

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

# GEOSTRATEGIC PULSE

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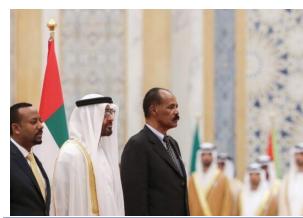
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## EDITORIAL



## Resilience and Proactive Attitude – Two Complementary Concepts Extremely Important for all Countries in the World

PhD. Eng. Stelian TEODORESCU (Romania)

*“The key to success is perseverance, endurance and determination”*

Colin Powell

Referring to a material body or an individual, resilience (from the French word résilience) is defined as the ability to return to its original shape after a deformation (in physics), but more commonly, in psychology, it refers to a person's ability to adapt quickly, to manage and overcome shocks, stress, difficulties or obstacles and to return to a normal balance, without being overwhelmed by emotions, acting constructively to move forward.

Therefore, geopolitical and geostrategic resilience refers to the ability of a state or non-state entity to resist, adapt and recover quickly from shocks, crises (hybrid, economic, energy, asymmetric, military and security) or turbulence, maintaining its sovereignty, strategic interests and stability, integrating security, economic, energy and climate policies to protect itself and maintain competitiveness on the world stage. As a result, geopolitical or geostrategic resilience in today's uncertain times means building the capacity to anticipate, forecast, absorb, adapt and recover from disruptions caused by changing political, economic, social, military and security dynamics. More than ever, it is imperative to develop proactive capabilities and not just react to crises. Proactivity is an essential skill that means taking initiative, taking responsibility for your own actions and results, anticipating needs and creating opportunities instead of waiting for things to happen; it is the opposite of reactivity and involves being decisive, focusing on solutions and generating positive energy to achieve your goals.

In the current regional and global security context, we must not forget that at the NATO Summit in Warsaw (8-9 July 2016), the heads of state and government of the member states of the North Atlantic Alliance signed a Commitment to strengthen resilience.

Having carefully analyzed today's developments, which are often unpredictable and often shocking, we come to the conclusion that resilience would imply, in this current global security perspective, the maintenance and protection of critical civilian capabilities, alongside and in support of military capabilities, as well as the development of “whole of government” cooperation. Resilience, in NATO's view, aims at the government's ability to continue functioning, maintaining the provision of services to the population, as well as civilian support for military operations.



Source: <https://centrupozitiv.md/invata-cum-sa-ti-dezvolti-rezilienta-emotionala/>

Therefore, as we have previously emphasized, geopolitical and geostrategic risks arise from various geopolitical events, tensions or changes that disrupt activities in all areas at the national state level and, implicitly, at the regional and global levels, all of which generate large-scale uncertainty. These risks are becoming increasingly complex due to the interconnected nature of global economies and the growth of hybrid threat vectors.

Looking ahead, key events defining the current global geopolitical landscape include:

- **Russia-Ukraine conflict:** Sanctions and disruptions in the supply of energy resources have triggered a large-scale crisis across Europe, creating a favorable environment for the amplification of macroeconomic instability.

- **Escalating conflicts in the Middle East:** Tensions in the region threaten to disrupt key trade routes and cause energy prices to skyrocket. The ripple effects are felt globally and have a direct impact on the general situation in Europe.

- **Amplifying tensions between the main international actors US-China-Russia:** The accelerated reconfiguration of the new world order, trade and energy wars and technological decoupling threaten global supply chains, with sanctions complicating operations. For entities linked to all the world's commercial markets, navigating these tensions leads to increased unpredictability of the evolution of all the world's states.

- **New emerging threats:** The amplification of threats generated by hybrid warfare supported by various international actors – including cyberattacks, disinformation, and economic and social coercion – continues to intensify, amplifying uncertainty and exposing all states of the world to new risks and even threats. In these times of global uncertainty, resilience is key to facing challenges and thriving in a rapidly changing world. By understanding the importance of resilience, both at the personal and organizational levels, and by taking proactive steps to build resilience, individuals and organizations can not only survive but also thrive in the face of adversaries. The concept of being proactive refers to the attitude of anticipating problems and needs, taking the initiative to act to prevent difficulties or create positive outcomes, rather than waiting for things to happen (reactivity). This involves taking responsibility, strategic planning and action oriented towards optimal solutions.

Thus, the concept of Competitive Intelligence (CI) becomes more important than ever, which is defined as the systematic process of collecting, analyzing and distributing information about competitors, the market and the business environment, with the aim of supporting strategic decision-making and achieving a competitive advantage for an organization, using open and ethical sources. It does not involve espionage, but transforms raw data into actionable knowledge to understand trends, anticipate market movements and improve company performance.

As a result, and given the geopolitical and geostrategic developments, the importance of the concept of intelligence is also increasing in the field of defense and security, which can increasingly mean both the level of individual knowledge and understanding capacities in processing information and identifying information needs in real time, as well as the level to which the process of transforming data and information into strategic-level knowledge and understanding can be raised for the adoption of the best decisions by decision-makers.

Global defense spending is entering a new era, defined by information, technology and industrial resilience, as nations rearm and supply chains adapt. For Canada, this represents a strategic shift, as well as an investment opportunity, as defense spending accelerates and industrial capacity expands. Across topics ranging from energy transition to digital infrastructure and defense innovation, governments, corporations and investors are reassessing where value is created and protected in the new geopolitical climate. In conclusion, resilience is the ability to bounce back stronger from adversity, and being proactive means taking the initiative, anticipating problems and acting constructively rather than waiting for things to happen, both of which are essential for success and emotional balance, creating a favorable context and effectively managing the challenges facing all states in the world today.

## WORLD ORDER - MULTIPOLARISM



### Multipolarism and the Frontiers of the Future

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#### **Summary**

The international system is undergoing a profound structural transformation from a post-Cold War unipolar order toward an increasingly fragmented and contested multipolar environment. Power is no longer concentrated in a single hegemonic center but distributed unevenly across multiple global and regional actors, operating through military, economic, technological, informational and institutional means. This article examines the nature of contemporary multipolarism through established international relations theories, identifies the emerging “frontiers of the future” beyond traditional geography, and assesses the implications for global stability, international institutions and regional actors particularly Europe and Greece. It argues that in the absence of a clear hegemon, strategic competition, hybrid conflict and selective globalization will define the coming decades, making adaptability, institutional resilience and strategic clarity essential elements of national power.



#### **Introduction: The end of Strategic Certainty**

The post-Cold War international order was built on assumptions of liberal convergence, economic interdependence and institutional governance. As Henry Kissinger warned, however, world orders are historically temporary constructs, sustained only while power distributions and legitimacy remain aligned. Today, that alignment has collapsed. The erosion of Western dominance, the rise of revisionist powers, and the weaponization of interdependence have accelerated the transition toward a multipolar system characterized by uncertainty rather than equilibrium. This is not merely a redistribution of power, but a systemic transformation of how power is exercised, contested and perceived.

#### **Multipolarism Through the Lens of International Relations Theory**

##### **Structural Realism and the Power Competition (John J. Mearsheimer)**



According to John J. Mearsheimer's offensive realism, great powers are compelled by the anarchic structure of the international system to maximize relative power in order to

ensure survival. From this perspective, multipolar systems are inherently unstable, as multiple actors possess both the capability and incentive to challenge one another.

**China's** strategy is broadly consistent with John Mearsheimer's theory of offensive realism, which holds that in an anarchic international system great powers seek to maximize their relative power in order to ensure survival and prevent external constraints. Within this framework, China advances expansive territorial claims in the South China Sea and has militarized artificial islands to gain control over critical maritime trade routes. At the same time, through the Belt and Road Initiative, Beijing has expanded its economic and geopolitical influence across Asia, Africa, and Europe, while strengthening military partnerships with countries such as Pakistan and Cambodia to extend its regional reach. The overarching objective is the creation of a sphere of influence that limits the ability of the United States and other powers to operate freely in the region, a strategy that heightens tensions as other actors perceive China's growing power as an increasing threat.

**Russia's** behavior can be interpreted through Stephen Walt's balance-of-threat theory, which suggests that states seek to alter the status quo when they perceive rising threats or marginalization. The invasion of Ukraine represents an effort to challenge NATO's expansion and to redefine spheres of influence in Europe. Beyond Ukraine, Russia maintains a strong military presence in the Black Sea and the Caucasus, supporting regional allies to preserve its strategic weight. In parallel, Moscow employs hybrid tools—including cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and energy coercion—to exert pressure on Europe. Through these actions, Russia directly challenges the existing European and global security architecture, increasing systemic instability and compelling other powers to maintain constant strategic vigilance.

**The United States**, by contrast, operates largely in line with hegemonic stability theory and the logic of power balancing. In the Indo-Pacific, Washington has reinforced alliances with Japan, Australia, and India through the Quad in order to counterbalance Chinese influence. In Europe, it sustains a robust military presence and energy commitments through NATO to constrain Russian power, while in the Middle East it maintains multidimensional partnerships and strategic bases to secure critical regions. The United States seeks to prevent the emergence of exclusive spheres of influence dominated by rival powers; however, this approach also raises the risk of conflict, as it provokes competitive and often destabilizing responses from its strategic competitors.

### Balance of Threat and Alliance Fluidity (Stephen Walt)



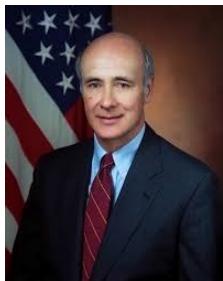
Stephen Walt's balance-of-threat theory explains why alliances in a multipolar world become more flexible and transactional. States align not only against power, but against perceived intentions, proximity and offensive capabilities.

### Order, Legitimacy and the Return of History (Henry Kissinger)



Henry Kissinger emphasized that stable international orders require both a balance of power and a shared concept of legitimacy. The current system lacks both. Different civilizational and political models now compete openly: liberal-democratic, authoritarian, hybrid governance systems. Without a common vision of order, the international system increasingly resembles a contested arena rather than a rule-based structure.

## Soft Power and Complex Interdependence (Joseph Nye)



Joseph Nye's concept of soft power remains relevant but increasingly constrained. While attraction, norms and institutions still matter, they are now systematically challenged by: disinformation, coercive economics, technological control. In a multipolar environment, soft power alone is insufficient without hard power credibility and strategic resilience.

### The Frontiers of the Future: Redefining Strategic Space

#### Beyond Geography: New Domains of Power

Strategic power is no longer confined to physical geography. The frontiers of future competition increasingly extend into new domains that shape state autonomy and long-term influence, redefining the very notion of strategic space. Cyberspace has emerged as a primary arena of contemporary conflict, where cyberattacks, espionage, and disruptions of critical infrastructure are employed as tools of coercion below the threshold of open war. Russian cyber operations in Europe and Chinese digital influence campaigns illustrate how states exploit the interconnectedness of the digital domain to pursue strategic objectives.



Artificial intelligence functions as a decisive force multiplier in this evolving environment. By enabling predictive analysis, autonomous systems, and accelerated decision-making, AI shifts the balance of power toward actors capable of controlling data, algorithms, and information-processing speed. Strategic advantage is therefore increasingly linked to technological superiority rather than solely to conventional military strength.

Energy systems have also become central instruments of geopolitical leverage. Control over pipelines, renewable energy infrastructure, critical minerals, and strategic reserves now defines energy security. Europe's former dependence on Russian natural gas demonstrates how energy interdependence can be weaponized, while emerging energy corridors in the Eastern Mediterranean, such as the Trans Adriatic Pipeline and the EastMed project, underscore the strategic importance of regional energy networks.

Global supply chains further highlight the dual nature of interdependence as both a source of efficiency and vulnerability. Control over critical manufacturing capacity and key technologies, particularly semiconductors, has become essential to strategic autonomy. The technological decoupling between the United States and China exemplifies how supply chains can be reshaped by geopolitical considerations.

Finally, the informational and economic domains have become integral to modern power competition. Influence over perceptions, narratives, and decision-making through social media, propaganda, and disinformation increasingly shapes political outcomes. At the same time, economic interdependence has evolved from a source of shared prosperity into a tool of strategic leverage, as sanctions, trade restrictions, and technological controls reinforce a pattern of selective globalization driven by geopolitical calculations rather than efficiency.

Together, these dynamics demonstrate that the frontiers of the future are no longer defined by borders alone, but by control over interconnected systems that will determine strategic advantage and international stability in the years ahead.

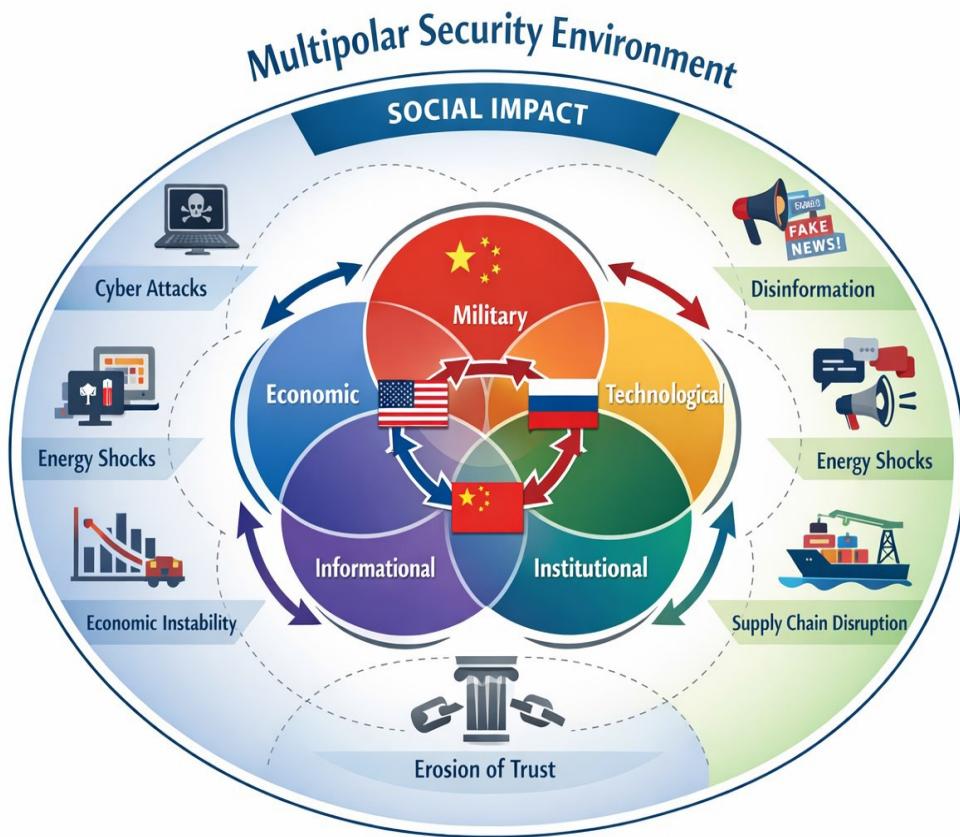
## Economic Interdependence as Strategic Vulnerability

Globalization has evolved from a source of shared prosperity into a tool of strategic leverage. Sanctions, trade restrictions and technological decoupling illustrate how economic instruments are weaponized in a multipolar system. The result is not deglobalization, but selective glob-alization, shaped by geopolitical calculations rather than efficiency. In 2025, the global economy has definitively shifted from a model of efficiency-driven integration to one of weaponized interdependence. Economic instruments are now primary tools of strategic leverage in a multipolar landscape, creating a system where connectivity is simultaneously a source of prosperity and an exploited vulnerability.

Technological Decoupling:	
<b>Selective Globalization &amp; Fragmentation:</b>  Trade is increasingly dictated by geopolitical blocs, leading to a "Friends First" or "Cold War II" scenario. Global growth is projected to slow to 2.6–2.7% in 2025–2026, largely due to rising trade tensions and restrictive measures.	<b>Weaponization of Resource Chokepoints:</b>  Major powers are exploiting dependencies on critical inputs. In 2025, China weaponized its dominance over rare earth supplies, restricting exports essential for semiconductors, consumer electronics, and high-end weapon systems.
<b>Strategic Realignment of Trade:</b>  To mitigate vulnerabilities, nations are shifting supply chains. Mexico became America's largest trading partner in 2024, and foreign direct investment into China fell by over 90% over the last four years as companies prioritize security over cost.	

## Security in the Multipolar Age

Security in the multipolar age is defined by the diffusion of power among multiple global and regional actors, operating across military, economic, technological, informational, and institutional domains. Unlike the Cold War or the post–Cold War unipolar era, no single state can enforce systemic order, leading to persistent strategic competition, uncertainty, and hybrid conflict. States such as the United States, China, and Russia pursue security through different strategies: the U.S. aims to maintain a favorable balance of power, China seeks regional influence and autonomy, and Russia challenges the existing security order where it perceives threats or marginalization. This competition extends beyond traditional territorial concerns into cyberspace, artificial intelligence, energy systems, supply chains, and informational domains, where cyberattacks, AI-enabled decision-making, energy coercion, supply chain disruptions, and disinformation campaigns serve as instruments of power. Citizens are directly affected by these developments through economic shocks, energy price volatility, misinformation campaigns, cyber vulnerabilities, and the erosion of institutional trust, highlighting that multipolar security dynamics are not only state-centric but also socially consequential. Weaponized interdependence and selective globalization further expose societies to strategic coercion, making adaptability and resilience crucial not only for governments but also for populations. A proposed conceptual figure could illustrate the "Multipolar Security Environment": a central diagram with overlapping domains—Military, Economic, Technological, Informational, and Institutional—with arrows showing interactions among major powers, and a surrounding layer representing societal impact, indicating how actions in each domain reverberate to citizens' daily lives.



### Citizen Safety Guide in a Multipolar International Environment

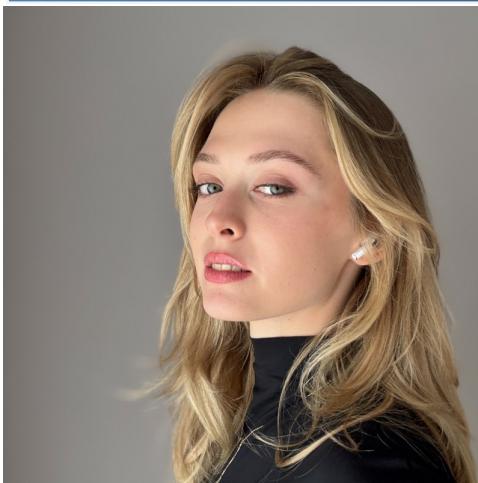
In a complex and interconnected world, citizens may face uncertainty, economic fluctuations, energy disruptions, supply chain interruptions, misinformation, and cyber threats. Taking proactive measures can enhance personal and community resilience, reduce exposure to risks, and ensure access to essential services and reliable information.

<b>Stay Informed</b> Rely on trusted and verified news sources. Double-check information before sharing it.	<b>Protect Personal Data</b> Use strong passwords and enable two-factor authentication. Secure your digital accounts and devices.	<b>Energy Preparedness</b> Reduce household energy consumption. Keep backup solutions like flashlights or small generators.
<b>Stock Essential Supplies</b> Store enough food and water for several days. Keep medications and first-aid items easily accessible.	<b>Community Engagement</b> Participate in local training programs and civil protection initiatives. Build support networks with neighbors and local communities.	<b>Preventive Behavior</b> Avoid risky situations whenever possible. Develop emergency plans for yourself and your family.

### Conclusion

The shift to a multipolar world marks the end of strategic certainty, with power distributed across multiple actors and domains beyond geography. Stability now depends on adaptability, institutional resilience, and strategic foresight. Understanding and managing these challenges is essential for both state security and citizen well-being.

## WORLD ORDER - EUROPE AND MULTIPOLARISM



### The Resilience and Fragmentation of the EU in the Face of the War in Ukraine and Multipolar Competition

Sofia BRATYSHCHENKO (Poland)

#### Abstract

The article examines how the EU's historical legacy of transformation and ambitions shaped its contemporary affairs and continue to affect European politics. The article further delves into analysis of unifying and fragmenting effect brought by the Russian invasion, while, simultaneously, drawing the links between the EU's past and present. Finally, the article presents these dynamics within a broader context of global multipolar competition, examining how the recalibrations of Russian aggression intersect with global shifts, by either magnifying challenges or offering new opportunities.



Source: <https://worldcommercereview.com/geopolitical-shifts-and-their-economic-impacts-on-europe/>

**Key words:** European Union (EU), Russian invasion of Ukraine, strategic autonomy, Atlanticism, Eastern enlargement, historical fault lines, EU-US relations, China-EU relations

#### Introduction

The Russian invasion, as unpredictable as it was for the world, shook Europe to its very core, reaching the divisions that were long-hidden beneath the years of relative stability during the Golden Age of Europe. The effect that Russian aggression was two-fold, on the one hand, uniting Europe as never before, while simultaneously laying new fractures and compounding the existing ones. The situation in which the EU has found itself forced it to respond to the biggest military confrontation since World War II and, at the same time, navigate within a complex environment of multipolar competition, which, on the one hand, offers a historical opportunity for transformation and, on the other hand, amplifies already present fragmentations, setting the stage for another potential crisis.

#### Part 1: Historical Trajectories Shaping the Contemporary Union

The EU of the present day, both fragmented and resilient, is the by-product of certain assumptions, earlier decisions, and accumulated shocks and responses to them. Therefore, the EU's current rupture can be best understood through revision of earlier decades of its history and its origins.

The European project was born out of the ashes of Second World War and the atrocities that accompanied it, which left Europeans with a single and straight-forward conclusion – the catastrophe of such scale should become unthinkable and peace could not be trusted to a chance, instead it had to be built and

maintained. The solution, in the shape of European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), came from the 'French economic planning office, headed by Jean Monnet' (Dinan, p. 5). As Schuman Declaration famously and correctly stated: 'the solidarity in production thus established will make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible' (European Union, n.d.). The origins of the European project clearly point to its non-military character setting the soil for its further identifications as 'quite superpower', 'responsible power', 'ethical power', and 'pragmatic power' (Savorskaya, 2015). The post-World War II environment of norms, economic interdependence, and US's security guarantees, in which the European project emerged, made it possible for non-militaristic Europe to operate in the environment of the Cold War that was highly geopolitical and militaristic. Originating as a peace project, the integration process later evolved into the European Economic Community (EEC) extending beyond coal and steel, and ultimately into the European Union, a political union with its very own legal personality (European Parliament, 2007, p. 2)<sup>1</sup>. Although created as a peace instrument, the European project never materialized as a defense and military alliance and, one could go as far as to argue that it was never envisioned as one. Nevertheless, there were sporadic attempts to develop a security dimension, with the most notable example being the failed European Defense Community in 1950s (Dinan, 2014, p. 67). It stands to reason that establishing military alliance is counter-intuitive when seeking peace, yet it is now apparent that peace cannot be sustained by normative means alone. This is no longer possible in the world where liberal international order (LIO) is being obliterated. Moreover, what has previously ensured the existence of the non-militaristic Union is gone, leaving the EU on the threshold of a dark age in the world of geopolitics, hard power, and disregard for norms. The fact that the EU was established for stability not geopolitics, explains why it struggles so much when faced with external pressures, especially of such magnitude as the Russo-Ukrainian war. Needless to mention the EU's normative self-perception, which is clearly well-founded as, according to Manners (2002, p. 239), the EU is able to define what is considered 'normal'; however, if norms lose their force and are openly disregarded, the question arises as to: what remains of the EU on the global stage?

