

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

GEOSTRATEGIC PULSE

No. 306 January - February 2026 | www.pulsulgeostrategic.ro

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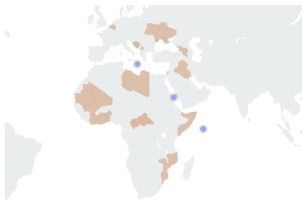
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EDITORIAL



Complex Regional Developments and Increasing Global Unpredictability

PhD. Eng. Stelian TEODORESCU (Romania)

“It is not the strongest species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most adaptable to change.”

Charles Darwin

In 2020, I found necessary and useful, in terms of geopolitics and geostrategy that is, to write an analysis entitled “Multipolarism and Security Developments at Regional Level - Defining Elements for the Future Geopolitical Architecture”. I wanted to emphasize this because even today, the dynamics and predictability of the geopolitical and geostrategic environments are increasingly strongly influenced by the sometimes understandable, but most often incomprehensible transformations of the relations between the main global actors, as well as by the increase in the freedom of action and influence of new regional actors. In such a context, political leaders and their teams of advisors consider developments in the distribution of power and the influence of various state or non-state actors at the regional and global levels and, implicitly, want to determine the most appropriate course of action to achieve main national objectives.



Source: <https://rmaindia.org/study-finds-global-uncertainty-outpacing-traditional-risk-frameworks/>

By carefully analyzing the transformations that have taken place so far or continue to take place at the regional and global levels, we can see that they are taking place with an increasingly accentuated dynamic and are marked by profound changes in the ability of states to create areas of influence. The link between regionalism and security becomes even more evident with the development of the concept of “new regionalism”. This metamorphosis of regionalism, from its almost exclusively economic dimensions to a very complex multi-sectoral movement, which involves political, social, cultural, economic, defense and security issues in the broadest sense, transforms regional organizations, alliances and agreements and induces the perception that they are the most suitable to respond to those challenges that make the defense and security process a regional public good.

It is now clear that regional conflicts are escalating as a major threat to global stability, with data, intelligence and strategic-level analysis indicating the highest levels of violence since World War II. These

conflicts are increasingly internationalized, with many countries involved in activities beyond their borders, causing massive disruptions to global, economic and humanitarian systems. Experts have identified regional state-to-state armed conflicts as the main immediate risk, overtaking previous concerns about the economy and, in the short term, environmental risks.

Various other experts are warning internationally that the world is in a “geopolitical recession”, in which multilateralism tends to fail and power is fragmenting. The period 2026-2027 is expected to be characterized by continued turbulence, with high risks of further escalation. Since the beginning of 2026, the global security landscape has been defined by “converging” threats, in which high-intensity regional conflicts, economic coercion, and technological disruptions intersect to create a volatile and multipolar world.

The main regional flashpoints and their global impact are:

- Middle East (Israel, the Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Iran, Yemen): The current conflict situation in the region, intensified by the war in the Gaza Strip, has spread to Lebanon and involved the outbreak of the current conflict between Iran and Israel, in which the US also takes part, resulting in significant civilian casualties and threats to vital sea routes and, implicitly, to maritime transport, especially in the field of energy resources, which is putting enormous pressure on the economy at a regional and global level. The region was in a state of “suspended” crisis following the 2025 Gaza War, and characterized by “armed peace”, but now moving to a “regional war”, with key points of the current Middle East conflict including the potential economic collapse of Lebanon and the continued regional threat and influence of Iran. After the kinetic escalation of 2025, there is the threat of a potential “Phase 2”, a direct conflict in the Middle East with the massive involvement of other international actors.

- Ukraine-Russia: This ongoing war continues to amplify global instability, impacting energy security, food supplies, and regional security in Eastern Europe, and is being billed as a high-intensity war of attrition, with combined casualties that could reach 2 million by the spring of 2026.

- Sudan and the Sahel: A severe civil war in Sudan has created one of the world’s largest humanitarian crises, with widespread violence and massive population displacement.

- Asia-Pacific (Taiwan, South China Sea, Myanmar): Heightened tensions between China and Taiwan, as well as the ongoing civil war in Myanmar, involving over 1,200 armed groups, pose significant risks of larger, high-impact confrontations. In the same context, it is imperative to remember the US-China rivalry. Rising tensions around Taiwan are a “moderate probability/high impact” threat, with China increasing military, economic and political pressure. In other news, Myanmar’s fragmented civil war has left more than 90,000 dead since 2021, with the military junta holding mock elections in early 2026.

- Ethiopia-Eritrea: A looming crisis in the Horn of Africa, with rearmament and shadow wars, risks a “regional conflagration”.

- NATO-Russia hybrid conflict: Russia is increasingly engaging in disinformation and espionage pressure to create a “gray zone” against NATO members and threaten critical infrastructure across Europe.

- Elsewhere: Conflicts in Haiti, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo are also contributing to a more dangerous and increasingly unpredictable regional and global landscape.

As a result, the decline of international organizations and norms and the increased reliance on force have increased the danger of proliferation of nuclear threats and technological warfare, including cyberattacks based on artificial intelligence.

In conclusion, the year 2026 is considered a turning point in which the “illusion of a predictable global order” has evaporated, replacing it with a “polycrisis” state that combines regional conflict with global economic and technological disruptions.

EUROPE AND NATO



P.O.L.A.N.D - Parallel Orchestration of Linked Atlantic – European National Defense

Emilia STEFANKIEWICZ (Poland)

1. Introduction

Poland occupies a structurally consequential position at the intersection of continental and maritime Europe, a condition that has historically generated both vulnerability and strategic relevance. Halford Mackinder observed that control over Eastern Europe determines access to the Eurasian core (Mackinder, 1904). Nicholas J. Spykman later reformulated the same structural insight from the opposite direction, arguing that the Rimland is the intermediary region between the Heartland and the marginal seas, and that control over this intermediary belt determines the balance of power across Eurasia (Spykman, 1944). Taken together, these insights situate Poland as a corridor exposed to continental pressure while simultaneously embedded in a wider networked system. Poland's contemporary security architecture is therefore best understood as a response to structural duality.



This article first argues that Poland's response to geographical exposure has taken institutional form through dual anchoring in NATO and the European Union. NATO deters coercion by aggregating military capability and alliance commitments. The European Union institutionalizes resilience by scaling infrastructure, industrial capacity, systemic endurance, and economic depth. Taken together, they form complementary layers of the same security architecture. Poland's strategic position therefore lies within its capacity to operate as the state that connects both systems operationally.

Second, it contends that realism defines the necessity of deterrence under conditions of anarchy, emphasizing the primacy of credible capability and alliance anchoring. Liberal institutionalism explains how institutions multiply national capacity by strengthening systemic resilience. These frameworks describe different stages of the same causal chain: deterrence protects sovereignty, while institutions sustain the material foundations that make deterrence credible over time.

focusing on the complementary orientations of President Karol Nawrocki and Prime Minister Donald Tusk. Acting within distinct institutional arenas, Nawrocki reinforces NATO anchoring, alliance credibility, and the primacy of hard security, while Tusk strengthens EU integration, institutional depth, and systemic resilience. If strategically synchronized with good will, and ONLY THEN, these roles could transform political differentiation into cumulative state capacity, enabling Poland to secure both the military and institutional instruments necessary for the defense of its statehood.

Fourth, the article advances one unifying model. Poland's intermediary geography generates two requirements—deterrence and resilience. These are operationalized through NATO (deterrence) and the EU (resilience). Realism and liberal institutionalism provide the explanatory lenses for each requirement, while executive leadership determines whether the two instruments are strategically synchronized or politically frictional.

2. From the Iron Curtain to the Iron Umbrellas

Since the end of the Cold War, Poland's security strategy has been shaped by a dual process of institutional integration aimed at overcoming both historical vulnerability and structural weakness. This duality is the cumulative outcome of Poland's twentieth-century experience under the Iron Curtain and its post-1989 effort to translate historical memory into durable strategic capital. As a result, Poland's contemporary security posture is historically anchored in two distinct institutional orders: the North Atlantic Alliance and the European Union. These anchors emerged sequentially in response to different categories of risk after the end of the Cold War and were never conceived as equivalent substitutes. In this sense, Poland's post-Cold-War trajectory can be read as a transition from life under the Iron Curtain to shelter beneath two distinct but complementary „Iron Umbrellas”: NATO in the domain of hard security and deterrence, and the European Union in the institutional-economic sphere. NATO accession in 1999 was pursued as a security enhancement, while EU accession in 2004 was primarily framed as a project of modernization, economic convergence, and institutional stabilization.

From the beginning, NATO membership was understood in Poland as a hard security guarantee. The legal core of this deterrence function is codified in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which states that „an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all” (North Atlantic Treaty, 1949). For Polish strategic elites, this clause resolved the central post-Cold-War dilemma of deterrence credibility on the eastern flank. This understanding closely corresponds to the realist premise articulated by the political scientist Kenneth Waltz: under anarchy, credibility depends on capabilities states can generate and the arrangements they can sustain (Waltz, 1979), placing collective defense not in opposition to sovereignty but as its functional extension (Waltz, 1979). Analytically, NATO performs a single structural function: it institutionalizes deterrence by transforming collective defense commitments, planning processes, and capability targets into a credible mechanism that raises the expected cost of aggression (North Atlantic Treaty, 1949; Waltz, 1979). Polish historian Andrzej Nowak describes NATO accession as a „return to the West,” but analytically he also points to the core purpose: integration into a concrete security order capable of deterring Russian power (Nowak, 2018). NATO thus functioned as Poland's primary Iron Umbrella in the strictly military sense, replacing vulnerability and strategic ambiguity with alliance-backed deterrence, while preserving the realist priority of survival (Nowak, 2018).

In capability-planning terms, this interpretation produced a lasting hierarchy of priorities. NATO was treated as the primary source of deterrence, operational planning, and alliance credibility, while defense modernization and spending were increasingly aligned with alliance requirements. Even critics of post-1989 transformation within conservative scholarship did not challenge this assessment. The Head of the National Security Bureau, Sławomir Cenckiewicz, notes that despite internal political disputes, „membership in NATO was perceived across the political spectrum as the only realistic guarantee of Poland's sovereignty in a post-imperial security environment” (Cenckiewicz, 2016). In this sense, NATO consistently defined what must be defended and what capabilities must exist. The protective logic of the Alliance operated as a strategic shield, but one that presupposed national investment, credibility, and sustained political commitment, reflecting Waltz's further observation that „the first concern of states is not to maximize power but to maintain their position in the system” (Waltz, 1979). Taken together, these legal and capability-planning elements constitute a single deterrence mechanism (North Atlantic Treaty, 1949; Cenckiewicz, 2016).

European Union accession followed a different strategic logic. Although security considerations were present in the background, the EU was primarily approached as a framework for economic development, regulatory alignment, and infrastructural catch-up. The Union did not present itself as a military alliance but it emphasized cohesion, integration, and prosperity. This distinction is embedded in EU strategic language. As the European Union later acknowledged, „the EU is not a military alliance, but it

must be able to act autonomously when necessary and with partners wherever possible” (European External Action Service, 2016). Analytically, the European Union performs a single structural function: it generates systemic resilience by strengthening infrastructure, economic depth, regulatory coherence, and logistical connectivity necessary to sustain security under conditions of geopolitical stress (European External Action Service, 2016).

In this configuration, the EU evolved into a second Iron Umbrella of institutional, economic, and infrastructural function. In the Polish case, EU membership translated into unprecedented access to structural and cohesion funds that reshaped the material foundations of the state. Large-scale investments in transport, energy, and digital infrastructure enhanced mobility, resilience, and economic depth, attributes increasingly relevant to defense planning (European Commission, 2023). This resilience function reflects the liberal institutionalist argument advanced by Robert Keohane that institutions increase the capacity of states to sustain cooperation and absorb systemic shocks. Liberal institutionalism explains why institutional depth strengthens security; the European Union provides the operational framework through which this resilience is materially generated. (Keohane, 1984).

Infrastructure investment constitutes one material component of this resilience function, enhancing mobility, economic depth, and systemic endurance under conditions of geopolitical stress. As Paweł Markiewicz of the Polish Institute of International Affairs underlined, Poland’s integration into European economic structures created „a material and institutional environment that indirectly strengthens security by increasing the state’s capacity to absorb shocks and support allied operations” (Markiewicz, 2018). This dynamic reflects the broader liberal-institutionalist concept of „complex interdependence,” in which, as Keohane and Joseph Nye argue, „states are connected through multiple channels and military force is not always the most effective instrument of power” (Keohane & Nye, 2012).

This divergence produced an asymmetrical but complementary anchoring. NATO functioned as Poland’s hard-security framework, while the EU evolved into a secondary yet increasingly consequential enabler of defense-relevant capacity. The sociologist and political theorist Zdzisław Krasnodębski captures this distinction succinctly, arguing that „for states on the eastern flank, European integration was never a replacement for security guarantees, but rather an instrument that could support them indirectly” (Krasnodębski, 2009). The EU did not replace NATO but it gradually reduced the economic and infrastructural costs of fulfilling alliance obligations (Krasnodębski, 2009). Taken together, these two trajectories constitute Poland’s accumulated strategic capital. Decades of alliance participation, credibility-building, and infrastructural investment positioned Poland simultaneously as a frontline NATO state and a major beneficiary of European integration. Crucially, this capital is not static. Its strategic value depends on the ability to convert inherited institutional alignments into present-day capabilities under changing geopolitical conditions (Nowak, 2018; Krasnodębski, 2009). Today, the institutional story intersects with domestic political differentiation. The roots of persistent misreading lie in the divergent post-1989 diagnoses that shaped Poland’s two major political camps: Law and Justice and the Civic Coalition. The parties emerged from different assessments of what most threatened the durability of the Polish state after the transformation. In analytical terms, these diagnoses correspond closely to a classic divide in international relations theory between realism and liberal institutionalism (Waltz, 1979; Keohane, 1984).

