine-the-middle-east-and-the-mediterranean/>

Keywords: Multipolarism, Middle East Security, Geopolitical Realignments, Regional Alliances, Foreign Policy Adaptations, Lebanon and Regional Conflicts

Introduction

The post-Cold War era was characterized by a unipolar international system dominated by the United States. However, recent years have witnessed a shift towards multipolarism, with emerging powers such as China and Russia asserting greater influence on the global stage. This transition has led to a reconfiguration of international alliances and strategic priorities, particularly evident in regions like the Middle East (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

The Middle East has historically been a nexus of geopolitical tensions, owing to its strategic location, energy resources, and complex socio-political dynamics. The region's security landscape is further complicated by the involvement of external powers pursuing divergent interests. The interplay between regional actors and global powers has intensified the security dilemma, where measures taken by one state to enhance its security often led to increased insecurity for others (Walt, 1991).

1. How has the shift towards multipolarism influenced the security dynamics of the Middle East?
2. What strategies have regional actors adopted in response to changing global alignments?
3. How does Lebanon's security posture reflect broader regional and international trends?

I. The Security Dilemma: Definition and Theoretical Roots

The security dilemma, a core concept in international relations, refers to a situation where actions taken by a state to enhance its own security such as increasing military capabilities can lead other states to respond with similar measures, thereby escalating tensions and potentially leading to conflict, even when no side desires it. This phenomenon arises from the anarchic nature of the international system, where the absence of a central authority compels states to rely on self-help strategies (Herz, 1950; Jervis, 1978). The dilemma is intensified when distinguishing between offensive and defensive postures becomes challenging, leading to misperceptions and unintended escalations (Tang, 2009).

The transition from a unipolar to a multipolar international system has significant implications for global security dynamics. In a multipolar world, power is distributed among several states, reducing the dominance of any single actor and increasing the complexity of international relations (Ashford, 2023). This distribution of power can lead to increased competition, shifting alliances, and a higher potential for regional conflicts, as states navigate a more intricate web of relationships and strategic interests (Mearsheimer, 2019). The Middle East, with its strategic importance and existing tensions, is particularly susceptible to the uncertainties introduced by multipolarity.

Neorealism, or structural realism, posits that the anarchic structure of the international system compels states to prioritize survival through power accumulation and balancing behaviors (Waltz, 1979). This perspective emphasizes the role of systemic factors over individual state characteristics in shaping international outcomes. Complementing this, the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) suggests that security dynamics are often regionally concentrated, with states in a particular geographic area forming interlinked security concerns that are relatively autonomous from global patterns (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). In the context of the Middle East, RSCT highlights how regional actors' security concerns are deeply intertwined, influenced by both intra-regional rivalries and the interventions of external powers.

II. Global Strategic Realignments: The Multipolar Shift

The United States has been gradually reducing its military footprint in the Middle East, shifting its focus towards strategic competition with China and addressing domestic priorities. This retrenchment has led to a perception of waning U.S. influence in the region, prompting regional actors to reassess their security strategies and alliances (Gholz & Press, 2023).

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has significantly expanded its economic and diplomatic presence in the Middle East. Through substantial investments in infrastructure and energy projects, China has become a vital partner for many Middle Eastern countries, enhancing its influence and fostering deeper bilateral ties (Martini, 2023).

Russia's intervention in the Syrian conflict marked a pivotal moment in its re-engagement with the Middle East. By providing military support to the Assad regime and establishing a permanent military presence, Russia has positioned itself as a key power broker in the region, leveraging arms sales and diplomatic initiatives to expand its influence (Kozhanov, 2024).

The European Union's approach to the Middle East has been characterized by a focus on promoting democratic values and human rights. However, internal divisions among member states and inconsistent policy implementation have limited the EU's effectiveness as a cohesive actor in the region (Manners, 2023).

III. Regional Responses and Security Reconfigurations

Saudi Arabia: Strategic Hedging Between the U.S., China, and Russia

Saudi Arabia has adopted a strategic hedging approach to navigate the evolving multipolar global order. While maintaining its longstanding security partnership with the United States, Riyadh has simultaneously

deepened economic and political ties with China and Russia. This multifaceted strategy aims to diversify alliances and reduce overreliance on any single power, thereby enhancing Saudi Arabia's strategic autonomy in a complex international landscape (Alshammari, 2024).

Iran: Expanding Influence via Proxies and Strategic Depth

Iran continues to exert regional influence through a network of proxy groups across the Middle East. Various militias in Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen, Iran seeks to project power and counterbalance adversaries without direct military engagement. This strategy of cultivating strategic depth allows Tehran to maintain a presence in key areas, despite facing internal challenges and external pressures (Vaez, 2024).

Turkey: Assertive Regional Posture and Balancing Strategy

Turkey has pursued an assertive foreign policy aimed at expanding its regional influence while balancing relationships with global powers. Ankara's involvement in conflicts in Syria and Libya, coupled with its efforts to mediate disputes and engage with both Western and Eastern blocs, reflects a pragmatic approach to securing national interests. By positioning itself as a central player in regional affairs, Turkey seeks to enhance its strategic standing amid shifting geopolitical dynamics (Kirişci, 2023).

IV. Lebanon's Security Predicament in a Multipolar Context

Lebanon's Domestic Fragmentation and Vulnerability to External Influence

Lebanon's political structure, rooted in sectarian power-sharing, has led to a fragmented state apparatus susceptible to external manipulation. The confessional system, intended to balance representation among religious groups, has instead fostered clientelism and weakened national cohesion. (International Crisis Group, 2021).

International engagement with Lebanon has been inconsistent, oscillating between periods of active involvement and strategic neglect. While donor conferences have pledged substantial aid, the disbursement and effectiveness of this assistance have been hampered by concerns over governance and corruption. The lack of a coherent international strategy has allowed external powers to fill the vacuum, often pursuing their own interests at the expense of Lebanon's sovereignty (Hale, 2024).

The recent election of President Joseph Aoun and the formation of a new government under Prime Minister Nawaf Salam present an opportunity for Lebanon to reassert its sovereignty and pursue a policy of strategic neutrality. This approach would involve distancing the country from regional conflicts and focusing on internal reforms to strengthen state institutions. However, achieving this neutrality is contingent upon addressing the entrenched influence of non-state actors and implementing comprehensive political and economic reforms (The Guardian, 2025).

V. Emerging Trends and Future Security Architectures

The 2023 rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, brokered by China, marked a significant shift in Middle Eastern geopolitics. This agreement led to the restoration of diplomatic relations and the reopening of embassies after a seven-year hiatus. The détente has facilitated dialogues aimed at reducing tensions in conflict zones like Yemen and has opened avenues for cooperation on regional security matters. However, the durability of this rapprochement remains uncertain, given the deep-seated rivalries and divergent strategic interests of both nations.

In response to the complexities of regional conflicts and the limitations of traditional multilateral frameworks, Middle Eastern states have increasingly turned to minilateralism. These are small, flexible coalitions formed to address specific security concerns. Examples include the I2U2 group (India, the UAE, and the United States) and the International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC), which focuses on safeguarding maritime routes in the Persian Gulf. While these arrangements offer agility and targeted cooperation, they also risk creating exclusive blocs that may exacerbate regional divisions.

The Middle East stands at a crossroads between the potential for collective security and the risk of further fragmentation. The success of recent diplomatic efforts, such as the Saudi-Iran rapprochement, suggests a willingness among regional powers to pursue stability through dialogue. However, enduring conflicts, mutual suspicions, and external interventions continue to challenge the establishment of a comprehensive security architecture. The future of regional security will depend on the ability of Middle Eastern states to build trust, engage in inclusive dialogues, and commit to cooperative frameworks that transcend sectarian and geopolitical divides.

Conclusion

The transition to a multipolar international system has fundamentally reshaped the strategic landscape of the Middle East. The decline of U.S. dominance, the assertive rise of China, Russia's strategic re-entry, and the EU's normative but fragmented influence have collectively produced a dynamic and volatile environment. In response, key regional actors Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey have adopted diversified and adaptive strategies to safeguard their national interests, navigating this evolving geopolitical terrain with caution and ambition. Lebanon exemplifies the vulnerability of small states caught in the crosscurrents of regional rivalries and global shifts. Its internal fragmentation, coupled with weak state institutions and powerful non-state actors, has left it particularly exposed to external influence. The prospect of strategic neutrality, while conceptually appealing, remains constrained by structural and political realities. Emerging trends, including regional de-escalation efforts and the rise of flexible minilateral security formats, point to a recalibration of traditional alliance systems. Yet the risk of further fragmentation persists unless sustained dialogue, inclusive frameworks, and mutual trust can be institutionalized across the region. Ultimately, the future of Middle Eastern security will depend on the region's ability to evolve from reactive posturing to proactive collaboration. In an increasingly multipolar world, the choice between strategic pluralism and systemic disorder will shape not only the trajectory of regional politics but also its implications for global peace and stability.

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SECURITY AND RESILIENCE - MIDDLE EAST



Reconstruction of Lebanon - Return to the Title of “Pearl of the Middle East”, a Priority Objective on the Agenda of the Entire International Community

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“Things won’t work out perfectly. What matters is how you adapt to these things and what you learn from your mistakes.”

Michael Phelps

On March 9, 2023, the “GEOSTRATEGIC PULSE” published an article that pointed out the general situation in Lebanon, which was at that time and is still considered as being in a continuous process of deterioration. The level of poverty and unrest among the population is very high. For years, Lebanon was seen as a country in the midst of an economic collapse, especially in the context in which, we are in one of the worst situations recorded globally.

We highlight this because this country called Lebanon, which was also called the “Pearl of the Middle East”, was seen as a beautiful country with a varied economy, with various branches of industry, as well as agriculture, tourism and a banking system worthy of consideration. Many other nations might know this country for its olive oil and delicious plant-based foods. Lebanon is also a place where people of different religious beliefs live in harmony. Surprisingly, it is one of the few countries in the Middle East where you will not find people with camels or vast areas of desert. The capital and most populous and vibrant city is Beirut.

An agreement to end the last hostilities between Israel and Lebanon entered into force on November 27, 2024, after more than 13 months of tragic altercations, mainly involving Israel and the Hezbollah. The agreement and commitments of both parties, which was brokered by the US and France, established that Israel will

no longer conduct offensive military operations against Lebanese targets on Lebanese territory (withdrawal of the Israeli Military Forces / IDF) and that the Lebanese government will prevent Hezbollah and all other armed groups from conducting operations against Israel. Under the terms of the agreement, the Lebanese



Source: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/how-end-third-lebanon-war-and-prevent-fourth>

and the confiscation of weapons illegally held by armed groups. According to reports published by both Israeli and Lebanese media, the US has bilaterally provided Israel with additional guarantees regarding the implementation of the ceasefire, including recognition of “Israel’s right to respond to Hezbollah threats.” On January 26, the day the 60-day period stipulated in the cessation of hostilities agreement for the IDF withdrawal and the LAF deployment expired, Israel and Lebanon agreed to extend the deadline until February 18, following concerns expressed by both sides that the withdrawal and deployment operations, as agreed, were progressing too slowly. However, in such a fragile security context, hours before the extension, IDF forces in several locations in southern Lebanon opened fire on demonstrators demanding Israel’s withdrawal, some of whom were even carrying Hezbollah flags. At least 22 people were killed and 124 were injured, including six women and one LAF soldier. Currently, as a result of international studies on the destruction caused and the effects generated by the latest conflict between Israel and the Hezbollah group, it has been concluded that reconstruction and recovery needs are estimated to reach 11 billion USD, according to a report on Lebanon’s Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA) 2025, published by the World Bank, which assesses damage, losses and needs in ten distinct sectors across the country, covering the period from October 8, 2023 to December 20, 2024. Of the 11 billion USD required for reconstruction and recovery needs, the report estimates that 3 to 5 billion USD will need to be publicly financed, including 1 billion USD for the infrastructure sectors (energy; municipal and public services; transport; water supply facilities, wastewater collection facilities and irrigation facilities). At the same time, according to assessments, 6 to 8 billion USD will be required from private financing, mainly in the housing, trade, industry and tourism sectors. Based on these needs estimates, the report nevertheless estimates that the true losses and economic cost of recovery resulting from the conflict in Lebanon is around 14 billion USD, with damage to physical structures amounting to 6.8 billion USD, and economic losses due to reduced productivity, lost income and operating costs amounting to 7.2 billion USD.