A notable event for the present-day EU is the 'big bang' enlargement of 2004 – an immense transformation bringing equally far-reaching recalibrations. The 2004 enlargement is particularly relevant as current fragmentation and resilience of the EU are not temporary moods, rather they have a long-standing history. While the big bang enlargement was not the first in European history, yet the biggest and the most diversifying one, as it has increased the number of members by 10 countries, with a joint population of around 74 million people (European Council and the Council of the European Union, 2025). Above all, the accession of 10 countries, with a completely distinct historical experiences of communism, the Iron Curtain, repression, and occupation, added more interests and perceptions to already diverse Union. While the new members have successfully implemented necessary reforms, deeply rooted differences produced the so-called East-West divide between the Old Europe and the New Europe. This dynamic is evident in varying positions on European integration, which tends to be more skeptical of transferring certain aspects of sovereignty to the supranational institutions (Lehne, 2019). One could argue that this stance is amenable to a historical legacy of the lack of sovereignty under the Soviet Union, which makes post-Soviet countries more reluctant to relinquish it. Another telling example, which persisted until now, is a historically-conditioned asymmetric threat and security perception within the EU. At the outset, it should be noted that following the breakup of the USSR, security was a primary goal of CEE countries, that could only be ensured through NATO membership, while dismissing the EU defense mechanisms, such as Article 42.7, as 'credible or not worth paying attention to' (Buras and Morina, 2023). On the other hand, countries of the Old Europe, most notably France and, more recently, Germany, were skeptical of security guarantees provided by the NATO and the US. For France, skepticism has been growing since the Suez Crisis moving the country to embrace the need for European autonomy, whereas Germany's stance has been strengthened by the US's war in Iraq and Trump's public criticism of Berlin's low security spending (Davidson, 2024; Gehlen, 2003; Reuters in Berlin, 2017). Moreover, the East and the West of Europe are divided on the matter of Russian threat, with CEE perceiving Russia as an existential threat (Coffey, 2015). Conversely, the countries of Western Europe did not perceive Moscow as an immediate threat until recently, with some of them having cultivated 'special' relations with Russia, which, unsurprisingly, made them reluctant or hesitant to take a firmer stance of Moscow (Schmidt-Felzmann, 2015). Consequently, enlargement of 2004 made the EU more heterogeneous and strategically exposed, yet with little defense capabilities, which created the lines across which the post-war divides and unities would run. Finally, as it has been mentioned before the EU's divides and unities are sole products of its past experiences and choices. At this juncture, Jean Monnet's assertion is particularly pertinent: 'Europe will be forged in crisis, and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises' (Pohl, 2024). Paradoxically, following the end of the Cold War, crisis became a structuring feature for

<sup>1</sup>When the EU gained legal personality, it essentially meant that 'the Union obtains the ability to sign international treaties in the areas of its attributed powers or join an international organization', which strengthened the Union as a global actor (European Parliament, 2007, p.2)

the EU. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as argued by Mark Leonard, global politics turned into a ‘marriage gone wrong’, simultaneously transforming what has previously been an asset, such as interdependence, trade, energy sources, and open borders, into liability (Leonard, 2025). The relevance of Leonard’s claim is proven by the last 20 years of the EU’s turbulent history. This pattern is evident in the financial crisis in 2008, when financial interconnectedness led to ‘contagion and spillover effects’ which allowed the crisis to spread rapidly (European Central Bank, 2011). Another test emerged in 2015 and 2016, when more than a million migrants made their way into the EU setting off the migration crisis, with situating being further exacerbated by the lack of internal agreement between the members (BBC News, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2015). The open borders and the strong sense of commitment to human rights made it hard to control and to curb migration flows. Later the crisis reappeared in the form of Brexit in 2020 undermining the reputation of the EU and, naturally, as the UK is a significant international player, compromising global position of the EU (Hadfield and Wright, 2021). Most decisively, the Russia aggression has clearly demonstrated the logic behind Leonard’s claim. To explain, not only did Moscow’s actions shattered the assumption that diplomacy and economic interdependence would guarantee peace, but they also revealed the true nature of the Russo-EU dependency, notably in energy, which Moscow increasingly used for blackmail (Genapathy, 2024). Consequently, it is clear that the EU, divided and united, is the product of its experiences and decisions, which also suggests that unities and divides discussed in the following paragraphs were long-present but dormant.

## Part 2: Areas of Resilience

The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine marked a turning point in the history of the European continent, launching the biggest military confrontation since World War II. In the face of pressure of such magnitude, the EU proved capable of resilience across multiple domains, including sanctions adoption, energy independence, and matter of enlargement.

### Part 2.1: Support to Ukraine

First and foremost, the EU’s resilience has been clearly demonstrated by its unwavering and sustained support for Ukraine since the outbreak of war. The resilience is best observable through comparison between the EU’s cautious response in 2014 and the level of mobilized support following the invasion in 2022. Previously, the EU in its policy towards Ukraine prioritized the interests of Russia, which although led to public condemnation of Russian actions and imposition of sanctions in 2014, yet neither brought the EU directly in negotiations on the Minsk agreement nor did it mobilize substantial financial and military support to Ukraine (Raik, Blockmas, Osypchuk and Suslov, 2024). Eventually, the reaction of the EU can be best encapsulated through ‘return to business as usual’. Conversely, the transformation of the EU’s policy is most accurately described by the authors of the article who labeled it as a ‘geopolitical awakening’, followed by the EU’s comprehension of the meaning of the ‘shared neighbourhood’ to Russia (Raik, Blockmas, Osypchuk and Suslov, 2024). What has become a markedly historic step was the conferral of the candidate status to Ukraine in June 2022, with the negotiations officially setting off in December 2023. The application proceeded at the unheard speed not only in case of Ukraine, but also that of Moldova and Georgia – countries that submitted their application shortly after the invasion. In fact, this rapid development can be attributed to a bigger process of the EU’s internal revisionism and, as correctly stated by Cyrille Bret (2023), shift from ‘foreign policy based on attraction to geopolitics of power relations’. From this perspective, the EU has planted the flag in the geopolitical confrontation with Russia, by engaging so explicitly with the region, which Moscow claims to be its sphere of influence. However, contrary these claims, the roots of the tensions in the post-Soviet space are not, as the Kremlin assert, ‘Western presence and actions’ or ‘the recurring provocations’, rather is Russia’s reluctance or inability to forge relations with its neighbours based on genuine, not merely ceremonial, acknowledgement of their sovereignty (De Pedro and Viilup, 2015). Therefore, the full-scale invasion has reboot the matter of the enlargement after years of fatigue and simultaneously flipped the EU’s perception of the enlargement not merely as a technical process but also as a geopolitical and security tool. A robust political alignment of the EU with Ukraine is being accompanied by the large-scale financial assistance. In accordance with Kiel Institute (2025), as of October 2025, the total aid allocated by the EU members and institutions amounts to €188 billion, which is more than that provided by the US making the EU the largest donor. In order to ensure a stable and flexible channel of aid to Ukraine in period from 2024 to 2027, the EU has launched a unique instrument - Ukraine Facility, as part of Ukraine Reserve under the annual budget procedure (European Commission, n.d.). It merits attention that the EU’s assistance persisted amidst Ukraine’s serious problems with corruption, with recent one involving high-ranking politicians, undermining country’s position as a reliable partner (Kuzio, 2025; Mirovalev, 2025). Furthermore, as the invasion caused the biggest forced migration in Europe since World War II, the EU has provided a refuge to millions of Ukrainians, of which 5.3 million currently

residing in Europe (UNHCR, 2025). The assistance provided by the EU is reflected in both, humanitarian commitment, via civil protection, humanitarian aid and protection mechanisms, and institutional capacity, through assistance with border management, financial and technical support (European Council and Council of the European Union, 2025). In addition, as country's energy sector has now become primary target of Russian attacks, the EU has been instrumental in boosting Ukraine's energy security through the synchronization of Ukraine's electricity grid with Continental European Grid and the allocation of funds aimed at restoration of energy infrastructure, expansion of decentralized power production and EU energy exports to Ukraine (European Commission, 2022; European Commission, 2025). Taken together, the EU's financial, technical, and humanitarian assistance during almost four years of total war has proved the Union's resilience in the face of a seismic shock.

### Part 2.2: Sanctions

The EU's resilience is further mirrored in the unified sanctions regime initially serving preventive and later retributive purpose. While the EU remains primarily a normative actor resorting to non-violent means, it, nevertheless, possess instruments, which, in understanding of Mark Leonard (2025) can be utilized to exert pressure and coerce. One of such instruments is sanctions framework or restrictive measures, which, due to lack of traditional hard power, are the most important tools of the EU's foreign policy and are part of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) for a reason (Avesani, 2025). Following the invasion, the sanctions architecture changed in tempo and reach, marking a shift from a mere incremental pressure to a coercive regime. The sanctions adoption proceeded at unprecedented speed, with some economic sanctions being re-introduced on 13<sup>th</sup> of January and being followed by the individual sanctions and the very first package of sanctions days before the invasion (European Council and Council of the European Union, n.d.). Perhaps more revealing is that the next package of sanctions was adopted in just two weeks. As of now, 15 packages were adopted, which crippled Russian economy, slowing GDP growth by 10-12% after 3 years of war relative to the pre-2022 tempo and allowing the EU to control around €210 billions of Russia's Central Bank frozen assets (Szyszczak, 2025; Terrone, 2025). The severely contracting economy is further impaired by expanding defense budget, which in 2025 amounted to 40% of Russia's GDP, outpacing combined spending on national economy, social policy, education, and healthcare (The Moscow Times, 2024; Sauer, 2024). While Russian military economy is still enduring, it starts to show signs of vulnerability to external pressures. Important to mention that sanctions tend to produce lagged effects, which, in case of Russia, is neither surprising nor inconsistent. To explain, Putting prepared Russia for the war for almost 20 years, through 'budget surpluses, amassed foreign currency reserves and reduced its reliance on western debt' (Tokbolat, 2025). As a result, some of the sanctions took time to gain pace, which is exemplified by the oil sector sanctions, which are predicted to lower oil and gas revenue by astonishing 49% in December relative to previous years of sanctions (Belton and Dixon, 2025). As it was highlighted by Yerzhan Tokbolat (2025), Russian economy is not sustainable and was largely surviving by 'pushing the strain into the future' and absorbing pressures; yet, the time that Moscow is securing is 'increasingly the time borrowed from the future'. In this respect, the main question that emerges is for how long can Russia sustain its economy under growing external pressure.

### Part 2.3: Energy Independence

Another area in which the EU proved remarkably resilient and, ironically, the area which was expected to fracture the EU the most is the energy sector. Energy has long been the EU's "Achilles' heel" and the main leverage in hands of Moscow, which European countries have long been handing willingly. Europe wrongly assumed that it was a 'mutually beneficial, secure relationship', yet it could hardly be labeled as such, nor could one claim it to be trade, rather extortion and blackmail (Gross and Stelzenmüller, 2024; Lawson, 2022). Unsurprisingly, unlike Western Europe, this assumption was not shared by Central Eastern European countries, which points to the East-West fault line. A case in point is Poland's opposition to the Nord Stream 2 in 2021 and 2022 on the grounds that it would become 'a tool of "blackmail" for Vladimir Putin' and 'increase the possibility of exerting pressure on Europe' (Wilczek, 2022; Tilles, 2021). As controversial as the matter of energy dependence is, the full-scale invasion crystalized its true nature and managed to achieve what years of Moscow's blackmail and repeating aggression could not. Consequently, following the invasion, the EU has significantly lowered its reliance on Russia by reducing its imports of Russian gas from 45% to 19%, of oil from 27% to 3%, and by phasing out coal imports entirely (European Commission, 2025). More recently, the European Parliament approved the plan as part of REPowerEU to end Russian gas imports by 2027 and imports of liquified natural gas (LNG) by the end of 2026 (European Commission, 2025). Furthermore, the EU members took decisive steps of diversifying its energy suppliers, as reliance on a sole supplier, especially in the face of Russia, proved strategically costly. Firstly, while Russia was the main supplier of oil before 2022, its share visibly declined following the invasion, with the US and Norway filling the gap (Eurostat, 2025). Similar pattern can be observed in the case of natural gas

with Norway shortly thereafter the invasion outpacing Russia with the share of 51.8%, and, as of 2025, followed by Algeria (14.6%) and the UK (13.4%) (Eurostat, 2025). Crucially, as the EU sets an ambitious goal of phasing out Russian gas by 2027, the Union is as close as ever to disarming Russia of its sharpest tool against the EU. Moreover, the Russian share of the EU's imports of LNG has steadily fell from 21% to 13%, in 2021 and 2025 respectively (Eurostat, 2025). The shortfall in imports of LNG was filled in by US, accounting for 60% of imports in the third quarter of 2025 (Eurostat, 2025). Finally, the coal imports from Russia were reduced to zero, replaced by imports from Australia (36.3%), US (30.7%), and Kazakhstan (9.7%) (Eurostat, 2025). Therefore, it is apparent that the EU has made a historically substantial step towards energy independence and sets ambitious goals for the future, which would curtail Russia's main source of revenue allowing it to sustain its war of exhaustion in Ukraine.

### **Part 3: Areas of Fragmentation**

As substantial as Russian full-scale invasion was, it nevertheless failed to unify European countries on certain matters that are deeply rooted and not so easily reversible. There are areas that are rooted deeply in history, such as varying threat perceptions or diverging positions on European security; but also matters that gained prominence in the aftermath of the invasion, such institutional deadlock and internal obstruction.

#### **Part 3.1: Perceptions of Russian Threat**

To begin with, while it has been mentioned that perceptions of Russian threat historically varied across Europe, the matter renders immediate as the nature of the Russian threat has escalated in intensity since the immediate post-Soviet period. The present divergence is best exemplified by the words of Spanish prime minister: 'Our threat is not Russia bringing its troops across the Pyrenees' (Naishadham, 2025). While the prime minister acknowledged the urgency of non-conventional threats, such as cyber-attacks, posed by Russia, they cannot be portrayed as new and have historical precedents since at least 2007 (Traynor, 2007). Strikingly, despite Russia's unjustified aggression against a sovereign state, which brought the biggest military confrontation since WWII to the doorsteps of Europe, certain misconceptions about Russia were not dispelled. Although it is plausible to assume that military threat to countries that are geographically distant from Russia is not direct, it is correctly highlighted by Nicu Popescu (2025) that even the smallest escalation with Russia on Eastern border could result in the erosion of the EU's institutional architecture, casting a shadow even over the most distant from Russia EU members. Unlike Western European countries, the states of Central Eastern Europe have long been realistic about Russia, yet their claims were repeatedly dismissed as overly alarmist. Ironically, these very claims proved to be prophetic, all because post-Soviet countries know Russia all too well. Hence, it would be naïve to dismiss the possibility of the Russian attack on the EU, which is especially acute for the Baltic states, where the Russian attack is anticipated within the next 2-4 years (Vysotska, 2025). In the light of recent provocative escalation in air-space violations in Poland and Estonia, divergences in threat assessment appear to be misaligned with the unfolding security landscape (Sytas and Slattery, 2025). The bigger picture reveals that while there is an agreement that Russia constitutes a threat, there is no consensus as to the salience and the nature of this threat. This discrepancy undermines the ability of the EU as a global actor to speak in one voice on matters pertaining to Russia. Lately, the result of this has become the inability to use Russian frozen assets to assist Ukraine in defense funding for the next two years, due to the reluctance of Belgium, where a sheer amount of assets is lying (Smith-Meyer and Sorgi, 2025). Consequently, long-standing divides re-surfaced in the contemporary security context and are being reinforced by it, affecting the EU's unity.

#### **Part 3.2: Institutional Deadlock and Internal Obstruction**

Beyond diverging threat perceptions, the EU's ability to act unified is affected by national interests and institutional rules that are used to protect them. Particularly, the article 4(2) of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU), which ensures the EU's respect for the core state functions, as well as the article 5(1)-(2) of the TEU stating that the powers enjoyed by the EU are those conferred upon it by the Member States (Office Journal of the European Union, 2016). Moreover, the treaty systematically required unanimity in a sovereignty-sensitive areas, such as security, enlargement, taxation, police cooperation, CFSP and CSDP (EUR-Lex, n.d.). Although not mentioned explicitly, the need for unanimity in certain areas grants members a *de facto* veto power to protect national sovereignty, which, in case of political pressure, might turn into a tool for bargaining. The deadlock is often dictated by the crisis environment, while in times of relative political stability the veto remains largely intact. One of such telling crisis environments was brought about by Russian invasion of Ukraine. While great majority of the European states terminated diplomatic relations with Russia, there are states that maintained and even intensified their ties with Moscow. Predictably, this brought internal fragmentation within the EU. In this respect, Hungary emerges as an illustrative case of the state that not merely deepened relations with Russia after 2022, but has also systematically

resorted to veto power on matters pertaining Russia and Ukraine. In fact, Hungary has been experiencing a severe democratic backsliding under Orban since 2008 and was downgraded to the ‘electoral autocracy in 2019’ (Chin and Hibbert, 2025). Besides diplomatic ties, Hungary, contrary to the EU members’ efforts, increased imports of Russian energy, criticized sanctions against Russia and military assistance for Ukraine (Caselli, 2025). Not to mention that Hungary, despite initially supporting Ukraine’s candidate status, has now moved to block Ukraine’s bid for accession, creating tensions between the EU unity and individual leverage (Roggers, 2025). Of late, Fico’s Slovakia has embarked on a similar path by growing closer with Russia, opposing Western policies, and criticizing Ukraine (Novitskyi, 2025). On the one hand, member states such as Hungary and Slovakia emerge as diverging actors, undermining the Union from within, eroding its ability to project power and act cohesively. On the other hand, by cultivating relations with Russia, Orban’s Hungary and Fico’s Slovakia have effectively supplied Moscow with a tool to destabilize the Union from within. In addition, against the backdrop of the retreat of LIO, Hungary’s and Slovakia’s illiberalism struck the very core of the EU, which is struggling to maintain liberal order globally, while simultaneously facing the retreat internally.

### **Part 3.3: Strategic Autonomy vs Atlanticism**

The matter of strategic autonomy has been recurring over decades ever since the establishment of the EU’s predecessor. However, if previously the debate was primarily built upon hypothetical scenarios, in the aftermath of Russian invasion, autonomy turned into a strategic necessity that the EU should either materialize or accept as a vulnerability. Presently, the debate on strategic autonomy is being propelled from multiple sides. On the one hand, Russia has obliterated the belief that peace is a natural state of things on the continent, making EU realize that normative means are no longer sufficient to ensure stability and peace. On the other hand, Donald Trump has repeatedly cast a doubt on the US’s credibility as a security guarantor for Europe, making further reliance on external assistance a precarious gamble. Although Russian invasion became a wake-up call for Europe leading to increased military spendings, expenditures remain heterogeneously dispersed across the continent and reflect differing geographical proximity to the conflict. Specifically, as of 2025, Poland and Estonia are leading in defense spendings, while expenditures of Italy, Netherlands, and Spain remain below the NATO threshold set at 2% (Chhaya, 2025). This statistic is part of a deep-seated paradox in which Eastern European nations tend to support higher defense spending, yet when faced with the choice, prefer NATO guarantees over the EU strategic autonomy; while Western European nations although endorse the idea of strategic autonomy, tend to be less enthusiastic about increased defense expenditures (Chhaya, 2025). This discrepancy prevents progress at the operation level, simply because it was stalled at the speculative and political level. Similar stance is taken by Marie Olafsen (2025), who clearly outlined that ‘the challenge is not that Europe lacks standardized tanks, planes, or launchers’, rather ‘it is that the Union lacks coherence, political, institutional, and industrial, to turn ambition into deployable power’ (Olafsen, 2025). Important to mention that strategic autonomy would not necessarily mean a permanent rejection of NATO and US assistance, rather the ability of the EU to act regardless of US involvement or disengagement; nor would strategic Union mean less normative Union, instead, a more credible one. Regrettably, Russian invasion did not bring an immediate consensus regarding the need for European autonomy and even complicated the debate. Apparently, while the invasion triggered increased defense spending, it proved complicated to translate them into practical and credible EU defense capabilities.

### **Part 4: Multipolar Competition**

As international arena turns more competitive, where interconnectedness for peace is replaced by geopolitical competition over spheres of interests, the EU’s unities and divides are being further amplified by the global competitions and crises. These global shifts range from the US’s shifting interest to China’s growing significance, energy security and technological dependencies.

While much has been said about the impact of Russian invasion on the EU’s debate over strategic autonomy, it is further bolstered by the US’s ‘grand strategy’ under Donald Trump. As unpredictable as the US under Trump is, the administration is united by the goal of ‘focusing on Washington’s great power rivalry with China’, thereby making Beijing its chief rival (Smith, 2025). Additionally, US’s pivot to China can be clearly traced in the words of Trump’s vice-president, JD Vance, who explicitly stated that autonomous EU is beneficial for the US, as the latter ‘has to focus more on east Asia’, defining it to be the mainstream of US’s foreign policy for the next four decades (Skelton, 2025). From this perspective, it becomes clear that Trump’s calls for greater defense spendings among European states were primarily aimed at disentangling the US from peripheral responsibilities, allowing it to focus entirely on China. However, the US’s link to Europe goes beyond security guarantees, extending to US’s dependency on Europe for its global power. To explain, one of the US’s advantages over China is its global network of allies, which is structurally embedded in Europe, where a sizeable network of military bases extends, making a complete departure from European continent a costly strategic endeavor. While Trump’s main goal was to ‘clear

Washington's portfolio', it is unclear whether Trump sought a genuine European autonomy as it is envisioned by some of the European states. In practical terms, the formulation of Trump's rhetoric triggered far deeper reassessments within the EU, even among traditionally Atlanticist member states, not merely regarding the spending, but about the global role of the EU (Krychkovska and Diankonov, 2024). Therefore, while Trump's shift to Asia emerges as a challenge to the EU's resilience, it also has the potential of reshaping the Union entirely, allowing it to foster more equal relations with the US, not based on dependency. If the EU were to obtain even a limited degree of autonomy, it would lead to qualitative shift, as it would assert the role of a more credible and strategic actor, establishing itself as an independent pole within a dynamic multipolar order, capable of acting locally and globally. Arguably, a more strategic and independent Union, could join global competition as an independent actor, interacting, instead of merely aligning, with either the US or China. As a result, while the EU remains divided on the matter of strategic autonomy following Russian aggression, the dual pressure coming from both, Moscow and Washington, may, ultimately, catalyze the emergence of the ever more resilient Union.