For the environment from which Law and Justice emerged, the central problem of the Third Republic was state fragility: weak security institutions, geopolitical dependence, and the absence of real subjectivity vis-à-vis stronger actors. This diagnosis appears clearly in the party’s foundational documents. The statute of Law and Justice defines the party’s purpose as action „for the common good, the strengthening of the state, the protection of citizens’ rights and freedoms, and the pursuit of social justice” (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, 2001). This conviction was articulated explicitly by Jarosław Kaczyński, co-founder of the party. He described the post-1989 state as „unable to effectively defend the interests of its citizens, a weak state, vulnerable to pressure and deprived of real subjectivity” (Kaczyński, 2001). As Kaczyński later put it, „without a sovereign state there is no democracy, no development, and no security. Sovereignty is not an abstraction—it is a condition of real state action” (Kaczyński, 2005). From this premise follows a clear hierarchy: defense is not a sector but the foundation of a political community. The diagnosis articulated by Law and Justice is structurally realist in character. Realism begins from the premise that the international system is anarchic and that states ultimately rely on their own capabilities to survive, as articulated by the jurist Hans Morgenthau and later refined by Kenneth Waltz (Morgenthau, 2006; Waltz, 1979). These theoretical principles are translated into operational reality through institutions designed to implement deterrence and resilience under conditions of structural constraint (Waltz, 1979; Keohane, 1984). From this perspective, institutions may constrain behavior, but they do not eliminate power asymmetries or coercive pressure, reinforcing the realist assumption that security must be grounded in autonomous capability before it can be pooled (Morgenthau, 2006; Waltz, 1979).

By contrast, the Civic Coalition, rooted in the earlier Civic Platform tradition, diagnosed the primary threat to state durability as developmental peripherality. Its statutes define the party's goals in terms of civilizational and economic development, the strengthening of democratic institutions, the rule of law, and the protection of individual rights (Platforma Obywatelska, 2007). The diagnosis associated with Civic Coalition aligns with the logic of liberal institutionalism, in which institutions function as multipliers of capacity rather than substitutes for statehood (Keohane, 1984; Keohane & Nye, 2012). From this standpoint, European Union integration functioned as a capacity-building mechanism (Keohane, 1984; Keohane & Nye, 2012).

These trajectories produced two distinct pathways to the same ultimate objective: security. Law and Justice approached security from the side of threat and survival, leading naturally to defense, deterrence, and NATO anchoring. The Civic Coalition approached security from the side of capacity, leading to innovation, infrastructure, resilience, and EU integration (Krasnodębski, 2009; Platforma Obywatelska, 2007). Crucially, these frameworks are not mutually exclusive. They occupy different positions along the same causal chain. Understood this way, the tension between NATO-centric defense logic and EU-centric integration logic is not evidence of incoherence. It reflects two theoretically grounded answers to the same historical problem: how does a medium-sized state emerging from the Iron Curtain secure autonomy and resilience beneath two complementary Iron Umbrellas, in a system shaped simultaneously by power politics and institutional interdependence? (Waltz, 1979; Keohane, 1984; Keohane & Nye, 2012).

Placed in a longer intellectual perspective, this complementarity is not an anomaly of contemporary policy, but a return to the classical understanding of politics itself. The term „politics” was stabilized by Aristotle, who used the Greek word *πολιτικά* (*politiká*) as the title of his work *Politics*. It is from this title that the analytical meaning of politics derives: a reflection on governance, power, institutions, and the common good. *Πολιτικά* literally meant „the affairs of the polis,” that is, matters concerning the organization of the civic community. As Aristotle writes, „the political community exists for the sake of living well.” (Aristotle, 1932) This Aristotelian conception became the foundational reference point for the entire Western tradition of political thought, and read through this lens the preceding divergence between realism and liberal institutionalism appears in a different light: these frameworks are not competing moral projects or expressions of incompatible values, but distinct answers to the same Aristotelian question of how the political community should be organized so that it can endure and enable collective well-being (Aristotle, 1932). Whether this duality becomes a source of paralysis or a source of strategic advantage is therefore not predetermined, but depends on how both sides of the Polish political scene choose to respond (Aristotle, 1932).

3. Contingent Potential

The strategic significance of Poland derives not only from abstract geography but from the contemporary distribution of power across Eurasia. To the east lies a continental power, Russia, whose strategic behavior has demonstrated imperialist ambitions over the years to revise borders by force and to reassert influence through military coercion. To the west lies a densely institutionalized European order embedded within NATO and the European Union, organized around collective defense, economic integration, and regulatory interdependence. Poland is positioned between a revisionist continental actor and an institutionalized maritime-networked bloc (Mackinder, 1904; Spykman, 1944; European External Action Service, 2016). The eastern vector is associated with land-based military mass, strategic depth, and coercive leverage. The western direction provides alliance guarantees, economic integration, infrastructural density, and political cohesion. The friction between these two systemic models reflects a broader transformation of the international order in which great-power competition and institutional consolidation operate simultaneously. It also reflects the erosion of the post-Cold War settlement in Europe, in the past premised on territorial inviolability, expanding integration, and the assumption that large-scale interstate war on the continent had become improbable (Mackinder, 1904; Spykman, 1944). As the assumptions underpinning that settlement weaken, geography reasserts its salience. Gateway territory acquires amplified significance precisely when the stability of the surrounding order is contested. If Eastern Europe constitutes the corridor between continental mass and maritime-networked power, then control, influence, or destabilization within this corridor alters the balance between the two. A successful projection of continental power westward expands strategic depth and bargaining leverage. Conversely, effective anchoring within NATO and the European Union reinforces the durability of the existing institutional order (Mackinder, 1904; Spykman, 1944).



Figure 1

Heartland and Rimland in classical geopolitical theory

Note. Adapted from „Geostrategic Domination of the Rimland,” Sikh Archives, <http://www.sikharchives.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/rimland.jpg> (accessed February 22, 2026)

It is at precisely this point that classical geopolitical theory regains explanatory power. Poland’s strategic condition cannot be understood apart from geography. Long before the emergence of contemporary institutional security architectures, Halford J. Mackinder argued in *The Geographical Pivot of History* (1904) that „who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island commands the World” (Mackinder, 1904). In Mackinder’s formulation, Eastern Europe constituted the critical gateway to the Eurasian core — a structural hinge between continental mass and maritime power. As he later wrote in *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (1919), „man and not nature initiates, but nature in large measure controls,” and further, „the geographical pivot of history is that vast area of Euro-Asia which is inaccessible to ships” (Mackinder, 1919). Geography, in this understanding, imposes constraints that cannot be legislated away (Mackinder, 1919). Where Mackinder emphasized the continental pivot, Spykman emphasized the maritime-industrial periphery, the zone of flows, trade routes, and strategic choke points, which he called the Rimland (Spykman, 1944).

Placed in dialogue, these two canonical texts reveal not contradiction but structural duality. The Eurasian system generates two simultaneous vectors of pressure: continental military depth and maritime-networked connectivity. Poland’s location situates it precisely at the friction point between these logics. It lies neither fully within the continental interior nor safely embedded in the maritime Rimland. It occupies what may analytically be termed a gateway position - a transitional corridor between strategic mass and systemic circulation. As Jacek Bartosiak, Polish lawyer and geopolitical expert, argues in *Pacyfik i Eurazja. O wojnie* (Pacific and Eurasia: On War, author’s translation) (Warsaw: Zona Zero, 2016) (2016), „Poland lies along the geostrategic axis between the West and Eurasia.” (Warsaw: Zona Zero, 2016) (2016) This is a structural condition imposed by spatial configuration. Geography defines the structural constraints within which security policy must operate. The next analytical step is to examine how international relations theory interprets these constraints and translates them into functional requirements (Bartosiak, 2016).

In contemporary institutional form, Mackinder’s continental vulnerability is addressed through NATO’s deterrence architecture, while Spykman’s networked Rimland logic is operationalized through the European Union’s infrastructure, regulatory integration, and economic resilience mechanisms (Mackinder, 1904; Spykman, 1944; European External Action Service, 2016). In this context, Poland’s position must be analyzed not as a structural hinge. Its geography places it at the interface between competing strategic

logics as its policy choices affect not only national security but the equilibrium between deterrence-based and integration-based orders. The stakes therefore extend beyond national orientation. They concern the balance between continental coercion and institutional resilience in a European order whose post-Cold-War assumptions are under sustained pressure (Mackinder, 1904; Spykman, 1944).

From this geographic premise follows the second proposition: a gateway state cannot be neutral. The political scientist Andrew A. Michta, in *The Limits of Alliance: The United States, NATO, and the EU in North and Central Europe* (2006), demonstrates that for Central European states NATO accession was not perceived as discretionary alignment but as the only viable framework for securing sovereignty in a post-Soviet strategic environment marked by uncertainty and residual Russian power (Michta, 2006). In subsequent Atlantic Council analyses, Michta repeatedly stresses that geography continues to determine the strategic calculus of NATO's eastern flank, arguing that states in this region remain structurally exposed to continental coercion absent credible alliance guarantees (Michta, 2006). Therefore, a state located at a continental hinge cannot sustain isolation without incurring strategic vulnerability (Michta, 2006).

The relationship between international relations theory and institutional architecture is not merely conceptual but operational. Theories of international relations define the functional requirements of state survival under specific structural conditions. Institutions translate those functional requirements into mechanisms that operate in physical, fiscal, and organizational domains. In the case of gateway states exposed simultaneously to continental coercion and systemic interdependence, realism and liberal institutionalism generate distinct but complementary institutional responses (Keohane, 1984; Morgenthau, 2006).

Geography defines the structural constraints within which security policy must operate. International relations theory provides the explanatory framework that interprets these constraints and specifies the functional requirements of survival. Institutions such as NATO and the European Union then translate these theoretical requirements into operational mechanisms. Realism provides the interpretive framework for understanding the continental vector. Waltz, in *Theory of International Politics* (1979), states succinctly that „in anarchy, security is the highest end,” and that „states... must rely on the means they can generate and the arrangements they can make for themselves” (Waltz, 1979). Under conditions of systemic anarchy, survival depends upon credible deterrent capacity. For a state situated along Mackinder's eastern European corridor, the realist logic of alliance becomes existential (Mackinder, 1904; Waltz, 1979). In legal terms, this deterrence function is again anchored in Article 5. This clause codifies collective defense as a functional extension of sovereign survival (North Atlantic Treaty, 1949). NATO thus represents the institutionalization of realist premises: deterrence through aggregation of capability, credibility through shared commitment, and stabilization through integrated planning structures (North Atlantic Treaty, 1949; Waltz, 1979).

In realist terms, the relevant implication is straightforward: under anarchy, deterrence must rest on credible capability and executable commitments (Waltz, 1979). In this framework, security depends on the ability to impose unacceptable costs on a potential aggressor (Waltz, 1979). This logic acquires particular structural urgency in the geographic context identified by Mackinder (Mackinder, 1904). A state located within a continental gateway corridor is structurally exposed to land-based power projection. The threat it faces is not primarily regulatory or economic, but military. Geography creates vulnerability that can only be mitigated through credible deterrent capability (Mackinder, 1904). The strategic requirement is therefore not only diplomatic alignment but operational defense readiness (North Atlantic Treaty, 1949). NATO thus operationalizes the deterrence function described above by translating collective defense commitments into integrated planning and executable reinforcement capacity. It transforms the abstract requirement for deterrence into a concrete system of obligations, capabilities, and infrastructure. Poland increased defence spending to over 3% of GDP under the Homeland Defence Act, embedding high-level defense expenditure within domestic law (Republic of Poland, 2022). Additionally, the collective defense clause raises the expected cost of aggression by aggregating the military capabilities of multiple states into a unified deterrent structure (North Atlantic Treaty, 1949). Deterrence credibility thus derives from institutionalized joint response (North Atlantic Treaty, 1949).

Operationally, this deterrence function is implemented through the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP), which translates political intent into quantifiable capability requirements. NATO specifies that „The NDPP aims to ensure that Allies develop the necessary capabilities in a timely manner to meet NATO's level of ambition,” and further emphasizes that „Allies are expected to allocate sufficient resources to meet agreed capability targets” (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2022). These requirements structure national defense planning around alliance-defined capability targets, force readiness benchmarks, and interoperability standards (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2022). Military capability is therefore not left to discretionary national preference but embedded within an alliance-wide planning architecture (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2022). To keep the operational layer concrete without overextending into technical detail, the relevant point is that alliance deterrence is executed through a

layered architecture. The NDPP's capability targets and readiness cycles generate concrete demands across force structure, interoperability, and sustainment. Deterrence therefore depends on the ability to mobilize, move, and integrate forces at speed, as well as to sustain them over time. This is why NATO's fiscal and planning commitments matter operationally, not just politically (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2022).

At the enabling layer, the requirements are enlisted in the Brussels Summit Communiqué. Infrastructure commitments are explicit: „improving military mobility by air, land, and sea to ensure rapid movement of forces and equipment across Europe” (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2018). Logistics hubs, pre-positioning sites, hardened facilities, and mobility corridors thus become structural components of deterrence architecture. In operational terms, this is the bridge between Article 5 as commitment and Article 5 as executable response: host-nation support, and command-and-control resilience are the material preconditions for credible reinforcement (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2018). As Michta has argued in more recent commentary, „security on NATO's eastern flank depends not only on military deployments but on political cohesion and economic resilience,” reinforcing the proposition that continental pressure requires hard-security anchoring even as it must be sustained by broader depth (Michta, 2006).