The housing sector was the most severely affected sector, with estimated damages of 4.6 billion USD. The trade, industry and tourism sector was also significantly affected, with estimated losses of 3.4 billion USD, across the country. Given Lebanon’s geographical area and administrative division, out of the total of 9 governorates¹, the most severely affected are the Nabatiyeh and South governorates, followed by the Mount Lebanon governorate (which includes the southern suburbs of Beirut). From a macroeconomic perspective,

Governorates of Lebanon



Source: <https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

¹All governorates except Beirut and Akkar are divided into districts, which are further subdivided into municipalities. The newest governorate is Keserwan-Jbeil, which was created on September 7, 2017, but whose first governor, Pauline Deeb, was not appointed until 2020. The implementation of the next most recently created governorates, Akkar and Baalbek-Hermel, also remains ongoing since the appointment of their first governors in 2014.

the report finds that the impact of the conflict reduced Lebanon's real GDP by 7.1% in 2024, a significant setback compared to a growth in the non-conflict period, which was estimated at 0.9%. By the end of 2024, the cumulative decline in Lebanon's GDP since 2019 had approached 40%, compounding the effects of the economic recession on several fronts and having an extremely negative impact on Lebanon's economic growth prospects.

The governorates of Lebanon are: 1. Akkar, 2. Baalbek-Hermel, 3. Beirut, 4. Beqaa, 5. Keserwan-Jbeil, 6. Mount Lebanon, 7. Nabataea, 8. North, 9. South.

This RDNA report, related to the impact of the 2023-2024 conflict that affected Lebanon and which was carried out by the World Bank at the request of the Government of Lebanon and in collaboration with the National Council for Scientific Research - Lebanon (CNRS-L), estimates the impact of the conflict in terms of physical damage and economic losses and identifies preliminary needs for recovery and reconstruction in the immediate, short and medium term. The RDNA covers the entire country, assessing both direct and indirect impacts of the conflict in the ten sectors mentioned above: agriculture and food security; trade, industry and tourism; education; environmental and waste management; energy; health; housing; municipal and public services; transport; water, wastewater and irrigation. Alongside these estimates, the report summarizes the macro-economic impacts of the conflict and presents detailed conclusions of the assessment. This includes a fact-sheet, key findings of the assessment on damage, loss and needs, a macroeconomic impact assessment, an impact analysis, summary findings for each sector and information on the methodology used. Furthermore, it is important to note that the annexes include a detailed methodology note, unit cost assumptions and maps and figures supporting the assessment made.

At the UN level, on the morning of March 17, a briefing was eagerly awaited during consultations on the latest report of the UN Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 1701 (S/2025/153), which was circulated to Council members on March 11. Adopted in 2006, resolution 1701 called for a cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah. The Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, and the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, were the most anticipated briefings. The Secretary-General's report, which covers the period from October 21, 2024 to February 20, 2025, notes that the level of violence has "significantly decreased" since the agreement on the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Lebanon (S/2024/870) entered into force on November 27, 2024, after more than 13 months of animosity involving Israeli and Hezbollah forces. As mentioned in a previous paragraph, the agreement initially provided, among other things, a 60-day period for the IDF to withdraw south of the Blue Line and, at the same time, for the LAF to deploy south of the Litany River. The Blue Line is a withdrawal line established by the UN in 2000 to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon. Although not an international border, the Blue Line acts in practice as an agreed border between Lebanon and Israel.

It is worth mentioning that the mandate of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) expires on August 31, 2025. However, we cannot forget that on February 14, a UNIFIL convoy carrying peacekeepers to Beirut Airport was attacked, a vehicle was set on fire and several peacekeepers were injured. In a statement issued on the same day, UN Secretary-General António Guterres condemned the attack and called for those responsible to be held accountable. The attack followed the decision of the Lebanese authorities to revoke permission granted to two Iranian flights to land in Beirut. According to international media, the decision "came after the Israeli military issued a statement alleging that Iran had been smuggling cash" to Hezbollah using civilian flights, "leading some in Lebanon to claim that their country's authorities had caved in to an Israeli threat." A group of Hezbollah-aligned people protesting the decision on their way to the airport were reportedly involved in organizing and carrying out the attack. However, a Hezbollah official later denied that the group had any involvement in the attack. The incident occurred against the backdrop of Hezbollah's loss of military power and political influence in Lebanon following the war with Israel and the ouster of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, which led to the loss of a key military supply route for Hezbollah from Iran through Syria.

Despite reduced hostilities, ceasefire violations, airstrikes and unexploded ordnance continue to endanger communities, particularly in the southern areas of Lebanon, the Beqaa, Baalbek and Beirut. The crisis has deepened existing vulnerabilities, worsening economic and food insecurity, increasing school dropout and contributing to and exacerbating a growing mental health crisis. While the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has fallen from nearly 900,000 to just over 110,000 by January 2025, many returnees to Lebanon are facing significant damage to essential infrastructure and residential buildings.

But recent political developments highlight that Lebanon has a new president promising reforms but faces significant economic and political challenges, including the influence of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah.

On January 9, 2025, the Lebanese Parliament elected the commander of the Lebanese army, Joseph Aoun², as president, who in turn, on January 13, appointed Nawaf Salam³, the former president of the International Court of Justice, as prime minister, the latter announcing the formation of a new government on February 8, 2025.



Lebanon's new cabinet, led by Prime Minister, Nawaf Salam (center-right), with President, Joseph Aoun (center), Parliament Speaker, Nabih Berri (center-left) and cabinet members at the Presidential Palace, on February 11 –

Source: <https://www.theworldmind.org/briefing archive/dzzp7tedcpsin168gldg95h04dxbm2025/2/15>

Lebanon has had an interim presidency since October 2022, when Michel Aoun left office and the Lebanese Parliament failed to agree on a successor. It is significant to emphasize that the vote follows a conflict of more than 13 months between Israel and Hezbollah, an organization that is also internationally listed as a banned terrorist organization. However, it should not be overlooked that Hezbollah has exercised significant political and military power in Lebanon since its emergence in the 1980s, maintaining an armed force independent of the other structures of the state. Some analysts have said that the election of Joseph Aoun is an opportunity for the Lebanese state to exercise its power over Hezbollah and address the current challenges facing the country. This perspective is reflected on the front pages of international analyses on the challenges facing Lebanon and on the significance and effects of the elections that took place.

Who is Joseph Aoun? Joseph Aoun has served in the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) since 1983, serving as its commander since 2017. He is a Maronite Christian (as, by convention, all Lebanese presidents are within the country's confessional political system). He was elected after two rounds of voting, winning 99 out of 128 votes in the second round. He will serve for six years. Saudi Arabia, France, and the United States are

²Joseph Khalil Aoun (născut la 10 ianuarie 1964) este acum un politician și fost general de armată libanez care servește, în prezent, ca cel de al 14-lea președinte al Libanului, începând cu 09 ianuarie 2025. Anterior, el a servit ca și comandant al Forțelor Armate Libaneze și este al cincilea comandant militar ales președinte în Liban. J. Aoun s-a născut în suburbia Beirut Sin el-Fil, din districtul Metn, fiul lui Hoda Ibrahim Makhoul și Khalil Aoun. A absolvit liceul la Collège des Frères Mont La Salle. Familia lui este originară din orașul Al-Aaishiyah, sudul Libanului. J. Aoun sa înscris la Universitatea Libanezo-Americană pentru a urma o diplomă de licență în științe politice și afaceri internaționale, pe care a obținut-o în 2007. De asemenea, deține o diplomă de licență în științe militare de la Academia Militară a Armatei Libaneze. J. Aoun s-a alăturat armatei libaneze în 1983 și s-a înscris la Academia Militară în timpul războiului civil libanez. S-a antrenat în străinătate, în special în SUA și Siria. De asemenea, a urmat un antrenament de combatere a terorismului în SUA, în 2008, și în Liban, în 2013. A devenit șef al Brigăzii a 9-a de infanterie a armatei în 2015.

³Nawaf Abdallah Salim Salam (born December 15, 1953) is a Lebanese politician, diplomat, jurist and academic who was appointed the 53rd Prime Minister of Lebanon on February 8, 2025. N. Salam previously served on the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for a nine-year term, starting in 2018. He served as Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, in New York, from 2007 to 2017, during which time he held the positions of President of the Security Council and Vice-President of the General Assembly. In 2024, he was elected the 27th President of the ICJ, becoming the second Arab judge and the first Lebanese to hold this position. He resigned from the ICJ after the Lebanese Parliament nominated him as Prime Minister. He comes from a Sunni political family. He studied in France and the United States. He worked as a university lecturer and lawyer.

considered by observers to have supported J. Aoun's candidacy. His election follows the withdrawal of an initially Hezbollah-backed candidate, Suleiman Frangieh⁴, in early January 2025. S. Frangieh ultimately supported J. Aoun, as did Hezbollah, in the second round of voting for the Lebanese Parliament.



Lebanon's New President –

Source: <https://www.ctvnews.ca/world/israel-hamas-war/article/war-torn-lebanon-forms-its-first-government-in-over-2-years/>

As expected, the importance of electing a new president in Lebanon, now after an extremely difficult period, is being intensively analyzed. The new president, a career military man, is also responsible for appointing and dismissing the Lebanese prime minister. However, the prime minister is also the one who actually leads, together with his entire cabinet. An interim prime minister, Najib Mikati, began exercising this function in 2022, but the new Lebanese president, J. Aoun, was keen to mention after his appointment that he would act quickly to appoint a new prime minister, as he has already done. He also said that the Lebanese Armed Forces will have a monopoly on weapons in Lebanon (which requires the disarmament of Hezbollah) and is planning reforms in public administration. The US Presidential Envoy to Lebanon, Amos Hochstein, declared that the election of J. Aoun was a “step towards peace and stability”. It is significant to note that former US Secretary of State Antony Blinken had previously argued that the election of a president would enhance the Lebanese state's ability to “stand up, assert itself and take responsibility for the lives of its citizens”. On 18 February, the expiry date of the extended deadline for the IDF withdrawal and the LAF deployment, the IDF withdrew from most of the areas under its control in southern Lebanon. It did, however, maintain a presence in five positions on Lebanese territory near the Blue Line. Announcing its decision on the five positions, the IDF announced on February 17, that it would remain there “until Israel is certain that Hezbollah will not return to the area south of the Litany River”.

In a joint statement on February 18, J. Aoun, N. Salam, and the Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, Nabih Berri⁵, stressed the “urgent need for Israel's complete withdrawal from occupied Lebanese territory” and announced that they would appeal to the UN Security Council to “force Israel's immediate withdrawal” and to implement resolution 1701.

During a press conference on February 18, UN Secretary-General Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric said that the LAF continues to deploy in southern Lebanon with the support of UNIFIL, and displaced communities

⁴Suleiman Antoine Frangieh (born October 18, 1965) is a Lebanese politician. He is the current leader of the Marada Movement and a former member of the Lebanese Parliament for the Maronite seat of Zgharta–Zawyie, in northern Lebanon. Politically, he is considered an ally of former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. He was Hezbollah's lead candidate for the Lebanese presidential election.