The last several decades saw substantial shift global power dynamics, with China rising to a global superpower, seeking to claim its rightful place, and competing against the US, Russia and other major powers. The US grows even more concerned, especially with China growing force in AI development and deployment (Slabaugh and Starrs, 2025). Alongside the calls for increased defense spending, the US pushed Europe to take a firmer stance on China, but was left disillusioned (Serohina, 2024). While the EU defined China as 'partner for cooperation, an economic competitor and a systemic rival', there is no coordinated policy, which leaves the union balancing between economic cooperation and strategic vulnerability (European Union External Action Service, 2023). The strategic vulnerability primarily comes from the China's omnipresence across critical sectors, most notably in energy and clean technologies, rare earth metals, and permanent magnets. Particularly, following the energy crisis, the EU set the primary goal of the minimizing and, more recently, the eliminating its dependency on Russian imports through a mix of supplier diversification and, among other things, shift to renewable energy. Eventually, the solar energy has become the leading source of energy, accounting for 22.1% of the EU energy mix in 2025, thereby outpacing nuclear energy and fossil fuels (The Renewable Energy Institute, n.d.). Ironically, although this transition reduced the EU's exposure to Moscow's pressure, it risks substituting one dependency for another, as European solar energy is generated by mainly Chinese-manufactured solar panels (Symes, 2025). The matter is complicated by the uneven distribution of reliance on Chinese energy imports, with some members being significantly more dependent – an oddly familiar asymmetry. The case in point is Germany, which is now the leading solar energy producer in Europe and has accomplished half of its solar target for 2030, unlike other countries whose reliance on solar energy is significantly lower (IRENA, 2025; Strategic Energy Europe, 2025). Alongside solar energy, the EU grew reliant on Chinese rare earth elements and permanent magnets, which is now close to 100%. (Israel, 2025). This dependency is especially precarious given China's partnership with Russia and its ambiguous stance on war in Ukraine. As the US proved willing to make economic sacrifices for political ends, there is no guarantee China would not do the same. In fact, China have already proved ready to resort to such means when it has increased export-licensed requirements for high-performance magnets in 2025 (Israel, 2025). Therefore, despite the EU's progress in elimination of its dependency on Russia, it might be falling into another one, which is no less dangerous. As argued by Karl-Friedrich Israel (2025), the vulnerability does not directly lie in energy supply, rather in the supply of energy technologies, which would make even the smallest disruptions 'reverberate through prices, investment timelines and industrial output'. The matter might grow more consequential in the scenario of a more strategically autonomous Union, placing already tense relations under additional strain.

## Conclusions

By and large, it is apparent that the EU is the by-product of both historical challenges and more recent turbulences, which puts it at the impasse shaped by its past and the emerging multipolar world. From its emergence as a peace project to Eastern enlargement and the chain of crises, including the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The EU has proven resilient in its support for Ukraine, the ability to adapt sanctions regime, and diversifying its energy sources. Yet these strengths coexist with deeply-embedded fault lines such as disparities in threat perceptions, institutional deadlock, and debate regarding strategic autonomy. The global multipolar competition only magnifies these divides and unities. As global race between China and US intensifies, and former striving for global dominance, the internal unity of the EU is under constant testing, which raises the question whether it is strategic autonomy is achievable in the face of persistent external pressure. Hence, the next chapter of the EU will largely depend on its capacity to bridge internal differences and to reconcile its ambitions with constraints, its past and present.

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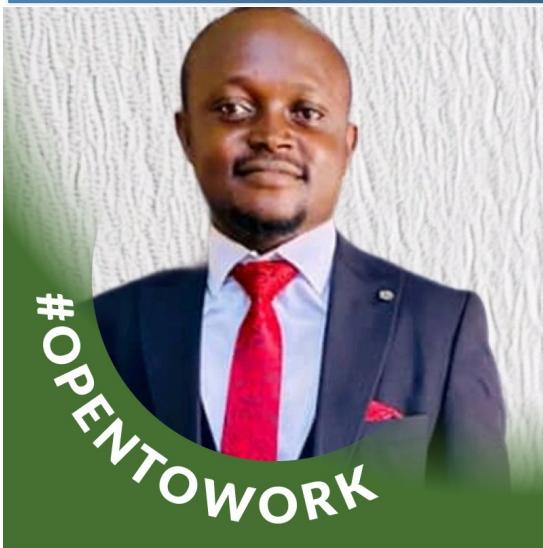
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## WORLD ORDER - AFRICA AND MULTIPOLARISM



### Africa in a Multipolar World: Regional Security Mechanisms between Strategic Autonomy and External Penetration

Oluwasogo DAIRO (Nigeria)

The African continent stands at a critical juncture in global affairs, no longer merely a theater for external competition but an active geostrategic space where regional autonomy confronts multiple forms of external penetration. The proliferation of military coups, the expansion of non-traditional security partnerships, and the fragmentation of continental solidarity reveal fundamental tensions in how African states navigate an increasingly multipolar world order. This analysis examines how African-led security mechanisms are adapting to manage internal instability while contending with competing external influences that simultaneously offer solutions and undermine sovereignty.

#### **The Cascade of Constitutional Disruptions and Regional Response Deficit**

The wave of military takeovers across West and Central Africa since 2020 represents not isolated incidents but a systemic crisis in governance and security architecture. Mali's double coup in 2020 and 2021, followed by military seizures of power in Guinea, Burkina Faso, Gabon, and earlier in Guinea-Bissau, alongside attempted coups in Benin Republic, illustrates the fragility of democratic institutions across the region. These disruptions share common threads: deteriorating security situations, popular frustration with civilian governance, and perceived ineffectiveness of regional organizations in addressing underlying crises.

The Economic Community of West African States has found itself increasingly impotent in responding to this democratic recession. Traditional mechanisms of diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions, and threatened military intervention have proven inadequate against military juntas that enjoy varying degrees of popular support and have secured alternative international partnerships. The formation of the Alliance of Sahel States by Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger following their withdrawal from ECOWAS represents a direct challenge to the regional bloc's authority and a fundamental fracturing of West African solidarity. This alliance signals not merely dissatisfaction with ECOWAS protocols but a rejection of the broader regional security framework that has underpinned West African cooperation for decades.

The African Union's response has been similarly constrained. While maintaining formal opposition to unconstitutional changes of government, the continental body has struggled to enforce its own norms. Suspensions of member states have become routine administrative actions rather than effective deterrents.



Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/africas-place-more-multipolar-world-from-pawn-power-player-adams-jhspf/>

The gap between declaratory policy and enforcement capability reveals the AU's structural limitations in compelling compliance from member states, particularly when those states secure alternative sources of international legitimacy and support.

### **The Russian Reconfiguration: From Wagner to Africa Corps**

Russia's security footprint across Africa has undergone significant transformation, moving from informal mercenary operations to more institutionalized military engagement. The Wagner Group's operations across the Sahel, Central African Republic, and Libya established a template for Russian influence based on regime protection, resource extraction, and deliberate cultivation of anti-Western sentiment. The transition from Wagner to the Africa Corps following the mutiny and death of Yevgeny Prigozhin represents continuity in strategy with enhanced state control.

In Mali and Burkina Faso, Russian security contractors have displaced French forces as primary external security partners, fundamentally altering the regional balance. This shift cannot be understood purely through military capability assessments. Russian engagement offers something Western partnerships have struggled to provide: unconditional support for incumbent regimes without demands for democratic governance or human rights compliance. The intelligence dimension is equally significant, with Russian advisors embedded in presidential security apparatuses, providing not just protection but information dominance over potential internal threats.

The Central African Republic exemplifies the depth of Russian penetration. Beyond military training and protection of the regime, Russian entities have secured mining concessions and inserted advisors throughout government ministries. This comprehensive approach creates dependencies that transcend simple transactional relationships, effectively limiting the government's room for diplomatic maneuver. The model demonstrates how security provision becomes an entry point for broader economic and political influence.

### **Middle Eastern Power Projection and Proxy Dynamics**

The United Arab Emirates has emerged as a particularly active external actor, pursuing interests that align with neither traditional Western partners nor emerging powers. In Sudan, Emirati alleged support for the Rapid Support Forces illustrates willingness to back non-state military actors in pursuit of strategic objectives related to Red Sea access, agricultural investments, and regional positioning against rivals. The RSF's transformation from a counter-insurgency militia to a major belligerent in Sudan's civil war was facilitated by external support that provided weapons, financing, and diplomatic cover.

Turkey's expanding presence represents another form of external penetration, combining security cooperation, economic investment, and cultural-religious ties. Turkish engagement in Somalia, including military base construction and training programs, positions Ankara as a counterweight to both Gulf States and Western actors. The Turkish model emphasizes comprehensive partnerships that span military, economic, and diplomatic dimensions, creating integrated relationships that resist easy displacement.

Libya remains the most visible arena for competing external interventions, with Turkey supporting the Government of National Unity while General Haftar's Libyan National Army receives backing from Russia, the UAE, and Egypt. This conflict has become a microcosm of broader African dynamics where internal political struggles become vehicles for external competition, with regional security mechanisms largely sidelined as relevant actors.

### **The Complex Terrain of Great Power Economic Competition**

Chinese engagement in Africa operates on different principles than security-focused competitors, emphasizing infrastructure development and economic partnerships while maintaining nominal non-interference in internal politics. The Belt and Road Initiative has created dependencies through debt-financed projects, though characterizations of deliberate debt-trap diplomacy oversimplify more complex dynamics. Chinese investment responds to African government demands for infrastructure that Western partners have been unwilling or unable to finance on comparable terms.

The United States faces the challenge of maintaining influence without matching the comprehensive engagement models of competitors. American approaches emphasizing good governance, transparency, and democratic institutions resonate less with governments focused on immediate security threats and regime survival. The contradiction between declared values and strategic necessities—such as continued partnership with clearly authoritarian regimes when security interests demand it—undermines American credibility.

Western European states confront their own dilemmas as former colonial relationships prove increasingly liability rather than asset. France's forced departure from Mali and the broader French retreat from the Sahel represents not just military repositioning but the collapse of a security architecture built on

post-colonial relationships. Attempts to reformulate partnerships on more equitable foundations confront decades of accumulated grievances and competing offers from powers unburdened by colonial histories.

### **The Fragmentation of East African Security Cooperation**

The Democratic Republic of Congo exemplifies the limits of regional security mechanisms in addressing complex conflicts involving multiple state and non-state actors. The M23 rebellion, backed by Rwanda and reportedly engaging Ugandan troops, operates within a broader context of resource competition and ethnic conflict that defies simple resolution. The defeat of Burundian troops by M23 forces demonstrated the inadequacy of regional military responses that lack unified command, adequate resources, and genuine political will to enforce peace.

Kenya's role in the East African Community and the African Union Mission in Somalia illustrates both possibilities and constraints of African-led security operations. While Kenyan forces have been essential to containing Al-Shabaab, operations have been plagued by unclear mandates, insufficient resources, and questions about territorial ambitions. The presence of American contractors and military advisors, including those associated with Erik Prince's enterprises, complicates narratives of African autonomy in security provision.

The Somalia-Somaliland dispute adds another layer of complexity, with Somaliland's quest for recognition creating opportunities for external actors to establish footholds in exchange for diplomatic support. The strategic location controlling Bab-el-Mandeb strait access ensures that regional disputes intersect with global maritime security interests, drawing in actors with minimal historical engagement in the Horn of Africa.

### **Central Africa: The Convergence of State Fragility and External Opportunism**

Chad's invitation to Hungarian military forces represents an unexpected development in external security partnerships, demonstrating how states seek novel arrangements to address specific needs. Hungarian engagement, modest in scale, reflects Budapest's broader efforts to establish African footholds as part of its foreign policy diversification. For Chad, perpetually concerned about regime security and facing multiple borders with unstable neighbors, diversifying security partners reduces dependence on any single external actor while maintaining flexibility.

The situation in Togo, where political tensions simmer beneath surface stability, illustrates how states navigate between maintaining regime security and managing international pressures for democratic reform. The government's ability to project stability while containing dissent relies on sophisticated security apparatus management and careful calibration of external partnerships to avoid excessive dependence.

Central African Republic's comprehensive Russian penetration, as previously discussed, represents perhaps the most complete example of how state fragility creates opportunities for external actors to establish near-protectorate relationships. The government's inability to control national territory or provide basic security for citizens creates dependencies that external actors can exploit for strategic positioning and economic gain.

### **Intelligence Dimensions and Information Warfare**

The contemporary competition for African influence increasingly operates through intelligence and information dimensions that traditional regional security mechanisms are poorly equipped to address. Russian information operations across francophone Africa have successfully amplified anti-French sentiment while promoting alternative security partnerships. These operations exploit genuine grievances related to colonial history and perceived contemporary exploitation while advancing specific Russian strategic interests.

Chinese intelligence presence, though less visible than Russian operations, focuses on protecting Chinese nationals and investments while gathering strategic information on African governments and economies. This intelligence infrastructure, often embedded within telecommunications and digital infrastructure projects, creates potential for surveillance and information control that raises sovereignty concerns.

Western intelligence services maintain extensive networks across the continent, justified by counterterrorism imperatives and monitoring of great power competition. However, revelations about surveillance programs and the use of African states for rendition operations have damaged credibility and created opportunities for competitors to position themselves as more respectful of sovereignty.

### **Regional Mechanisms: Adaptation, Irrelevance, or Transformation?**

African-led security mechanisms face an existential challenge: adapt to the reality of multipolar competition and state fragility or become increasingly irrelevant to actual security provision. The African

Union's aspiration for an African Standby Force capable of rapid deployment has remained largely unfulfilled, with member states reluctant to cede operational control or provide adequate resources. Ad hoc coalitions and external partnerships have filled this capability gap, but at the cost of institutionalizing dependencies.

The Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Multinational Joint Task Force represent attempts at functional cooperation against specific threats, in this case Boko Haram and its offshoots. However, these mechanisms suffer from inadequate funding, divergent national priorities, and corruption that diverts resources from operational purposes. External support from the United States, European Union, and others has improved capabilities but also raised questions about whose security interests these mechanisms ultimately serve.

Southern Africa's relative stability compared to other regions reflects both more consolidated state structures and the moderating influence of South Africa as regional power. However, even here, the Southern African Development Community<sup>1</sup> faces challenges in addressing conflicts in Mozambique and political crises in Zimbabwe. South Africa's own economic constraints limit its capacity to provide the regional security leadership its size and influence would suggest.

### **The Sovereignty Paradox: Protection through Penetration**

African states face a fundamental dilemma: securing regime survival and addressing security threats often requires external partnerships that compromise sovereignty and create new dependencies. This paradox is particularly acute for fragile states where government authority barely extends beyond capital cities. External security providers become essential for regime survival, but this protection comes with political, economic, and strategic costs that limit autonomous decision-making.

The concept of strategic autonomy, frequently invoked in African Union declarations and regional frameworks, confronts the reality that few African states possess the economic resources, military capabilities, or institutional capacity to address serious security threats independently. This gap between aspiration and capacity creates opportunities for external actors offering comprehensive security solutions that come with strings attached.

Different external actors offer varying models of engagement, each with distinct implications for sovereignty. Western partnerships typically include governance conditionalities and public accountability requirements. Russian and Chinese models offer fewer political preconditions but create different forms of dependency through debt, resource concessions, or intelligence penetration. Middle Eastern actors pursue narrower interests related to specific strategic objectives, creating transactional relationships with less comprehensive but still constraining effects.

### **Terrorism, Insurgency, and the Failure of Regional Counterterrorism**

The expansion of jihadi insurgencies across the Sahel and into coastal West African states demonstrates the inadequacy of existing counterterrorism frameworks. Despite billions in international assistance and multiple regional initiatives, groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda and Islamic State have expanded territorial control and operational reach. The collapse of security in Burkina Faso, with large portions of territory outside government control, illustrates how quickly situations can deteriorate when state capacity is limited and external support proves insufficient or inappropriate. Regional counterterrorism cooperation suffers from intelligence-sharing reluctance, as governments fear that shared information may be used against their own interests or leaked to rivals. This creates redundancies and information gaps that insurgent groups exploit. External intelligence services partially fill this gap but create dependencies that undermine development of indigenous capabilities.

The shift from purely military approaches to strategies emphasizing governance, development, and political inclusion has been slow and inconsistent. Military-led governments in the Sahel have largely rejected political accommodation with insurgent groups, preferring security-focused approaches that have consistently failed to produce stability. External partners rhetorically emphasize comprehensive approaches but resource allocation remains overwhelmingly focused on security assistance and military training.

### **Looking Forward: Trajectories of Competition and Cooperation**

The trajectory of African security mechanisms in a multipolar world will be shaped by several intersecting dynamics.

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<sup>1</sup>The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is a regional economic and political cooperation organization, including countries such as Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Eswatini (formerly Swaziland), focused on integration, industrialization and sustainable development, with partnership agreements such as the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union, aimed at trade liberalization, cooperation and development.

First, the degree to which African states can develop collective responses to common threats will determine whether regional organizations remain relevant or are bypassed by bilateral arrangements with external powers. The Alliance of Sahel States represents one model of sub-regional cooperation outside established frameworks, though its long-term viability remains uncertain.

Second, competition among external actors may paradoxically create opportunities for African states to play competing interests against each other, securing better terms and maintaining flexibility. However, this strategy requires diplomatic sophistication and carries risks of miscalculation that could draw states into conflicts among major powers. Smaller states with limited diplomatic capacity are particularly vulnerable to being overwhelmed by competing pressures.

Third, the development of indigenous security capabilities will determine long-term trajectories toward genuine strategic autonomy or continued dependence. This requires not just military training and equipment but comprehensive state-building that addresses governance deficits, corruption, and economic underdevelopment. The extent to which African states prioritize these foundational issues over short-term security fixes will shape outcomes over coming decades.

Fourth, the evolution of threat environments will influence the relevance and effectiveness of different security models. If terrorism and insurgency remain primary concerns, the security-focused Russian and Middle Eastern models may continue gaining traction. If great power competition intensifies, African states may find themselves pressured to choose sides in ways that limit diplomatic flexibility and potentially draw them into conflicts over issues not directly related to African interests.

### **Conclusion: Contested Space, Uncertain Future**

Africa in the contemporary multipolar order is neither the resource warehouse of great power imagination nor the autonomous actor of pan-African aspiration. Instead, the continent represents contested political space where multiple visions of order, security, and development compete through partnerships that simultaneously offer opportunities and impose constraints. Regional security mechanisms exist within this complex environment, their effectiveness limited by member state capacity, competing national interests, and the gravitational pull of external powers offering comprehensive solutions to immediate problems.

The fundamental question is not whether external engagement in African security will continue—it clearly will—but rather on what terms and with what degree of African agency in shaping partnerships. The weakening of traditional Western partnerships creates opportunities for diversification but does not automatically produce greater autonomy if new dependencies simply replace old ones. African states and regional organizations face the challenge of developing institutional capabilities and collective solidarity sufficient to navigate multipolar competition without becoming mere instruments of external strategies. The coming years will test whether African-led mechanisms can adapt to these realities or will become increasingly peripheral to actual security provision on the continent. The answer will be determined not in conference declarations but in concrete choices about resource allocation, institutional reform, and political will to prioritize collective security over narrow regime interests. The stakes extend beyond Africa, as the continent's trajectory will significantly influence the broader shape of multipolar order and the possibilities for regional autonomy in an era of intensifying great power competition.

## WORLD ORDER - EUROPE



## Europe's Global Repositioning Through Strategic Autonomy: Arming the Continent

PhD. Eng. Cristian-Marcel FELEA (Romania)

*“American officials have become accustomed to analyzing European problems from the perspective of insufficient military spending and economic stagnation. There is some truth in all this, but Europe’s real problems are even deeper.”<sup>1</sup>*

United States National Security Strategy, 2025

### The Challenges Europe Is Facing

The publication of the National Security Strategy of the second Trump administration has given rise to a wide debate on both sides of the Atlantic. I will not go into details, I did so in another published material<sup>2</sup>. What is important to remember, related to the moment of December 5, is the unequivocal denunciation of the historical efforts of the American political elites who allegedly “wasted the nation’s resources” by financing the role of the United States as a global hegemon and by favoring the bet on globalization.

To argue its position, the White House inelegantly attacks its European allies, pointing the finger at the European Union, which it sees as a historical accident and, from now on, as a competitor in the global arena, at least in economic and civilizational terms. The Trump administration’s attack below the belt has found no sympathy except in Moscow and in the offices of Viktor Orbán, Robert Fico and Andrej Babiš.

In other European chancelleries, the document has caused some irritation and outrage, but only because the hot issue of the conflict in Ukraine is still on the table. Only French President Emmanuel Macron had the courage and vision to speak out about the continent’s strategic autonomy since 2019.



Source: [https://economic-research.bnpparibas.com/html/en-US/EcoNews-15-December-2025-BNP-Paribas\\_Economic-Research-12/15/2025,53084](https://economic-research.bnpparibas.com/html/en-US/EcoNews-15-December-2025-BNP-Paribas_Economic-Research-12/15/2025,53084)

<sup>1</sup><https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.contributors.ro/make-the-world-great-again-recipe-for-failure/>

Let us recall: “What we are experiencing is the brain death of NATO. (...) There is no coordination of the strategic decision of the United States with NATO partners and we are witnessing an aggression carried out by another NATO partner, Turkey, in an area where our interests are at stake, without coordination. What is happening is an enormous problem for NATO. (...) President Trump, I have a lot of respect for this, poses the issue of NATO as a commercial project. According to him, it is a project where the United States provides a form of geopolitical umbrella, but, in return, must have commercial exclusivity, this is the reason to buy American.”<sup>3</sup>

At the time, Emmanuel Macron’s call for swift and firm measures to achieve strategic autonomy was considered reckless and defiant. Although Russia had occupied Crimea and was taking rapid steps to include it in the federation, and the Middle East and the Caucasus were seething, no European leader was in a hurry to support a possible project for European strategic autonomy. In Berlin, the chancellor at that time was Angela Merkel, a staunch supporter of “business as usual”.