Yet geography generates a second vector. If Mackinder's continental axis necessitates deterrence, Spykman's Rimland logic foregrounds connectivity (Mackinder, 1904; Spykman, 1944). The Rimland is not merely a battlespace but a zone of trade, energy interdependence, infrastructure corridors, financial flows, and regulatory harmonization. This reflects complex interdependence: influence often runs through networks, not only military force (Keohane & Nye, 2012). Here liberal institutionalism provides the analytical lens. Applied to the European context, this framework illuminates the European Union's function not as a military alliance but as a capacity multiplier (Keohane, 1984; Keohane & Nye, 2012).

Liberal institutionalism begins from a different but complementary premise. While anarchy persists, institutions can increase predictability, reduce coordination costs, and enhance the capacity of states to function under conditions of stress. Consistent with the liberal-institutionalist mechanism already defined, EU instruments reduce coordination friction and increase commitment credibility (Keohane, 1984). Institutions do not eliminate vulnerability, but they mitigate its systemic effects by increasing organizational coherence, economic stability, and infrastructural depth (Keohane, 1984). This logic corresponds to the structural conditions identified by Spykman (Spykman, 1944). A gateway state is exposed to military pressure because it is situated within a network of flows such as energy systems, industrial production chains, transportation corridors, and economic exchange. Vulnerability in such a system arises from invasion and systemic disruption. The ability of a state to sustain military mobilization, economic stability, and political cohesion under pressure depends on the resilience of its infrastructural and economic systems (Keohane, 1984).

Logistical integration represents another operational dimension of this resilience function, as reflected in the European Commission's Action Plan on Military Mobility, which states that „military mobility aims to simplify and standardise cross-border military transport procedures,” and further that „dual-use transport infrastructure will be upgraded to meet both civilian and military requirements” (European Commission, 2018). Industrial and technological coordination constitutes an additional component of this resilience function, as reflected in instruments such as the European Defence Fund Regulation (EU) 2021/697, which provides that „the Fund shall support collaborative research and development projects in the field of defence” (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2021). The EU Strategic Compass (2022) asserts that „the EU must be able to act more swiftly and decisively when facing crises,” and commits that Europeans will enhance their „resilience, including critical infrastructure protection” (Council of the European Union, 2022). To keep this operational layer concrete without turning it into a funding catalogue, the key point is that EU instruments transform networked exposure into material depth. Dual-use transport corridors and standardized cross-border procedures reduce friction in crisis movement and reinforcement. Energy interconnectors and diversification reduce coercive leverage. Digital infrastructure and regulatory interoperability reduce systemic vulnerability and enable continuity of governance and command functions under stress. Defense-industrial collaboration increases sustainment capacity and reduces single-point dependency on fragile external supply chains (European Commission, 2018; European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2021; Council of the European Union, 2022). EU architecture, from cohesion mechanisms to common regulatory standards, thus deepens systemic robustness. Taken together, infrastructure investment, regulatory integration, industrial coordination, and logistical connectivity constitute a single resilience mechanism rather than separate analytical categories (Markiewicz, 2018).

Institutions provide the structural mechanisms of deterrence and resilience, but their effectiveness depends on political actors who activate, prioritize, and sustain them through strategic leadership (Posen, 1984). Their stewardship functions as the transmission layer through which institutional logic is translated into national strategy. In the political transmission layer, this deterrence function is reinforced through leadership signaling, as reflected in President Karol Nawrocki's emphasis that „the foundation of Poland's

security is a strong position within NATO and a close alliance with the United States.” Nawrocki also warned that „without a strong NATO presence, security on the eastern flank would be weakened” (Nawrocki, 2024). He has repeatedly reiterated this NATO-first signaling, emphasizing alliance anchoring and the need for a strong U.S. link on the eastern flank (Nawrocki, 2024). Read through Mackinder’s continental logic, this emphasis is structural reflex (Mackinder, 1904). If Eastern Europe remains the corridor through which continental power can project outward, then deterrence, visible alliance commitments, and sovereign military credibility necessarily become the first line of defense (Mackinder, 1904). It reinforces the credibility of deterrence by signaling sustained political commitment to alliance integration and forward defense posture. In deterrence theory, credibility depends not only on capability but on perceived willingness to maintain alignment. Political signaling therefore forms part of deterrence architecture itself (Waltz, 1979). This emphasis reflects the same realist priority already established: deterrence first on the eastern flank (Waltz, 1979). This is the language of the Heartland problem — the recognition that geography imposes military vulnerability that cannot be neutralized by regulation or interdependence alone (Mackinder, 1904; European External Action Service, 2016).

Donald Tusk’s strategic emphasis operates along a structurally complementary axis. The Prime Minister places emphasis on European integration as a security multiplier. Addressing the European Parliament in 2024, he positioned EU-level capacity, cohesion and coordination as a security multiplier by declaring: „Security is our top priority. That is why the motto of our presidency is ‘Security, Europe!’” and insisted that „Europe must take greater responsibility for its own security” (Tusk, 2024). This orientation corresponds to the institutional logic of resilience embedded within the European Union (Keohane, 1984). By reinforcing Poland’s integration within EU fiscal, infrastructural, and regulatory frameworks, such positioning strengthens the systemic depth necessary to sustain national security under conditions of prolonged geopolitical stress (European External Action Service, 2016; Keohane, 1984). Interpreted through Spykman’s Rimland framework this emphasis becomes strategically legible (Spykman, 1944). Tusk’s orientation toward institutional depth corresponds to the maritime-networked vector (Keohane, 1984).

The strategic consequence of this duality becomes visible only when the two vectors are examined together. A version of Poland that leans exclusively into the Mackinderian axis risks constructing deterrence without endurance, a fortress without economic elasticity. In the second scenario, Poland that privileges only the Spykmanian dimension risks integration without protection, a network without a shield (Mackinder, 1904; Spykman, 1944). The interaction between Nawrocki’s NATO-centered emphasis and Tusk’s EU-centered orientation does not replicate geographic structure but determines how effectively Poland activates the institutional mechanisms required by its geographic position. Leadership therefore operates as the transmission layer that converts structural constraint into operational strategy. The tension between these approaches is the political expression of geography translated into theory and institutional design (Mackinder, 1904; Spykman, 1944; Keohane, 1984). The practical consequence is that credibility and endurance rise or fall with political prioritization and sustained investment (Posen, 1984). Parallel orchestration, therefore, should not be mistaken for political compromise. It is the synchronization of two rationalities generated by spatial reality (Mackinder, 1904; Spykman, 1944). NATO institutionalizes the first through the Article 5 collective-defence commitment (North Atlantic Treaty, 1949). The European Union operationalizes the second through institutional density that creates endurance. In this configuration, geography functions not as a deterministic constraint but as a structural variable whose effects depend on Nawrocki and Tusk’s mediation (Mackinder, 1904; Spykman, 1944). Its effectiveness depends on the two political actors who interpret structural constraints, allocate resources, and signal strategic orientation, but most importantly operate like interlocking gears that drive one another forward for the benefit of Poland, instead of generating friction through misalignment.

These functions operate within distinct operational domains but serve a unified structural purpose. NATO anchoring reduces the probability of aggression by increasing expected costs, while EU integration reduces the probability of systemic destabilization by increasing endurance capacity (North Atlantic Treaty, 1949; European External Action Service, 2016). Leadership therefore performs a transmission function between institutional architecture and strategic output. It converts structural necessity into operational continuity through fiscal prioritization, institutional engagement, and political signaling (Posen, 1984). Nawrocki and Tusk do not define Poland’s strategic orientation. They reinforce different operational vectors within an architecture imposed by geography, articulated by theory, and implemented through institutions (Posen, 1984). These orientations operate at different institutional levels but perform analogous structural functions. NATO anchoring strengthens deterrence by increasing the expected cost of aggression. EU integration strengthens resilience by increasing the capacity to absorb and withstand systemic pressure (North Atlantic Treaty, 1949; European External Action Service, 2016). Leadership does not create these mechanisms. It reinforces their operational credibility (Posen, 1984). The interaction between these political orientations reflects not personal preference but structural position. A gateway state exposed

simultaneously to continental coercion and systemic interdependence must sustain both deterrent capability and systemic resilience. Leadership becomes the mechanism through which these institutional imperatives are maintained in practice. That is the essence of parallel orchestration: the transformation of structural constraint into strategic depth through synchronized political and institutional motion (Mackinder, 1904; Spykman, 1944; Posen, 1984).

4. Conclusion

Poland's strategic condition is not a matter of political preference but of structural position. Situated between continental military pressure and maritime-networked institutional integration, Poland occupies a gateway zone whose security depends on its ability to simultaneously deter coercion and sustain systemic resilience. Classical geopolitical theory identified this condition long before the emergence of contemporary institutions. Mackinder demonstrated that control over Eastern Europe determines access to continental strategic depth, while Spykman showed that intermediary zones derive their significance from their role in connecting land-based and maritime power systems. Poland's geography therefore generates dual exposure, and with it, dual strategic requirements.

These requirements have been translated into institutional form through Poland's dual anchoring in NATO and the European Union. NATO operationalizes deterrence by aggregating military capability, embedding Poland within a credible collective defence architecture that raises the expected cost of aggression. The European Union operationalizes resilience by strengthening infrastructural depth, economic endurance, and systemic coherence. At the interface between deterrence and resilience, the Joint EU-NATO Declarations (2016, 2018, 2023) explicitly „ensure coherence and complementarity between the EU and NATO,” confirming that these institutions were not designed as substitutes, but as mutually reinforcing components of a broader security architecture. Deterrence protects sovereignty in the short term, while institutional integration sustains the material and organizational foundations that make deterrence credible over time.

International relations theory provides the explanatory logic for this institutional duality. Realism explains the necessity of deterrence under conditions of anarchy, emphasizing capability, credibility, and alliance anchoring. Liberal institutionalism explains how institutional integration multiplies national capacity by reducing systemic vulnerability and increasing endurance. Geography generates exposure; theory defines functional requirements; institutions provide operational mechanisms; leadership determines the degree of commitment to those mechanisms. These elements form a continuous causal chain through which structural constraint is translated into operational strategy.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of this architecture depends on political leadership. The complementary orientations of President Karol Nawrocki and Prime Minister Donald Tusk reflect the two operational vectors generated by Poland's structural position. NATO anchoring reinforces deterrence credibility, while EU integration strengthens systemic resilience. When synchronized, these orientations function not as competing strategies but as interlocking components of a unified national security framework. Poland's strategic advantage therefore lies not in choosing between deterrence and integration, but in aligning both simultaneously. In this configuration, geography does not predetermine vulnerability. Properly mediated through theory, institutions, and leadership, it becomes the foundation of strategic leverage and the basis for the durable defense of Polish statehood.

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EUROPE - INDIA



The EU-India Trade Deal: “Mother of All Deals; Strategic Diversification Brings India to the Global Stage”

Gargi AWASTHI (India)

Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and European Commission President H.E Ms. Ursula von der Leyen, jointly announced the conclusion of the India–European Union Free Trade Agreement (India–EU FTA) at the 16th India–EU Summit, held during the visit of the European leaders to India. This announcement marks a historic milestone in India–EU economic relations and trade engagement with key global partners.

The FTA comes after intense negotiations since the re-launch of negotiations in 2022. The announcement of the FTA marks the culmination of years of sustained dialogue and cooperation, between India and the EU, demonstrating the political will and shared vision to deliver a balanced, modern, and rules-based economic and trade partnership.

The European Union is India’s one of the largest trading partner, with bilateral trade in goods and services growing steadily over the years. In 2024–25, India’s bilateral trade in goods with the EU stood at INR 11.5 Lakh Crore (USD 136.54 billion) with exports worth INR 6.4 Lakh Crore (USD 75.85 billion) and imports amounting to INR 5.1 Lakh Crore (USD 60.68 billion). India-EU trade in services reached INR 7.2 Lakh Crore (USD 83.10 billion) in 2024.

India and EU are 4th and 2nd largest economies, comprising 25% of Global GDP and account for one third of global trade. Integration of the two large diverse and complementary economies will create unprecedented trade and investment opportunities.

Union Minister for Commerce and Industry, Shri Piyush Goyal, lauded the strategic vision and steadfast leadership of Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. He stated: “The conclusion of the India–European Union Free Trade Agreement represents a defining achievement in India’s economic engagement and global outlook. This supports India’s approach to secure trusted, mutually beneficial and



Source: <https://www.epc.eu/publication/why-geopolitics-not-just-trade-finally-sealed-the-euindia-deal/>

balanced partnerships. Beyond a conventional trade deal, it represents a comprehensive partnership with strategic dimensions and is one of the most consequential FTA. India has secured unprecedented market access for more than 99% of Indian exports by trade value to the EU that also bolsters the 'Make in India' initiative. Beyond goods, it unlocks high-value commitments in services complemented by a comprehensive mobility framework enabling seamless movement of skilled Indian professionals. India, powered by a young and dynamic workforce and one of the fastest-growing major economies, stands poised to leverage this FTA to create jobs, spur innovation, unlock opportunities across sectors, and enhance its competitiveness on the global stage."

The India-EU trade pact covers conventional areas such as trade in goods, services, trade remedies, rules of origin, customs and trade facilitation, as well as emerging areas such as SMEs and digital trade, amongst others.