⁵Nabih Mustafa Berri (born January 28, 1938) is a Lebanese politician who has been the Speaker of the Parliament of Lebanon since 1992. He leads the Amal Movement and its parliamentary wing, the Development and Liberation Bloc. He was born in Bo, Sierra Leone, to Lebanese Shia parents. His father, Mustafa Berri, was a merchant there. Berri attended school in Tebnine and Ain Ebel, in southern Lebanon, then continued his education at the Bint Jbeil and Jaafariya supplementary schools in southern Lebanon, and later studied at Makassad and the Ecole de la Sagesse in Beirut. He graduated in law from the Lebanese University in 1963, where he was president of the student body and became a lawyer at the Court of Appeal. In 1963, Berri was elected president of the National Union of Lebanese Students and participated in student and political conferences. Early in his career, he became a lawyer at the Court of Appeal. In the early 1970s, he worked in Beirut as a lawyer for several companies.

are returning to their homes. In an apparent reference to the IDF's decision to maintain its presence on Lebanese soil, Hennis-Plasschaert⁶ and UNIFIL's head of mission and force commander, Lieutenant General Aroldo Lázaro, said in a statement that "another delay" in the implementation of the ceasefire agreement was not what they had "hoped for, not least because of the continuing violation" of resolution 1701. The statement added, however, that the delay should not "overshadow the tangible progress" made since the cessation of hostilities.

We must highlight the position adopted by the United Kingdom, which stressed out that it would support "vital reforms" during the term of J. Aoun. Numerous other international analyses argue that additional steps will be necessary beyond the election of a new president, including the provision of new economic and military assistance and, possibly, the imposition of sanctions against some Lebanese politicians. In this context, it is significant to note that the United Kingdom previously introduced sanctions against the former governor of the Central Bank of Lebanon for embezzlement of funds for personal purposes.

In a statement on February 18, France, for its part, called on all parties to accept the proposal that UNIFIL, including the French contingent of the mission, be deployed in the five positions to replace the IDF, but it seems that the proposal has not been officially taken up. International analysts have concluded that the IDF's presence on Lebanese territory could reinvigorate Hezbollah's rhetoric about the need for an armed movement in Lebanon to resist the so-called invasion launched by Israel. As a result of developments both in Lebanon and in the region, the question is increasingly being asked: what could new political, military and security developments mean for the future of Hezbollah? As is well known, Hezbollah has been and continues to be supported by Iran and is an organization widely seen as one of the most powerful non-state armed groups in the Middle East. The conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, starting in October 2023, has led to the substantial degradation of its military capabilities. Israel killed its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, in September 2024 and estimated that it killed between 2,500 and 4,000 Hezbollah operatives (Hezbollah may have had between 40,000 and 50,000 fighters). Israel has been keen to highlight the fact that Hezbollah is "no longer an effective tool" for Iran to threaten Israel. Hezbollah also lost a significant ally when Bashar Al-Assad, the former Syrian president, fled his country in December 2024.

As is well known, Syria played an influential role in Lebanon during the period of both Bashar Al-Assad and his father, with a Syrian military presence in Lebanon from 1976 to 2005. Hezbollah fought in the Syrian civil war in support of Bashar Al-Assad, but it is noteworthy that, in December 2024, Hezbollah was keen to emphasize that it would focus on actions in Lebanon. Hezbollah will continue to exert influence as a representative of Shiite groups in Lebanon, as well as allied parties in the parliamentary political coalition of March 8, 2025. Hezbollah voted for both former President Michel Aoun and J. Aoun to be the new president of Lebanon and has a history of holding ministerial positions. According to detailed analyses (Atlantic Council), J. Aoun is unlikely to "provoke a confrontation with Hezbollah," which remains a fairly "domestically powerful" group.

What is the outlook for Lebanon's economy? Lebanon has been facing a severe economic crisis since 2019, with its gross domestic product expected to decline by about 40% between 2019 and 2024 and a peak annual inflation rate of 221% in 2023. The 2023–2024 conflict with Israel is also estimated to have caused 8.5 billion USD in damage. Lebanon has also hosted about 1.5 million Syrian refugees, of whom 90% are estimated to live in poverty. An estimated 1.3 million people have also been displaced in the 2023–2024, Israel–Hezbollah conflict. An agreement for a financing program with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to assist Lebanon was reached as early as 2022. In October 2024, the IMF stated that it was ready to commit to providing support to Lebanon. Although a president has now been elected, the World Bank previously argued that Lebanon's economic challenges were "orchestrated by the country's political elite that has long captured the state." In 2020, then-President Michel Aoun acknowledged that corruption was "deeply entrenched" and "institutionalized." What are the challenges facing Israel-Lebanon relations? Lebanon and Israel do not have formal diplomatic relations and share a disputed land border (an agreement on maritime borders was reached in 2022).

Lebanon's economy has been hit hard. However the international community is optimistic that Lebanon could return to pre-crisis levels if the country's leaders implement radical reforms, the Institute of International Finance (IIF) said in a new report. The Washington-based Association of Global Financial Institutions has estimated that such reforms could unlock more than 12.5 billion USD in international aid,

⁶Jeanine Antoinette Hennis-Plasschaert (born April 7, 1973) is a Dutch politician and diplomat who has served as the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon since May 2024. She is a member of the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD).

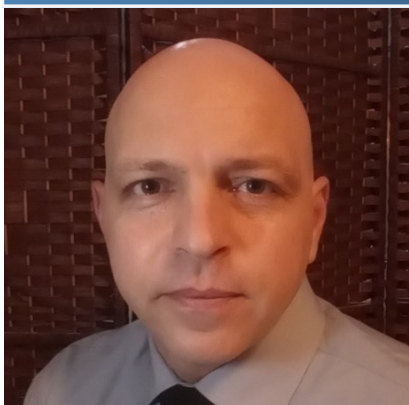
offering a potential way out of the economic crisis that has gripped Lebanon since late 2019. The IIF believes that the new administration – established after the election of Joseph Aoun as president on January 9 and the subsequent formation of the government of Nawaf Salam – could succeed where its predecessors failed. Aid intended to rebuild areas devastated by the war between Hezbollah and Israel and revive Lebanon's crippled financial system would be distributed over several years in the IIF's most optimistic scenario, which has a 50% chance of actually materializing. According to the report, Gulf Cooperation Council countries could contribute 4.5 billion USD, the International Monetary Fund 3 billion USD through an aid program, and the World Bank 3 billion USD through various projects. It adds that major European countries would provide the remaining 2 billion USD. But the IIF suggests that the benefits could extend even further. Once reforms begin, Lebanon could attract up to 10 billion USD in foreign direct investment between 2025 and 2029. Key sectors such as tourism – hit hard by domestic and regional instability – exports, particularly to Saudi Arabia after years of strained ties, and public investment – depleted by the crisis – could all see a revival. If this optimistic outlook holds, Lebanon's real GDP could grow by an average rate of 6.2% by the end of 2029, a sharp reversal from other assessments projected by the World Bank in its most recent forecast in December 2024.

The IIF points out that seven critical pillars for Lebanon's recovery can be defined: achieving political stability and restoring security, reforming the judiciary to combat corruption, adopting a flexible exchange rate to restore confidence in the Lebanese pound, restructuring fiscal policy, overhauling and revitalizing the banking sector to restore most deposits, and finally, strengthening social protection systems. However, the IIF also foresees an intermediate scenario — with a similar 50% probability of success — in which the N. Salam government, whose mandate expires after parliamentary elections in May 2026, fails to achieve the objectives of these seven pillars. According to this outcome, Lebanon's growth would average 3% between 2025 and 2029. Despite the country's recent turbulent history, the IIF does not outline a more pessimistic scenario. This apparent confidence reflects the positive momentum following the ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah and recent political developments. Signs of renewed investor confidence are already emerging. Lebanese Eurobonds – dollar-denominated debt instruments on which the state defaulted in March 2020 – have risen. After remaining at 6 to 7 cents on the dollar since the start of the crisis, their value rose last autumn and accelerated further after the election of J. Aoun, which ended a two-year presidential vacuum. A telling example can be found on February 18, when the bonds were trading at 18.6 cents on the dollar.

However, we cannot ignore the statement of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk's⁸ on January 16, when he visited Syria and Lebanon. He expressed solidarity with the people of both countries. He conveyed hope for Lebanon's future, noting signs of new beginnings despite the “immense challenges” ahead, and stressed the critical importance of the ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel. V. Türk offered the assistance of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to support the Lebanese authorities' commitments to undertake reforms to strengthen the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, and efforts to hold those responsible for the Beirut Port explosion to account. Among other things, he noted that the Israeli military action in Lebanon “has caused widespread civilian casualties,” raising “serious concerns” about compliance with the principles of proportionality, distinction and precaution. He also stressed the need for a ceasefire to move towards a lasting peace and a renewal of the social contract in Lebanon.

⁸Volker Türk (born August 27, 1965) is an Austrian lawyer and United Nations official. He has been the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights since October 2022. In 1991, Türk became a UN Junior Professional Officer and had a temporary mission to Kuwait, funded by the Austrian Foreign Ministry, and then held posts in various regions of the world, including Malaysia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On April 18, 2019, Türk was appointed by Secretary-General António Guterres as Under-Secretary-General for Strategic Coordination in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General at the UN Secretariat. In January 2023, Türk criticized the “rapid removal” border policy of President Joe Biden's administration and the United States, under which illegal aliens who are not citizens could be removed from the country or denied entry, stating that it posed a risk to fundamental rights. In April 2023, Türk called on Russian authorities to release longtime Kremlin critic Vladimir Kara-Murza, who was sentenced to 25 years in prison on charges including treason. In March 2024, Türk said he recognized “China's progress in alleviating poverty and promoting development” and urged the release of human rights defenders, calling on China to implement the recommendations of the 2022 UN Human Rights Office report on Xinjiang. In September 2024, U.S. Senator Tom Cotton wrote a letter to V. Türk, criticizing V. Türk's refusal to designate Hamas a terrorist organization even after the execution of six hostages in Gaza.

SECURITY AND RESILIENCE - HEALTH SECURITY



Understanding National Security Part VI: The Component of Health Security

Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Georgios KOUKAKIS (Greece)

“Even as the world recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, the key drivers of disease emergence and spread are increasing rapidly, including the growth and mobility of populations, human encroachment on animal habitats, wildlife trade and trafficking, loss of biodiversity and the impact of climate change. [...] While a significant challenge, the recovery of health systems offers an opportunity to build greater resilience against a range of future emergencies, and to end the cycle of panic and neglect that has characterized the international community’s response to epidemics and pandemics.”

U.S. Government Global Health Security Strategy (2024)

Abstract

This article is the sixth 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 health 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 to a variety of policy fields and finally highlight its importance for peace and stability. Its main conclusion is that health security is a very important component of national security and must not be overlooked.