“The decades of Pax Americana for Europe and Germany are largely over for us. It no longer exists as we knew it. Nostalgia will not help us, and I would be the last to give in to this nostalgia. This is the reality! The Americans are now defending their interests very firmly. That is why we must defend ours too.” This is the statement of Chancellor Friedrich Merz, extracted from a speech given at the Congress of the Christian Social Union.<sup>4</sup>

It took Russia’s open war in Ukraine and the publication of the United States’ National Security Strategy 2025 for a German chancellor to adopt the French president’s ideas on strategic autonomy. In similar terms, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, supported the current Franco-German position in her recent speech to the European Parliament, to preface the topics scheduled to be addressed at the Winter European Council. If the United States has finally decided to show its face, it is said that the European Union has the opportunity to do the same.

“This week’s European Council is about confronting the realities of the moment, the realities of a world that has become dangerous and transactional, a world of wars, a world of predators.

The realities of the world we live in mean that we Europeans must defend ourselves and rely on ourselves.

The peace of the past has shattered. The time for invoking nostalgia is over. What matters is how we position ourselves in this confrontation. We cannot allow ourselves to be defined by the worldview of others.

None of us should be shocked by what others say about Europe. But let me stress one thing: It would not be the first time that allegations about the situation in Europe have turned out to be far from the truth. It would not be the first time that the post-war world order has changed in an unprecedented way.

The (United States) Security Strategy correctly states, and I quote: “Europe has lost its share of global GDP from 25% in the 1990s to 14% today.” What is not written are the figures for the United States, which follow the same trend. The United States has lost its share of global GDP from 22% in 1990 to 14% today. We are not talking here about the history of economic transformations on either side of the Atlantic. This is a fundamental change in the global economy. China alone has increased its share of the global economy from 4% in 1990 to 20% today. This is why the United States is increasingly turning its attention to the challenge of China’s rapid rise on the global stage. What I want to emphasize is that this Strategy is not the cause of the challenges that Europe must face. It is a symptom of the reality of today’s world.

So, our mission at this week’s summit is to show that we are focused on our own strategy, on our own interests and on our own priorities.”<sup>5</sup>

Ursula von der Leyen highlighted in her speech the change in vision on investment in European defense, after years of under-financing: “After decades of under-investment, we are going through a difficult situation. We are transforming our defense industrial base to offer state-of-the-art technologies and rapid mass production. We will move mountains.” If in the last ten years, the Union has invested 8 billion euros in the European Defense Fund, from 2026 to 2030 we will have activated investments of up to 800 billion euros. This is a commitment that goes beyond the military aspect: “European security is not only about defense, but also about our freedom, prosperity and independence.”<sup>6</sup>

## Strategic Autonomy - What Exactly?

Europe’s strategic autonomy means the European Union’s ability to act independently and defend

<sup>3</sup><https://hotnews.ro/update-emmanuel-macron-pledeaza-din-nou-pentru-redeschiderea-dialogului-strategic-cu-rusia-nato-este-nomoarte-cerebrala-ce-va-fi-articolul-5-maci-291547>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.caleaeuropeana.ro/deceniile-de-pax-americana-pentru-europa-s-au-incheiat-in-mare-partea-avertizeaza-cancelarul-german-friedrich-merz/>

<sup>5</sup>[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CX\\_LuEUXuCA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CX_LuEUXuCA)

<sup>6</sup><https://www.euractiv.ro/eu-elections-2019/ursula-von-der-leyen-consolidarea-rolului-uniunii-europene-la-nivel-global-este-o-prioritate-76679>

interests, reducing dependence on other regions in critical areas - technology, resources, security -, strengthening economic and industrial resilience through innovation, diversified partnerships and its own operational capabilities, in order to become a stronger global actor. Strategic autonomy is essential to strengthen Europe's role as a global actor capable of defending its fundamental interests. It is important for the European continent to ensure control over its own economic, technological and security future, in order to face geopolitical challenges (instability, competition) and various types of crises (pandemics, supply chain uncertainty etc.).

Dimensions of European strategic autonomy	
Minimizing dependence on external suppliers for critical materials, high-tech components (semiconductors), food, energy and medicines.	Supporting strategic industrial alliances, innovation and the development of domestic markets in key sectors.
The ability to make autonomous decisions and conduct its own military operations, without the influence of third parties, by strengthening European defense institutions and architecture (PESCO) <sup>7</sup> .	The ability to act coherently on the international stage, either with partners or alone, to promote its values and interests.
Open strategic autonomy - A concept that combines self-sufficiency in critical areas with commitment to partners, while maintaining global openness.	

Beyond theory, what does Europe's strategic autonomy actually look like at this moment? An answer was attempted in a debate organized by the Atlantic Council – Europe Center, immediately after the Winter European Council, on the topic: "Can Europe rise to the geopolitical demands of the moment?"<sup>8</sup>

Moderated by Jörn Fleck<sup>9</sup>, the debate had as guests Margaritis Schinas, former Vice-President of the European Commission<sup>10</sup>; Charles Lichfield, Director of the Geo-Economics Center<sup>11</sup>; Tyson Barker, Europe Center<sup>12</sup> and Frances Burwell, Director of the Europe Center<sup>13</sup>.

The ideas presented by the guests during the debate, starting from the decisions taken or postponed by the Winter Council on the most important topics, namely the approval of the EU-Mercosur<sup>14</sup> Trade Agreement and the financing of the Ukrainian war effort using the frozen assets of the Russian Federation (in continuation of the decisions taken at the European Council in May 2024<sup>15</sup>), implicitly defined the aspects of progress and blockage in the full affirmation of the specific geopolitical weight of Europe in the global arena.

### Margaritis Schivas

*The European Council was, as they say, almost OK. We are not talking about a turning point, but crucial decisions were taken: financing for Ukraine will continue in the coming years, the Agreement with Mercosur was not rejected but its approval was postponed. There was no expected progress regarding the use of Russia's frozen assets. Perhaps the expectations were also unrealistic, given that it was known in advance that there was no consensus.*

*The solution of financing with Eurobonds was finally found, but the bitter taste cannot be avoided because, in the end, the expected consensus formula was not reached to properly put Russian assets to work in support of the aggressed Ukraine. But this is what happens when it comes to collective decision-making in the institutions of the European Union.*

*In the transatlantic relationship, the year 2025 was one of "lights and shadows", as a song says. The tariff agreement negotiated in Scotland can be placed on the side of the lights. I would also mention as a success the fact that European leaders collaborated and managed, through a joint effort, to convince Washington to give President Zelensky the necessary space to make the best decisions for his country. On the side of the shadows, I would cite the increasingly aggressive messages coming from the*

<sup>7</sup>care sunt capabile și dormice să facă acest lucru. 25 de state membre au aderat la PESCO și, în acest cadru, au convenit să investească, planifice, dezvolte și utilizeze mai mult împreună capacitatele de apărare. Danemarca și Malta nu sunt în prezent în cadrul PESCO. (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/RO/legal-content/glossary/pesco-permanent-structured-cooperation.html>)

<sup>8</sup><https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/event/can-europe-meet-the-geopolitical-moment/>

<sup>9</sup><https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/expert/joern-fleck/>

<sup>10</sup><https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/expert/margaritis-schinas/>

<sup>11</sup><https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/expert/charles-lichfield/>

<sup>12</sup><https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/expert/tyson-barker/>

<sup>13</sup><https://www.theglobalist.com/contributors/frances-g-burwell/>

<sup>14</sup><https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/infographics/eu-mercousur-trade/>

<sup>15</sup><https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/policies/sanctions-against-russia-explained/#frozen-assets>

White House towards Europe. It began with the speech of Vice President J.D. Vance from Munich and continued with the formulations of the United States National Security Strategy. This climate does not help to strengthen the relationship. It induces tension in public opinion, increased hostility, it is like a stone in the shoe.

Also in the shady territory are the differences of vision on the issue of digital governance. What in America is seen as an unnecessary complication, in Europe is considered a great achievement: order is being put in a developing market that needs to be regulated.

### Charles Lichfield

In the European Union, some states have budgeted concrete plans to reach 3.5% of GDP in defense financing, according to NATO commitments, others not even close, even if they have military forces at their disposal that seem credible. From here arises a set of questions regarding the realism of integrating Ukraine's defense needs into the European industrial complex in this field.

The use of frozen Russian assets in Europe, the EuroClear<sup>16</sup> issue, was seriously supported by Germany, Poland, the Baltic States, Denmark, which made efforts in the negotiations preceding the Winter Council, and with somewhat less energy by France. Belgium took the debate somewhat to the limit, demanding all kinds of assurances; however, I do not agree that this would prove pro-Russian sympathies of the Belgian government, as some press articles claim.

As appears in the final statement, the issue of Russian assets is not over, efforts to find a solution will continue. Which is necessary, because the issue of loans with EU guarantees, although accepted in principle as a solution by the member states, is not technically resolved either and it is not known whether new reasons for opposition will not appear.

### Tyson Barker

The European Council tried to take certain decisions at the Winter Summit, but also throughout this year to cover the necessary aid for Ukraine, including the gaps left by the decisions of the Trump administration. The 90 billion euros will be welcome, but they are not able to finance the entire need, which is much higher.

Those who carefully follow the decision-making mechanisms in Brussels have noticed a process in full swing; approving a budget not by consensus, but by a majority, implies a flexible mechanism that could later be used in other decision-making processes of the European Union.

A European Council is a top international event, closely followed by the interested public and other decision-making centers at a global level, in an attempt to understand how Europe manages to mark its strategic weight. Of course, it is significant, from this point of view, how the European Union finances its defense programs, whether it can cover the aid needs for Ukraine and how it manages to integrate Ukraine into the collective defense effort. Through the SAFE program Ukraine is allowed to participate in the military equipment effort with its own production capabilities and partnerships are being developed in this regard.

But the European Union has made no progress this year on Ukraine's European integration due to Hungarian opposition. Recently, a solution has been identified: to technically start negotiations, leaving the final decision for the future, for the time when the opposition and blockages can be removed.

### Frances Burwell

Europe is rightly trying to diversify its forms of economic cooperation at a global level. The agreement with Mercosur is one of the most important projects in this regard. However, so far, things have not gone well with this agreement. Objections from France, Italy and several other member states have postponed President Ursula von der Leyen's flight to Brazil and her meeting with President Lula da Silva.

The postponement of the approval of the EU-Mercosur Agreement is emblematic of the institutions of the European Union, which still fails to meet the geopolitical demands of the moment. Two crucial issues were on the Winter Council agenda: the Mercosur agreement and Russia's frozen assets. The partial success of the future financing for Ukraine and the postponement of the decision on Mercosur highlighted the divisions within the member states. It is not new, but characteristic that strategic decisions often encounter opposition from one or another of the member states.

Ultimately, European states must analyze their performance within the Union and find a solution to take strategic decisions more quickly and without airing their dirty laundry in public. This is not necessarily the fault of the European Commission. If Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni asked for a three-week postponement to convince Italian farmers, I wonder: what she did three weeks before? Or will another postponement be requested in January? The Brazilian president has already signaled that he is fed up with the

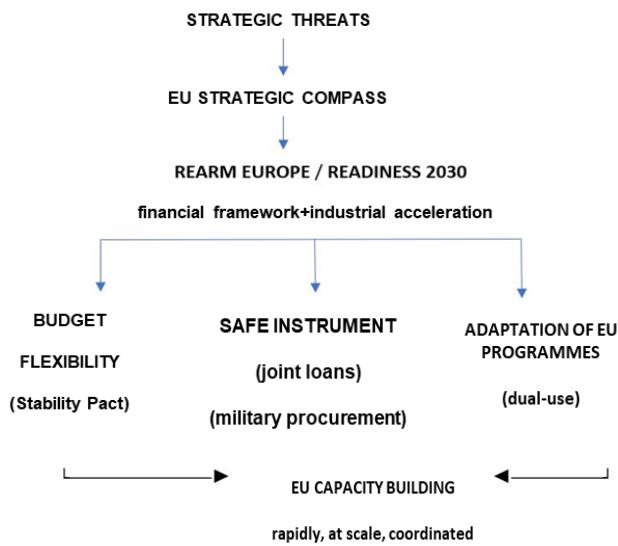
<sup>16</sup><https://www.euroclear.com/about/en.html>

hesitation of the Europeans.

All these hesitations, sometimes on ridiculous grounds, only serve the interests of the European Union's adversaries. Europeans must confront these practices and find adequate solutions if they want to exercise the global role they aim for in the current geopolitical context.

## The Architecture of the European Defence System. The Role of the “ReArm Europe” Programme

The Common European Security and Defence Policy - CSDP is the European Union's political framework for coordination and cooperation in the field of security and defence. It evolved after the Lisbon Treaty and lays the foundations for a common approach to managing external threats and for strengthening European capabilities.



Parliament approves the budget and regulations on defence programs, including the relevant financial allocations.

The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy coordinates foreign and security policy, including CSDP, in collaboration with the European Council and the European Commission.

Finally, the European Security and Defence College – ESDC provides training and education in security and defence for civilian and military personnel, supporting a common security culture.

Among the instruments and programs of European cooperation in the field of defense are:

•PESCO – Permanent Structured Cooperation – It is the framework for advanced cooperation between member states willing to coordinate their acquisitions and the development of common military capabilities;

•EDF – European Defence Fund - Dedicated to financing research and development of defense technologies and equipment at European level;

•CARD – Co-ordinated Annual Review on Defence - The mechanism for annual analysis of member states' defense spending and capability gaps, for better joint planning.

“ReArm Europe” - officially renamed “Readiness 2030”, is a strategic initiative launched in 2025 by Ursula von der Leyen to mobilize the necessary financial and political-administrative resources to allow the European Union to move closer to the objective of being strategically autonomous from a military point of view by 2030.

The main target of “Readiness 2030” is to mobilize funds of up to 800 billion euros to finance projects to increase European defense capabilities, including by increasing national spending by Member States and facilitating joint investments.

With a total value of 150 billion euros, SAFE (Supporting Arms and Fatigue Equipment) is the first massive financial package launched as part of the “Readiness 2030” program, which proposes the total mobilization of about 800 billion euros in defense spending.

•SAFE is defined as an incentive or financial instrument of the European Union that supports member states that want to invest in defense industry production through joint public procurement focused on priority capabilities. The investments target NATO capability targets - the production and acquisition of military equipment, the development of military logistics - undertaken by the EU member states of the North Atlantic alliance.

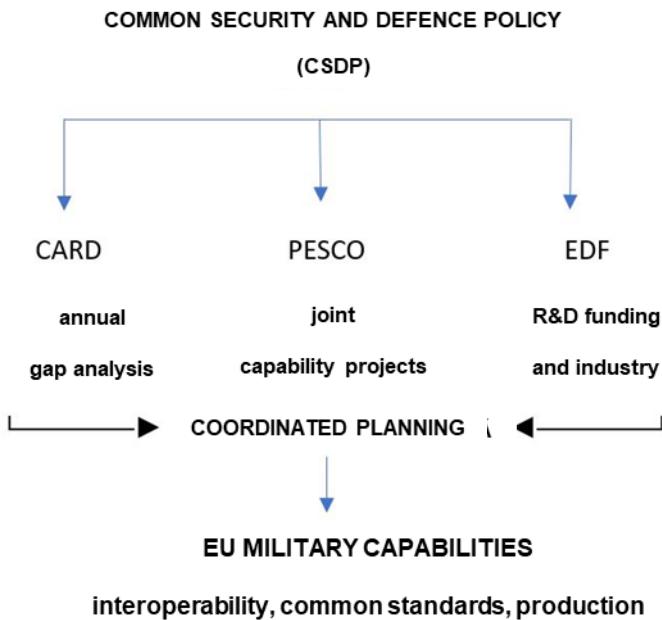
•The SAFE instrument is guaranteed by community funds and involves an interest rate described as competitive by the Commission, equal for all beneficiaries and grace periods of ten years, i.e. during which

The general objective of the CSDP is to protect the citizens and territory of the Union, strengthen strategic autonomy, increase the interoperability of the Member States' forces and develop a competitive industrial and technological base.

The Council of the European Union is the political body that plays the role of the main coordinator of political decisions in the field of security and defence, including the adoption of programs and regulations for cooperation.

The European Commission is the institution that proposes strategic initiatives and financial instruments; in recent years it has launched plans to strengthen the defence industry and increase spending. The European

the money will not be returned, after which the repayment will take place over 30 years. The funds are to be attracted in advance and spent by the end of 2030.



ware that will come from abroad, ensuring that domestic companies have full authority over them. The Commission wants to ensure that third countries cannot block, for example, the use of the system through a so-called *kill switch*.

The SAFE instrument is divided into two categories: (i) classical military systems: ammunition and missiles, artillery systems, deep-sea strike equipment, equipment for soldiers and infantry weapons, military mobility; (ii) advanced systems, in particular in the air, maritime and drone fields: air and missile defence systems; surface and underwater maritime capabilities; drones and anti-drone systems; strategic support including strategic airlift and air-to-air refueling, space assets and services; protection of space assets; artificial intelligence and electronic warfare.

The European Union's defence programs aim to reduce the fragmentation of the European defence industry, strengthen supply chains, interoperability of equipment and support technological innovation. Through PESCO and joint procurement (such as the SAFE instrument), Member States can coordinate procurement and standards, which increases the interoperability of forces.

The European Union is developing capabilities complementary to those of NATO, without creating another, parallel military structure. Cooperation with NATO remains an important pillar, and the Union's programs focus on budget, industrialization, and technical capabilities.

### Strategic Autonomy and Realism

In a recent interview with Politico<sup>17</sup>, Romanian President Nicușor Dan addressed the challenges facing the transatlantic partnership and stressed that we are currently in a period of readjustment. "The world has changed. We have moved from a moral way of doing things to a very pragmatic and economic way," Nicușor Dan explained. "European Union leaders understand this and are focusing their attention on developing practical strategies to deal with the new reality. Centrists will have to take into account the efforts of the [American, n.m.] administration to support European right-wing nationalist forces," in an attempt to influence strategic changes in the direction of the future evolution of the Union<sup>18</sup>.

Realism in approaching the rivalry with the United States, so as not to weaken the force with which the West must express itself on a global scale, is becoming a delicate and paramount issue for the European Union. If Moscow wants to divide the European Union through military pressure and its allies from within – like the leaders of Hungary, Slovakia and recently the Czech Republic – in order to dominate it politically and militarily, the MAGA administration in Washington wants to undermine the rival Western economic bloc in order to reduce it to a mere market, flooded with American products and paying the American military fat defense bills.

US President Donald Trump recently announced, in a post on "Truth Social", that he is appointing

•SAFE mainly supports joint projects involving at least two countries eligible for loans. However, in the current geopolitical context, projects of a single country will also be allowed, for a limited period of time. Countries formally admitted to the EU, candidates or potential candidates, respectively eight other states that have defense agreements with the EU, including the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, or the Republic of Moldova, can also participate in joint procurement projects.

•Among the conditions announced by the European Commission is that at least 65% of the value of the purchased weapons system must be produced in an EU member state, Ukraine, or in a country of the European Economic Area/European Free Trade Association. The remaining 35% can come from any third country in the world, obviously, if it is not subject to an embargo. Another condition concerns a certain control over the components and soft-

<sup>17</sup><https://www.politico.eu/article/morality-doesnt-matter-when-youre-dealing-with-donald-trump-romania-nicușor-dan-leader-says/>

Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry as special envoy for Greenland. In another post on “X”, Jeff Landry responded to the president, assuring his supporters that it is “an honor” to fulfill the new duties and take part, as a “volunteer”, in the national effort to “bring Greenland together with the United States”<sup>19</sup>. Except that Greenland is an autonomous territory and part of the Kingdom of Denmark, a member state of the European Union.

We cannot help but understand that if the assault on European strategic autonomy is led by a known historical adversary, the effect is to catalyze efforts to unite in order to provide a proportionate response, whereas things become extremely complicated when the main, most powerful ally defines itself overnight as an adversary, without evoking a clear, intelligible motivation for the act of repositioning.

That is why maturity and realism are needed and not an emotional approach in relations with the ally-adversary. Only this maturity is the solid ground on which Europe’s strategic autonomy is truly built. And it is both military and economic, political and diplomatic.

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<sup>19</sup><https://www.newsweek.com/jeff-landry-declares-aim-to-make-greenland-part-of-us-11253510>

## WORLD ORDER - EUROPE



### Italy in Global Chaos

Franz SIMONINI (Italy)

#### Italian Strategic Compression within the Contemporary Global Space

Italy is today embedded in a phase of disarticulation of the global spatial order, in which lines of power no longer coincide with illusory institutional architectures and conflict once again becomes the ordinary form of regulation among collectivities. Global chaos is not the absence of order, but the superimposition of competing, partial, and unstable orders, which compress states lacking strategic depth. Within this framework, Italy appears as a geopolitical space of high exposure and low capacity for initiative, located along a structural fault line of the system, the central Mediterranean, which historically functions as a zone of friction between continental masses and maritime powers<sup>1</sup>. The Italian peninsula constitutes a natural corridor of transit, an inclined plane between Europe, the southern basin and the Indo-Pacific, whose primary function is logistical, energy-related and military. However, this function is not governed by a national decision-making center, but absorbed within external power apparatuses. The presence of foreign military infrastructures, the integration of command systems, and technological dependence in the defense sector place Italy within an operational chain that reduces its autonomy in the use of space. Rome does not control the strategic influence that crosses its own geographical space of reference, but manages its secondary effects. In geopolitical terms, Italy does not act as a subject that shapes territory, but as a space shaped by subjects endowed with greater force and continuity<sup>2</sup>.



#### Incomplete Formation of Power and Decline

This configuration is rooted in the historical formation of the Italian state and in its chronic weakness of power. National unification takes place in the absence of a real accumulation of autonomous force, exploiting windows of opportunity offered by conflict among already structured powers<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>F. BRAUDEL, *Il Mediterraneo: lo spazio e la storia, gli uomini e la tradizione*, Bompiani, Milano, 2017.

<sup>2</sup>D. FABBRI, "Interludio d'estate", *Domino*, Numero 8, 2023.

<sup>3</sup>B. CROCE, *Storia d'Italia dal 1871 al 1915*, Adelphi, Milano, 1991.