The India-EU FTA gives a decisive boost to its labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, apparel, leather, footwear, marine products, gems and jewellery, handicrafts, engineering goods, and automobiles bringing down tariffs up to 10% on almost 33 bn USD of exports to zero on entry into force of the Agreement. Beyond enhancing competitiveness, it empowers workers, artisans, women, youth, and MSMEs, while integrating Indian businesses more deeply into global value chains and reinforcing India's role as a key player and supplier in global trade.

On automobiles, calibrated and carefully crafted quota based auto liberalisation package will not only allow EU auto makers to introduce their models in India in higher price bands but also open the possibilities for Make in India and exports from India in future. Indian consumers to benefit from high tech products and greater competition. The reciprocal market access in EU market will also open up opportunities for India made automobiles to access EU market.

India's agricultural and processed food sectors are poised for a transformative boost under the India-EU FTA, creating a level playing field for Indian farmers and agrarian enterprises. Key commodities such as tea, coffee, spices, fresh fruits and vegetables, and processed foods will gain enhanced competitiveness, strengthening rural livelihoods, promoting inclusive growth, and reinforcing India's position as a trusted global supplier. India has prudently safeguarded sensitive sectors, including dairy, cereals, poultry, soymeal, certain fruits and vegetables, balancing export growth with domestic priorities.

Beyond tariff liberalisation, the FTA provides measures to tackle non-tariff barriers through strengthened regulatory cooperation, greater transparency, and streamlined customs, Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) procedures, and Technical Barriers to Trade disciplines.

Through CBAM provisions, commitments have been secured including a forward-looking most-favoured nation assurance extending flexibilities if any granted to third countries under the regulation, enhanced technical cooperation on recognition of carbon prices, recognition of verifiers, as well as financial assistance and targeted support to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and comply with emerging carbon requirements.

Services being dominant and faster-growing part of both economies will trade more in future. Certainty of market access, non-discriminatory treatment, focus on digitally delivered services, ease of mobility will provide boost to India's services exports.

The FTA secures expanded and commercially significant commitments from the EU across key sectors of Indian strength, including IT and IT-enabled services, professional services, education, financial services, tourism, construction, and other business sectors.

India's predictable access to EU's 144 subsectors (which includes IT/ITeS, Professional Services, Other Business Services and Education Services) will provide boost to Indian service providers and enable them to provide competitive world class Indian services to EU's consumers while EU's access to 102 subsectors offered by India will bring in high tech services, investment into India from EU resulting in a mutually beneficial arrangement.

On mobility, the India-EU FTA provides a facilitative and predictable framework for business mobility covering short-term, temporary and business travel in both directions. These enable professionals to travel between the two economies to provide services under different scenarios. EU and India is providing mobility commitments to each other for Intra-Corporate Transferees (ICT) and Business Visitors, along with entry and working rights for dependents and family members of ICTs. The EU has also offered commitments in 37 sectors/sub-sectors for Contractual Service Suppliers (CSS) and 17 sectors/sub-sectors for Independent Professionals (IP), many of which are sectors of interest to India, including Professional Services, Computer and related Services, Research and Development Services, and Education Services.

India also secured a framework to constructively engage on Social Security Agreements over a five-year horizon, together with framework supporting student mobility and post-study work opportunities. Additionally, India has also secured access for practitioners of Indian Traditional Medicine to work under home title in EU Member States where traditional medical practices are not regulated.

In financial services, the FTA promotes cooperation to advance innovation and secure cross-border electronic payments, while providing India with enhanced market access across several major EU member states. These provisions are expected to deepen financial integration and support the growth of financial services trade.

These commitments not only unlock high-value employment opportunities but also reinforce India's position as a global hub for talent, innovation, and sustainable economic growth.

The FTA reinforces intellectual property protections provided under TRIPS¹ relating to copyright, trademarks, designs, trade secrets, plant varieties, enforcement of IPRs, affirms Doha Declaration and recognises the importance of digital libraries, specifically the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) project initiated by India.

The FTA is expected to facilitate cooperation in critical areas like Artificial Intelligence, clean technologies, and semiconductors, supporting India's technological advancement. The FTA is expected to substantially scale up trade, enhance export competitiveness, and integrate Indian businesses more deeply into the European and global value chains.

The India–EU FTA marks a new chapter in bilateral economic engagement, strengthening trade, and strategic cooperation between India and the 27-member EU bloc. Cognizant of multifarious objectives placed on trade, dynamic nature of trade, fast evolving technologies and increasing regulatory complexities, the Agreement embeds multiple review, consultation and response mechanisms to deal with new, sudden challenges which emerge in future. The Agreement relies on strong stewardship and trust to deliver gains for both sides.

EU becomes India's 22nd FTA partner. The Government since 2014 has signed trade deals with Mauritius, UAE, UK, EFTA², Oman and Australia, and announced trade deal with New Zealand. In 2025, India signed trade deal with Oman and UK and announced conclusion of trade deal with NZ.

The India-EU trade deal, along with India's FTA with the UK and the EFTA effectively opens up the entire European market for Indian businesses, exporters and entrepreneurs. Beyond boosting commerce, it reinforces shared values, fosters innovation, and creates opportunities across sectors and stakeholders from MSMEs, women and skilled professionals to farmers and exporters. Aligned with India's vision of "Viksit Bharat 2047," the FTA positions India as a dynamic, trusted, and forward-looking partner on the global stage, setting the foundation for inclusive, resilient, and future-ready growth.

EU–India Strategic Convergence Beyond Trade

For the first time, the Republic Day celebrations may not host a single head of state. The invitation extends to Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, and António Costa, President of the European Council, marking the culmination of a year of momentum in EU–India relations. It began with the unprecedented visit of the College of Commissioners to New Delhi in February 2025—the Commission's first official visit outside of Europe.

The Commission's visit provided an impetus to fast-track the signature of the EU–India Free Trade Agreement (FTA), whose negotiations resumed in 2022 after nearly a decade of stagnation. The deadline to conclude the deal by the end of 2025 was missed. The accelerated pace of the talks may result in a more limited agreement, shaped by political imperatives and the need to have it as a deliverable for the EU-India summit of 27th January. Some sensitive issues, particularly those related to agriculture, are likely to be overlooked. Even if the outcome appears to be more strategic than commercially ambitious, it nonetheless has the potential to place the two economic blocs on a closer partnership trajectory. The EU is India's second-largest trading partner, while India ranks as the EU's largest trading partner among the Global South.

Looking beyond trade, this new dynamism in the EU–India relationship is due to shifts in US foreign policy under the Trump administration, which have prioritised unilateral action and have adopted a more confrontational posture towards both its European allies and India. This underscores the desire for New Delhi and Brussels to coordinate more closely as the US and China are seen by both as systemic rivals. In a multipolar and multi-aligned world, this EU-India partnership could pave the way for new models of partnership, grounded in mutual, predictable, and stable relations.

Nonetheless, for that cooperation to bear fruit, both actors need to outline their core interests and priorities. India and the EU's diverging approach to Russia almost derailed the launch of the strategic

¹The TRIPS Agreement sets minimum standards for copyright protection, binding WTO members to the Berne Convention (excluding moral rights) and expanding coverage to computer programs (as literary works) and databases. Key protections include a 50-year minimum for recordings/performances, rental rights for software and films, and enforcement mechanisms against piracy.

²The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) consists of four member states: **Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland**. Founded in 1960, this intergovernmental organization promotes free trade and economic cooperation, operating in parallel with the European Union (EU). They are part of the Schengen Area and European Single Market.

agenda last September, coinciding with Exercise Zapad. However, ties were further strengthened less than two months later when the EU-India foreign policy and security consultations were held in Brussels, with both sides reaffirming their desire to secure lasting peace in Ukraine. Lastly, the visit of President Vladimir Putin to New Delhi earlier in December reassured Brussels, as no major deals and strategic agreements were concluded, highlighting the largely symbolic nature of the visit.

Advancing EU-India Collaboration in Technology and Defence

The fact that the two entities are looking towards a long-lasting partnership is evident in the focus of the New EU-India Strategic Agenda, unveiled on 17 September 2025. It lists key areas of cooperation in the years to come, arranged around five pillars: sustainability, technology and innovation, connectivity, security and defence, and enablers.

In the technological field, the Trade and Technology Council (TTC) announced in 2022 will need to be strengthened and recalibrated if it is to succeed along the lines of the India-United States (US) Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET). If elevated to the leaders' level, the TTC could accelerate key components of the strategic relations—particularly in areas such as Digital Public Infrastructures (DPI), critical minerals and supply chain, and green energy. This could help both the EU and India manage dependencies in energy and critical minerals, areas where major powers such as the US and China exert significant influence. Furthermore, there is considerable scope in security cooperation. Coordination in the maritime domain has already begun, notably through a joint exercise conducted in the Indian Ocean in June 2025 between EUNAVFOR Atlanta and the Indian Navy. These efforts could be enhanced and systematised to respond to the regional security challenges, including piracy, illegal fishing, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR).

Looking ahead, a formal bilateral defence and security partnership, modelled on EU-Türkiye and EU-South Korea, could ease access to EU and Indian defence industrial bases. This, in turn, could enable co-production and co-development of key components in both territories, building on synergies already established with key defence players such as HAL, Safran, Airbus, and L&T. This would allow Indian access to SAFE funds to support EU defence requirements, notably in ammunition meant for Ukraine. This could incentivise Indian defence manufacturers to set up plants in the EU, encouraging enhanced technology transfer between the EU's defence firms and their Indian counterparts—a step that appears increasingly plausible in light of recent announcements.

In the diplomatic sphere, India and the EU may be well placed to bridge the divide between the Global South and the Global North and offer an alternative model of cooperation, eschewing the US-China antagonism. In that light, both blocs appear positioned as potential stabilising anchors in an era of growing rivalries and adversarial relations. This stability is further reinforced by the democratic nature of both entities at a time of heightened global uncertainty.

Enhancing EU-India People-to-People Exchanges

The EU and India must find new avenues of engagement to enhance people-to-people exchanges. While strategic ties have been supported by a growing number of high-level Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues, more needs to be accomplished with regard to migration and mobility.

Although the two entities signed the Common Agenda for Migration and Mobility (CAMM) in 2016, the number of Indian nationals in the EU—standing today at less than a million—is lower than the corresponding figure for Australia, despite Australia's significantly smaller population. EU member states need to do more to attract students and skilled professionals from India, including by easing visa rules and making their long-term stay more viable. In that regard, proposals emerging from the EU-India High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Mobility—such as the creation of an EU legal gateway office in India to facilitate ICT-related mobility—mark a constructive step forward.

As changes in US migration policy affect pathways for skilled mobility, much could be achieved through expanding the EU Blue Card programme, particularly in light of recent constraints affecting the US Green Card and H-1B initiatives.

Sectorial Effects for India

The sectors experiencing the largest expansion in Indian exports to the EU, IT and professional services: The 8% NTB reduction in services trade, combined with the parallel mobility agreement facilitating movement of professionals, substantially deepens India's 24DGCIS (India), "Quick View of India's Trade—2024": India's exports to China were \$15.1 billion while imports from China hit \$109.4 billion in 2024. 25DGCIS (India), "Quick View of India's Trade—2024": imports from China grew 9.8% year-on-year.

Sectorial Effects for the EU

Rights, supports women's empowerment, provides for a platform for dialogue and cooperation on trade related environmental and climate issues and ensures effective implementation.

The EU and India will also sign a Memorandum of Understanding that intends to establish an EU-India platform for cooperation and support on climate action. The platform will be launched in the first half of 2026. Furthermore, subject to the EU's budgetary and financial rules and procedures, €500 million in EU support over the next two years is envisaged to help India's efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and accelerate its long-term sustainable industrial transformation.

Next Steps

On the EU side, the negotiated draft texts will be published shortly. The texts will go through legal revision and translation into all official EU languages. The Commission will then put forward its proposal to the Council for the signature and conclusion of the agreement. Once adopted by the Council, the EU and India can sign the agreements. Following the signature, the agreement requires the European Parliament's consent, and the Council's decision on conclusion for it to enter into force. Once India also ratifies the Agreement, it can enter into force.

Background

The EU and India had first launched negotiations for a free trade agreement in 2007. The talks were suspended in 2013 and then re-launched in 2022. The 14th and last formal negotiating round took place in October 2025, followed by inter-sessional discussions at technical and political level.

At the same time as FTA negotiations were re-launched, the EU and India also launched negotiations for a Geographical Indications Agreement and an Investment Protection Agreement. Negotiations for these agreements are still ongoing. Successful implementation will remain the FTA's ultimate test. Sometimes, geopolitical gains outweigh the advantages of the ledger. Take for example the Indo-US civil nuclear deal of 2008, which served as an important geopolitical pivot but yielded modest returns.

The FTA, too, faces significant implementation challenges. India's NITI Aayog has recently reported that the country's trade deficit with its existing FTA partners has widened. India is also known to undermine its own trade agreements after signing them. Further, the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) remains a looming non-tariff barrier for Indian steel and aluminium as the agreement provides no direct relief but includes a framework for constructive engagement on CBAM. India's complex federal structure will also pose a challenge, as several FTA-related sectors are under state jurisdiction, requiring cooperative centre-state engagement. For the EU, the conclusion of the negotiations is the start of a rigorous technical process: the deal will be translated into the EU's 24 official languages and undergo legal scrutiny before it reaches the ratification stage in the European Parliament.