Introduction

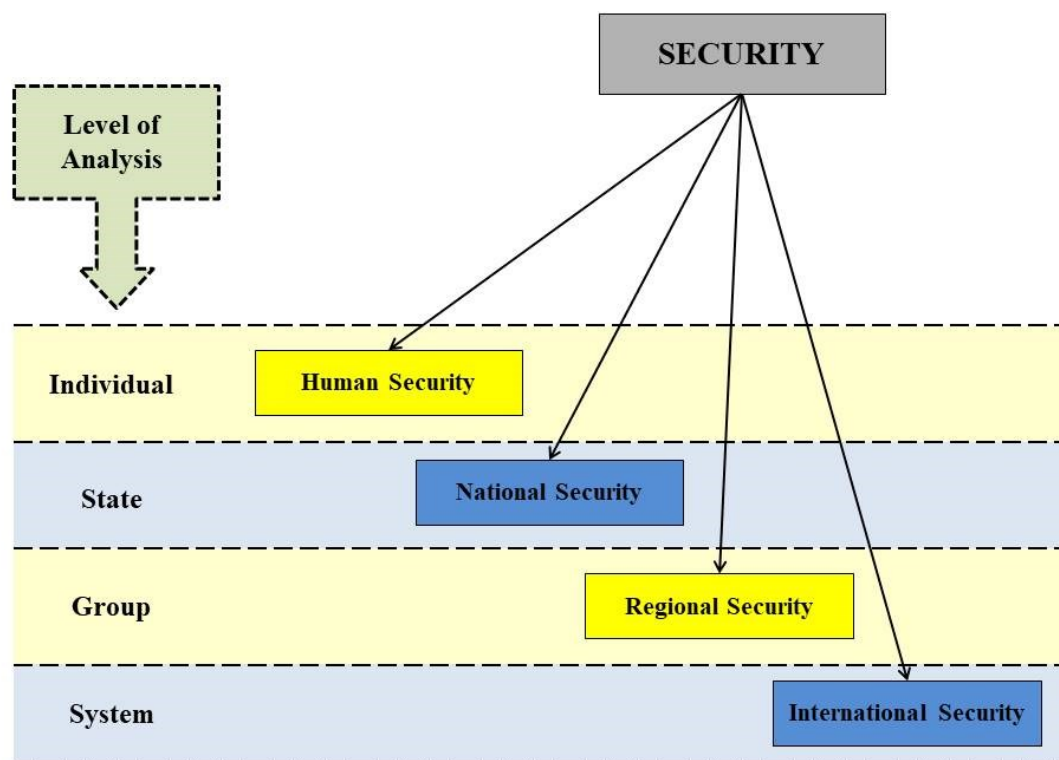
The contemporary security environment has been characterized as an environment of *polycrises* (multiple crises) and *permacrises* (permanent crises)¹, due to the numerous long-lasting and different types (military, economic, energy, food, health, etc.) of crises that have occurred. In this context, 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 *health security*, the importance of which has been highlighted through several incidents that are going to be presented in the article, having a direct or indirect impact on several policy fields.

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 health security, a significant component of national security. Its importance lies in the fact that public health is very important for every state, as it ensures the states' *proper function* and the well-being of its citizens. The hostile conditions of the contemporary security environment of polycrises and permacrises – especially after the COVID-19 pandemic – forced states to re-evaluate their policy regarding health 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 health security and *policy makers* plan respective policies in a more effective way.

Its purpose is to clarify the content of health 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 health security is a very 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 health security in the context of national security, after that it presents the main international collaborative scheme and several recent incidents in regard to health security, it then proceeds to a brief analysis of the interconnection between health security and other policy fields, and concludes by referring to future challenges and opportunities in regard to health security.

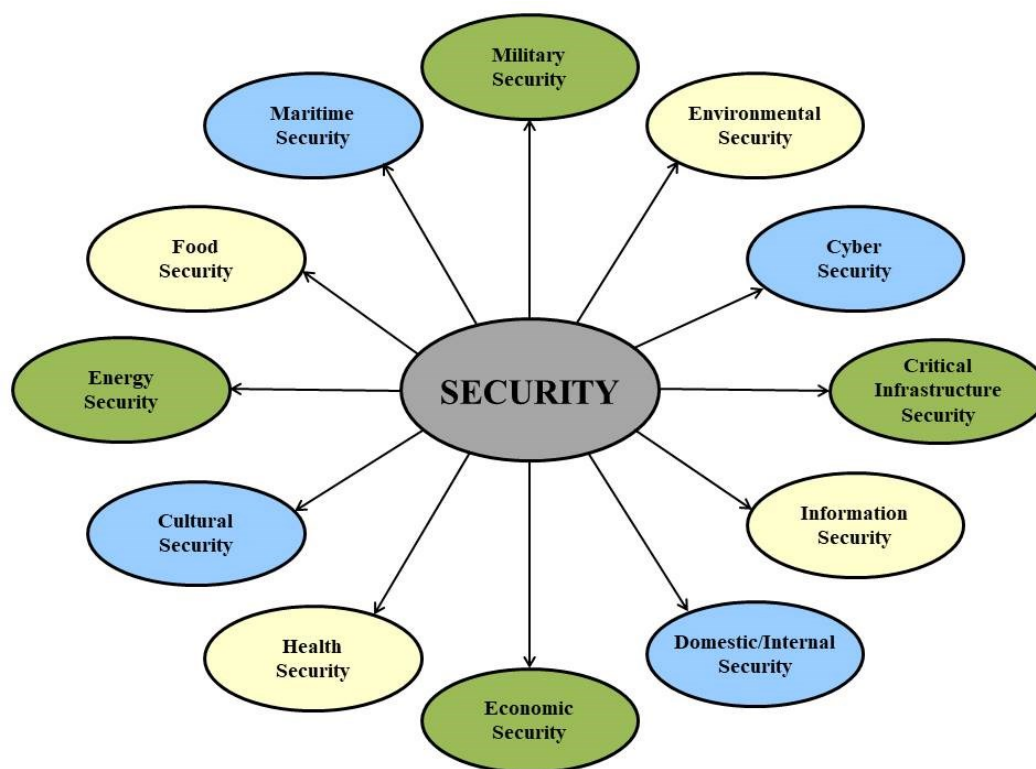


Picture 1: The 4 types of security
Source: Created by Georgios Koukakis

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*, etc³. 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 (**Picture 1**).

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



Picture 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

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>.

through international organizations such as the United Nations¹². 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 (**Picture 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) health security, (6) food security, (7) environmental security, (8) health security, (9) domestic/internal security, (10) cyber security, (11) cultural security, (12) water security, (13) demographic security, (14) information security, and (15) space security.

The Context of Health Security

Taking into consideration the aforementioned definition of security, it is understood that health security is the protection of a state's *infrastructure* (e.g. hospitals) and *assets* (e.g. ambulances) that are related to public health, in addition to the protection of its *citizens' health* (public health) from any threat/risk that endangers their health. At this point it must be clarified that the term public health refers to:

*“[...] the art and science of preventing disease, prolonging life, and promoting physical and mental health, sanitation, personal hygiene, control of infectious diseases, and organization of health services”.*¹³

It is also important to clarify the content of two – similar, yet different – terms that are closely related to public health. The first one is the term epidemic which refers to:

*“[...] an occurrence of disease that is temporarily of high prevalence. [...] The rise and decline in epidemic prevalence of an infectious disease is a probability phenomenon dependent upon transfer of an effective dose of the infectious agent from an infected individual to a susceptible one [...]”*¹⁴

The second one is the term pandemic – basically a worldwide epidemic – which refers to an:

*“[...] outbreak of infectious disease that occurs over a wide geographical area and that is of high prevalence, generally affecting a significant proportion of the world's population, usually over the course of several months. Pandemics arise from epidemics [...]”*¹⁵

In order though for the content of health security to be fully comprehended, the following health security factors need to be analyzed:

1. **Threats:** As far as health security threats are concerned, it must be stressed that they include both *state* and *non-state actors*. The first category usually includes a state's armed forces or intelligence services, while the second one mostly includes *terrorist/criminal organizations* or *natural phenomena*.
2. **Means:** As far as the means that an actor may use to (intentionally) threaten a state's health security, they usually include physical means, cyber means, or administrative/operational means. Moreover, a state's health security can be threatened (unintentionally) by a technical deficiency/situation (malfunction).
3. **Ways:** As far as the ways that the aforementioned means are used, the most common ones include the conduction of military CBRN operations, the implementation of embargos, the restriction of exports, cyberattacks and physical attacks (sabotage, terrorist attacks, etc.) against a state's health services infrastructure, assets and/or healthcare services.
4. **Goals/Objectives:** The main goal that an actor aspires to accomplish by disrupting the functioning of a state's healthcare system and cause damage to its infrastructure/assets is to impose its will by coercion. As far as the objectives are concerned, they usually include the *malfunction* and/or *degradation* of an actor's *economy*, *trade*, *defence*, and/or *supply chain* and/or the *deprivation* of its critical health resources in

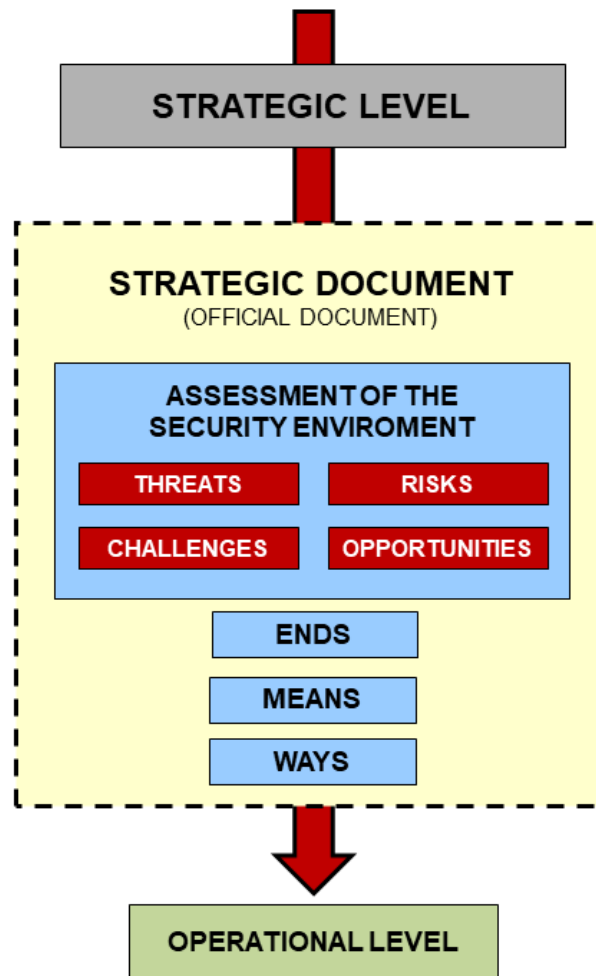
¹²United Nations. (2023). *Determined: Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Organization* [Official Document]. https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_annual_report_2023_en_0.pdf/.

¹³Bryant, J.H., Rhodes, P. (2025, April 13), *public health*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/public-health>

¹⁴The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2025, April 3). *epidemic*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/science/epidemic>.

¹⁵Rogers, K. (2025, April 3). *pandemic*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/science/pandemic>.

order to cause the overall malfunction of a state and public unrest which will put pressure on the state's leadership in order to reach a favorable agreement.



Picture 4: The function of Strategic Documents
Source: Compiled by Georgios Koukakis

5. **Strategic documents:** As far as the strategic documents that are related to health security are concerned, they include specialised official documents such as the *Global Health Security Strategy* of the United States¹⁶, the *United Kingdom Health Security Agency (UKHSA) Strategic Plan 2023 to 2026*¹⁷, the *National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030* of Australia¹⁸, and the *Global Public Health Strategy 2021-2025* of the UNHCR¹⁹. Their main purpose is to provide the framework –by assessing the conditions (threats, risks, challenges and opportunities) in regard to the health 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 (**Picture 4**).

6. **Decision-making:** As far as the decision making process regarding issues related to health security is concerned, due to the fact that it is a policy field with very important political, diplomatic and social

¹⁶The White House. (2024). U.S. Government Global Health Security Strategy 2024 [Official Document]. <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Global-Health-Security-Strategy-2024-1.pdf>.

¹⁷United Kingdom Health Security Agency. (2023). UKHSA Strategic Plan 2023 to 2026 [Official Document]. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/650d530e52e73c00139426c1/UKHSA_3_year_strategy.pdf.

¹⁸Australian Government/Department of Health. (2021). National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030 [Official Document]. https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/12/national-preventive-health-strategy-2021-2030_1.pdf.