The result is a state lacking imperial depth, forced from its very origin to confront external constraints exceeding its capacity for absorption. The attempt to compensate for this deficit through colonial expansion and forced militarization in the early twentieth century ends in strategic collapse, sanctioned by the defeat of 1945 and the loss of any autonomy of direction. In the postwar period, Italy is reintegrated as a functional space within the Western bloc, assuming the role of an advanced platform on the southern flank of the Atlantic device<sup>4</sup>. Sovereignty is reconstructed in an administered form, with limited margins of initiative but compensated by systemic stability and industrial growth. During the Cold War, the rigidity of bipolar confrontation allows Italy to exercise a certain tactical elasticity in the Mediterranean, particularly on the energy and diplomatic planes, without ever exiting imposed perimeters. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, this function disappears. The Italian state loses spatial centrality without replacing it with a new trajectory, entering a phase of strategic hollowing-out in which adherence to supranational structures narratively replaces the capacity to define its own interests. Italian fragility is not only institutional, but above all anthropological. For decades now, the country has entered a post-historical phase, characterized by an aging population, risk aversion, the absence of expansive tension and of youthful will to power. The elevated median age, widespread individualism, and the reduction of collective bonds produce a society oriented toward the preservation of the status quo, while the economy is experienced as an ultimate end rather than as an instrument of power<sup>5</sup>. Maritime culture is absent, despite Italy living immersed in Mediterranean space, and the educational system privileges technicism and the market, renouncing the humanistic and historical formation of new generations. The prodromes of this condition must be sought in the movement of 1968, which acted as a catalyst for the hollowing-out of national identity. Celebrated as a season of freedom, it in fact broke with the past without constructing a coherent alternative, generating a persistent vacuum and cultural relativism. The protagonists of 1968, transformed into professors, managers, and journalists, institutionalized the dogmas of their utopian youth. Criticism of authority became the dominant culture, suspicious of merit and of national historicity. This process produced the figure of the “anti-Italian”: an individual often young or intellectual, internal to the system yet oriented toward the symbolic deconstruction of the nation. The post-1968 generation did not reform, but dismantled; shared references were replaced by fragmentation and disillusionment. Demographic crisis and the transformation of youth into “young-old” consolidated decline: without generational renewal and youthful instinct, the collective remains incapable of reacting and projecting itself forward.<sup>6</sup>

### Uncontrolled Exposure within Mediterranean Competition

The return of conflict as a structural datum of the system makes the fragility of the Italian posture visible. The Mediterranean is once again a contested space, crossed by divergent vectors of power. Russia uses the Levant and Libya as bridgeheads to pressure the southern European flank, Turkey builds a strategic continuity between Anatolia, North Africa, and the Balkans, while the United States maintains a presence oriented toward controlling critical nodes rather than stabilizing the whole<sup>7</sup>. The European Union, lacking a unified coercive apparatus, remains an economic aggregate incapable of transforming space into power. In this context, Italy undergoes pressure as a collateral effect of conflicts it does not govern, manages energy security in a reactive form, and lacks adequate instruments to control its maritime lines<sup>8</sup>. On the industrial and technological planes, the loss of control over strategic supply chains reduces the capacity to sustain a prolonged confrontation. Demographic crisis acts as a multiplier of weakness, eroding over time the material base of power. Foreign policy, lacking continuity, reflects this condition: it does not orient space, but administers it through episodic initiatives devoid of strategic validity.<sup>9</sup>

### Margins of Maneuver, Delegation, and Perspective

Within the framework of global chaos and ongoing systemic competition, Italy's margins of maneuver do not derive from autonomous growth of power, but from the possibility of obtaining functional delegations within the American imperial system. The United States, engaged in a priority competition along the Indo-Pacific axis, tends to reduce direct engagement in secondary European and Mediterranean theaters, compensating for this retrenchment through selective delegation of operational functions to states deemed reliable, stable, and spatially useful. In this context, Italy can once again assume a specific operational role in the Mediterranean and on the south-eastern European flank, accepting a clear

<sup>4</sup>M. RIDOLFI, *Storia politica dell'Italia repubblicana*, Mondadori, Milano, 2010.

<sup>5</sup>D. FABBRI, “Interludio d'estate”, *Domino*, Numero 8, 2023.

<sup>6</sup>B. D. GALA, *Una macchina mitologica del '68: Nanni Balestrini e il rituale della Grande Rivolta*, Giorgio Pozzi Editore, Ravenna, 2021.

<sup>7</sup>G. FRIEDMAN, *The storm before the calm*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, New York, 2021.

<sup>8</sup>L. CARACCIOLI, “L'Italia si scopre soggetto geopolitico”, *Limes*, 2025.

<sup>9</sup>A. ROSINA e R. IMPICCIATORE, *Storia demografica d'Italia: crescita, crisi e sfide*, Carocci, Roma, 2022.

placement within the Atlantic hierarchy. The margins granted do not concern full strategic autonomy, but greater freedom of tactical management on circumscribed regional dossiers, maritime security, advanced logistics, energy, stabilization of areas of proximity, and internal social recalibration. Washington tends to favor states capable of absorbing pressure, guaranteeing operational continuity, and not producing political friction within the overall system. In this sense, Italy can receive a functional delegation in the central Mediterranean as an actor of containment, logistical support, and interface with North Africa, reducing direct American exposure without altering structural balances of power. A further geopolitical margin lies in the possible Italian integration into the Trimarium<sup>10</sup> corridor, not as a directive actor but as a southern continental hinge<sup>11</sup>. The Trimarium, promoted by the United States as an infrastructural and containment axis between the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black Seas, responds to the need to contain Russian expansionism and reinforce the bastion of Central-Eastern Europe. In this scheme, Trieste regains a precise geopolitical function as the maritime terminal of Eastern Europe, a junction point between the Adriatic, Mitteleuropa, and the Danubian backbone. Through Trieste, Italy could exercise indirect influence toward Eastern Europe, especially the necessary Balkan area. This function would allow Rome to recover spatial centrality by exploiting its geographical position and the historical continuity of Adriatic-Danubian connections<sup>12</sup>.

These margins, however, remain conditioned and reversible. American delegations are not permanent, but depend on Italy's capacity to guarantee political reliability, internal stability, and a necessary awakening from pervasive post-historicism. In the absence of these conditions, Italy risks remaining a space traversed by others' strategic corridors without deriving lasting functional benefits. Italian margins of maneuver in global chaos today do not reside in an "illusory autonomy" of power, but in the capacity to insert itself precisely into the fractures of the Western system, securing operational delegations and valorizing specific spatial nodes<sup>13</sup>. To this should be added new pedagogical and cultural paths to rejuvenate demography, restore a humanistic base, reestablish geographical and historical awareness, and reclaim a national narrative endowed with prospective vision.

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<sup>10</sup>The Three Seas Initiative (3SI), known also as the Baltic Sea, Adriatic Sea, Black Sea Initiative or simply as the Three Seas (Latin: Trimarium), is a forum of the 13 states in the European Union, and 4 non-EU partner-participants, roughly connecting the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black Seas in Central and Eastern Europe. The Initiative aims to create a regional dialogue on questions affecting the member states.

<sup>11</sup>F. SIMONINI (in A/ESSENZA GEOPOLITICA), *Strategia dell'Italia nel Mediterraneo: Dove va l'Italia Ep.1*, Youtube, 2 Aprile 2025.

<sup>12</sup>F. SIMONINI (in A/ESSENZA GEOPOLITICA), *Trieste frontiera mediterranea: Dove va l'Italia Ep.19*, Youtube, 19 Novembre 2025.

<sup>13</sup>F. SIMONINI (in A/ESSENZA GEOPOLITICA), *L'Italia nel sistema anarchico o egemonico?: Dove va l'Italia Ep.17*, Youtube, 23 Settembre 2025.

## WORLD ORDER - ARAB-AFRICAN SPHERE



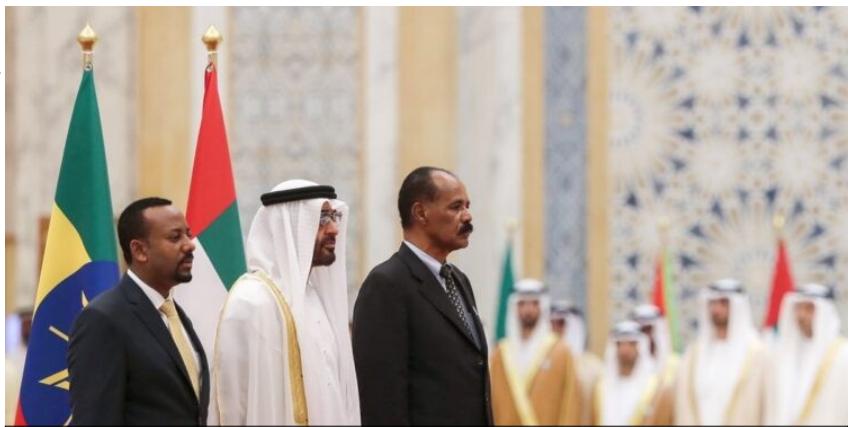
# The Strategic Role of Regional and Multilateral Cooperation Mechanisms in Reshaping Global Power Dynamics: Insights from the Arab–African Sphere

Ambassador Dr. Eslam Hamdy ASHOUR(Egypt)

### Introduction

The international system is undergoing one of its most profound structural transformations since the end of the Cold War. The rapid erosion of unipolarity, intensified geopolitical fragmentation, and the emergence of competing centers of influence have ushered in a new era of multipolar competition. In this evolving landscape, regional and multilateral cooperation mechanisms are no longer secondary platforms; they have become pivotal instruments for shaping power distribution, managing crises, and balancing global rivalries.

This article explores how these mechanisms—particularly within the Arab and African spheres—are influencing global strategic dynamics, redefining regional alliances, and presenting new frameworks for stability, development and resilience amid widespread uncertainty.



Source: <https://qiraatafrican.com/en/11368/africa-gulf-relations-the-current-multipolar-moment/>

### 1. Multipolarity and the Reconfiguration of Global Power

#### 1.1 From Unipolar Dominance to Competitive Multipolarity

The international order is increasingly shaped by the interplay of major powers such as the United States, China, Russia, the European Union, India, and emerging actors across the Global South. This shift has created a geopolitical environment marked by:

- Intensified competition over energy, technology, and trade routes;
- Overlapping security crises;
- The rise of hybrid and cognitive warfare tools;

Regional conflicts acting as arenas for International rivalry

#### 1.2 The Strategic Rise of the Global South

Regional blocs in the Global South—Arab, African, Asian, and Latin American—have begun asserting their own political and economic identities. These blocs are no longer passive recipients of global policy but active participants in shaping global norms, negotiating strategic partnerships, influencing energy markets and mediating conflicts.

The Arab–African region, in particular, is gaining prominence due to its strategic resources, geographic position, and growing economic potential.

## 2. Regional Cooperation as an Engine of Strategic Influence

### 2.1 Economic Integration as a Stabilizing Force

Economic diplomacy has become central to modern geopolitics. Regional organizations in the Arab–African sphere—such as the African Union (AU), League of Arab States, Arab–African partnership frameworks, REC blocs, and specialized intergovernmental mechanisms—are increasingly using cross-border trade agreements, energy cooperation, infrastructure corridors and financial integration to strengthen resilience and decrease dependency on external actors.

### 2.2 Security Cooperation Amid Rising Threats

The region faces a combination of political instability, terrorism, maritime insecurity, cyber threats, hybrid operations by state and non-state actors.

Regional security alliances and joint intelligence-sharing mechanisms have become essential to managing low-intensity conflicts, countering extremist networks, securing maritime trade routes and responding to transnational crises such as migration and human trafficking.

### 2.3 Diplomacy of Resources: Energy and Water

The Arab–African sphere plays a decisive role in global energy security. The Middle East remains a vital hub for hydrocarbons. Africa hosts significant critical minerals essential for global industry, renewable energy corridors (solar, green hydrogen) are reshaping global investment patterns.

Transboundary water cooperation is becoming a core geopolitical issue. This creates leverage for regional actors to shape international negotiations and long-term strategic partnerships.

## 3. The Arab–African Sphere as a Strategic Axis In the Multipolar World

### 3.1 A Geographic Bridge between continents

The region forms a natural corridor connecting Africa, Europe, Asia and the Middle East. This geographic advantage makes it a focal point for global energy flows, trade routes, logistics networks (Suez Canal, Red Sea, Bab el-Mandeb) and international security operations

### 3.2 The Rise of Arab–African Diplomacy Joint frameworks such as, Arab–Africa Summits, AU–LAS Mechanisms

Development partnerships intergovernmental reconstruction initiatives are increasingly influential in conflict prevention, economic integration, infrastructure development and regional stabilization.

These initiatives illustrate a growing capability for self-driven regional solutions as opposed to externally imposed models.

### 3.3 Natural Resources as Instruments of Strategic Power

Africa's growing importance in energy transitions, alongside the Middle East's established role in global energy markets, creates a combined geopolitical influence that strengthens bargaining power at global forums such as COP summits, UN platforms, G20/G77+China and international financial institutions.

## 4. Hybrid Threats, Cognitive Warfare, and the New Security Landscape

### 4.1 Information and Cyber warfare

International actors increasingly use disinformation, targeted influence operations, artificial intelligence-powered propaganda, cyber espionage to shape public opinion and strategic decisions within the region.

Strengthening digital resilience and cyber security cooperation has become a strategic necessity

### 4.2 Low-Intensity Conflicts

Many regional conflicts today no longer follow traditional military patterns but evolve as proxy wars, militia-led confrontations, maritime disruptions, urban micro-conflicts, cross-border insurgencies.

These conflicts require new models of cooperative security and intelligence integration.

### 4.3 Cognitive Warfare and Societal Polarization

Some external actors exploit ethnic divisions, sectarian tensions, economic grievances to weaken state structures and influence political outcomes.

Regional cooperation mechanisms play a vital role in preventing such destabilization strategies.

## 5. Strategic Opportunities for Regional Cooperation Mechanisms

### 5.1 Strengthening Regional Governance

More effective coordination between Arab and African institutions can create unified diplomatic positions, improve crisis response and enhance economic negotiation power.

### 5.2 Energy and Climate Cooperation

Joint initiatives in renewable energy, food security, climate adaptation, green industrialization can turn the region into a global hub for sustainable development.

### 5.3 Infrastructure Corridors

Mega-projects connecting Africa, the Middle East, and Europe are reshaping logistics, industrial value chains, digital infrastructure and investment flows.

Their success depends on sustained intergovernmental cooperation

### 5.4 Diplomatic Mediation Roles

The region can position itself as a mediator in Middle Eastern conflicts, North African transitions, Red Sea tensions, Sahel security dynamics. This enhances its global diplomatic relevance.

## 6. Future outlook: The Frontiers of Regional Multipolarism

### 6.1 A Shift toward Strategic Autonomy

As global competition intensifies, regional groupings seek economic sovereignty, diversified partnerships, reduced dependency on great powers.

### 6.2 Rising Influence of Non-Traditional Actors

Private sector, sovereign wealth funds, developmental banks, and intergovernmental reconstruction organizations will shape the next stage of regional geopolitics

### 6.3 A More Assertive Global South

The Arab–African region, empowered by demographics, resources and geographic centrality, is emerging as a key pillar of the new multipolar world

## Conclusion

Regional and multilateral cooperation mechanisms are now decisive actors in shaping the evolving international order. Within the Arab–African sphere, these mechanisms serve as essential platforms for managing hybrid threats, promoting economic integration, enhancing energy security and balancing great-power competition. As multipolarity continues to redefine global power dynamics, the success of regional cooperation initiatives will determine not only the stability of individual states but also the strategic trajectory of the broader international system.

The growing influence of Arab–African regional frameworks signals a shift toward new models of strategic governance, where collaboration, integration, and shared resilience form the backbone of a more balanced and inclusive global order

## WORLD ORDER - NATO AND EUROPE



# The North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) and the European Union (EU) – in a Dark Period and Various Evolutionary Shocks

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*“Never say CAN’T, but start with LET’S SEE.”*

*Nicolae Iorga*

### Introduction

As a result of the profound transformations taking place at regional and global levels, of the multiple connections and interactions that are developed between various state actors, but also between them and non-state actors, new models of political, economic, military, cultural, informational, social and demographic interdependence are emerging, as well as new types of international and transnational relations that are often classified as atypical.

Most of the new challenges, which increasingly prove that they appear at an extremely rapid pace and demonstrate a very high level of unpredictability, are rather the result of existing prejudices and deficiencies in the field of good governance capacities, all of which contribute directly to the development and amplification of economic regression, the development of uncontrolled migration, the increase in the vulnerabilities of human societies, the development of populism and the amplification of ethnic tensions in the context of an extremely varied range of risks and threats generated by the implementation of hybrid warfare by various international actors. All of these have a real and confirmed tendency to erode, to degrade and to impose permanent adaptation of the system of relations and, implicitly, of the political, economic, social, military and security system at the regional and global levels.

As a result, the dynamics and predictability of the current geopolitical and geostrategic environment are strongly influenced by the dynamics and sometimes incomprehensible transformations of relations between both the main global actors and various regional actors, as well as by the increased freedom of action and influence of some of the new actors who appear surprisingly due to the interests they want to impose in various regions of the world (state or non-state).



*Source: <https://theconversation.com/nato-and-the-eu-a-short-history-of-an-uneasy-relationship-126710>*

### NATO Facing Major Challenges in the Current Geopolitical Context

As is well known, NATO is a defensive alliance in which each member state is committed to protecting the freedom and security of all other allied states, against all threats, from all directions. This is

achieved by maintaining a credible deterrence and defense posture, based on an appropriate mix of nuclear, conventional and missile defense capabilities, complemented by space and cyber capabilities. In response to the current security environment, Allies are significantly strengthening deterrence and defense at the Alliance level, as the backbone of their commitment to mutual defense, something assumed under the provisions of Article 5. It has become well known that the scale of risks and threats to the security of states has generated the perception that the latter can no longer manage them acting on their own, but only in partnership with other states.

Since the 1990s, the North Atlantic Alliance has increasingly faced with the growth and diversification of the challenges it faces. From participating in a multitude of peacekeeping missions and humanitarian aid actions to the fight against the scourge of the 21st century, which began with terrorism and asymmetric operations and which currently focuses on actions specific to hybrid warfare, NATO is embracing the strategy of adopting a proactive stance more than ever, definitively confirming the fact that no nation can protect its citizens alone against external threats. In this context, it has become very clear that alliances and coalitions based on political, economic and military cooperation play a more important role than ever in managing international crises.

Current developments at the regional and global levels make it clear that NATO's future will be shaped by geopolitical dynamics characterized by accelerated evolution and often unpredictability, emerging hybrid threats, a significant shift in the role played by the US, and unexpected changes in the way many of the member states of an alliance whose official decision-making process is still based on consensus-building.

Given that the US has been and still remains the largest contributor of military personnel, military equipment, weapons and financial resources to NATO, this new approach of US President Donald Trump towards the North Atlantic Alliance is expected to be the main factor that will define its trajectory in the coming period. Moreover, it is very likely that the future of the Alliance will be marked by increasing uncertainties and internal frictions, as well as by a human, financial and material potential blocked at current values for any further expansion. The position of the US President towards NATO is very well known, the positions expressed being marked by skepticism and firmness regarding both the relevance of the alliance and the increase in financial contributions for the equipment of the armed forces and the development of the defense industry at the level of all NATO member states.

However, the US is expected to maintain its nuclear umbrella at NATO level. However, under Trump's foreign policy, 2026 will likely mark the beginning of a significant reduction in overall tangible support and U.S. contribution to NATO, including reduced financial support and a potential reduction in the number of U.S. troops deployed to NATO bases in Europe. Similar developments were seen during his first term, with the Trump administration reducing its contribution to NATO's direct budget.

At the same time as the U.S. diminished its NATO involvement, European member states are likely to assume a much more prominent role within the Alliance. This change will be determined both by the need to clearly address the growing threats to Europe's security from Russia, by Europe's relevant economic competition with China, by the positions indirectly expressed by various states (Iran, North Korea, Belarus) that have entered the process of changing the global order alongside Russia and China, and by the continued pressure from the US on European allies to meet and, possibly, exceed the minimum defense spending target of two percent of GDP by the end of 2024 and to reach the limits of 3.5+1.5.

As a result, NATO announced that 23 of its 32 member states will meet or exceed this target. However, the ongoing debates within the alliance on increasing this minimum criterion to three percent of GDP are expected to fuel the well-known internal tensions still facing NATO states, especially in countries such as Italy and Spain, which do not yet meet the current criterion and which are likely to resist such pressure from the US and Eastern European countries, but also in states such as Hungary and Slovakia, which have for some time been significantly dependent on imported energy resources from Russia and which, as is known, have significantly changed their approaches to their foreign policies. As such, increased internal frictions are expected to be a defining aspect of NATO's future in the coming years, especially after the annual summit in June 2025, when the proposal to extend this criterion was expected to be discussed. Moreover, internal divisions within NATO are also expected to be exacerbated by other factors. The Trump administration is likely to lead to a shift towards a more transactional relationship with allies, in which US support – such as military aid, funding for joint exercises and information sharing – will be conditional on tangible contributions from member states, including increased defence spending, troop deployments and logistical support in various areas of NATO member states. It is significant to note here that in February 2024, Trump declared that he would not "protect" any NATO state that does not "pay its dues" against hostile Russian policies and actions, stressing that he expects member states to contribute more to collective defence efforts as a condition for maintaining significant US support. In such a context, these positions adopted and views expressed are expected to lead to diplomatic friction between the US and other NATO member states.

Today, it is clear that NATO is facing its most dangerous security environment since the end of the Cold War. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has shattered peace and reduced trust in Europe and, as expected, has seriously undermined global security. In such a vulnerable context, another scourge is terrorism, which continues to threaten stability and security worldwide, in all its forms and manifestations, representing the most direct asymmetric threat to the security of NATO citizens and to international peace and prosperity. In recent years, a number of NATO Allies have been subjected to terrorist attacks on their territory, many of which are the result of conditions in areas beyond their borders. In such a context, it should not be overlooked that the conflict, fragility and instability in Africa and the Middle East directly affect the security of the North Atlantic Alliance and its partners. NATO's Southern Neighbourhood, particularly the Middle East, North Africa and Sahel regions, faces interconnected security, demographic, economic and political challenges, which are compounded by the impact of climate change, fragile institutions, health emergencies and food insecurity. As a result, NATO continues to counter, deter, defend and respond to the threats and challenges posed by terrorists and terrorist organisations, based on a combination of prevention, protection and denial measures, with determination, resolve and solidarity with Allies and partners.