A Geopolitical Leap

The FTA is a timely and necessary fuel for India and the EU's strategic engine. It is rooted in the geopolitical pressures of the 2020s. De-risking through diversification is a key feature of New Delhi and Brussels' strategic realism. This deal is a cornerstone of Europe's de-risking strategy, which aims to avoid mirroring its Russia vulnerabilities with China. Diversifying through India allows the EU to gain a foothold in one of the fastest-growing large economies that shares its democratic values, thereby strengthening its global relevance. India anchoring itself to the EU allows access to technology and a capital-rich partner outside the Washington-Beijing binary. Washington's 50 per cent punitive tariffs and its outreach to Islamabad would have aided New Delhi's final push. The conclusion now allows both parties to build a buffer against an unpredictable world order.

The accompanying signing of the Security and Defence Partnership and mutual endorsement of the 'Towards 2030: A Joint India-European Union Comprehensive Strategic Agenda' further signify the FTA's geopolitical leap. The partnership adds a holistic security angle through cooperation in maritime security, joint naval operations in the Indo-Pacific, and defence industrial co-development. This will enable India to diversify its defence hardware further away from Russian sources while giving Europeans a trusted market for its defence technology. The security alignment on cyber defence, counter-terrorism, and space security will help both sides achieve more substantial gains.

The 'Towards 2030' agenda ensures that this economic and geopolitical roadmap is structured across five pillars: prosperity and sustainability, technology and innovation, security and defence, connectivity and global issues, and enablers (human mobility). The alignment of this five-year plan aims to make the India-EU partnership resilient enough to withstand global disruptions—from trade wars to maritime tensions.

Strengthening EU-India Supply Chains Across Pharma, Automotive, and Clean Energy

Pharmaceuticals are the low-hanging fruit. EU tariffs on medicines are already low, but the FTA is expected to simplify regulatory compliance and strengthen intellectual property frameworks, which could make Indian pharma an essential in Europe's healthcare supply chain. Automotive outcomes could remain a bit more mixed. While India is likely to opt for quotas and phased tariff cuts for finished vehicles, similar to the recently concluded FTA with the UK, expected full tariff removal on auto components would lower production costs and strengthen cross-border manufacturing. EU carmakers like Volkswagen AG and Renault Group are already deeply embedded in India's production ecosystem; the FTA would reinforce India's role as an automotive supply chain hotspot.

Clean energy cooperation also stands to get a boost, considering that Europe's Green Deal and India's 500-gigawatt renewable target for 2030 create a natural platform for joint leadership in solar, wind, grids, and green hydrogen.

Hence, the FTA would strengthen India's credibility as a scale alternative, not just a marginal "China+1" beneficiary.

Mega Trade Deal Reinforces India's Attractiveness for Trade and Supply Chain Pivots

On the supply-chain front, the India–EU FTA is squarely about diversification and resilience. Global trade is increasingly fragmented by trade wars and geopolitical rivalries, and businesses are moving well beyond single-country sourcing and production. India stands to be a major beneficiary of this trend. Take Apple Inc, for instance — already having shifted 7%+ of its iPhone production to India, the company could accelerate producing in India post-FTA, leveraging duty-free access to the EU market. Similarly, European fashion brands like Zara and H&M, currently reliant on Chinese factories, could pivot to India's textile hubs in Tiruppur and Surat, where manufacturing costs are also 15%–20% lower.

Economic Growth Impacts and Caveats for the EU and India: Agreement would Boost Growth, Inherent Structural Constraints Need to be Eliminated for Achieving Maximum Potential

The FTA will provide sizable growth upsides to the EU. The deal would essentially provide the bloc with long-term incremental growth support in manufacturing, clean tech, defense, and digital services.

India's ambition to sustain ~8% GDP growth under its Viksit Bharat 2047 vision hinges on export expansion, manufacturing scale-up, and technology absorption. The FTA directly supports all three. That said, the deal is not sufficient on its own. India's growth trajectory will continue to depend on domestic reforms, infrastructure execution, and, critically, a stable trade relationship with the US.

EU–India FTA Could Accelerate Momentum Toward a US–India Trade Deal

Washington cannot afford to ignore this deal. Against the backdrop of rising US–EU frictions and especially because of the recent Greenland dispute, the India–EU FTA signals Europe's intent to broaden its economic partnerships and hedge against policy volatility. The EU–India deal could very well incentivize the US to double down on its own India trade strategy, perhaps fast-tracking a bilateral trade deal in 2026.

For India as well, a US–India trade deal is extremely vital. India's trade exposure remains heavily skewed toward the US, with a \$45.8 billion^[3] goods surplus with the US in 2024, versus \$25.8 billion with the EU. The FTA can therefore partially cushion, but not fully offset, the punitive US tariff shocks.

The Bottom Line

The India–EU FTA, complemented by a defense and security cooperation framework, may not rewrite global trade and growth overnight, but it meaningfully reshapes the movement of trade, investment, and supply chains in a new era of globalization.

Manufacturers should reassess footprint strategy—particularly in autos, electronics, defense, and clean energy—as lower tariffs on components, streamlined rules of origin and greater regulatory alignment reduce the cost of producing in India. Exporters and services firms should move early, in the window following the deal's political conclusion on the 27th and ahead of formal ratification, to secure market access and partnerships before competitive intensity rises.

Strengthening EU-India Supply Chains Across Pharma, Automotive, and Clean Energy

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Impact on South Asian Countries

Bangladesh, the region's largest garment exporter, faces the most immediate risk – the EU is its top market, absorbing around 60% of its ready-made garment exports under DFQF duty-free access. Bangladesh faces the most acute challenge as its export was built on the 9–12% price advantage it held over India. At the same time, Bangladesh faces another challenge as it is set to graduate from Least Developed Country (LDC) status in late 2026. While it retains access for a transition period (typically 3 years), it faces a cliff-edge in 2029. If it reverts to standard GSP (paying ~9% duty) or MFN terms while India pays 0%, Bangladesh could suffer a massive diversion of trade to India. Indian exporters, who are more vertically integrated (producing their own cotton and yarn) than their Bangladeshi

Pakistan's GSP+ status since 2014 allows duty-free access for ~66% of tariff lines, crucial for its textile sector. The India-EU FTA grants Indian exporters broader access (nearly 100% of tariff lines) without the stringent periodic reviews on human rights and labour standards that hang over Pakistan's GSP+ status. India has a larger, more diversified industrial base. With tariffs removed, European buyers may prefer sourcing from India to consolidate supply chains (e.g., buying apparel, machinery, and chemicals from one country), leaving Pakistan isolated as a "textile-only" supplier. Sri Lanka, also a GSP+ beneficiary with strengths in apparel, faces similar pressures. Smaller LDCs like Nepal and Bhutan may see limited direct impact due to lower export volumes, but indirect effects could arise if regional supply chains shift toward India. The India-EU FTA is a wake-up call. While it strengthens India's global position, it exposes vulnerabilities in neighbouring economies reliant on unilateral preferences. Proactive structural reforms and strategic diversification are essential to turn potential threats into opportunities for sustained growth.

Recommendations

With the Growing Free Trade Agreements

Preference erosion for the LDCs of South Asia and countries benefitting from GSP ++ schemes have become a reality and these countries must prepare themselves to counter these challenges. With the unilateral preferential market access, the beneficiary countries have got better market access, however, it did not create efficiency in production chain, nor the countries expand their manufacturing base and thus these free trade agreements will impact their economy negatively. The ultimate aim, thus, should be to create efficiency within the country and not always relying on unilateral preferences.

The graduating LDCs and GSP ++ beneficiaries must act faster in this regard. Some of the policy options for these countries are:

1) Boost competitiveness: Bangladesh and Pakistan should prioritize energy efficiency and skill development to offset cost disadvantages. They must have a plan to invest in productivity, automation, and compliance with EU sustainability, labour, and traceability standards (e.g., CBAM and due diligence regulations).

2) Diversify markets: There is a need to reduce EU dependence by targeting high-growth regions—the US (via bilateral deals), UK, Middle East, Africa, and ASEAN. Bangladesh could leverage its recent UK trade continuity agreement more aggressively.

3) Pursue trade diplomacy: One Pursue trade diplomacy: One option is to initiate negotiating a bilateral FTAs or seek enhanced EU preferences. Pakistan could work to maintain or upgrade GSP+; Bangladesh should prepare post-LDC strategies, including WTO negotiations for extended preferences.

4) Promote regional cooperation: Despite political uncertainties in the sub-region, it is important for Bangladesh, Pakistan and other countries to strengthen supply-chain linkages under SAFTA or BIMSTEC, allowing smaller economies to integrate with Indian manufacturing for mutual benefit rather than direct competition.

5) Focus on value addition: Shift from low-margin assembly to design, branding, and higher-value products to build resilience.

The Success of Vietnam's Strategy is There for Everyone to See

Its merchandise exports, which were about a third of India's in 2010, have now almost reached

parity, according to World Bank Data, even though gross domestic product (GDP) is only around a tenth of India's.

In fact, almost all major Asian exporters, including Malaysia, Bangladesh and Indonesia, have outperformed India in terms of compounded exports growth in the last decade, according to Asia Decoded. While India has worked hard to gain a foothold in hi-tech manufacturing – making iPhone for the likes of Apple – it lags behind the others when it comes to textiles, footwear, furniture and other low value-added goods, which are the more labour intensive.

“It's unlikely that if Nike is faced with high tariffs in Vietnam, it'll consider India as the best alternative. India's onerous logistic costs, import duties and cumbersome customs regulations, all weigh it down,” says Kishore.

Now that the FTAs are done and dusted, the focus in Delhi will have to shift towards streamlining these irritants, experts say. It's what will also help India attract more private investment, create jobs and hit its \$1tn per year exports target.

Challenges Ahead

Biggest gaps are around the complexity of Rules of Origin requirements, high documentation costs, non-tariff barriers such as testing and labelling rules, and inconsistent customs interpretation. “Many exporters technically qualify for lower tariffs but still pay full duties because proving eligibility is slow, risky, or expensive.”

Rules of Origin – which require exporters to prove that goods are substantially manufactured or value-added in India rather than merely assembled – remain particularly contentious. Under earlier arrangements, the government issued origin certificates. But under the fine print of the deal with EU, exporters must now self-certify, according to the Delhi-based think tank Global Trade and Research Initiative (GTRI). As a result exporters will “now bear the legal and financial risk of getting it wrong. Beyond boosting commerce, it reinforces shared values, fosters innovation and creates opportunities across sectors and stakeholders — from MSMEs, women and skilled professionals to farmers and exporters.

Aligned with India's vision of “Viksit Bharat 2047”, the FTA positions India as a dynamic, trusted and forward-looking partner on the global stage, setting the foundation for inclusive, resilient and future-ready growth for both regions.

EUROPE



The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy: Recent Developments and Strategic Outlook for 2026

Andrei ȚÎCU (Romania)

The purpose of this article is to analyze the operational dimension of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), focusing on the civilian and military missions deployed over the past two decades and the strategic reorientation they reflect. The analysis does not seek to provide an exhaustive assessment of Europe's rearmament process or of the industrial-economic dimension of the CSDP. Rather, it concentrates specifically on operational effectiveness and on the structural conditions under which the European Union can generate durable effects on the security environment.

The analysis starts from the premise that the CSDP had a solid operational beginning in the Western Balkans (e.g., EULEX Kosovo, EUFOR Althea), where it achieved tangible results in maintaining a secure environment and supporting post-conflict institutional consolidation. However, attempts to replicate this stabilization model centered on capacity-building and elements of state-building in Asia (e.g., EUAM Iraq, EUPOL Afghanistan) and in Africa, particularly in the Sahel region (e.g., EUCAP Sahel Mali, EUTM Mali, EUCAP Sahel Niger), generated limited outcomes and revealed persistent structural constraints. These experiences did not indicate a deficit of institutional competence on the part of the Union, but rather highlighted the limits of external intervention in the absence of normative convergence, internal political stability, and genuine local ownership.

In response to these operational constraints, the European Union initiated a profound strategic recalibration, redirecting its financial resources, politico-military instruments, and political capital toward Eastern Europe (e.g., EUMAM Ukraine, EUAM Ukraine, EUPM Republic of Moldova). This "All In" orientation reflects not merely a budgetary priority, but a broader strategic repositioning in the face of direct and existential security stakes for the continental order, within a geopolitical context in which lessons learned from previous operations can be applied in a structurally more convergent environment.

The effectiveness of CSDP missions is not determined solely by the European Union's operational capacity, but by the cumulative presence of favorable structural conditions. CSDP missions tend to function effectively where:

- (1) the crisis has direct relevance for the EU's continental security;
- (2) there is a credible European integration perspective that fosters institutional compatibility and normative convergence;

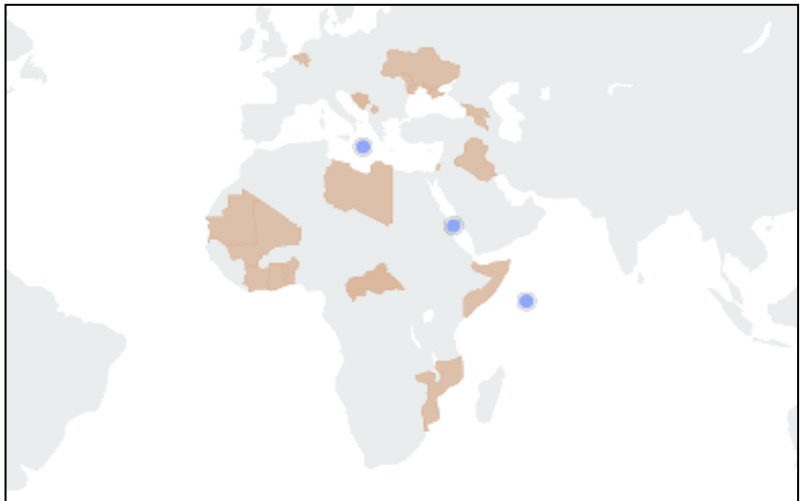


Figure 1. Active CSDP Missions and Operations as of February 2026

Source: Council of the European Union, "CSDP Missions and Operations," updated February 2026.