¹⁹UNHCR. (2021). UNCHR Global Strategy for Public Health [Official Document]. <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/612643544.pdf>.

consequences that must be coordinated with other actors, the decision for the implementation of a certain health security policy is usually taken in the higher strategic political level (Head of State/Government) by the respective *Ministry/Department of Health*.



Picture 5: *The logo of the World Health Organization*

Source: *World Health Organization*

The World Health Organization (WHO)

As states have realized that their common national goals/objectives in several policy fields can be more quickly and easily achieved through cooperation, they have established several cooperative schemes in regional and global level that specialize in certain policy fields. As far as health security is concerned, the most important one is the *World Health Organization (WHO)*, the Constitution of which was signed on *22 July 1946* by 51 UN member-states and 10 non member-states, and came into force on *07 April 1948*²⁰. The goal of the WHO is to:

*“[...] promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable – so everyone, everywhere can attain the highest level of health”.*²¹

According to the WHO²², some of the most important events in regard to its work and the evolution of healthcare services –that not only highlight the importance the WHO but also the large variety of health issues it deals with– are the following:

²⁰WHO. (n.d.). *History of WHO*. <https://www.who.int/about/history>.

²¹WHO. (n.d.). *About WHO*. <https://www.who.int/about>.

²²WHO. (n.d.). *Public health milestones through the years*. <https://www.who.int/campaigns/75-years-of-improving-public-health/milestones#year-1948>.



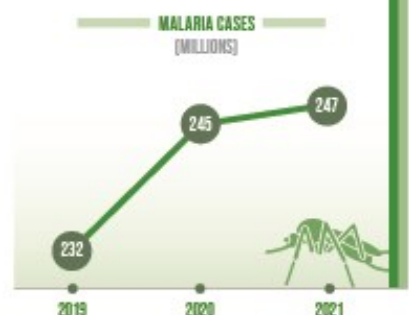
NOTABLE STRIDES HAVE BEEN MADE TOWARDS
IMPROVING GLOBAL HEALTH OUTCOMES



25 MILLION CHILDREN
MISSED OUT ON IMPORTANT
ROUTINE IMMUNIZATIONS
IN 2021

6 MILLION MORE
THAN IN 2019

MALARIA CASES HAVE
SURGED WORLDWIDE



OUT-OF-POCKET PAYMENTS

FOR HEALTH PUSHED OR FURTHER PUSHED



A WOMAN DIES EVERY
TWO MINUTES

FROM PREVENTABLE CAUSES
RELATED TO PREGNANCY
AND CHILDBIRTH
(2020)



Picture 6: Infographic of the No.3 Goal of the UN 2030 Agenda
Source: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal>

1. The establishment of a *global disease-tracking service* in 1947.
2. The adoption of an *International Classification of Diseases (ICD)* in 1948.
3. The discovery of *antibiotics* in 1950.
4. The development of the *inactivated polio vaccine* in 1952.
5. The development of the *attenuated live-virus polio vaccine* in 1961.
6. The establishment of the first *International Health Regulations (IHR)* in 1969.
7. The creation of the special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in *Human Reproduction (HRP)* in 1972.
8. The foundation of the *Expanded Programme on Immunization* in 1974.
9. The establishment of the Special Programme for Research and Training in *Tropical Diseases (TDR)* in 1975.
10. The publication of the first *Essential Medicines List* in 1977.
11. The endorsement of the '*Health for All*' goal and launch of the *global diarrhoeal diseases programme* in 1978.
12. The *eradication of smallpox* in 1980.
13. The endorsement of the *International Code of Marketing Breastmilk Substitutes* in 1981.
14. The discovery of the *Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)* in 1983.
15. The launch of the *Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI)* in 1988.
16. The adoption of a comprehensive definition of *reproductive health* in 1994.
17. The launch of an *Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI)* in 1995.
18. The changes made in *emergency contraception* in 1998.
19. The establishment of the *Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI)* and the publication of the first *Global strategy for Noncommunicable Diseases* in 1999.
20. The establishment of specific goals in regard to health in the context of the *Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)* and the establishment of the *Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN)* in 2000.
21. The adoption of the *UN Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS* in 2001.
22. The revision of the *International Health Regulations* in 2005.
23. The launch of *Child Growth Standards* in 2006.
24. The establishment of the first *rapid molecular test* for detection of TB in 2010.
25. The adoption of the *Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan* in 2013.
26. The adoption of *Goal 3* (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages) in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that was endorsed in 2015 (**Picture 6**).
27. The launch of the *Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health* in 2016.
28. The adoption of the *United Nations Political Declaration on universal health coverage* in 2019.
29. The signature of an *Agreement for cooperation on the health of humans, animals, plants and the environment* between the WHO, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), the UN Environment Programme in 2022.

Incidents Related to Health Security

The importance of health security has also been highlighted through time by the appearance of several pandemics²³, such as:

1. The *Sixth Cholera Pandemic* (1899-1923).
2. The *Spanish Flu Pandemic* (1918-1920).
3. The *Asian Flu Pandemic* (1957-1958).
4. The ongoing *Cholera Pandemic* (1961-present).
5. The *Hong Kong Flu Pandemic* (1968-1969).
6. The *Smallpox Pandemic* (1977-1980).
7. The ongoing *HIV/AIDS Pandemic* (1981-present).
8. The *SARS Pandemic* (2002-2003).
9. The *H1N1 Pandemic* (2009-2010).
10. The *MERS Pandemic* (2012) in Middle East.

²³Council on Foreign Relations. (n.d.). Major Pandemics of the Modern Era. <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/major-epidemics-modern-era>.

11. The *Polio Pandemic* (2014) in Asia & Africa.
12. The *Ebola Pandemic* (2014-2016 & 2018-2020) in West Africa.
13. The *Zika Virus Pandemic* (2015-2016) in Americas.

As far as the contemporary incidents related to health security are concerned, the most famous incident in regard to terrorism is the '*Tokyo Subway Sarin Attack*' that occurred on 20 March 1995 when a Japanese religious movement released quantities of the toxic gas *sarin* resulting in the death of 13 and the injury of approximately 5.500 people²⁴, while the most recent incident in regard to diseases is the *COVID-19 pandemic* when a coronavirus epidemic occurred in late 2019 in Wuhan (China) and quickly spread worldwide leading to severe casualties and the imposition of restrictive measures to citizens from most states.²⁵

The Interconnection of Health Security with other Policy Fields

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

1. **Economy:** The first sector that is usually affected by a health security threat is the economy, as in most cases epidemics and pandemics result in the imposition of restrictive measures in the *movement* of citizens, *transportation*, and other everyday life *habits* that decrease sales and trade volume between states.
2. **Security & Defence:** Another sector that is interconnected with health security is security & defence, as health security incidents may result in a decrease in the number of the combatant personnel (thus the *operational capability* of a military force), the requirement of additional *protective equipment*, and/or the avoidance of certain *areas* that have been infected.
3. **Resilience:** Resilience is also affected by health security, as the respective incidents not only maximize the *vulnerabilities* of a society, but has also a negative impact on its ability to *recover*. That is why resilience is nowadays one of the most important capacities for actors.²⁶
4. **Technology:** Technology has also a great (both positive and negative) impact to health security, because it facilitates *innovation* not only as far as *countering* health security threats/risks is concerned but also by inventing new means and ways of *disrupting healthcare services*.
5. **Environment:** As far as the environment is concerned, health security is very closely related to environmental security, as many diseases can turn into epidemics and/or pandemics depending on the *environmental conditions*.
6. **Public Administration:** The relation between public administration and health security mainly refers to public healthcare facilities and services, which are usually under the authority of a respective agency/department, such as the *Ministry/Department of Health*. Moreover, it relates to the policies that a government implements in order to promote and ensure public health, which may even result in the imposition of restrictive measures to its citizens.
7. **Intelligence:** Last but not least, intelligence is another sector that is related to health security, as it not only enhances the overall health security threat awareness, but also provides information about the vulnerabilities of public health infrastructure leading to the enhancement of resilience.

Concluding Remarks

Taking into consideration the information presented in this article, it is concluded that health security is a very 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 protect its healthcare infrastructure, assets and provided services in order to ensure public health, thus function

²⁴Pletcher, K. (2025, March 13). Tokyo subway attack of 1995. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Tokyo-subway-attack-of-1995>

²⁵Bernstein, L. (2024, October 3). What was the impact of COVID-19?. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/What-was-the-impact-of-COVID-19>

²⁶Koukakis, 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>

in a proper way and protect its national interests. The main *challenge* that most states are facing in regard to health security lies in the ability to keep up with the *technological advancement* in order to effectively address health security threats and ensure public health. As for the main *opportunity* that lies ahead, states must take advantage of the existing technological means and enhance its collaboration in order to increase their resilience and ensure that health regulations are being followed.

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CHINA AND MIDDLE EAST



China's Middle East Policies and Investments: Technological and Strategic Ascendancy

Kadir Özağ (Turkey)

Abstract

China has rapidly emerged as a global superpower in the 21st century, significantly expanding its economic, political, and technological influence in the Middle East. Through its **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, Beijing has executed massive infrastructure investments, energy agreements, and digital partnerships, deepening its strategic foothold in the region. This paper analyzes China's Middle East investments and technological dominance, positioning it as an alternative development model to Western approaches.

China's leadership in **5G networks, artificial intelligence (AI), smart cities, and renewable energy** has reinforced its regional clout. Moreover, its **non-interference policy** has cultivated diplomatic trust, offering an attractive alternative to Western interventionism. This study evaluates how China's growing Middle East presence may reshape global power dynamics.

Keywords: China, Middle East, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), 5G, Huawei, energy diplomacy.



Source: https://mecouncil.org/blog_posts/will-china-engage-more-on-middle-east-security/

1. Introduction

Since the early 21st century, China has transformed its economic growth into a global strategy, becoming an increasingly influential actor in the Middle East. The **decline of Western influence** and the **U.S. pivot to Asia** have provided China with greater strategic leverage in the region (China Power Project, 2023). The **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** has facilitated billions of dollars in infrastructure, energy, and digital technology investments.

This paper examines China's Middle East policies through three key dimensions:

1. Economic and Infrastructure Investments
2. Technological Dominance and Digital Diplomacy
3. An Alternative Diplomatic Model to the West

China's ascendancy signifies not only an economic shift but also a **techno-geopolitical transformation** in the region.

2. China's Economic and Infrastructure Investments in the Middle East

2.1. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Strategic Projects

Launched in 2013, the BRI is a global infrastructure project spanning over 150 countries, with the Middle East as a critical hub. China has invested heavily in **ports, railways, power plants, and smart city projects** in **Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iran, and Egypt** (BRI Observatory, 2023).

- **Saudi Arabia:** China supports **NEOM**, a futuristic mega-city aligned with **Vision 2030**.
- **UAE:** Investments in **Abu Dhabi and Dubai ports** strengthen China's logistical network.
- **Egypt:** Chinese projects near the **Suez Canal** enhance trade connectivity.

2.2. Energy Security and Oil Agreements

As the world's largest energy importer, China relies heavily on Middle Eastern oil, securing long-term energy deals (IEA, 2023).

- **Iran:** A **25-year comprehensive cooperation agreement** ensures stable oil supply.
- **Saudi Arabia:** Moves toward **petro-yuan transactions** challenge dollar dominance (Bloomberg, 2023).

3. China's Technological Leadership and Digital Diplomacy

3.1. 5G and Smart Cities: Huawei's Dominance

Chinese tech giant **Huawei** leads **5G infrastructure deployment** in the Middle East, offering an alternative to Western technology (Huawei Annual Report, 2022).

- **UAE's Masdar City:** Powered by Huawei's smart solutions.
- **Saudi NEOM:** Designed as a fully digitized metropolis.