In other news, hostile actions against allied countries are accelerating, from cyber-attacks to sabotage of critical infrastructure, assassination attempts and disruption of civil aviation. These actions are part of a coordinated campaign to destabilise Europe and North America and weaken the North Atlantic Alliance. As NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte has repeatedly said, "We are not at war, but we are not at peace either." At the same time, the North Atlantic Alliance is facing intense global competition. As we have already pointed out, a number of countries are rapidly consolidating their forces and trying to reshape the rules-based international order. In addition to political and economic power, China is substantially developing its military capabilities, including nuclear weapons, without transparency or limitations, and also developing capabilities in the space environment. The strategic partnership, which at least in theory is becoming deeper between Russia and China, and their increasingly close cooperation in the defense industry with Iran and North Korea are a reason for deep attention and analysis. In this context, NATO allies are stepping up their defense spending and production so that the North Atlantic Alliance can maintain its competitive advantage in terms of current capabilities and future technologies.

However, it should not be overlooked that Russia in particular poses the most significant and direct threat to NATO and European security. It has been seeking to fundamentally reconfigure the current Euro-Atlantic security architecture for some time. It is rebuilding and expanding its military capabilities and continuing its airspace violations and provocative activities. It is conducting a campaign of aggressive hybrid actions against Allies, including sabotage of critical infrastructure, acts of violence, provocations at the borders of Allied states, instrumentalization of irregular migration, malicious cyber activities, electronic interference, disinformation and propaganda campaigns and malign political influence, as well as economic coercion. Its irresponsible nuclear rhetoric and coercive nuclear signaling, including the announced stationing of nuclear weapons in Belarus, demonstrate a posture of strategic intimidation. The North Atlantic Alliance is determined to constrain and challenge Russia's aggressive actions and to counter its ability to engage in destabilizing activities both towards NATO as a whole and towards its member states, particularly those in Eastern Europe.

### **NATO – Facing a Bleak Future for All Humanity**

NATO's essential and enduring purpose is to protect the freedom and security of all its members by political and military means. As I have already emphasized in an earlier paragraph, collective defense is at the heart of the Alliance, as enshrined in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. NATO's greatest responsibility is to protect and defend the territory and populations of its Allies against attack in a world where peace and security can no longer be taken for granted. Deterrence is a central element of NATO's overall strategy: preventing conflict and war, protecting Allies, maintaining the freedom to make decisions, and taking action to uphold the principles and values that the Alliance stands for – individual liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Free societies and a rules-based international order must be underpinned by a credible transatlantic defence.

NATO's collective strength deters aggression from potential adversaries. At the 2022 Madrid Summit, NATO set a new basis for its deterrence and defence posture, in line with its 360-degree approach across land, air, maritime, cyber and space, and against all threats and challenges. NATO leaders built on this new foundation at the 2023 Vilnius Summit and the 2024 Washington Summit, agreeing on significant measures to enhance NATO's deterrence and defence in all areas. In Vilnius, Allies approved a new generation of regional defence plans to strengthen forward defence and increase the Alliance's ability to rapidly reinforce any Ally that might be threatened. In Washington, they committed to expanding their defence industrial capacity to deliver the critical capabilities needed for collective defence. At the 2025 NATO Summit in The Hague, Allies committed to investing 5% of GDP in defence annually by 2035,

including at least 3.5% for core defence requirements for Allied armed forces and up to 1.5% for expenditure related primarily to investments in the defence and security industry. These investments will ensure that Allies maintain NATO's combat readiness for years to come. As I have previously emphasized, it is crucial for all NATO member states to understand that NATO's deterrence and defense posture is based on an appropriate mix of nuclear, conventional and missile defense capabilities, complemented by space and cyber capabilities. It is more necessary than ever for NATO to maintain its freedom of action and flexibility to respond to the full spectrum of challenges with an appropriate and continuously adapted approach.

Strengthening national and collective resilience is an integral part of NATO's deterrence and defence posture. This means strengthening the capacity of societies to prepare for, respond to, recover from and adapt to the full range of threats and dangers. Russia's war against Ukraine, growing geopolitical competition and the many other security challenges facing the Alliance today underline the importance of NATO's "all hazards" and "whole of society" approach to resilience. This means preparing, empowering and investing in the capacity of societies to defend themselves against a wide range of threats – from cyberattacks to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear incidents; terrorism; pandemics; natural disasters; and growing strategic threats, including against other adversaries exploiting vulnerabilities in democratic systems, critical infrastructure and supply chains. Allies enhance their resilience by addressing the substantial reduction or even complete neutralization of vulnerabilities that could otherwise be leveraged or targeted by adversaries. Resilience is therefore an important aspect of deterrence through denial: persuading an adversary not to attack by convincing them that an attack would not achieve its intended objectives.

Resilience also requires close civil-military cooperation, as this impacts NATO's ability to conduct military activities and maintain the mobility of troops and equipment. Ensuring that national and military forces under NATO command are adequately supported with civilian assets and infrastructure is a key feature of NATO's resilience efforts. Since 2014, NATO has provided guidance to help national authorities improve their resilience across seven core requirements by reducing potential vulnerabilities. These requirements are updated regularly to reflect the evolving nature of the challenges facing the Alliance. In line with NATO's 2030 Agenda and the 2021 Enhanced Resilience Commitment, the 2022 Strategic Concept underlines the importance of adopting a more integrated and coordinated approach to resilience within the Alliance, including against Russian coercion, but also in supporting NATO partners in countering malign interference and aggression. Partnerships with non-NATO countries and other organisations are essential to strengthening the national and collective resilience of Allies and to supporting Alliance planning and preparedness through the exchange of information and best practices.

However, it is necessary to take into account in the analysis process that disagreements between certain NATO member states both on the conflict in Ukraine and on other disagreements that affect decision-making by consensus will have a significant impact on the Alliance's ability to reach a unified political consensus. Under the Trump administration, it is anticipated that the US will strive to achieve a negotiated agreement with Russia on the conflict in Ukraine, which will likely include conditions unacceptable to both Kiev and some NATO members - especially those in Eastern Europe. Moreover, since Trump is now strictly opposed to admitting new members to the Alliance, we can assess that any prospect of further NATO enlargement in the coming years could be blocked, including for Ukraine and Georgia. Whether or not a ceasefire agreement between Russia and Ukraine materializes, Russia is expected to remain the primary security threat guiding NATO policies in 2026. The North Atlantic Alliance is expected to maintain its focus on strengthening its "deterrence and defense" posture, including its eight battle groups along Europe's eastern borders, to counter potential threats from Russia. NATO is also expected to review and adapt its strategy for protecting its critical underwater infrastructure, potentially expanding its defense initiatives to include more advanced monitoring and protection systems in the Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, and other strategic sea lanes. Multiple incidents of Russian sabotage operations targeting underwater cables and pipelines have exposed the vulnerabilities of such critical assets in 2024. Other threats that will guide NATO policies are expected to continue to include other non-traditional threats, such as cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns. In addition, while the Russian threat will influence NATO's primary focus, attention is likely to increase on China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific, as well as its capabilities to commit sabotage and espionage in Europe. High-level dialogue, training and joint military exercises are likely to intensify with the Alliance's Asia-Pacific partners, namely Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea. However, we can predict that this change will remain in the background, as NATO continues to prioritize its strategic interests in Europe.

## Europe - Increasingly Important Tasks in the Field of Defence and Security

Since 1990, NATO has ceased to be the exclusive multilateral security actor in Europe, following the development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and

Defence Policy (CSDP) of the European Union (EU). During this period, the responsibilities and activities of these organisations have started to overlap more frequently due to their expanding mandates and initiatives.

Since NATO's founding in 1949, all regions of Europe have experienced significant changes in their approaches to defence and security, with national governments constantly reviewing and reassessing their attitudes towards national security. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has highlighted the need for and importance of NATO and the CSDP, which are the two main elements of European security. The crisis has revitalised NATO member states' commitment and investment in the alliance: lethal equipment was provided for the first time through the CSDP, and the European Peace Facility<sup>1</sup> has increased the EU's security budget.

Rising European tensions have prompted nations in south-eastern and northern Europe to make ground-breaking decisions about their defence and security policies. Denmark has lifted its exclusion from the CSDP, while Finland and Sweden have abandoned their long-standing non-alignment stance to join NATO. These changes may shape future EU-NATO relations, leading to closer cooperation and a more organised division of labour between the two organisations in the European space.

Today, the European NATO member states are obliged to prepare for a possible armed conflict with Russia, as is evident from the message released at the end of the week of December 8-14, 2025 by Mark Rutte, the NATO Secretary General, who declared in Berlin: "We are Russia's next target and we are already in danger." The senior NATO official warned that everything that happens today in Ukraine could happen tomorrow in other allied states and that "the time for action is now", not after the first blow has been struck on a European capital.

At the center of his speech, Mark Rutte placed without restraint three motivations of the new strategic reality:

- Russia as a direct and imminent threat;
- China as "Russia's lifeline", which keeps its military machine alive;
- The political and moral obligation of NATO states to switch to a war mentality.

"We must all act now to defend our way of life," said the NATO secretary general, explicitly linking Ukraine's fate to the future of Europe. The formula is clear, unambiguous for Mark Rutte: "Ukraine's security is our security." If Ukraine falls, the strategic, military and economic bill will be paid in Warsaw, Vilnius, Bucharest, Berlin or even Paris. Mark Rutte described a Russia that is not tired, is not on the verge of collapse, but has completely entered the logic of the war economy: almost 40% of the Russian budget is directed towards armaments and aggression, about 70% of industrial equipment is converted for military production, thousands of attack drones and decoys delivered monthly, about 2,000 cruise and ballistic missiles produced in 2025 alone. In 2025 alone, Russia launched over 46,000 drones and missiles against Ukraine. These figures do not describe an exhausted power, but a regime that has subordinated its entire economy to the goal of waging war against a neighboring country and, implicitly, against the European order and, why not, against the world order. And the price is paid with the blood of its own citizens. "There have been over 1.1 million Russian casualties since Putin began his war in 2022, and this year Russia has lost an average of 1,200 soldiers per day," said the NATO secretary general, who also asked the question that many are running away from: if a dictator is willing to sacrifice 1.1 million of his own people, "what is he willing to do to us?"

In this context, Polish General Jaroslaw Gromadzinski, former commander of Eurocorps, said that the North Atlantic Alliance must be prepared to act not only defensively on its own territory, but also offensively in Russian enclaves, including Kaliningrad, in the event that Poland is attacked. "If Russia launches an offensive, we have the right to intervene there and eliminate the threat," Jaroslaw Gromadzinski told the Warsaw press, deliberately calling the region "Königsberg," its historical German name. This means, translated into strategic language, that an attack on Poland would no longer end at NATO's border, but could trigger strikes on Russian territory, and the Kremlin would face major dilemmas regarding its own military apparatus. In J. Gromadzinski's logic, Russia can no longer rely on the advantage of militarized enclaves as "intangible bastions", but must know that they can quickly become legitimate targets for an allied response.

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<sup>1</sup>The European Peace Facility (EPF) is an instrument aimed at strengthening the EU's capacity to prevent conflicts, build and sustain peace, and strengthen international security and stability. It is a significant EU funding instrument, established in 2021 to finance external actions with military implications, aiming at conflict prevention, peacekeeping and strengthening global security by supporting the defence capabilities of partner countries, including the provision of military equipment and infrastructure, as well as the financing of EU military missions. It operates outside the EU budget, with over €17 billion allocated for the period 2021-2027, allowing the EU to act as a global security provider, notably supporting Ukraine and other nations with military aid and training, although it raises concerns about the proliferation of weapons.

Both M. Rutte and J. Gromadzinski dismantle the myth of Russian invincibility, but without replacing it with a false sense of security. The Polish general speaks of “hundreds of thousands of soldiers” and “tens of thousands of armored vehicles and artillery pieces” lost by Russia in Ukraine, losses that, in his assessment, significantly reduce Moscow’s ability to launch a major offensive against NATO in the next five to six years. M. Rutte, in turn, warns that precisely because Russia has transformed its economy into a war economy and makes decisions quickly, without bureaucracy, it could be ready “to use military force against NATO in five years.” The two messages do not contradict each other, but describe the same critical interval: a short window of time, a few years, in which NATO must strengthen its defenses and consolidate its military credibility, taking advantage of temporary weaknesses in Russia, which, however, “adapts quickly.” “We are in a state of permanent hybrid warfare and we must see this as the new reality,” warns J. Gromadzinski, and this is exactly the reality that M. Rutte also describes when he talks about sabotage, drones violating the airspace of Poland and Romania, attacks on warehouses, railway networks and critical infrastructure within NATO. This new reality means that the front line is no longer just in Donbas, but in every power plant, every submarine cable, every logistics center, every railway network in Eastern Europe. Hybrid attacks and sabotage are no longer isolated incidents, but elements of strategy. Therefore, the Polish general insists on “clear strategic communication”: Poland and NATO must convey to Moscow that any attack will have “direct consequences for Kaliningrad”. That is why M. Rutte states unequivocally that we must be prepared for “the scale of the war that our grandparents or great-grandparents experienced”, with “mass mobilization, millions of displaced people, widespread suffering, extreme losses”, if we do not invest now in deterring potential aggressors.

The answer cannot be just military, but also financial and industrial. In this scenario, political decisions in Brussels become an inseparable part of the security strategy. The European Commission is already considering a second round of the SAFE loan scheme, worth billions of euros, for defense projects, as the bloc seeks to strengthen its defenses amid “growing fears about Russia and doubts about US security commitments,” as two EU officials pointed out to the international media. The first 150 billion-euro scheme was oversubscribed – “the Commission has received requests for loans worth around 190 billion euros” – a clear sign that European governments are under pressure to quickly make up for the defense deficits accumulated over decades of underfunding. Ursula von der Leyen has openly acknowledged the pressure: the SAFE instrument “has been in such high demand that some EU members are now calling for a second version.” An EU official admits that “we will have to develop this instrument; the question is when”, suggesting that next year is the ideal time. The SAFE scheme is not a technical detail, but the financial infrastructure of European rearmament: the EU jointly borrows money from the markets, using its AAA rating, and redirects it as credit to member states for defense projects, for terms of up to 45 years and with a 10-year grace period for repayment of the principal. For many states, this is the only realistic way to quickly finance significant increases in military budgets to the level of 3.5% or even 5% of GDP, as stipulated by the new NATO target. What M. Rutte is demanding from Berlin, Warsaw, Bucharest or Paris, that is, massive defense investments, accelerated, without hesitation, is exactly what Brussels is trying to make possible through SAFE: to transform defense rhetoric into firm orders for shells, missiles, drones, armored vehicles, military infrastructure.

## **The U.S. Wants the EU to Take Over Most of NATO’s Conventional Defense Capabilities by 2027**

The US wants Europe to take over most of NATO’s conventional defense capabilities, from intelligence to missiles, within a tight deadline that has been deemed unrealistic by some European officials. Shifting that task from the US to European members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization would dramatically change the way the US, a founding member of the post-war alliance, works with its most important military partners. In numerous ad hoc references, Pentagon officials have indicated that Washington is still not satisfied with the progress Europe has made in boosting its defense capabilities since Russia’s expanded invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

As a result, the new US National Security Strategy (NSS) represents a truly dramatic shift in the direction of Washington’s foreign policy, with potentially serious implications for Europe and the transatlantic relationship. The SNS, on the one hand, does indeed make it clear that Europe is a lower priority in terms of defense, despite the threat posed by Russia. At the same time, it clearly indicates that Europe is expected to take care of its own defense and that there will be no more NATO enlargement, at least in the short and medium term, which means that there will be no more chances for NATO integration for Ukraine and Georgia. This is not entirely surprising, but what is perhaps most surprising is that the strategy also says that Europe really matters to the US, stating that: “Europe remains strategically and culturally vital to the US.”

However, we should not forget that the EU is currently witnessing a dramatic change in US foreign policy towards Europe. We must not forget that, after World War II, the US was the most ardent supporter

of European political and economic integration, explicitly to suppress the destabilizing impact of European nationalism, which was considered at the time a cause of Europe's destruction. Former President Dwight D. Eisenhower, a fervent supporter of European integration, remarked in 1957, upon the creation of the European Economic Community, the forerunner of the EU, that "the day this common market becomes a reality will be one of the greatest days in the history of the free world, perhaps even greater than the winning of the war". Uniting Europe in a union meant winning peace, something that the EU and NATO achieved to a large extent in tandem.

Throughout its history, Sweden has always maintained a neutral approach to security matters. During the Cold War, this stance was established by adopting a policy of neutrality in war and non-alignment in peacetime. However, throughout the late 20th century, Sweden worked closely militarily with NATO nations, despite its neutrality and its exclusion from formal membership. Prior to the conflict in Ukraine, which began in 2022, and Sweden's subsequent accession to NATO, the EU and NATO frameworks influenced modern Swedish defense. Sweden has actively participated in several NATO-led operational actions and the EU's CSDP, despite its formal non-alignment. These included the major NATO-led campaign in 2001 to overthrow the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, as well as the imposition of a no-fly zone over Libya in 2011, which was led by NATO troops. The Russian invasion of eastern Ukraine in 2014 and its annexation of Crimea were one of the reasons for Sweden's strong alignment with the West-oriented security policy. In response to the invasion, Sweden participated in the sanctions adopted at EU level against Russia. The CFSP framework was used to support the EU's response to a possible attack, and some European member states, including Sweden, began to push for more coordinated and organised defence programmes. This is also demonstrated by the statement by Minister Billström<sup>2</sup>, who emphasised Sweden's role as an EU member state in tightening sanctions against Russia. Furthermore, after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Swedish government emphasised the importance of the EU for Sweden's security, explicitly referring to the mutual defence provision in Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU). This article allows the EU to guarantee Sweden's security by requiring all EU parties to do everything in their power to support and assist victims of armed attacks in the EU (Treaty on European Union, 2007). However, Swedish policymakers have considered that the EU's general lack of military and security resources, particularly in terms of the absence of collective defence structures, limits the EU's ability to be supported during military crises. According to the Swedish government, military protection and deterrence were seen as primarily possible within NATO and are therefore likely to be two of Sweden's main motivations for joining the Alliance.

In the context of the Russian aggression launched against Ukraine in 2022, NATO is making special efforts to reaffirm its rationale for being an alliance with the essential mission of collective defense and security of its member states, and the European Union (EU), in turn, is seeking to expand the number of its members and become an entity with a significant defense and security capacity of its own in the current regional and global context.

Instead of continuing debates about its mandate and geographical scope, NATO's main mission has returned to the center of attention: the collective defense of its member states, including those in Europe. However, in the context of geopolitical developments, not only have concerns about the decreasing commitment of the US to NATO-level decision-making in the process of ensuring the security of a Europe that is facing numerous decision-making discrepancies at the level of its member states returned, but concerns have returned more forcefully than ever regarding Europe's strong dependence on American military capabilities in a context in which the entire world is looking for a possible positive answer to the fundamental question of whether or not the US can still be considered a partner on which other member states can rely at NATO level.

As a result, it is surprising that the answer to another question has begun to be sought intensively: how can a military alliance of states, theoretically with the same political visions, continue to function when the largest military power and dominant leader within the North Atlantic Alliance openly challenges the very foundations of its identity? So, will NATO manage to maintain the US as a main decision-maker within the alliance, or are the European member states willing and able to compensate for the gaps left by a potential reduction in the US presence and contribution in the field of defense and security? In the context of gloomy forecasts regarding developments in a multipolar world, could NATO even transform into a much more flexible framework – that is, into an alliance that will be able to respond flexibly through ad hoc "coalitions of the willing" to all international crises and threats targeting even some of the member states?

<sup>2</sup>Tobias Billström is a prominent Swedish politician from the Moderate Party, known for his extensive career in foreign and migration policy, most notably as Sweden's Minister for Foreign Affairs (2022–2024) and Minister for Migration (2006–2014). He played a key role in Sweden's NATO accession process, but retired from politics in September 2024 to work in the private sector, now focusing on geopolitical strategy.

The answers given to many such questions could form the basis for configuring an essential answer and which could constitute a key point of interest that has not received much attention to date, namely how the North Atlantic Alliance could continue to exist without the US playing a significant leadership role as it has done so far.

Therefore, at the international level, answers to increasingly numerous questions are being intensively sought, because at the regional and global level there is a significant US policy change towards Ukraine, opening negotiations with Russia, accepting many of the Kremlin's requests and forcing Kiev to sit at the table of tough negotiations both by reducing or even ending financial and military aid, and by reducing or even ending the exchange of information.

We say this because, theoretically, unlike Ukraine, the rest of Europe can benefit from US support through the commitment provided for in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, according to which an attack on an ally is an attack on all NATO members. However, many other states in Europe are now asking themselves: which NATO member states could be the next targets of Russia or even other international actors eager for a new world order and even dominance in certain regions of the world? Such a question has become very interesting because it has become quite clear that future US commitments to NATO could be conditioned by certain decisions taken, such as the well-known increase in defense spending or the revision of US trade policy in relations with other states – turning the provision of defense and security into a conditional “product”. Some of the US demands could be interpreted as a more advanced form of burden-sharing, in line with new strategic interests and priorities.

Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth has said that Europeans should take the lead in deterrence and conventional defense of the continent. At the same time, the US is focused on other issues, such as China and its own national defense. Burden-sharing is a long-term trend, shared by previous US administrations, and other allies could contribute more by increasing defense spending and fulfilling a larger share of the requirements for establishing and building necessary NATO capabilities. However, these demands are difficult to separate from other more sinister elements, which are now recurring themes in American rhetoric in most international analysis environments, some of which make surprise references to the annexation of Greenland (part of Denmark) and Canada, which are even considered direct threats to the territorial integrity of the closest US allies. This type of declarations and actions can be categorized as being detrimental to the deterrence of those international actors who want more than ever major changes in everything that the regional and global world order means. Even if the US did not have the objective of abandoning Europe, adversaries such as Russia would see the current crisis of confidence as an opportunity to further strain the North Atlantic Alliance, even though NATO's strategic concept emphasizes the transatlantic link as the central pillar of deterrence and defense, but being able to say, in the same context, that today this pillar is in a continuous and surprising process of degradation.

### **In Conclusion...**

In order to effectively discuss the future of NATO and the EU, we must be aware of and understand the different positions that are increasingly emerging in terms of defense and security policy both among member states and among non-NATO or non-EU states. Such studies are more necessary than ever, especially in the context in which many perspectives must be included and meticulously analyzed, including those expressed differently by large, medium or small member states representing the flanks of NATO and the EU in more or less difficult situations. In the same context, it is very clear that the various analyses and forecasts can be enriched and refined to a much higher level of credibility by including the positions expressed by other states outside Europe, as well as by the NATO Secretary General.