- (3) genuine local ownership exists, supported by a minimum level of political stability;
- (4) the objectives and instruments of the mission are congruent with those of other Western actors involved, particularly NATO, thereby avoiding strategic fragmentation and dysfunctional mandate overlap.

To assess the actual effectiveness of CSDP missions, this article employs an analytical framework built around three complementary criteria: strategic design, operational performance, and impact on the security environment. Each dimension is structured around a guiding question that shapes the comparative analysis of the selected case studies.

The first criterion, strategic design, addresses the question: *To what extent was the mission mandate coherent, realistic, and aligned with the political-strategic objectives established by the European Union?* This dimension examines the clarity and realism of the initial objectives, the congruence between mandate and available resources, adaptation to the local context, and alignment with the Union's broader strategic priorities.

The second criterion, operational performance, is structured around the question: *To what extent was the mission implemented effectively from a technical and institutional perspective?* This dimension analyzes the level of resources allocated compared to those actually utilized, the quality of training and expertise transfer, inter-institutional coordination, the stability of personnel rotations, and the sustainability of the structures created.

The third criterion, impact on the security environment, addresses the question: *Did the mission produce measurable and durable changes in local security dynamics?* The evaluation includes indicators such as the rate of violent incidents, the consolidation of the state's legitimate monopoly on the use of force, improvements in crisis management capacity, and the prevention of conflict relapse.

By articulating these three fundamental questions, the analytical framework enables a systematic and comparative evaluation of CSDP operational effectiveness, distinguishing between the intentional level of strategic design, the level of implementation, and the structural effects produced on the ground.

To test the article's central argument, the analysis will be structured around three representative case studies corresponding to the regions discussed. In the Western Balkans, the focus will be on EUFOR Althea. For Africa and Asia, the analysis will primarily examine EUTM Mali and EUCAP Sahel Mali, with comparative references to EUPOL Afghanistan. Finally, in Eastern Europe, the article will analyze EUPM Republic of Moldova, with additional references to CSDP support provided to Ukraine.

I. CSDP Missions in the Western Balkans. The Case of EUFOR Althea

I.1. Structural Conditions

As argued in the introduction, the effectiveness of a CSDP mission is determined by the cumulative presence of favorable structural conditions. In order to quantify this context, the present article employs a pre-operational potential assessment tool translated into an index ranging from 0 to 4 points. Each of the four identified conditions, strategic relevance, integration perspective, local ownership, and Western congruence, is evaluated on a weighted scale: 1 point for full fulfillment of the criterion, 0.5 points for partial or fragile presence, and 0 points for its absence. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, all four conditions are present to a significant degree.

(1) Continental Strategic Relevance

Bosnia and Herzegovina has direct relevance for the security of the European Union, both due to its geographical proximity, being located in the EU's immediate neighborhood, and the destabilizing potential of renewed inter-ethnic conflict. The region's recent history demonstrates that the escalation of local tensions can generate broader regional spillover effects, with direct implications for European stability.

(2) European Integration Perspective/Institutional Compatibility

There exists a formal and politically endorsed European integration perspective, which functions as a normative and institutional framework for convergence. Since the launch of the mission, institutional compatibility has increased, and reforms in the fields of defense and security have been conducted within the logic of alignment with Euro-Atlantic standards.

(3) Local Ownership

Despite persistent internal political tensions and recurring blockages between different ethno-political components, the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina have maintained cooperation with EUFOR Althea. Official reports indicate that the mission is perceived as a stabilizing factor, and in certain institutional areas there is even a degree of functional dependence on its support.

(4) Western Strategic Congruence

The objectives of EUFOR Althea are congruent with those of NATO and other Western actors involved in the region. The division of mandates was clearly defined from the moment responsibility was transferred from SFOR to the EU. This strategic continuity reduced the risk of institutional fragmentation and dysfunctional overlap of objectives.

I.2. Mission Effectiveness Analysis

(1) Strategic Design

EUFOR Althea's mandate, authorized annually by the UN Security Council and extended until November 2026¹, has had as its central political-strategic objective the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement and the maintenance of a safe and secure environment. In terms of political-strategic alignment, the operation was explicitly integrated into the EU's comprehensive approach to the Western Balkans and operated under the Berlin Plus arrangements (utilizing NATO capabilities), which provided interoperability and a stable division of roles. However, a design deficit emerges at the level of the theory of change. Following the 2012 reconfiguration, the focus shifted toward capacity-building and training for the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina (AFBiH), but without sufficiently operationalized benchmarks or a clearly defined transition timeline (exit strategy). This complicates the assessment of success and may fuel perceptions of a "politically maintained presence"².

In 2024–2025, activities concentrated on implementing the "master plan" for the reduction of ammunition and weapons stockpiles: 89.95 tons of obsolete ammunition were destroyed (30.96% of the 2024 annual target). However, no progress was recorded in reducing small arms and light weapons stockpiles, while the decision-making process regarding heavy weapons reduction remains ongoing. Monitoring of storage sites and arms import-export flows continued, with no irregularities detected, though safety conditions deteriorated in certain locations³.

(2) Operational Performance

Operationally, mission personnel numbers have varied significantly over time. At its launch in 2004, EUFOR Althea took over from NATO a force of approximately 7,000 troops, reflecting a robust post-conflict stabilization profile. In subsequent years, as the security environment improved, the force was progressively reduced, reaching approximately 600 troops after the 2012 recalibration toward a predominantly non-executive mandate. In the context of regional security deterioration and internal political tensions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, EUFOR decided in 2025 to reinforce its presence by deploying an additional 400 troops and four helicopters⁴.

The current force level is estimated at between 1,500 and 2,000 personnel, maintaining deterrence capacity and a network of Liaison and Observation Teams (LOT) to ensure territorial presence. The annual "Quick Response" exercises (including the 2024 and 2025 editions) have strengthened interoperability between in-theatre troops and "over-the-horizon" reserves, preserving the credibility of deterrence⁵.

Financially, EUFOR Althea is considered a relatively low-cost mission within the CSDP architecture. According to official factsheets, common costs managed through the EU's new military operations financing mechanism amount to approximately €10–14 million annually, funded through Member State contributions. In addition, support has been provided through the European Peace Facility (EPF), amounting to approximately €20 million for strengthening the capabilities of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including in areas such as demining, CBRN protection, and operational mobility⁶. On the training and institutional capacity-building component, AFBiH has continued to participate in CSDP missions (e.g., EUTM CAR) and regional cooperation frameworks (e.g., the Balkan Medical Task Force). Moreover, the Peace Support Operations Training Centre (PSOTC) has trained over 10,000 professionals from more than 60 countries, representing a truly quantifiable outcome⁶.

Nevertheless, structural deficiencies persist. Limited progress has been recorded in demining (only

¹United Nations Security Council (UNSC), *Report of the Secretary-General on Bosnia and Herzegovina, S/2025/471* (New York: United Nations, 2025).

²Ivana Boštjančič Pulko, Meliha Muherina, and Nina Pejić, "Analysing the Effectiveness of EUFOR Althea Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *European Perspectives – Journal on European Perspectives of the Western Balkans* 8, no. 1 (14) (October 2016): 15–39.

³United Nations Security Council (UNSC), *Report of the Secretary-General on Bosnia and Herzegovina, S/2025/471*.

⁴Sarajevo Times, "EUFOR Deploys 400 Additional Soldiers to Bosnia and Herzegovina; Four New Helicopters to Arrive," 2025, <https://sarajevotimes.com/eufor-deploys-400-additional-soldiers-to-bosnia-and-herzegovina-four-new-helicopters-to-arrive/>.

⁵European Union Force Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR Althea), "Quick Response 2025 – EUFOR QR2025," 2025, <https://euforbih.org/index.php/en/euforqr2025>.

⁶United Nations Security Council (UNSC), *Report of the Secretary-General on Bosnia and Herzegovina, S/2025/471*.

9.12% of the 2024 annual target achieved; 826.23 km² remain suspected mine areas), the absence of a comprehensive single registry for security forces' weapons, and delays in harmonizing small arms and light weapons legislation. These elements indicate very strong operational performance in the military-executive segment, but limited capacity to accelerate structural reforms dependent on domestic political will⁷.

(3) Impact on the Security Environment

From the perspective of impact, the central criterion—prevention of conflict relapse—has been fulfilled. No episodes of systemic inter-ethnic violence have been recorded, and the security environment has enabled the continuation of political dialogue and the accession process. The Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina function as a unified force, participate in international missions, and maintain NATO/EU interoperability.

However, the political environment remains fragile. Reform stagnation, contested alignment with EU sanctions, frequent contacts between authorities in Republika Srpska and the Russian Federation, and vulnerability to hybrid threats and foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) indicate that stability is managed rather than structurally consolidated. EUFOR's impact is strong in terms of deterrence and military risk control, but limited in achieving deep transformation of political-institutional dynamics.

II. CSDP Missions in Africa and Asia. The Case of EUTM / EUCAP Sahel Mali

II.1. Structural Conditions

(1) Strategic Relevance.

In the case of Mali, the relevance for the EU's continental security was indirect and mediated rather than existential. The 2012–2013 crisis, characterized by the occupation of northern Mali by jihadist and separatist groups, the French intervention (Operation Serval), and subsequently MINUSMA - generated concerns related to transnational terrorism, migration routes, destabilization of the Liptako-Gourma region, arms proliferation, and illicit trafficking.

However, the threat was not perceived by the EU as a structural continental risk comparable to the destabilization of the Western Balkans or Eastern Europe. Consequently, European political consensus was more fragile and often dependent on Member States with direct interests, particularly France. By comparison, Afghanistan carried strong post-9/11 symbolic relevance, closely linked to NATO. Yet for the EU itself, it was not a direct continental security threat, but rather an allied and normative engagement.

(2) European Integration Perspective/Institutional Compatibility

In Mali, the security sector reform (SSR) was externally supported and financially incentivized, rather than embedded in an internal project of integration into a shared normative architecture. There was no accession perspective capable of generating sustained institutional convergence. The situation in Afghanistan was similar: no institutional anchoring or legal convergence framework with the EU existed.

(3) Local Ownership and Minimum Political Stability

EUTM Mali was launched at the request of the transitional authorities in 2012–2013. However, the Malian state was deeply fragmented, and the armed forces (FAMA) suffered from corruption, weak cohesion, and limited capacity. Two coups took place in 2020 and 2021, and the authorities subsequently expelled Western missions. Structurally, the mission depended on the political will of a government that was selectively interested, often more in accessing resources than in pursuing deep institutional reform⁸.

(4) Strategic Congruence with Other Western Actors

Mali presents major structural ambiguities in this regard. Formally, EUTM Mali was coordinated with MINUSMA, Operation Barkhane, the G5 Sahel, and EUCAP Sahel Mali. In practice, however, France pursued direct counterterrorism objectives, MINUSMA operated under a stabilization mandate, EUTM had a non-executive training mandate, and the G5 Sahel followed its own regional logic. In Afghanistan, the divergence of strategic visions was even more pronounced. Through EUPOL Afghanistan, the EU sought to build a civilian police force capable of protecting the population, reducing gender-based violence, and strengthening the rule of law. NATO, and particularly the United States, adopted a deeply paramilitary approach, preparing Afghan police forces for counterinsurgency operations⁹.

These approaches were not complementary, but conceptually incompatible within an active conflict environment. Under such conditions, EUPOL Afghanistan operated within a highly fragmented strategic framework, marked by divergent objectives and competing priorities at the level of the Afghan Ministry of Interior. Structurally, reforming a civilian police force in a context dominated by military logic proved almost impossible.

⁷*Ibid*

⁸*Jair van der Lijn et al., Assessing the Effectiveness of European Union Civilian CSDP Missions Involved in Security Sector Reform: The Cases of Afghanistan, Mali and Niger (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, May 2024).*

⁹*Ibid*

II.2. Effectiveness Analysis

(1) Strategic Design

EUTM Mali's mandate was relatively clearly formulated on paper: rebuilding the military capacity of the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA) to enable operations supporting the restoration of territorial integrity and the reduction of terrorist threats. However, the design was constrained by two structural realities: its non-executive character and a rapidly deteriorating security environment. These factors pushed the mission toward successive adaptations and regionalization, with Liptako-Gourma becoming the operational epicenter.

The mandate underwent de facto reconfigurations and expansions that required contributing states to accept increased operational risk. EUCAP Sahel Mali illustrates even more clearly the risk of mandate dilution through gradual accumulation of responsibilities. Successive mandates added counterterrorism, transnational crime, and border security tasks in 2017–2018; later, logistical support, implementation of the Internal Security Reform Plan (PSIRC), and extension to G5 Sahel operational areas in 2019–2020. From 2021 onward, additional responsibilities were added regarding human rights, combating impunity, and supporting the restoration of state authority¹⁰.