3.2. AI and Cybersecurity Collaborations

China is forging strategic partnerships in **AI and cybersecurity** with Gulf states.

- **UAE's AI strategy** integrates Chinese expertise (SCMP, 2023).
- **Saudi digital transformation** leverages Chinese tech.

4. China's Diplomatic Model: An Alternative to the West

4.1. The "Non-Interference" Policy

Unlike Western powers, China avoids political conditions, gaining regional trust.

- **Saudi-Iran Reconciliation (2023):** Brokered by China, showcasing its diplomatic rise (Al Jazeera, 2023).
- **Declining Western Influence:** The U.S. military presence contrasts with China's economic focus.

4.2. Reshaping Global Finance

- **Petro-yuan:** Promoting yuan in oil trade to reduce dollar reliance.
- **Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB):** Funding Middle Eastern projects.

5. Conclusion and Future Projections

China's Middle East expansion represents a **multi-dimensional power shift**. Key future trends include:

- **Increased tech exports** from China,

- **Greater petro-yuan adoption,**
- **Further decline of Western influence.**

China is not merely an investor but a **technological and diplomatic leader**, reshaping the region's future.

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CHINA AND EUROPE



The Rapprochement Between the European Union and China: on the Threshold of a New Geo-Economic Era

Kadir ÖZAĞ (Turkey)

Abstract

The dynamics of global trade have undergone significant transformation in the 2020s, driven by post-pandemic supply chain disruptions, escalating geopolitical tensions, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Within this context, the economic and commercial relations between the European Union (EU) and China have emerged as a focal point, navigating a delicate balance between strategic competition and mutual interdependence. Enhanced cooperation in sectors such as electric vehicles, green energy technologies, and advanced manufacturing underscores the multifaceted nature of the EU-China relations, with implications extending beyond bilateral ties to encompass geopolitical considerations. This article examines the evolving dynamics of EU-China commercial rapprochement between 2023 and 2025, its impact on global trade policies, and the resultant pressures on the United States. By analyzing trade tariffs, minimum price agreements, and transatlantic relations, it argues that this rapprochement signals the advent of a new geo-economic era.



Source: <https://geopoliticeconomy.org/europe-in-the-new-cold-war-panel-discussion/china-and-european-union-flags/>

Introduction

The global economy is undergoing a profound transformation in the third decade of the 21st century. The COVID-19 pandemic, supply chain crises, intensifying geopolitical rivalries, and regional conflicts have compelled states to reassess their economic security strategies. Within this milieu, the economic and commercial relationship between the European Union (EU) and China has assumed a pivotal role, both regionally and globally. Characterized by a complex interplay of strategic competition and economic interdependence, the EU-China relations are shaped by cooperation in critical sectors such as electric vehicles (EVs), renewable energy technologies, and advanced manufacturing. However, this rapprochement is not merely an economic phenomenon; it carries significant geopolitical ramifications. The deepening ties between the EU and China exert influence on transatlantic relations and the United States' global trade policies,

heralding the emergence of a new geo-economic paradigm. This article seeks to analyze the drivers of EU-China commercial rapprochement, its implications for global trade, and its particular impact on the U.S., offering a comprehensive examination of this evolving dynamic.

1. The Global Context of EU-China Commercial Rapprochement

The 2020s have witnessed a dramatic reorientation of global trade. The disruptions caused by the pandemic, heightened great-power competition, and the Russia-Ukraine war have prompted states to recalibrate their economic policies. Against this backdrop, EU-China relations have undergone a process of redefinition, balancing economic imperatives with strategic considerations. While the EU views China as a systemic rival, it simultaneously seeks to maintain and expand commercial cooperation. This duality reflects the EU's broader endeavor to safeguard its economic security while asserting its role as a global leader.

In 2023 and 2024, EU-China trade relations have increasingly centered on technology-driven sectors. Collaboration in electric vehicles, green energy technologies, and artificial intelligence has strengthened bilateral economic ties. Yet, this rapprochement transcends bilateral dynamics, impacting transatlantic alliances and global power structures. The United States' stringent trade policies toward China have inadvertently facilitated closer EU-China cooperation, signaling a potential realignment in global trade networks.

2. Electric Vehicles and Trade Tensions

The electric vehicle sector has emerged as a cornerstone of EU-China commercial relations. China's dominance in the global EV market, coupled with the EU's role as both a consumer and producer, has fostered significant interdependence. However, the influx of low-cost, state-subsidized Chinese EVs into the EU market has sparked trade tensions.

In October 2024, the EU imposed additional tariffs of up to 35% on Chinese EVs following an investigation into subsidies. This decision directly affected major Chinese manufacturers such as BYD, Geely, and SAIC. Remarkably, despite these tariffs, China's EV exports to the EU continued to rise, underscoring the competitiveness of Chinese producers and robust demand within the EU market.

Responses within the EU have been varied. Germany, heavily reliant on the Chinese market, has adopted a cautious stance toward protectionist measures, with its automotive industry expressing concerns over potential disruptions to bilateral trade. In contrast, countries like France have advocated for stricter measures to safeguard domestic industries. These divergences highlight the challenges of formulating a cohesive EU strategy toward China.

3. Minimum Price Agreements and New Solutions

The escalation of trade tensions prompted by tariffs has led the EU and China to explore alternative mechanisms. Minimum price agreements have emerged as a key area of negotiation, aiming to establish a baseline price for Chinese EVs imported into the EU. Such agreements seek to ensure fair competition while mitigating trade disputes, offering a pragmatic solution to balance protectionism and cooperation.

Historically, similar approaches have proven effective in other sectors. For instance, the EU's minimum price agreements on Chinese solar panels successfully reduced trade frictions while fostering collaboration. A comparable outcome in the EV sector could significantly shape the trajectory of EU-China relations, reinforcing their mutual commitment to sustainable trade practices.

4. U.S. Trade Policies and Global Implications

The EU-China rapprochement must be understood within the broader context of global trade dynamics. The United States' imposition of high tariffs on Chinese imports, particularly during the Trump administration, has reshaped global trade alignments. These policies have driven China to seek alternative markets, deepening its commercial ties with the EU.

This shift has implications for transatlantic relations. The EU, while maintaining its strategic alliance with the U.S. through NATO, is increasingly prioritizing its economic interests by strengthening ties with China. This delicate balancing act underscores the EU's pursuit of strategic autonomy in a multipolar world. Moreover, the EU-China collaboration in EVs, battery technologies, and renewable energy is redefining global supply chains, potentially challenging U.S. dominance in these sectors. To remain competitive, the U.S. may need to reassess its trade strategies.

5. Conclusion: On the Threshold of a New Geo-Economic Era

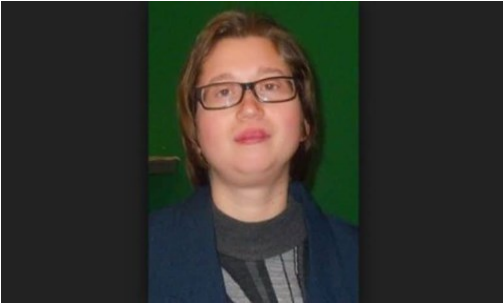
The commercial rapprochement between the EU and China represents more than an economic partnership; it is a transformative process with far-reaching implications for global power dynamics. Cooperation in electric vehicles, green energy, and advanced technologies lies at the heart of this relationship, yet it is fraught with challenges, including tariffs, minimum price negotiations, and geopolitical tensions.

The deepening EU-China ties exert significant pressure on transatlantic alliances and the United States' global strategy. This dynamic suggests the emergence of a new alignment in global trade, with the EU navigating a complex path between economic pragmatism and strategic autonomy. As such, the EU-China rapprochement stands as a harbinger of a new geo-economic era, one that will redefine the contours of global commerce and power in the years to come.

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SECURITY AND RESILIENCE - NEW WORLD ORDER



“Diplomatic 9/11 in the Oval Office” and the Reconfiguration of the World Order: Russia at Strategic Advantage?

Mona AGRIGOROAIEI (Romania)

The February 2025 Oval Office meeting between Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky was a watershed moment in global politics, an episode that shook international alliances and reopened the question of the United States’ commitment to European security. The two leaders, with fundamentally opposing views on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, reached an open confrontation, one that escalated rapidly, sending shockwaves through Washington, Kiev, Brussels, and Moscow. The meeting was heavily publicized, becoming not only a symbol of the diplomatic crisis between the two countries but also a catalyst for profound shifts in the global balance of power.

In the months leading up to it, the Trump administration had sent mixed signals about its support for Ukraine. If in the previous term, despite numerous scandals, military support for Kiev had been maintained, in 2025, the American president began to increasingly vocally challenge the need for US involvement in this conflict. At the Munich Security Conference, Vice President J.D. Vance made statements that alarmed European allies, suggesting that America could not be “the bank financing other people’s wars.” This phrase was interpreted as a clear indication that US support for Ukraine was no longer guaranteed and that Washington could take a path similar to that adopted in Afghanistan – a gradual withdrawal, leaving the allies to fend for themselves.

In this tense context, Zelensky arrived in Washington hoping to obtain reassurances of American commitment. But the meeting quickly degenerated. According to sources present in the Oval Office, Trump repeatedly interrupted Zelensky, accusing him of not being grateful enough for the help received so far and of refusing to consider negotiating options with Russia. The Ukrainian leader, visibly irritated, responded by stating that his people were fighting for survival and that any compromise with Moscow would mean a betrayal of those who sacrificed their lives. The tone became increasingly aggressive, with Trump raising his voice and stating that “America will not continue to finance a lost cause”. At that moment, according to witnesses, Zelensky allegedly said that “if the US abandons Ukraine, history will not forget this”. Tensions reached a climax, and the meeting ended abruptly, with Trump leaving the room before Zelensky could finish his plea.

The international reaction to the standoff was immediate. In Europe, NATO leaders convened emergency meetings to discuss the implications of a possible American withdrawal. France and Germany, alarmed



Source: <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/columns/chapter-two-of-the-new-world-order-is-about-to-open>

by the possibility of reduced military support for Ukraine, began to draw up plans for additional aid, but without the logistical and financial capabilities of the United States, any such efforts seemed insufficient. The French president went even further, suggesting that France could extend nuclear protection to other European nations, an unprecedented step that would signal a new direction for EU security policy.

In Russia, state media presented the incident as clear evidence that Zelensky was isolated and that Ukraine had lost its main ally. The Kremlin exploited the moment to intensify anti-Western propaganda, suggesting that it was only a matter of time before Ukraine would be forced to capitulate. This perception was quickly followed by an escalation of Russian attacks in eastern Ukraine, with Moscow testing the West's response to a divided America.

In the United States, reactions were divided. The Trumpist wing of the Republican Party supported the president's position, arguing that Europe must take greater responsibility in the conflict. In contrast, Democrats and some national security experts warned that the incident could have serious long-term consequences, undermining not only support for Ukraine but also America's credibility as a global leader. Trump's opponents compared the moment to the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan, warning that such a weakening of American commitment would have negative effects on all US allies, not just Kiev.

The confrontation between Trump and Zelensky was not just an isolated episode, but a turning point in global politics. If in 2001, the September 11 attacks radically transformed global security strategy, launching a war on terror, this moment in 2025 marked the beginning of a new era – a world in which America is no longer the absolute guarantor of international stability. The world order that was built after World War II was based on a firm commitment by the US to support its allies, but this meeting demonstrated that the old rules no longer apply.

For Ukraine, the effects were immediate. Without certainty of American support, Zelensky was forced to seek new allies, and Europe was faced with the need to redefine its defense policy. NATO, although still strong, was forced to rethink its strategies, and Eastern European countries such as Poland and Romania began to strengthen their own defense capabilities, anticipating that future American support might become uncertain.