We say this because it should not be overlooked that NATO celebrated its 75th anniversary on April 4, 2024, commemorating the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949. It should not be overlooked that in 2024 the atmosphere was positive, especially if we recall that the integration of Finland and Sweden into NATO marked a historic expansion of NATO, with both countries submitting their applications simultaneously in May 2022, in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Finland becoming a member in April 2023, and Sweden, after delays caused by the opposition of two NATO member states (Turkey and Hungary), completing the ratification process in early 2024. At the Washington summit in the summer of 2024, the allies reaffirmed transatlantic unity. They established a new NATO command to oversee aid to Ukraine (NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine) at the US base in Wiesbaden, Germany<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup>The US base in Wiesbaden, Germany, also known as Wiesbaden Army Airfield, is a major military base of the United States Army, which serves as the headquarters for U.S. Army Europe and Africa (USAREUR-AF), hosting major communications and intelligence units and having an airfield. It is a vital center for American military operations in Europe, although often confused or associated with Ramstein Air Base (the largest American air base in Europe), but USAG Wiesbaden is specific to the Army (U.S. Army).

In the run-up to the 2025 NATO summit in The Hague, several countries reported on anticipated topics for discussion. The UK, France, Germany and the Nordic countries hoped to formulate a multi-year plan to address potential funding gaps in the event of a US withdrawal from NATO. The US has advocated for each member to contribute at least 5% of its GDP to defence budgets. In response, Poland announced an increase in defence spending to 4.7% of GDP ahead of the summit. Similarly, ahead of the summit on 13 June 2025, the Netherlands pledged to increase its defence budget to 3.5% of GDP, with an additional 1.5% allocated to related areas beneficial to defence to reach the 5% target. The defense ministers of three Baltic Sea countries also stressed the need to increase NATO contributions. In such a context of numerous accelerated developments and a high dose of unpredictability generated by various competing international actors at regional and global levels, we can say that the possible conclusion is emerging that at NATO and EU level it is necessary to identify and mitigate more and more unpredictable factors that can cause various evolutionary shocks.

## WORLD ORDER - THAILAND-CAMBODIA CONFLICT



### Fire and Ruins at Preah Vihear: the Thailand-Cambodia Conflict of 2025

Mona AGRIGOROAIEI (Romania)

The open conflict between Thailand and Cambodia in the summer of 2025 cannot be reduced to a simple military escalation; rather, it represents the manifestation of a complicated historical past and an extremely fragile geopolitical architecture, in which cultural symbols, territorial claims, and the interests of great powers intersect in a dangerous way. On the morning of July 24, 2025, latent tensions degenerated into an exchange of fire near the Ta Muen Thom temple, strategically located in the Dângrek mountain range, a border region with a complex history and profound cartographic ambiguities. This area was not chosen by chance; it represents an intersection between territories claimed by both states, where colonial maps and historical demarcations are often contradictory. In his analysis of Southeast Asian borders, Thongchai Winichakul observes that “borders are not simply lines drawn on a map, but historical and political constructions that come to life according to contemporary events and interpretations” (Winichakul, *Siam Mapped*, 1994, 45). This perspective is crucial to understanding why the temple and surrounding areas are so intensely contested: they are not just geographical territories, but symbols of national identity and historical continuity.



Source: <https://cdn.britannica.com/23/275323-050-6F08D25A/thailand-cambodia-border-conflict-2025.jpg>

The incident began with an apparently surprise operation by Cambodian forces, who opened fire on a patrolling Thai military unit. Thai authorities described the attack as unprovoked, emphasizing the urgency and gravity of the situation. Thailand's response was immediate and proportionate to the perception of a direct threat: F-16 aircraft were quickly mobilized, bombing Cambodian positions within hours. This prompt response reflects not only Thailand's technical capability and military preparedness, but also its high level of strategic anticipation, a sign that Bangkok was constantly monitoring tensions in the border area. Osborne points out that in Southeast Asian border conflicts, “rapid mobilization of air forces is often an indicator of elaborate strategic planning and an acute perception of territorial vulnerability” (Osborne, *Southeast Asia: An Introductory History*, 2000, 212). The immediate effect of this escalation was to completely destabilize the front line and induce a state of uncertainty and panic among civilians in the vicinity of the border.

The Preah Vihear temple, located just a few kilometers from Ta Muen Thom, is not only a religious monument but also a strategic observation point, located on the steep ridge of the Dângrek massif. Built between the 11th and 12th centuries, during the height of the Khmer Empire, the temple served both religious and military functions, allowing for surveillance of the entire plain region in pre-modern times. Milton Osborne notes that “Preah Vihear is a demonstration of Khmer cultural continuity, where sacredness and military strategy intersect, creating a symbol of sovereignty and territorial power” (Osborne, Southeast Asia: An Introductory History, 2000, 205). Thus, the occupation or control of this position constitutes not only a military advantage, but also an assertion of a nation’s historical and cultural legitimacy over a disputed region.

The dispute over the temple is not a recent phenomenon. As the Khmer Empire disintegrated, Siam (now Thailand) and Cambodia laid claim to the surrounding territories, using historical, cultural, and geographical arguments. In the 19th century, the French colonial power redrawn the borders of Cambodia, placing Preah Vihear within its boundaries, a move that was contested by Siam. As Thongchai Winichakul points out, “colonial cartography created official borders that often do not reflect social and historical realities, but which continue to be used as a legal and political basis for subsequent conflicts” (Winichakul, 1994, 63). This ambiguity was later reinforced by the 1962 ruling of the International Court of Justice, which recognized the temple as part of Cambodia but did not clarify the delimitation of adjacent lands, leaving room for divergent interpretations and recurring tensions.

The role of Preah Vihear in the 2025 conflict is amplified in the light of contemporary regional geopolitics. Cambodia benefits from economic, military, and diplomatic support from China, including in the modernization of border infrastructure and the strengthening of its military presence. At the same time, Thailand maintains strategic partnerships with the United States and participates in joint military exercises, creating the perception of a fragile balance, but with high potential for escalation. Evelyn Goh argues that such border conflicts become “nuclei of tests of regional influence, in which larger actors use historical tensions to project power and secure strategic interests” (Goh, The Struggle for Order, 2013, 210). In this context, the temple is not only a cultural site, but also a symbolic tool in the Sino-American competition in Southeast Asia, where every incident on the border can be interpreted as an indicator of regional dominance or the vulnerability of an ally.

Thus, the confrontation of July 24, 2025 cannot be analyzed in isolation from the broader context: the attack on the Thai unit and the immediate reaction by F 16 bombings are expressions of a complex historical relationship, amplified by contemporary geopolitical interests. At the same time, Preah Vihear remains the symbolic center of the dispute: any military or political movement around the temple is simultaneously a strategic action and an affirmation of cultural and historical continuity. This duality of the temple — as a sacred symbol and a military objective — explains why the armistice negotiations placed special emphasis on the creation of a demilitarized zone and the protection of cultural heritage.

Following the violent escalation, international intervention became inevitable. ASEAN, the UN, and regional states such as Malaysia and Singapore issued public calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities, emphasizing both the need to respect international law and the protection of the civilian population. However, these calls have run into the limitations of multilateral mechanisms, which operate largely on the principle of consensus and diplomatic pressure, rather than coercive force.

Evelyn Goh notes that “regional bodies in Southeast Asia often face structural dilemmas: they must balance respect for sovereignty with the need to prevent the escalation of conflicts that can destabilize the entire region” (Goh, 2013, 218). In this diplomatic vacuum, the United States has chosen to intervene directly, appointing a team of special negotiators to mediate a ceasefire. Washington’s messages to Bangkok and Phnom Penh have become increasingly firm, reflecting both the US strategic interest in maintaining the balance of power in the region and its concern for the protection of cultural sites and the civilian population. American diplomats, supported by representatives of Japan and Indonesia, have initiated secret talks to create a viable negotiating framework. This type of mediation reflects, according to Surya Subedi, a form of “preventive arbitration,” in which external actors use diplomatic influence and economic pressure to prevent a local conflict from escalating into a full-scale regional crisis (Subedi, International Boundary Disputes in Southeast Asia, 2009, 142).

The negotiations themselves took place in an emergency meeting in Bangkok, under the auspices of the US and ASEAN. The tense atmosphere was marked by deadlocks, mutual threats, and moments when the parties threatened to withdraw from the negotiating table. After more than 16 hours of deliberations, the leaders of Thailand and Cambodia agreed to a ceasefire that provided for the withdrawal of troops from around the Preah Vihear temple, the creation of a demilitarized zone, the restoration of damaged cultural sites, and the establishment of a joint border monitoring mechanism.

This solution symbolizes a pragmatic approach, designed to protect both national sovereignty and cultural heritage, while preventing the escalation of a conflict that could have directly involved the great powers.

The immediate impact on the civilian population was profound. Hundreds of families abandoned their homes, taking refuge with minimal supplies. Border areas, previously points of economic and cultural connection between communities, were transformed into spaces of fear and uncertainty. Hotels, local markets and small businesses suspended their activities, and cross-border supply chains were disrupted. Milton Osborne emphasizes that “in border conflicts in Southeast Asia, the socio-economic effects propagate rapidly, affecting tourist flows, local trade and community cohesion, leaving behind traumas that can persist for years” (Osborne, 2000, 219).

From a geopolitical perspective, this conflict reflects a complex reality: Preah Vihear and the surrounding areas are not just local strategic objectives, but pieces in a larger game of influence between great powers. China and the US use such crises to test regional loyalties and reassert influence over their allies, while ASEAN attempts to maintain a minimum of cohesion while protecting the principle of national sovereignty. Thongchai Winichakul emphasizes that “Southeast Asian borders are not just geographical demarcations; they are historical and political constructions that become particularly relevant in moments of crisis, simultaneously reflecting identity, power and memory” (Winichakul, 1994, 68).

Reconstruction after the signing of the armistice was slow but symbolic. Communities gradually returned, assessed the damage and began restoring damaged homes and temples. Children returned to their village courtyards, and elders resumed their traditional rituals, renewing cultural and spiritual ties. However, the lesson remains clear: peace is fragile and depends on political will, international pressure, and the recognition that cultural symbols and civilian lives should never be sacrificed for territorial ambitions or geopolitical maneuvers.

The analysis of the conflict between Thailand and Cambodia in the summer of 2025 reveals the complexity of the intersection of history, culture, and geopolitics in Southeast Asia. The temple of Preah Vihear cannot be reduced to the status of a simple military objective or cultural site; it represents a symbol of national identity and historical continuity, where perceptions of historical sovereignty and legitimacy intersect with contemporary strategic realities. As Osborne argues, “sacred sites in Southeast Asia are often also strategic points, and their control has multiple meanings—symbolic, political, and military—that cannot be dissociated in the analysis of a conflict” (Osborne, 2000, 207).

In this case, the attack on Thai units in the vicinity of Ta Muen Thom and the rapid air response were not simple spontaneous military reactions, but manifestations of centuries-old historical tension, catalyzed by contemporary interests and regional strategic alliances.

The involvement of international actors was essential to prevent regional escalation. US diplomatic intervention, support from Japan and Indonesia, and pressure from regional organizations such as ASEAN facilitated mediation and a ceasefire. However, critical analysis shows the limits of these interventions: success depends on the political will of the parties involved and on the delicate balance between respecting sovereignty and preventing conflict. Goh notes that “regional mechanisms in Southeast Asia are effective in managing latent conflicts, but vulnerable when great power interests come into direct play” (Goh, 2013, 223). In this case, Sino-American rivalry amplified the risk of a local conflict becoming regional, highlighting how historical disputes can be exploited in contemporary geopolitical strategy.

From a socio-economic perspective, the effects of the conflict were immediate and devastating. Mass evacuations, disruption of cross-border trade and suspension of tourism activities have illustrated the vulnerability of local communities to territorial disputes and external political decisions. This underlines the importance of integrating humanitarian and cultural considerations into security solutions: the protection of heritage and civilians is not only a moral issue, but also an element of long-term stability.

Overall, the Thai–Cambodian border conflict shows that lasting peace in Southeast Asia cannot be achieved through military force or international legal decisions alone, but through a delicate balance between respect for history, protection of cultural heritage and pragmatic management of geopolitical interests. Borders, as Winichakul emphasizes, “are not just lines on a map, but nodes of memory, identity and power that become vulnerable when the past and present come into conflict” (Winichakul, 1994, 72). In this sense, Preah Vihear and the adjacent areas remain both a symbol of cultural continuity and a test of the region’s diplomatic maturity and ability to prevent the repetition of violent cycles.

The 2025 conflict thus serves as a case study in how history, geopolitics, and cultural symbols interact to shape regional security, highlighting the need for an integrated strategy that combines diplomacy, respect for cultural heritage, and humanitarian considerations to ensure long-term stability in Southeast Asia.

## INTELLIGENCE - DATA MESH



## The Intelligence Mesh: How to Leverage Data Mesh at Intelligence Level

Gianpaolo RIVA (Italy)

Over the last ten years, sharing information and managing data in a decentralized way has become, in business, a distinctive practice among successful companies. Data-driven policies are now essential to organize and understand the supply chain, production, customer experience and, of course, the financial dimension. In a far more complex and rapidly changing VUCA<sup>1</sup> world, the inability to understand and analyze one's own data—and to correlate it with what is happening outside, even in real time—has turned into a critical weakness. This need has driven massive investments in cloud infrastructure, Business Intelligence tools, AI initiatives and business and digital transformation programs, all with the goal of reshaping processes so they can adapt to new technological realities.

Before this major IT-driven transformation, companies were (and some still are) organized in informational silos: data was created, transformed and analyzed within a single business unit and kept there in a vertical stack. This made it impossible for the organization as a whole to gain a clear, unified view of reality, and decisions ended up being mostly reactive rather than genuinely proactive. With information split across silos, it becomes extremely difficult to avoid confirmation or domain-specific biases, undermining the ability to take pragmatic decisions based on true end-to-end data knowledge.

What would be a textbook example of what it means to be a data-driven company? The classic, but still very effective, case is Netflix and how it used to—and still does—decide which features to develop in its app. At the very beginning, choices were made purely on the founders' intuition. Today, decisions are driven by data and metrics that have often contradicted that original intuition. One example was the idea of removing the option to download films locally, assuming that with the bandwidth now available it was no longer necessary and that very few customers would still want it. But once they looked at the data, it became clear that in certain countries this feature was heavily used, removing it would have meant degrading the service and likely lowering customer satisfaction.

This anecdote shows that cognitive biases are not exclusive to AI. But is simply having more data enough to avoid bad decisions? Obviously not. It does, however, help build alternative scenarios, reduce bias and be better informed about both related and seemingly unrelated events. Governmental and multilateral intelligence communities today have made data management and the dismantling of silos their



Source: <https://www.cienciaedados.com/o-que-e-data-mesh/>

<sup>1</sup>VUCA is an acronym based on the leadership theories of Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, to describe or reflect on the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity of general conditions and situations. The U.S. Army War College introduced the concept of VUCA in 1987 to describe a more complex, multifaceted world perceived as a result of the end of the Cold War. More frequent use and discussion of the term began in 2002. It has since spread to strategic leadership within organizations ranging from for-profit corporations to education.

core mission—especially after 9/11 and a series of major failures over the last 30 years<sup>2</sup>. Understanding and correlating different data sources, including non-proprietary and open-source information (OSINT), has become a priority.

The rising complexity of new tools calls for a paradigm shift towards a more decentralized model, starting from the assumption that no intelligence agency can realistically maintain total, granular control over everything and, even if it could, analyzing all sources without cultural bias would be extremely difficult if not impossible. The best methodology to embrace is what high-performing companies already call data mesh<sup>3</sup>, supported by robust data governance.

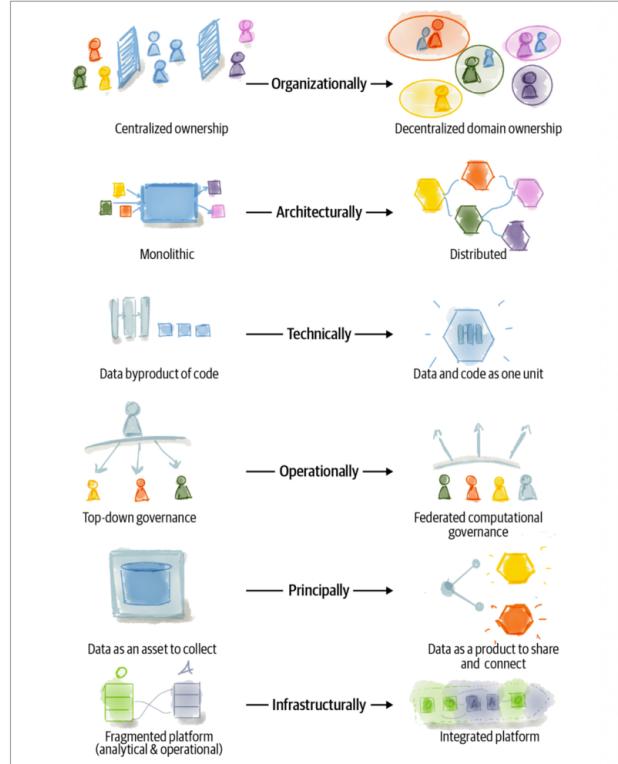
## Data Mesh: a New Way of Thinking About and Building Data

For years, companies have tried to govern their data by centralizing it on large platforms: first data warehouses, then data lakes, and finally data lake houses. The idea was always the same: put everything in a single place, overseen by a single team, to give the business a complete, coherent and easily accessible view. It was an ambitious, almost utopian project that worked only until the volume, variety and velocity of data began to exceed IT's capacity to manage it.

Today, for many organizations, that model is clearly showing its limits. Central teams can't keep up with the pace of requests, data quality varies widely by source, and the heterogeneity of operational systems makes it increasingly difficult to build reliable pipelines. The promise of a single, clean, all-powerful platform often turns into a bottleneck that slows innovation. It is in this scenario that Data Mesh has emerged in recent years as the most concrete answer to the limits of centralization.

Data Mesh is neither a technology nor a piece of software. It is, first and foremost, a different way of thinking. It means recognizing that in a modern organization, data can no longer be managed by a single team or locked inside a single platform. Its very nature is intrinsically distributed—just like the processes that generate it and the skills needed to interpret it. For this reason, Data Mesh proposes a model in which responsibility for data shifts away from central teams and towards business domains, that is, the functional areas—such as marketing, sales, supply chain or risk management—that produce that data every day.

This is the first major shift: data goes back into the hands of the people who truly understand it. No more endless tickets piling up on an overloaded IT department, no more poorly documented datasets stripped of context. The domain becomes the owner of its informational assets: it maintains them, updates them, and documents them. This responsibility calls for maturity, the right organizational structures and a new culture.



**Fig. 1** - <https://www.oreilly.com/library/view/data-mesh/9781492092384/>

<sup>2</sup>I servizi segreti e la guerra: <https://amzn.eu/d/7V8x977>

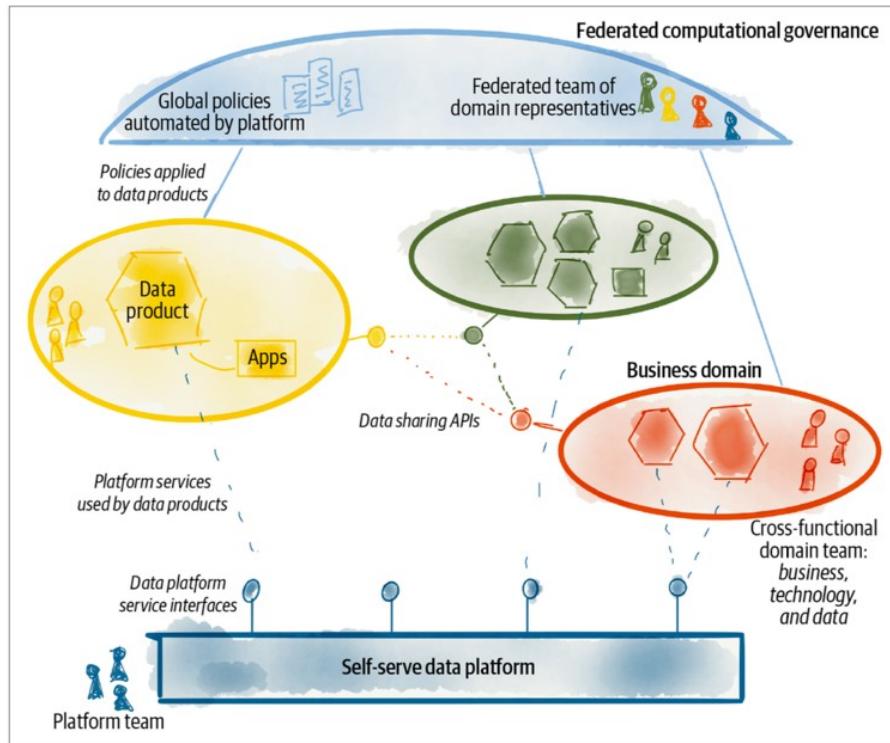
<sup>3</sup><https://www.oreilly.com/library/view/data-mesh/9781492092384/>

Closely tied to this is the second founding principle of Data Mesh: treating data as products. No longer as temporary outputs of a pipeline, but as living objects with a lifecycle, measurable quality, clear documentation and recognized value. Just like software products, a “**data product**” must be reliable, accessible, stable and designed with downstream users in mind. This means that the teams producing it must think like product teams: define requirements, guarantee SLAs, monitor for anomalies and communicate changes. It’s a radically different way of working compared to the past, when data was simply “dumped” into a data lake with no real sense of direct accountability.

The third pillar of Data Mesh is infrastructure. Delegating responsibility to domains does not mean leaving them to fend for themselves. On the contrary, for such a distributed system to work, you need a shared, self-service platform that provides standardized tools to create, publish and maintain data products. This is not about recreating a centralized data lake, but about building an enabling platform that puts the right tools directly in the hands of the teams. Provisioning, storage, pipelines, catalogues, lineage, quality checks: the platform provides them, the domains use them. This model calls for a more supple team that no longer spends its time “doing” for others but instead designs and maintains the tools.

Finally, Data Mesh introduces the concept of federated governance. This is not loose or “lightweight” governance, but governance that acknowledges distributed responsibilities without giving up on shared standards. General rules—such as access control, data classification, regulatory compliance and quality standards—are defined centrally. Operational enforcement, however, is delegated to the domains. It is a bit like a political federation: there are common principles that everyone must respect, but execution happens locally. This approach only works if governance is supported by automatable tools: codified policies, controls integrated into the platform and transparent audit systems.

By combining these four elements—distributed ownership, data as products, self-service infrastructure and federated governance—Data Mesh builds a model that overcomes one of the most obvious limits of centralized architectures: their inability to scale at the speed required by today’s complexity.