In the case of EUPOL Afghanistan, intervention in the security sector was from the start structured around a fundamental strategic contradiction. NATO treated the police as a paramilitary counterinsurgency tool, while the European Union attempted to reform it as a civilian law-enforcement institution anchored in the rule of law. These approaches were conceptually incompatible within an active conflict context.¹¹

(2) Operational Performance

In terms of implementation, EUTM Mali delivered substantial training outputs. The mission began with approximately 500 troops, gradually increasing to over 700 during its peak period (2020–2021), becoming the largest CSDP military training mission at that time. Over more than a decade of deployment, approximately 14,000 Malian soldiers received European training. By the end of 2013, GATIA battalions underwent ten weeks of training at Koulikoro, subsequently, the Combined Mobile Advisory Training Team (CMATT) delivered 19 in-depth training courses across eight locations between 2016 and 2019. The model evolved toward smaller-unit training, focusing on “train-the-trainer” formats, command structures, and specialized capabilities. EUCAP Sahel Mali, with approximately 200–250 civilian experts, aimed at professionalizing the police, gendarmerie, and national guard, strengthening command chains, improving criminal procedures, and supporting integrated border management¹².

However, the regional disparity is essential. In the south, particularly around Bamako training and advisory activities produced tangible tactical improvements in unit structure and planning capacity. However, in Azawad (Kidal, Gao, Timbuktu) and later in central Mali (Mopti, Liptako-Gourma region), the situation remained structurally unstable. Despite the deployment of EU-trained units, jihadist insurgency intensified and intercommunal violence increased. The concept of restoring state authority did not materialize: civil administration was not sustainably re-established, and the state's legitimate monopoly on the use of force was not consolidated¹³.

From 2022–2023 onward, the deterioration of relations between transitional authorities and European partners, rapprochement with the Russian Federation, and the presence of external paramilitary actors led to the progressive suspension of cooperation. EUTM Mali significantly reduced its activities, its mandate was effectively hollowed out operationally, and it was de facto closed. EUCAP Sahel Mali faced similar difficulties, with activities severely constrained by restrictions imposed by Malian authorities and by the worsening security environment¹².

(3) Impact on the Security Environment

At first glance, EUTM Mali's operational impact appears positive in terms of training output. However, it did not prevent the steady deterioration of the security situation. Even with impressive levels of training, the contribution to durable peace remained minimal. The conflict involved multiple actors and was driven by broader structural and external dynamics. The abandonment of the Algiers peace process and the junta's pivot toward Russian/Wagner assistance placed the mission in a precarious position.

As of 2026, Mali continues to face high and persistent levels of armed violence across its territory.

¹⁰Virginie Baudais et al., *The European Union Training Mission in Mali: An Assessment*, SIPRI Background Paper (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, April 2022).

¹¹Jair van der Lijn et al., *Assessing the Effectiveness of European Union Civilian CSDP Missions*.

¹²European Parliament, *Factsheet: European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali)* (Brussels: European Parliament, 2022).

¹³Jair van der Lijn et al., *Assessing the Effectiveness of European Union Civilian CSDP Missions*.

The north remains under significant jihadist influence, central regions experience recurring clashes, and the expansion of violence toward the south indicates generalized degradation of the security environment. Sustainable stabilization has not been achieved, and security sector reform has failed to produce irreversible structural effects.

III. CSDP Missions in Eastern Europe. The Case of EUPM Republic of Moldova

The final case study focuses on Eastern Europe, a region in which the European Union has undertaken a profound strategic recalibration, shifting from reactive crisis management toward a systemic investment in resilience-building and territorial defense capacities. This transition has been driven by two incontestable realities. First, the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine has demonstrated that the EU can no longer assume a peripheral role in the continental security architecture. Through instruments such as the European Peace Facility (EPF) and the EUMAM mission, the Union has become an indispensable strategic partner for Ukraine.

Second, the intensification of Russian hybrid actions against the Associated Trio states: Republic of Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine, has compelled the CSDP to develop response mechanisms tailored to threats operating below the threshold of conventional conflict. In this context, EUPM Republic of Moldova can be analyzed as a new benchmark for civilian strategic partnership missions.

III.1. Structural Conditions

(1) Continental Strategic Relevance

The strategic relevance of the Republic of Moldova has been redefined by the war of aggression in Ukraine. The country has shifted from a position of passive neighborhood to that of an active partner, providing massive humanitarian support and facilitating essential logistical corridors for Ukraine's war effort. This relevance is reinforced by Moldova's demonstrated capacity to resist hybrid attacks orchestrated by the Russian Federation. Political stability and reform-oriented governance displayed during the 2024 and 2025 electoral cycles offer a compelling case for the effectiveness of genuine local ownership within the EU's renewed security strategy.

Beyond institutional progress, the illegal presence of Russian troops in Transnistria and the risks associated with the Cobasna ammunition depot, whose instability could generate a regional-scale catastrophe, require sustained CSDP monitoring in order to prevent this frozen conflict from evolving into an active vulnerability for Europe. In this context, the Republic of Moldova naturally complements the Romania–Ukraine security axis, representing a segment of territorial cohesion where shared identity and values with Romania function as an integration multiplier. Moldova's stability thus constitutes an important element for the security of the Eastern European arc.

(2) European Integration Perspective/Institutional Compatibility

The Republic of Moldova exhibits a remarkably high level of institutional compatibility for a non-member state. The alignment with European standards has been embraced as a mechanism for deep reform across the entire security sector. European integration is not merely a political aspiration, but a central objective embedded in all major national strategic documents, ensuring advanced normative and procedural convergence. A decisive pillar of this compatibility is the Security and Defence Partnership signed in May 2024, the first document of its kind concluded by the Union with a non member state¹⁴.

(3) Genuine Local Ownership

The legitimacy of Moldova's trajectory is primarily confirmed by the positive outcome of the 2024 elections and referendum. Moldova demonstrates active commitment through progress under Chapter 31 (CFSP/CSDP), participation in PESCO projects, and a gradual transition from a purely security beneficiary to an active contributor to international missions. Participation in missions such as EUMAM CAR, EUTM Mali, EUTM Somalia, and EUFOR Althea confirms full strategic alignment and the willingness to contribute directly to European stability.

(4) Strategic Congruence with Other Western Actors

The Republic of Moldova benefits from an optimal symbiosis between EU instruments (EUPM, EPF) and the NATO partnership framework (ITPP)¹⁵, preventing dysfunctional mandate overlap. This Western strategic coordination ensures a unified response to hybrid threats, maximizes assistance efficiency, and supports defense modernization fully aligned with European priorities.

¹⁴Republic of Moldova and the European Union, *Security and Defence Partnership between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union, signed in Brussels, May 21, 2024*.

¹⁵Government of the Republic of Moldova, *Decision on the Approval of the Individual Partnership Programme between the Republic of Moldova and NATO for 2025–2028 (Chişinău, 2025)*.

III.2. Effectiveness Analysis

(1) Strategic Design

From a strategic design perspective, EUPM Moldova's mandate is clearly formulated and directly aligned with the European Union's current geopolitical priorities in Eastern Europe. The April 2023 Council Decision explicitly establishes the central objective: strengthening the resilience of Moldova's security sector in the fields of crisis management and hybrid threats, including cybersecurity and countering foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI)¹⁶.

The mandate is structured around three coherent components:

- (1) Identification of institutional needs;
- (2) Gradual implementation of tailored solutions;
- (3) Strategic advisory support for the development of national policies.

The design is one of partnership and strategic support rather than state reconstruction, making it realistic and proportionate to the local context. Congruence between objectives and instruments is high: the mission is civilian, non-executive, and oriented toward strategic advisory support precisely in the areas where Moldova's vulnerabilities are most evident. Unlike other CSDP missions characterized by expansive mandates and transformative ambitions, EUPM Moldova avoids overstretch and concentrates on resilience-building within a favorable political environment.

(2) Operational Performance

From an operational perspective, EUPM Republic of Moldova is one of the most easily assessable CSDP missions due to its high level of institutional transparency and systematic quantification of results. The mission has been instrumental in developing and adapting national legislation to European best practices, particularly in crisis management and critical infrastructure protection. It conducted a comprehensive assessment of Moldova's crisis management structures and issued EU-standard recommendations, directly contributing to the establishment of key institutions such as the Cyber Security Agency, the Centre for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation (StratCom), and the National Crisis Management Centre¹⁶.

Regarding the expertise, over 4,500 civil servants and security personnel have been trained in crisis management and FIMI response, while 16 national trainers have been prepared to ensure the sustainability of training programs. The mission also facilitated concrete operational support, IT and communications equipment worth over €2.6 million was donated to strengthen institutional infrastructure. A total of 62 capacity-building activities were carried out in strategic communications, counter-disinformation, cybersecurity, and crisis management, along with five study visits to EU Member States to facilitate expertise transfer¹⁷. Operational performance is further reinforced through integration into the broader European support architecture. In October 2024, the EU Cyber Rapid Response Team (CRRT), under PESCO, completed its third deployment to the Republic of Moldova, conducting vulnerability assessments and IT infrastructure monitoring during the presidential elections and constitutional referendum on European integration.

Experts from eight Member States worked directly with national cybersecurity authorities, demonstrating functional coordination between CSDP instruments and PESCO mechanisms¹⁸. In parallel, the European Peace Facility allocated a total of €197 million to the Republic of Moldova by 2025, including €40 million for tactical mobility and command-and-control systems, and €20 million for the modernization of short- and very-short-range air defense capabilities¹⁹.

(3) Impact on the Security Environment

The assessment of impact in the case of the Republic of Moldova must be conducted within a different analytical register compared to Mali or Bosnia and Herzegovina. The issue is not the reduction of armed violence or stabilization of a post-conflict theatre, but rather the prevention of escalation and the strengthening of resilience under sustained hybrid pressure. The most relevant indicator of impact is the management of the 2024 electoral cycle, including the constitutional referendum on European integration, conducted under intense informational and cyber pressure.

¹⁶European External Action Service (EEAS), *Factsheet: European Union Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova (EUPM Moldova) 2025* (Brussels: EEAS, 2025).

¹⁷European External Action Service (EEAS), *Factsheet – 2 Years of EUPM (European Union Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova)* (Brussels: EEAS, 2025).

¹⁸Cyber Rapid Response Teams (CRRT), "CRRT Concludes Deployment in Support of the Republic of Moldova's Cybersecurity," 2024, <https://crrts.eu/news-005-concludes-deployment-support-moldova.html>

¹⁹Council of the European Union, "European Peace Facility: Council Adopts Two Assistance Measures in Support of Moldovan Armed Forces," April 24, 2025, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/press/press-releases/2025/04/24/european-peace-facility-council-adopts-two-assistance-measures-in-support-of-moldovan-armed-forces/>

Despite coordinated attempts at external manipulation and information attacks, the electoral process proceeded without major systemic disruptions, suggesting genuine consolidation of institutional resilience. On the military dimension, support through the European Peace Facility and modernization of command-and-control and air defense capabilities indicate a gradual transition toward strengthening airspace security and deterrence capacity. Although the Republic of Moldova is not engaged in an active conventional conflict, the consolidation of defense infrastructure reduces structural vulnerability and increases the potential cost of external escalation. Therefore, the impact of EUPM Moldova is not reflected in stabilizing an existing conflict, but in preventing its materialization. In the informational, digital, and propaganda domains, tangible results are visible through enhanced institutional response capacity, integration of European support mechanisms, and the maintenance of internal political stability.

Structural Conditions	EUFOR Althea	EUTM/EUCAP Sahel Mali	EUPM Republica Moldova
Continental Strategic Relevance	1	0,5	1
European Integration Perspective / Institutional Compatibility	1	0	1
Genuine Local Ownership	0,5	0	1
Strategic Congruence with Other Western Actors	1	0,5	1
Total	3,5	1	4

Table 1. - Favorable Structural Conditions for the Success of CSDP Missions

IV. Determinants of CSDP Effectiveness: Comparative Conclusions

The comparative analysis of the three case studies highlights a clear correlation between favorable structural conditions and the operational performance of CSDP missions. The European Union's effectiveness in crisis management is not determined solely by the resources mobilized or by technical capacity, but by strategic convergence between European interests, local institutional compatibility, and domestic political ownership.

The war launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in 2022 constituted the decisive moment of CSDP strategic recalibration, accelerating the Union's reorientation toward Eastern Europe. In the new security environment, proximity to conventional and hybrid threats and direct relevance to continental security have become central variables in determining the effectiveness of European interventions.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, EUFOR Althea has demonstrated relative success. In a frozen post-conflict environment, absent systemic active violence, the mission has ensured the maintenance of a safe and secure environment and has functioned as a credible deterrence mechanism. However, the absence of a clearly operationalized exit strategy has gradually transformed the intervention into a quasi-structural component of the country's internal security architecture.

In contrast, Mali, Niger, and the experience in Afghanistan illustrate the limits of the CSDP in high-intensity active conflict contexts. Although EUTM and EUCAP generated significant operational output, political instability, coups d'état, and the absence of consolidated civilian control undermined reform outcomes. In the absence of genuine local ownership and minimum political stability, training and capacity-building cannot generate durable transformation.

The Republic of Moldova reflects the current stage of CSDP strategic recalibration. In a context of hybrid conflict, yet characterized by advanced normative convergence and sustained domestic political commitment, EUPM Moldova operates within a structurally favorable framework. Its impact does not

translate into a reduction of armed violence, a central indicator in evaluating the other missions, since this is not the primary threat. Rather, impact is reflected in strengthened institutional resilience, the development of defense capabilities, and enhanced cybersecurity.

However, given that this process is ongoing and dependent on the evolution of the regional security environment, the impact on the security environment cannot be considered maximal. The assessment reflects a dynamic of progressive consolidation rather than the attainment of a final stabilization stage.