The Oval Office meeting was a symbolic moment, but also a real turning point, one that showed the world that the era of American dominance was in decline. Russia and China, noticing this paradigm shift, intensified their efforts to expand global influence, taking advantage of the hesitation and divisions of the West. With an unpredictable American leader and a constantly shifting balance of power, the world has entered a new phase in its history – one marked by uncertainty, strategic realignments and a future in which each nation must assume greater responsibility for its own security.

Following the confrontation between Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky, a new geopolitical reality has emerged: an accelerated reconfiguration of the world order, in which the United States no longer plays the role of absolute leader of international alliances. If after World War II, Washington was the architect and guarantor of a global system based on multilateral institutions, military alliances and economic support for democratic states, in 2025 this model began to visibly fracture. Trump's attitude was more than a simple political strategy – it was a clear signal that the US was no longer willing to bear the costs of maintaining the old order. This reality was quickly perceived by other global actors, and Russia was one of the main beneficiaries of this change.

First, the weakening of American commitment to Ukraine was a significant boost to Russia's strategy in the region. The Kremlin relied on a strategy of attrition, assuming that, sooner or later, Western support for Kiev would erode. Until 2025, Ukraine was largely dependent on US logistical, economic, and military support, and any withdrawal of that support represented an immediate weakening of its ability to resist Russian aggression. When Trump signaled that America would no longer "spend money" on this conflict, Moscow saw a window of opportunity and began to intensify its offensive in eastern Ukraine, testing the West's reactions.

Without unconditional support from Washington, Ukraine was forced to look for alternatives in Europe. France and Germany tried to seize the initiative, but without US military resources, their support proved insufficient. Poland and the Baltic states pushed for a more aggressive strategy of support for Kiev, but without coordination and unity among NATO states, these initiatives were limited. This situation played perfectly to Russia's advantage, which used the West's indecision to impose a new reality on the ground.

Another strategic advantage for Russia was the domino effect on NATO and the European Union. The weakening of transatlantic unity encouraged the Kremlin to increase pressure on vulnerable European states. Over the years, Russia has invested heavily in propaganda, economic influence, and political destabilization in countries such as Hungary, Serbia, and even in certain political sectors in Germany and France. Amid growing distrust of America, these moves have become even more effective. Moscow no longer needed to resort to

direct confrontation with NATO; it was enough to exploit divisions and uncertainty within the alliance.

In addition, Ukraine also lost information support from the CIA... and one of the most immediate and visible effects was the decrease in the effectiveness of Ukraine's air defense. Until 2025, Ukraine's air defense systems depended largely on early warnings provided by NATO satellites and drones. This data allowed for real-time identification of missile and drone attacks, giving the Ukrainian military time to intercept a significant part of them.

But without this early warning capability, Ukrainian air defenses were overwhelmed. Russia began to launch massive, coordinated attacks on Ukraine's energy grid, transportation hubs, and command centers. In the months following the end of U.S. support, Kiev suffered long-term power outages and rail lines used to transport weapons were severely damaged. The lack of accurate information about Russian missile attack routes meant that many Ukrainian defense systems were used ineffectively, quickly becoming exhausted in the face of the increasing number of Russian attacks.

In addition to the intensified airstrikes, the end of CIA intelligence support also meant an acute lack of data on Russian troop movements. Until then, Ukraine had been able to monitor Russian battle groups and anticipate major offensives. When a Russian division was preparing to attack, Western intelligence quickly provided detailed information about the composition of its forces, their routes of advance, and their vulnerabilities. This allowed the Ukrainian army to organize effective ambushes, strike supply convoys, and thwart Russian advances.

In 2025, without this advanced intelligence network, Ukraine was forced to rely solely on its own sources, which were much more limited. As a result, Russia began to better coordinate its attacks and advance on multiple fronts. In the east, Russian troops took advantage of this lack of information and launched a powerful offensive in the Donetsk region, capturing several strategic cities, including Avdiivka and Sloviansk.

On the southern front, the Russian offensive in Zaporozhye became much more effective. Until then, Ukraine had managed to prevent the advance of Russian troops in this region using artillery strikes guided by information transmitted by the US. Without this advantage, Ukrainian forces found themselves unable to destroy Russian supply lines, and Moscow was able to create a stable logistical corridor between Crimea and the occupied territories in southern Ukraine.

Another major advantage for Russia was the intensification of electronic warfare. In previous years, the CIA and other US intelligence agencies had provided Ukraine with advanced technologies to counter Russian cyberattacks. These included protecting communication networks, blocking jamming systems, and using artificial intelligence to detect cyberattacks.

With the withdrawal of US support, Russia began to massively use its electronic warfare technologies, including the Krasukha and Leer-3 systems, to jam the communications of Ukrainian forces. Kiev's reconnaissance drones, which had previously played a crucial role in identifying Russian targets, were suddenly paralyzed by these systems. Without the ability to receive real-time information about enemy positions, Ukrainian units found themselves unable to respond quickly to Russian troop movements.

In addition, Russia began intercepting and falsifying communications between Ukrainian commanders, sending false orders to create chaos in Kiev's defensive lines. This led to several situations in which entire Ukrainian army units retreated or were ambushed, believing they were following a legitimate order to regroup.

As Russia gained the upper hand on the battlefield, it accelerated the construction of fortifications in the occupied territories. In previous years, Ukrainian counteroffensives had been able to break through Russian defensive lines thanks to accurate information provided by Western intelligence services. Ukraine knew where the weak points of these fortifications were and could attack them effectively.

But in the absence of this information, Ukrainian attacks became chaotic and less effective. Russia continued to expand its network of trenches, minefields, and anti-tank barriers, creating a large buffer zone in Donetsk, Luhansk, and Zaporizhia. The Ukrainian army's attempts to advance were met with fierce resistance, and the lack of effective coordination led to massive losses of equipment and soldiers.

Ultimately, all of these elements - the loss of early warning, the inability to anticipate enemy movements, the superiority of Russian electronic warfare, and the consolidation of defensive positions - relied decisively in Russia's favor. Ukraine, deprived of the essential information support it had enjoyed in previous years, found itself vulnerable, and Russian forces took full advantage of it to consolidate its territorial gains and diminish Kiev's ability to respond. Thus, the end of CIA support not only affected Ukraine, but also redefined the entire course of the war, giving Russia a strategic advantage it had not had since the beginning of the invasion.

Moreover, the change in the US position also gave Russia a boost on the global stage. China, the Kremlin's main strategic partner, interpreted the weakening of American commitment to Ukraine as a signal that the

US might hesitate in other key regions, such as the Asia-Pacific. This strengthened the Moscow-Beijing axis and gave Russia access to essential economic resources, especially in the context of Western sanctions. Russia was thus able to keep its economy afloat and continue the war effort without unbearable economic pressures.

When the United States, under Donald Trump, decided to stop providing strategic intelligence to Ukraine, the reality of the war on the ground changed dramatically. Until then, assistance from the CIA and other Western intelligence agencies had been a key factor in the success of the Ukrainian defense. American satellites, reconnaissance aircraft, and interceptions of Russian communications had given Kiev a crucial information advantage, allowing it to anticipate attacks, strike at the weak points of the Russian military, and protect critical infrastructure.

In addition to consolidating its position in Ukraine and destabilizing the West, Russia used this moment to expand its influence in other parts of the world. In the Middle East, the Kremlin intensified cooperation with Iran and exploited the progressive withdrawal of the United States from the region to strengthen its military presence in Syria and other areas of strategic interest. In Africa, Russia continued to expand its influence through the Wagner Group and through economic agreements that provided it with access to natural resources and strategic partnerships with authoritarian regimes.

The reconfiguration of the world order was not an instantaneous process, however. It was a cumulative effect, resulting from a series of decisions that demonstrated that the West was no longer willing to act with the same firmness as in the past. If in the 1990s and 2000s, US and NATO military interventions defined the geopolitical dynamics, in 2025 the trend was one of withdrawal and reassessment of priorities. This new reality was exploited by Russia, which demonstrated that, through a combination of military strategy, political influence and economic manipulation, it could obtain advantages without having to confront the West directly.

One of the greatest benefits for Russia from this reconfiguration was the change in global perception of the conflict in Ukraine. While in the early years of the invasion, Russia was considered the clear aggressor, in 2025, thanks to the hesitation of the West and effective propaganda, the Kremlin managed to impose its narrative in many parts of the world. Countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America began to see Russia not as an imperialist aggressor, but as an actor challenging American hegemony.

Basically, following the scandal between Trump and Zelensky, the world order was partially reconfigured in Russia's favor not only on the battlefield in Ukraine, but also in geopolitical and strategic terms. The Kremlin took advantage of the gradual withdrawal of the US to expand its influence, fragment Western alliances and build an alternative to the American-dominated system.

However, Russia should not rejoice too quickly. Europe's prompt reaction to new events, especially the commitment to arming European states, is a signal that Europe is rapidly regrouping. Let's hope he continues to do so: decisively and promptly. The stakes are huge: don't leave the old continent as a victim in the face of Putin's criminal darkness.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



Revolutionising Learning: Impact of AI in Education

Gargi AWASHTI (India)

“Success in creating AI would be the biggest event in human history. Unfortunately, it might also be the last, unless we learn how to avoid the risks.”

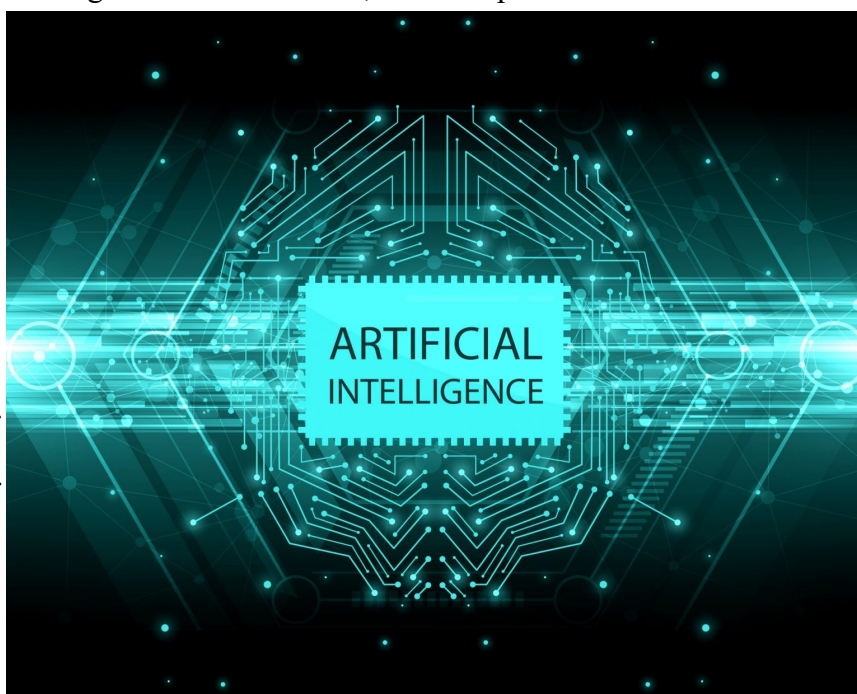
Stephen Hawking - Theoretical Physicist, Cosmologist, and Author

Artificial intelligence (AI), which was once a buzzword, has become an integral part of our lives. AI is shaping the future of technology and revolutionizing industries. AI holds, limitless potential and the transformative impact on our world.

“AI is a mirror, reflecting not only our intellect, but our values and fears. By far, the greatest danger of Artificial Intelligence is that people conclude too early that they understand it. Success in creating AI would be the biggest event in human history. Unfortunately, it might also be the last, unless we learn how to avoid the risks. AI is not a substitute for human intelligence; it is a tool to amplify human creativity and ingenuity. I believe AI is going to change the world more than anything in the history of humanity. More than electricity.”