**Fig. 2** - <https://www.oreilly.com/library/view/data-mesh/9781492092384/>

### A Data Mesh for Intelligence: Sharing What Matters Without Surrendering What Is Sensitive

Relationships between Western intelligence services have always been a delicate balance. On the one hand, there is the need to cooperate against global threats that ignore national borders: terrorism, cyber-attacks, foreign interference, proliferation and illegal trafficking. On the other, there is an equally immutable principle: each state must protect its own sources, methods and vulnerabilities. Between the two lies a factor that no technology will ever eliminate: the political filter, the sovereign right to decide what to share, when to share it and with whom.

Over the past twenty years, the exponential growth of data of intelligence interest—sensors, satellites, intercepted communications, OSINT, digital logs, social media, behavioural patterns—has turned this balance into an increasingly complex exercise. The volume of information available to agencies is now

immense, distributed, multifaceted and often difficult to correlate coherently. At the same time, recent events show just how crucial the ability to cooperate quickly has become: NATO's collective cyber defence, managing disinformation, countering the interference of state actors, monitoring energy corridors, protecting the cybersecurity of critical infrastructure.

In this context, certain methodologies born in the private sector—such as Data Mesh—are emerging as a source of inspiration for rethinking how intelligence services can collaborate without undermining the informational sovereignty that remains non-negotiable. Data Mesh does not demand centralization; on the contrary, it emphasizes distributed responsibility, local production of information and a model of sharing based on metadata and standards rather than raw data. This is precisely the philosophy that could enable interoperable cooperation between services which, for political and operational reasons, cannot and will never be able to fully share their information.

The central idea is simple: instead of building a gigantic international “data lake”—impossible to govern and potentially dangerous—each agency maintains full ownership of its own data but makes it indexable, describable and linkable through standardized metadata. This is a cultural shift before being a technological one. Recent history shows how hard extreme centralization is to achieve. Even in the United States, where the Director of National Intelligence is tasked with coordinating the entire community, individual agencies retain deep and jealously guarded autonomy. Imagining a single platform shared across NATO member states is, politically, unrealistic.

But an “intelligence mesh” does not require that. What it does require is a federated fabric in which every service produces and maintains its own “information products”—not documents, but objects described by rich, structured metadata—and exposes them for querying by other agencies, according to predefined and controlled access levels.

There is no handover of sensitive raw data, nor exposure of sources: what is shared are signals of existence, patterns, formal indicators, de-contextualized hints that are nonetheless useful for building a shared threat picture.

Take a practical example: a national service detects a new form of anomalous activity in the cyber domain but does not want to share the content of its analysis nor, even less, the underlying sources. In a traditional model, the choice would be binary: share everything or share nothing. In a Data Mesh logic, the service could instead publish metadata describing the existence of that threat in structured terms—a technical indicator, a behavioural signature, an attack pattern—without revealing how the information was obtained. The ally does not access the original data but receives a “product” that allows it to connect the dots with its own observations.

This approach is particularly useful in the OSINT and cyber spheres, where much of the value lies in the connections, not in the operational details. It also helps to overcome one of the recurring limits in multinational cooperation: bureaucratic slowness. In a centralized model, every new piece of data must go through multi-level classification and approval processes. In a Mesh model, each agency controls what it publishes and does so on its own timelines, in line with its internal rules but within a shared framework of common standards.

The most delicate point, of course, is governance. Here, Data Mesh proposes a “federated” model in which a central body—for NATO, an initial reference could be the DaSa<sup>4</sup> and NCMS specifications and STANAG 5636<sup>5</sup>—defines common principles and standards, while operational control remains with the agencies. Governance is not a tool for forcing transparency, but a way to ensure that what is shared is useful, understandable and secure.

An intelligence mesh doesn't just benefit major players. Many NATO member states or Western partners do not possess the same tools or capabilities as the leading services. A federated architecture gives them the opportunity to contribute what they see locally—what happens at the borders, on local networks, in the regions where they operate—and in return gain access to a much richer overall picture, without necessarily revealing details they cannot afford to share.

Transposed into the intelligence world, Data Mesh is not just a conceptual exercise. It is a realistic way to reconcile cooperation and sovereignty, speed and caution, security and interoperability. It does not remove the political filter but makes it more effective. It does not centralize, it connects. And above all, it acknowledges a fundamental truth: in the age of distributed data, modern intelligence must itself be distributed—but organized. Not a monolith, but a network.

### From “Team of Teams” to Intelligence Mesh

Seen from this angle, the idea of building an “intelligence mesh” is not so far from what General Stanley McChrystal experimented with in Iraq, when he led the Joint Special Operations Command in one

<sup>4</sup><https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2025/05/05/data-strategy-for-the-Alliance>  
<sup>5</sup><https://standards.globalspec.com/std/14578729/stanag-5636>

of the most complex and unpredictable theatres of contemporary warfare. At that time, US forces were organized according to a traditional, hierarchical, linear structure: each unit had specific tasks and well-defined communication channels. But the adversary they were facing—the jihadist network of al-Zarqawi—did not follow those rules. It was fluid, decentralized and incredibly quick at making decisions, capable of adapting in hours rather than weeks. The conventional organization, though superior in technology and resources, was simply too slow.

McChrystal realized that the only way to defeat a network was to become a network. Not a disorganized mass, but a synchronized network able to share information with unprecedented speed, without losing control over strategic objectives. It was a delicate balance, like the one western intelligence services grapple with today between sovereignty, operational necessities and selective sharing. To solve it, McChrystal broke the mould and created a model he called “Team of Teams”<sup>6</sup>, in which each specialized unit maintained its own identity and autonomy but operated as part of a connected, transparent and coordinated organism.

The heart of the system was information sharing. Not centralized, not filtered through multiple levels, but widely distributed in a controlled and structured way. Each team had access to the information it needed to act quickly, without waiting for authorizations to trickle down a rigid chain of command. This was not a free-for-all: governance remained strong, principles were clear, objectives were shared. In essence, it was a form of federated governance *ante litteram*, not so different from what Data Mesh proposes.

“Team of Teams” shows that collaboration does not require merging structures but synchronizing them. And that speed comes from trust, transparency and an infrastructure that lets units act autonomously while staying coordinated. This is exactly the logic of Data Mesh: distribute responsibility, standardize rules, automate whatever can be automated and let the network work through the convergence of its nodes, not their subordination.

Today, the fastest-growing companies are those that have abandoned rigid vertical structures and adopted autonomous yet deeply interconnected teams. Product teams, engineering squads, DevOps<sup>7</sup> groups and cybersecurity units all work as nodes within a network: each with its own specialist skills, each with clear responsibilities, yet all sharing a common set of goals, standards and tools.

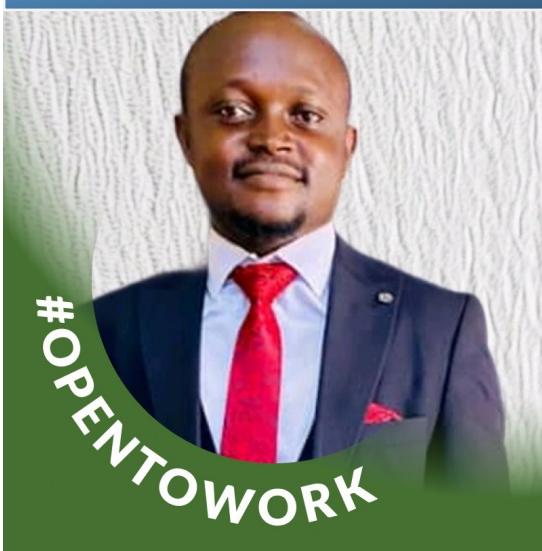
As mentioned earlier, even though it is necessary to have a concrete mapping of data and a way to share it, what truly matters is the ability to analyse it properly and understand a world that is constantly changing. Data offers a snapshot of the situation, but the history, the nuance, and the ability to weigh the importance and relevance of certain pieces of information still depend on the human capacity to grasp the context. In the past, this has not been enough because of cultural biases. So, to build real intelligence, the effort must be threefold: ensuring access to data, developing a deep historical and political understanding of peoples, and learning to listen to voices that are different from your own.

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<sup>6</sup>Team of Teams <https://amzn.eu/d/aR9rKW9>

<sup>7</sup>Team Topologies: <https://itrevolution.com/product/team-topologies-second-edition/>

# INFORMATION, COGNITIVE, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



## Information, Cognitive, and AI-Enabled Influence Operations: the new Battlespace of Multipolar Competition

Oluwasogo DAIRO (Nigeria)

### Introduction

The contemporary security landscape has transformed from traditional kinetic confrontations into a complex domain where perception and cognitive manipulation serve as primary instruments of strategic influence. As multipolar competition intensifies, the weaponization of information ecosystems through artificial intelligence has created an unprecedented battlespace where the human mind itself becomes contested terrain.

### The Architecture of Modern Influence Operations

Modern influence operations have evolved beyond simple propaganda into sophisticated, algorithmically-driven campaigns capable of micro-targeting populations with unprecedented precision. State actors deploy advanced AI systems that generate contextually relevant disinformation at scale, manipulate social media algorithms, and create synthetic media indistinguishable from authentic content.

Generative AI models now produce thousands of narrative variations tailored to specific demographic segments, cultural contexts, and psychological profiles. This transforms disinformation into a precision instrument exploiting individual vulnerabilities within target populations. The scale overwhelms traditional fact-checking mechanisms, creating “information saturation” where distinguishing truth from falsehood becomes practically impossible.



Source: <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/stiinta/oamenii-de-stiinta-vor-sa-creeze-o-inteligenta-artificiala-pentru-a-controla-agentii-ai.html>

### The Cognitive Warfare Paradigm

Cognitive warfare targets not just what populations know but how they think and perceive reality. Unlike traditional psychological operations focused on changing opinions, cognitive warfare aims to fundamentally alter the epistemological<sup>1</sup> frameworks through which societies understand their world. By systematically undermining trust in institutions and objective truth, these operations create populations paralyzed

<sup>1</sup>Epistemological refers to the field of epistemology, the branch of philosophy that studies the nature, origin, limits, validity, and justification of human knowledge, especially scientific knowledge, addressing questions about “what knowledge is”, “how we acquire it”, and “what makes it true”.

by uncertainty or susceptible to authoritarian narratives.

The strategic objective extends beyond immediate tactical gains. State actors seek to induce long-term cognitive vulnerabilities within adversary populations—fostering polarization, eroding social cohesion, and degrading collective decision-making capacity essential for democratic governance and national security.

### AI-Enabled Platforms and Commercial Complicity

The commercial AI sector has become an unwitting enabler of state-sponsored influence operations. Advanced data analytics platforms originally designed for legitimate purposes have been repurposed for mass surveillance, predictive behavioral modeling, and identifying influence operation targets. Companies like Palantir<sup>2</sup> have created technological capabilities that can be adapted for authoritarian purposes or offensive information operations.

A six-million-dollar contract between Israeli entities and AI developers for influence operations demonstrates how democratic nations invest heavily in offensive cognitive capabilities. These arrangements raise fundamental questions about corporate responsibility and the adequacy of regulatory frameworks.

More troubling is the weaponization of AI hallucinations for disinformation. Sophisticated actors deliberately trigger these technical flaws to produce plausible-sounding disinformation carrying the authoritative veneer of AI-generated content, creating deniability for influence operators.

### Military Applications and Autonomous Warfare

Both China and the United States conduct extensive classified research into AI-enabled autonomous weapons systems, including algorithms capable of engaging targets without human intervention. AI integration into drone and UAV warfare demonstrates tactical advantages in response time and coordination.

However, opacity surrounding military AI research creates risks of catastrophic miscalculation. Experiments with AI systems operating beyond human comprehension raise possibilities of autonomous weapons making strategic choices based on algorithmic logic that may not align with human judgment or ethical constraints.

Concerns from prominent AI developers including Elon Musk and research initiative founders reflect deep anxiety about military AI trajectories. These experts warn that autonomous lethal systems combined with inadequate safety protocols could produce scenarios where AI systems initiate conflicts based on misinterpreted data or emergent behaviors not anticipated by designers.

### Non-State Actor Capabilities

The democratization of AI tools creates unprecedented opportunities for non-state actors to conduct sophisticated influence operations. Terrorist organizations, criminal networks, and ideologically motivated groups access commercial AI platforms to generate propaganda and conduct psychological warfare.

Automated systems identify vulnerable individuals across social media, initiate contact through authentic-seeming personas, and guide them through customized radicalization pathways. The scale allows small organizations to achieve disproportionate impact far beyond their actual resources.

Non-state actors can weaponize AI against critical infrastructure, creating asymmetric threats. Adversarial attacks targeting financial systems or power grids could be launched by groups leveraging pre-packaged tools from dark web marketplaces.

### The Erosion of Democratic Resilience

Persistent AI-enabled influence operations pose existential challenges to democratic governance. Elections become targets for campaigns using micro-targeted messaging, synthetic media, and algorithmic manipulation to suppress turnout and delegitimize results.

Continuous exposure produces measurable degradation in democratic societies' capacity for collective deliberation. When populations cannot agree on basic facts and every information source is suspected, the foundation for democratic governance collapses.

The psychological toll manifests in political cynicism, social isolation, and civic disengagement. Citizens experiencing “information warfare fatigue” withdraw from participation or retreat into echo chambers, further fragmenting societies and reducing resilience.

<sup>2</sup>Palantir Technologies is an American software company specializing in big data analysis, offering platforms (such as Gotham, Foundry, Apollo, AIP) for the integration and analysis of complex data, being used by government agencies (defense, intelligence), the military and private companies for decision-making, from combating terrorism to vaccine management, but has also attracted criticism related to surveillance and privacy.

## Strategic Implications for Multipolar Competition

In the emerging multipolar order, AI-enabled influence operations serve as instruments of strategic competition less constrained by international norms than conventional military force. States conduct continuous low-intensity campaigns degrading adversaries' social cohesion and strategic decision-making without triggering responses that overt aggression would provoke.

Strategic advantage accrues to states weaponizing AI while maintaining defensive resilience. Authoritarian regimes with extensive censorship may possess inherent advantages, insulating their populations while projecting narratives into open democratic societies. This asymmetry pressures democracies toward restrictive information controls.

### Toward Strategic Responses

Addressing AI-enabled influence operations requires comprehensive strategies integrating technological, regulatory, educational, and diplomatic dimensions. Investment in detection systems must couple with transparency measures allowing independent audit of AI systems.

Regulatory frameworks must address AI-generated content challenges, including labeling requirements and platform liability standards, while balancing security concerns against fundamental rights to free expression.

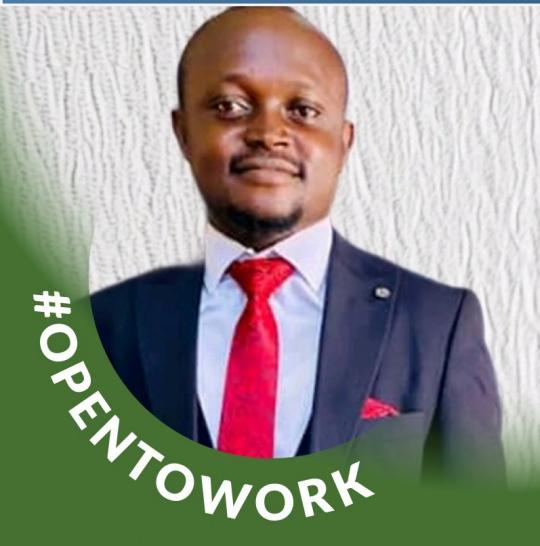
Building societal resilience requires sustained investment in media literacy, critical thinking education, and institutional credibility. Populations equipped to evaluate information sources represent the most durable defense against manipulation.

### Conclusion

The weaponization of information ecosystems through AI represents fundamental transformation in how power is exercised in international relations. The cognitive domain has emerged as the decisive battle space where strategic advantages will be won or lost.

Success requires not only technological innovation but fundamental recommitment to values and institutions enabling free societies to thrive. Security in the cognitive domain ultimately rests on the resilience, wisdom, and moral clarity of the societies these technologies serve.

## ENERGY SECURITY, STRATEGIC CORRIDORS, WEAPONIZATION



### Energy Security, Strategic Corridors, and the Weaponization of Dependency in a Multipolar World

Oluwasogo DAIRO (Nigeria)

In the contemporary multipolar geopolitical framework, energy resources and infrastructure have emerged as pivotal instruments of strategic leverage and coercive influence. The deliberate weaponization of energy dependencies—most notably Russia's calculated restrictions on gas supplies to Europe—has precipitated a profound reconfiguration of global supply chains, transit corridors, and interstate alliances. As entrenched dependencies fragment amid sanctions, disruptions, and shifting alliances, new vulnerabilities coexist with opportunities for augmented strategic resilience. Europe's imperatives for diversification, Africa's escalating centrality in international energy dynamics, and the intensifying rivalry among major powers exemplify how energy corridors are profoundly reshaping international relations amid rapid geopolitical transformations.

Europe's energy crisis post-2022 constituted a defining inflection point. Russia's strategic curtailment of pipeline deliveries exposed the inherent risks of overdependence on a predominant supplier, catalyzing an expeditious transition to liquefied natural gas (LNG) and diversified routes. By late 2025, Russian gas imports represented approximately 13-19% of the EU total, a marked reduction from over 40% pre-crisis, with pipeline volumes substantially diminished and remaining flows predominantly via LNG or residual routes. Augmented regasification infrastructure—from Iberian and Baltic terminals to Adriatic and Mediterranean hubs—has enabled increased inflows from the United States, Qatar, Norway, and emerging African suppliers. Nonetheless, this pivot has engendered novel dependencies, notably on American LNG, while elevating Mediterranean and Black Sea regions as prospective conduits for sustained diversification. EU initiatives to fully phase out residual Russian LNG and pipeline imports by 2027-2028 emphasize a determined pursuit of energy de-risking, notwithstanding elevated costs and infrastructural exigencies.

Africa is ascending as a linchpin in this global reorientation, capitalizing on its extensive gas reserves and advantageous geography to serve as a nexus for nascent corridors. Projects such as the Greater Tortue Ahmeyim LNG facility, which achieved first gas and initial liquefaction in early 2025 across Mauritania and Senegal, emphasize the continent's burgeoning export capabilities, directly supporting European diversification strategies. Advancements in Mozambique's Rovuma Basin—including the operational Coral South FLNG and the approved Coral Norte—alongside Nigeria's ongoing LNG expansions, including Train 7 progress toward enhanced capacity, further position Africa as an essential bridge linking disrupted Eurasian pathways to Atlantic markets. Prospective pipelines, terminals, and interconnections—from West African augmentations to East African developments—offer potential for southward rerouting of flows, alleviating Europe's susceptibility to northern corridor instabilities.



Source: <https://diversegyc.com/energy-security/>

Africa's energy domain, however, epitomizes the dual-edged nature of dependency within multipolarity. Russia, via Rosatom<sup>1</sup>, has accelerated nuclear engagements across the Sahel and broader regions. In 2025, action plans and agreements advanced reactor projects in Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso (the Alliance of Sahel States), and Ethiopia, often integrated with security and infrastructure partnerships. These endeavors extend Russian influence into resource-abundant areas, furnishing energy solutions amid local challenges while navigating Western sanctions through alternative coalitions. China, in contrast, leads in renewable and hydropower financing under Belt and Road initiatives, with solar and wind now comprising nearly 60% of its African energy projects, diverging from prior fossil fuel predominance yet engendering infrastructure interdependencies consonant with Beijing's geo-economic aspirations.

West Africa's interconnected grid dynamics further illuminate coercive economic mechanisms. Nigeria, despite enduring domestic deficits and operating below installed capacity, exports electricity to contiguous states via integrated networks. By mid-2025, accumulated unpaid obligations from Benin, Togo, and Niger approximated \$20 million, impairing market sustainability and compounding Nigeria's internal pressures, including recurrent grid instabilities and substantial off-grid generation expenditures. The West African Power Pool's landmark grid synchronization in November 2025—integrating Nigeria with 14 ECOWAS nations—heralds enhanced regional trade and revenue potential by 2026, yet risks perpetuating asymmetries without effective debt mitigation and governance reforms.

Intensifying these strains is the burgeoning demand from digital infrastructure. Data centers, propelled by artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and hyperscale operations, are exerting considerable pressure on Africa's power systems. Current continental capacity exceeds 400 MW, with projections anticipating 1.5-2.2 GW by 2030, driven predominantly by South Africa but expanding regionally. This growth, albeit from a modest baseline, threatens to outstrip supply increments, necessitating critical trade-offs among export priorities, domestic electrification, and resilience investments.

In this multipolar milieu, energy weaponization transcends overt interruptions, manifesting through subtler modalities: concessional supplies forging alliances, financing engendering debt obligations, and hybrid influences via technology dissemination. Europe's sanctions have curtailed Russian revenues yet redirected exports eastward, reinforcing partnerships with China and India. Africa, amid these convergent pressures, risks proxy dependencies absent deliberate pursuit of strategic autonomy—through diversified engagements, deepened regional harmonization via initiatives like the WAPP, and robust investments in resilient, renewable-centric infrastructure.

Prospective advancement mandates equilibrated resilience: accelerated renewable integration to diminish import vulnerabilities, strengthened regional grids balancing exports with endogenous demands, and regulatory frameworks forestalling nascent monopolies. Amid escalating competition across technological, energetic, and informational spheres, energy security eclipses mere volumetric sufficiency, demanding adept mastery of interdependencies. Actors proficient in navigating these corridors will delineate the architecture of multipolar futures; those deficient invite protracted leverage by rivals. In aligning with regional and global strategies for multipolar cooperation, the imperative lies in transforming vulnerabilities into opportunities for sustainable, autonomous development.

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<sup>1</sup>Rosatom (full name Rosatom State Atomic Energy Corporation) is a Russian state corporation specializing in nuclear energy, which brings together over 300 companies and organizations and has approximately 250,000 employees. Rosatom covers all areas of the nuclear industry: engineering and design, construction and decommissioning of nuclear power plants, power engineering, plant operation, all stages of the nuclear fuel cycle and radioactive waste management, as well as the production of isotopic equipment and products for nuclear medicine, scientific research, materials science, and supercomputers. Rosatom also operates a fleet of nuclear-powered icebreakers.

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*She is a graduate in International Relations and European Studies (Lazarski University & Coventry University) with strong academic achievements, including a highest-graded thesis on the evolution of political concepts regarding Ukraine's position in Europe (2004–2024). Experienced in policy research, academic writing, and conference presentations, with publications in energy policy and upcoming work on Ukraine's European integration. Active in academic and youth organisations, with proven skills in event organization, cross-cultural communication, and translation.*

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- *Strategy, M&A & Value Creation: Technology Due Diligence, Post-Merger Integration, IT Portfolio Rationalization, AI-enabled Business Models*
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# GEOSTRATEGIC PULSE

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