This year the International Day of Education 2025. UNESCO has decided to dedicate the day to the issues associated with artificial intelligence (AI). Artificial intelligence contains the seeds of a veritable anthropological revolution. It dramatically calls into question the relationship between humans and machines.

Generative AI is likely to reshape education systems. Aware of the transformations brought about by this technological disruption, UNESCO was very quick to address the issues surrounding artificial intelligence, on which the



Source: <https://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/makingsciencepublic/2023/01/06/artificial-intelligence-education-and-entertainment/>

Organization has been working for over 10 years now. As a result, in 2021, after two years of consultation, the Organization's Member States adopted the first global standard-setting framework for the ethics of artificial intelligence. In the field of education, however, many countries, torn between authorization and restriction, lack clear guidelines on the subject. In 2023, less than 10% of schools and universities had an official framework for the use of artificial intelligence in educational contexts. These guidelines suggest setting a minimum age limit of 13 years for the use of artificial intelligence in the classroom.

Artificial intelligence actually offers major opportunities for education. In May 2023, a UNESCO survey revealed that, while AI was widely being used by education professionals around the world, less than 10% of the schools and universities surveyed had developed institutional policies governing their use of generative AI. By 2022, only seven countries had developed AI frameworks or programmes for teachers, and only 15 had included AI training objectives. In accordance with the guidance set out in these documents, as Malala Yousafzai once said: "one child, one teacher, one pen, one book can change the world."

In May 2023, UNESCO organized the first global meeting of Ministers of Education to share knowledge about the impact of generative AI tools on teaching and learning. This meeting has helped UNESCO chart a roadmap to steer the global policy dialogue with governments, as well as academia, civil society and private sector partners. The 2021 UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI is an essential reference, as is the 2019 Beijing Consensus on AI and Education and our 2021 AI and Education Guidance for Policy-Makers more recently, the 2022 Transforming Education Summit, the largest gathering of the international education community in a decade.

Generative AI has opened up a whole new world to administrators, educators, and students. The power of AI is undeniable, and understanding the pros and cons of artificial intelligence in education is essential for making informed decisions. To best use AI in schools, teachers and administrators need to know AI's advantages and challenges.

According to a national survey conducted by Tyton Partners in 2023, 27% of students reported being regular users of generative AI tools, as opposed to just 9% of instructors. Nearly half of students have tried AI writing tools at least once; 71% of instructors have never tried AI tools.

The Advantages of AI in Education

We have already mentioned some of the advantages of AI in education - inspiring creativity, summarizing existing materials, and so on. This section will delve deeper into the pros and cons of AI in schools, focusing on how these tools can reshape the learning environment. Here's a brief look at eight more advantages.

It can be used to personalize learning. AI can help you tailor your content to individual student needs and learning styles, based on AI-driven analytics that give you insight into student performance and learning trends. In this way, AI helps students be more engaged and motivated.

It can provide students with immediate feedback. AI offers students instantaneous and detailed feedback on their work, helping them to see their strengths and weaknesses. Such feedback enhances understanding and learning outcomes, and helps teachers know what to focus on in future lessons.

It can be used to create and supplement content. Through AI-powered platforms, you can create lessons, activities, assessments, discussion prompts, and presentations simply by providing a short prompt with keywords.

It can result in more inclusive lessons. AI has powerful tools that make previously inaccessible material available to students with special needs. Tools that offer text-to-speech, visual recognition, speech recognition, and more can help teachers adapt resources so that all students have an equal learning opportunity.

It can provide greater access to resources. Educators can access a wealth of AI-powered platforms to facilitate and enhance the learning that takes place in their classrooms. Just a few examples are Canva Magic Write, which helps in brainstorming, outlining, and lesson planning; Curipod, which enables teachers to quickly create interactive lessons; Eduaide, which provides teachers with more than 100 resource types to choose from to create high-quality instructional materials; and Quizzizz, which can be used to design quizzes that will create a personalized learning path based on each student's responses.

It can make abstract concepts more understandable. Image-generating AI tools such as Picsart and Visme can turn complex concepts into more readily accessible content.

It can be used to handle administrative tasks. You can use AI to streamline administrative tasks such as grading, scheduling, communicating with parents, and managing student records. This frees you up to do what you do best: teach. It affords you more hands-on time with students and helps to ensure that no students fall through the cracks.

It can foster critical thinkers. The advent and growing use of AI in classrooms lends itself to discussions regarding critical thinking and ethical considerations. Students are naturally intrigued by AI. The rich discussions that you can facilitate can help them grow and develop as thinkers and learners.

The Challenges and Limitations of AI in Education

With all the advantages that AI can offer to teachers, students, and administrators, it does come with its challenges and drawbacks. Following are some of the most common issues that concern educators.

Privacy and Security Concerns

Privacy risks have been a concern for as long as AI has been around. People are wary about what personal data is collected and how it is used, and whether they have any knowledge of or control over how it is used. Broadly speaking, risks are involved in data collection, data processing, data dissemination, and invasion (encroaching into an individual's personal space, choices, or activities).

Potential Bias in AI Algorithms

Studies have shown significant bias in GPT (generative pre-trained transformers; e.g., Chat GPT) against non-native English speakers. For example, one study shows over half of non-native English writing samples were misclassified as AI generated (while the accuracy for native English speakers was nearly perfect).

Reduced Human Interaction

Relying more and more on AI may reduce the teacher-to-student interactions and relationships and take away from the social-emotional aspects of learning. If those interactions diminish, students' social skills and interpersonal development will suffer. Teachers need to be aware of this and take care to identify and respond to the social and emotional needs of their students.

High Implementation Costs

The cost of AI in education can vary greatly, depending on how schools want to use it. Simple generative AI systems that teachers can use in lesson planning can cost as little as \$25 a month, but larger adaptive learning systems can run in the tens of thousands of dollars. Implementing these larger systems is likewise very expensive and is beyond the budgets of many schools, including those in underserved communities. And then there's the ongoing costs of maintaining and updating the systems and training staff to effectively use them.

Academic Misconduct

Cheating and plagiarism are, as mentioned, chief among the AI concerns raised by educators. If AI is used to complete assignments or exams or write papers, it is unfair to the students who *don't* cheat, and it undermines the education and learning process for those who *do* cheat. If students learn to cheat and take shortcuts in classrooms, what kind of citizens will they make when they are finished with their education? Measures need to be in place to ensure that AI is not being used unethically.

Unpredictability and Inaccurate Information

AI is only as good as the algorithms it is based on. If the data it draws from is inaccurate or biased, then the information it creates will be inaccurate or biased. Students need to learn how to evaluate and think critically about the information they come across and not just accept it at face value. There are many educational resources accessible online to help them do this.

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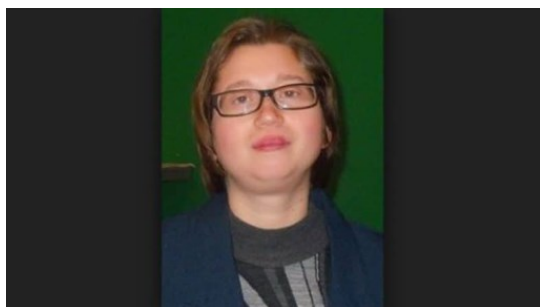
Georgios KOUKAKIS is a graduate of the Hellenic Military Academy (2002), the Hellenic Army War College (2020) and the Hellenic Supreme Joint War College (2023), with a strong professional and academic background in the field of security & defence, international relations, and adult training. He holds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





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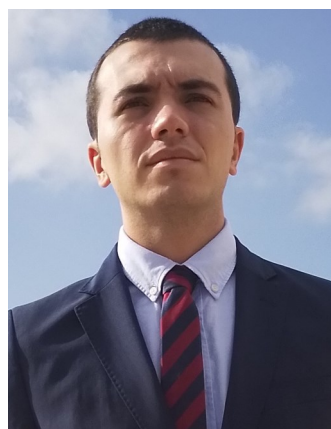
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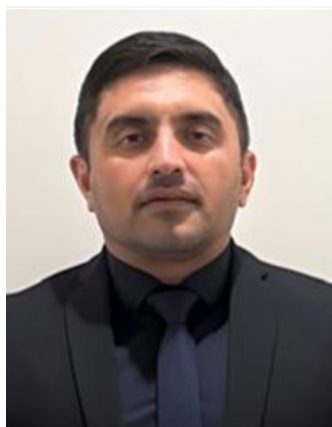
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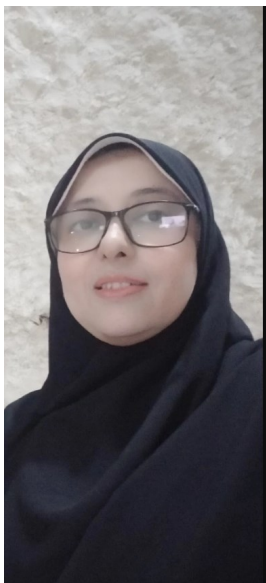
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He holds a Bachelor of Science in Security and Private Investigations from the American Military University (AMU), West Virginia, USA. He is an expert in business intelligence, intelligence collection and analysis, counterintelligence, terrorism and counterterrorism. He is the founder and director of International Private Investigators (I.P.I.) Marousi & Glyfada, Athens, Greece A former U.S. Army intelligence specialist Phillip Hatzis has over three decades of experience in the fields of intelligence collection. In terms of publications and media we highlight the following: Greek Investigator Magazine – Founder and Editor, Intelligence and Security Blog – Author and Analyst.



Kadir ÖZAĞ (Turkey)

Aspiring International Relations specialist, future diplomat, multilingual communicator. He is a final-year student at Anadolu University, studying Medical Documentation and Secretariat. His interests include migration, refugee rights, human rights, and the integration of technology and AI in healthcare. He is fluent in multiple foreign languages (English and German), he want to bridge cultural gaps. Passionate about Middle East politics, he desires to contribute to international solutions.

Certificates:



- Clinical Terminology – University of Pittsburgh
- Financial Markets – (Instructor: Robert Shiller, Nobel Laureate)
- International Women's Health & Human Rights– Stanford University
- Introduction to Psychology – Yale University
- Teach English Now! Foundational Principles –Arizona State University
- Occupational Health and Safety – Udey International





PhD. Mohammad AL-MOKDAD (Lebanon)

PhD in Geopolitics (2021 - Present) PSG IKI - France, PhD in International Relations and Diplomacy CEDS - France, (2021 - Present), Master in Social Policies (2019 - 2021), Lebanese University Strategic and Diplomatic Studies, (2017 - 2019), Military Studies, at the Military College. He knows Arabic, English, French and Italian. He is a graduate of numerous military, diplomacy, public order and security courses in Lebanon and abroad.



PhD. Eng. Stelian TEODORESCU (Romania)

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

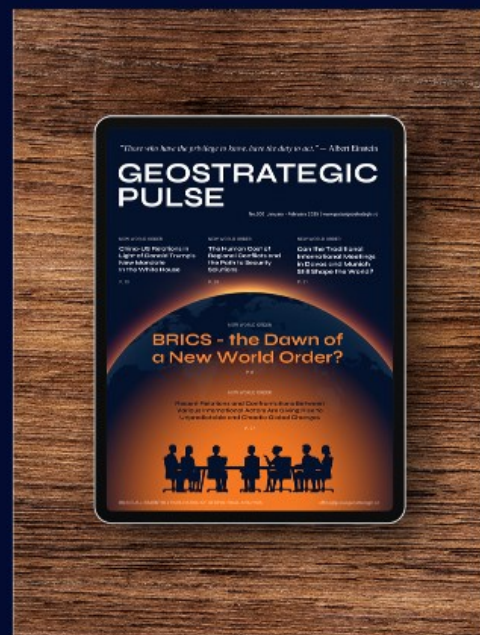




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