Criteria	EUFOR Althea	EUTM/EUCAP Sahel Mali	EUPM Republica Moldova
Strategic Design	1	0,5	1
Operational Performance	1	0,5	1
Impact on the Security	1	0	0,5
Total	3	1	2,5

Table 2. - Criteria for Assessing the Effectiveness of CSDP Missions

It is also important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. In analyzing CSDP mission effectiveness, conflict typology represents an essential variable. Mali faces a high-intensity active conflict; Bosnia and Herzegovina is situated in a frozen post-conflict context; and the Republic of Moldova operates within a hybrid conflict environment, against the background of a low-intensity frozen conflict (Transnistria). The nature of the security environment directly influences both operational conditions and the criteria by which effectiveness is evaluated. For reasons related to the article's length and the need to preserve a coherent analytical framework, this variable was not formally integrated into the evaluation model, which constitutes a methodological limitation.

A second limitation concerns the simplicity of the analytical instrument. The use of an ordinal scale (0–1) inevitably simplifies complex realities and involves a degree of analytical judgment in score attribution. Moreover, the analysis relies on a limited number of case studies, which restricts the possibility of statistical generalization and places the conclusions within the realm of theoretical inference.

In the case of the Republic of Moldova, impact is assessed within a relatively short time horizon, which does not allow for a definitive evaluation of long-term sustainability. Additionally, the analytical framework employed is not adapted for assessing maritime CSDP missions, an aspect that could be further developed in future research. The intention of this study was not to formulate an exhaustive model applicable to all types of operations, but rather to test an explanatory relationship within a limited comparative framework.

Future research could explicitly integrate conflict typology into the analytical model and test the robustness of these conclusions by extending the analysis to other CSDP missions, such as those in Somalia, the Central African Republic, or Iraq, in order to verify whether the relationship between structural conditions and operational effectiveness holds across additional contexts.

EUROPE



The New Multi Pressure: Europe at the Center of Global Strategic Competition

Abdullah KHALID (United Kingdom)

Sub-deck: Migration, hybrid threats, geo-economics, and rising self-interests are only the surface. Europe's future depends on managing complex interdependence and forging a united security framework.

Europe stands at a **strategic rupture**. The next pressures will not come as tanks on borders but through asymmetric channels — hybrid interference, sudden migration surges, geopolitical coercion, and multipolar disruption. In a world where major powers increasingly act on narrow self-interest, Europe cannot rely on past policies. It must invent a **unified foreign policy**, one that actively manages **complex interdependence**, to preserve autonomy, cohesion, and global influence.

For years, Europe treated challenges like **migration** and **extremist infiltration** as episodic policy problems. Yet these are symptoms of deeper strategic currents: declining global norms, fragmented great-power behavior, and rising competition over influence that transcends old institutional boundaries. The continent's geographic centrality — between Asia, Africa, and the Atlantic — and its highly interconnected economies make it uniquely exposed, and uniquely positioned to respond with political unity rather than reactive drift.

The doctrine of **complex interdependence** once taught that dense economic and political ties reduce the likelihood of conflict. Today, that premise still matters — but only if Europe actively governs those ties. Left unmanaged, interdependence becomes a conduit for coercion. What Europe needs is a Unified Strategic Foreign Policy (USFP) that coordinates economic, security, and diplomatic instruments as an integrated system, not isolated policy silos.

Already, powerful states are prioritizing geo-economic strategies and unilateral maneuvers that reshape incentives and weaken collective frameworks. When the United States imposes **secondary sanctions** that ripple into global energy and finance markets — as seen with measures tied to Russia's war in Ukraine



ESA-21: Europe's Strategic Spine

— it incentivizes others to build alternative systems, fragmenting global cooperation. Simultaneously, China's expanding **Belt and Road Initiative** across Asia, Africa, and Europe demonstrates how economic connectivity can be harnessed for geopolitical leverage, reshaping incentive structures around infrastructure, trade, and financial linkages.

Europe cannot allow its influence to be fragmented. It must consolidate a future-ready structure that integrates political will, collective defense, and shared decision-making into a single operational architecture.

ESA-21: Europe's Strategic Spine

To meet this existential moment, Europe must launch the **European Security Architecture for the 21st Century (ESA-21)** — a unified pact binding member states into shared deterrence, crisis management, and decision processes. ESA-21 is not a new bureaucracy; it is the strategic spine of a Europe that protects its interests through collective will and coordinated action.

ESA-21 Rests on Five Pillars:

1. **Political Unity With Binding Decisions** — A council empowered to act decisively in crises, issuing common threat assessments and joint strategies that prevent unilateral fractures. For example, when the **European Union adopted its Strategic Compass in 2022**, it set a precedent for joint threat assessment and capability planning.
2. **Joint Deterrence Capability** — Integrated forces, intelligence networks, and interoperable defense structures signal unity of purpose and credible deterrence, especially against hybrid threats like cyber attacks and disinformation campaigns.
3. **Managed Interdependence** — Convert dense economic and strategic ties into resilience: coordinated **investment screening**, critical infrastructure governance, and standards that prevent weaponization of interdependence by external powers.
4. **Crisis Response Corps** — Modular civil-military units capable of rapid deployment to manage hybrid pressures, sudden migration flows, and infrastructure disruptions, such as those witnessed during sudden migration waves after the 2021 Afghanistan collapse.
5. **Anchored Alliances with Autonomy** — Maintain partnerships while preserving strategic decision-making autonomy; interoperability enhances European sovereignty rather than diluting it.

Arctic and Northern Strategic Dimensions

Emerging Arctic routes and resource competition amplify multipressure. Russia's modernization of its Northern Fleet and China's polar investments via the **Polar Silk Road** threaten Europe's access to northern sea lanes, undersea cables, and energy corridors. A forward-looking **Arctic strategy** integrated into ESA-21 is essential to maintain operational awareness, protect critical infrastructure, and deter disruptions in this contested theatre.

Geo-economics and Strategic Leverage

Europe must account for economic instruments as core geopolitical tools. **Weaponized finance**, energy dependence, and trade leverage are now primary strategic levers. ESA-21 must link geo-economic resilience to its security architecture, ensuring that Europe's financial, industrial, and critical infrastructure networks cannot be easily exploited by rivals. Recent debates around global payment rails and the development of alternative settlement systems underscore this shift in leverage dynamics.

Strategic Wake-Up Call: The Risk of Complacent Continuity

The greatest danger to Europe is not external aggression alone — it is the illusion of stability within. For too long, incrementalism has been mistaken for strategy, and procedural consensus has substituted for decisive unity. The assumption that existing institutions and slow coordination mechanisms — even after adopting the **Compass** — are sufficient for an era of weaponized interdependence risks becoming a strategic vulnerability in itself. In today's environment, complacency amplifies pressure rather than absorbs it. Europe must move beyond comfort-zone governance and embrace what can be called **Strategic Future-Structuring** — the deliberate design of tomorrow's security architecture before crisis dictates it. Sovereignty is no longer preserved in isolation; it is reinforced through structured unity. The choice is not between national identity and collective strength, but between managed transformation and imposed fragmentation.

Multilateral and Global Coordination

Europe should convene a **Pan-Atlantic Security Forum** connecting partners across the Americas, Africa, and Asia to define crisis management protocols and prevent escalation before it becomes a larger conflict. This forum emphasizes political cohesion, not military bloc alignment, and reinforces Europe's role as a **cohesive global actor** capable of shaping norms and reducing strategic fragmentation.

Visionary Pull-Quotes

- “Europe’s next threats will exploit interdependence, not borders.”
- “Only collective political will can preserve Europe’s influence and autonomy.”
- “Strategic autonomy is purchased by unity, decision-making, and coordinated action, not by budgets alone.”

Conclusion: Europe Must Choose

The stakes are clear: Europe's identity, influence, and freedom of action now depend on how effectively it manages complex interdependence through unity. **ESA-21 is not merely a security framework** — it is the blueprint for a Europe that remains strategically coherent, economically resilient, and politically sovereign in an era defined by multipressure.

In this environment, autonomy cannot be improvised during crisis; it must be deliberately constructed in advance. Collective political will, anchored in shared architecture and integrated instruments of power, is the only credible path to preserving Europe's agency and shaping the strategic landscape rather than reacting to it.

History will not judge Europe by its declarations of unity, but by whether it transformed interdependence into strength before others turned it into leverage.

EUROPE



Europe's Strategic Autonomy Is a Myth — Only Hard Power and Industrial Capacity Matter

Aldo MUNGO (Belgium)

For nearly a decade, “European strategic autonomy” has been treated as a political mantra. Repeated in Brussels communiqués, echoed by ministers, inflated in policy papers, it is supposed to signal Europe’s emancipation from external dependencies and its arrival as a geopolitical actor in its own right. The problem is simple: **strategic autonomy does not exist**. And it cannot exist without hard power, industrial depth, and production capacity.

Autonomy Is Not a Narrative — It Is a Balance Sheet

A sovereign power is not defined by speeches, white papers, or institutional architecture. It is defined by its ability to **produce, sustain, and replace** critical capabilities under stress: munitions, missiles, spare parts, fuel, sensors, secure communications, trained crews, repair chains, and the political stamina to absorb losses. Measured against this standard, Europe fails repeatedly.



Source: <https://encompass-europe.com/comment/the-impacts-of-eu-strategic-autonomy-how-member-states-should-respond>

Defense: Europe Still Borrows Its Warfighting Backbone

Europe possesses high-quality platforms and genuine pockets of excellence. But it lacks three elements that decide wars: **mass, endurance, and integration**.

First, mass. High-intensity warfare consumes materiel at a rate that peacetime procurement systems are not designed to absorb. Stockpiles that look “acceptable” on spreadsheets become irrelevant within weeks when artillery fires thousands of rounds per day, air defenses burn through interceptors, and drones are attrited in swarms. The war in Ukraine did not create this problem; it exposed it. Europe entered the 2020s with stockpiles optimized for symbolic reassurance, not sustained combat.

Second, endurance. Europe’s defense industry is structurally optimized for boutique production: small batches, long lead times, bespoke national requirements, and political trade-offs that lock in inefficiency. Surge capacity is not improvised in a crisis; it must be financed, engineered, and maintained in advance. If warm production lines are not paid for in peacetime, the bill is later paid in blood and strategic humiliation.

Third, integration. Europe remains a collection of national armed forces with incompatible logistics, fragmented procurement, and overlapping platforms. Interoperability exists on paper, but the deeper layers—munitions standards, software, maintenance ecosystems, classified networks—remain largely national. Under pressure, fragmentation turns into paralysis.

This is why Europe continues to rely on NATO—and in practice on the United States—for the high-end enablers that make modern military power decisive: ISR, strategic lift and air-to-air refueling, integrated air and missile defense architecture, space-based early warning, cyber capabilities, and the command-and-control backbone that ties everything together. Europe can deploy brigades; it struggles to run a theater.

There is also the nuclear reality. Europe's deterrence posture ultimately rests on the American umbrella, with French and British forces providing partial, nationally owned contributions. Deterrence is not a press release. It is credibility, signaling, readiness, and a chain of command an adversary believes will function under stress. Remove the U.S. anchor, and Europe's strategic calculus changes overnight.

Industrial Capacity Is the Real Center of Gravity

Wars are not won by doctrines. They are won by factories.

Industrial capacity is the unglamorous but decisive center of gravity of strategic autonomy. It means the ability to produce at scale, replace losses, repair complex systems, secure critical inputs, and prevent coercion through supply-chain choke points.

Europe's vulnerabilities are well known:

- **Munitions:** insufficient stocks, limited energetic-materials supply, constrained production lines, and procurement rules built for accountants rather than war.
- **Missiles and air defense:** high-end interceptors that are expensive, slow to build, and quickly depleted.
- **Electronics:** dependence on external supply chains vulnerable to export controls, sabotage, or scarcity.
- **Maintenance and repair:** the "tail"—spares, depots, technicians, tooling—is where readiness actually lives, and where Europe often underinvests.

In a prolonged conflict, the advantage goes to the side that sustains production, diversifies suppliers, and keeps equipment in the fight. Strategic autonomy without industrial autonomy is theater.

Defense Procurement: Europe's Internal Self-Sabotage

Europe's procurement culture is a strategic liability.

National procurement systems reward political compromise over operational logic. Programs are used to distribute jobs before delivering capability. Specifications multiply to satisfy domestic constituencies. Common requirements are proclaimed, then diluted. The result is a patchwork of platforms, each with its own maintenance chain, training pipeline, and ammunition ecosystem.

This is not an engineering problem. It is a governance problem. Europe has money, talent, and industrial history. What it lacks is ruthless prioritization of readiness and mass production.

Real autonomy would require a wartime procurement mindset: **fewer variants, faster contracting, long-term framework orders** that give industry predictability, and **stockpile targets measured in months of high-intensity consumption**, not abstract "days of supply" designed to reassure parliaments.

Technology and Cloud: Sovereignty That Can Be Switched Off

Europe's dependency is not only military. It is digital—and therefore systemic.

Cloud infrastructure, hyperscalers, AI compute, operating systems, core enterprise software, and critical cybersecurity tools are dominated by non-European actors. This creates three major strategic risks.

Coercion risk. In a crisis, access can be constrained by sanctions regimes, extraterritorial law, licensing decisions, or political pressure. "We own the data" is meaningless if the infrastructure, tooling, and update channels are controlled elsewhere.

Visibility risk. Data governance is not just about privacy; it is about intelligence. Control of cloud layers creates opportunities for collection, pattern mapping, and leverage over critical services.

Continuity risk. If a decision in Washington, or an industrial shock in Asia, can interrupt European public services, transportation systems, defense IT, or industrial workflows, then Europe's sovereignty is conditional. A continent that can be stopped by a remote permissions layer is not

autonomous. It is dependent by design.

Energy: Autonomy Dies in the Basement

Energy is the basement of strategy—unseen until the lights go out.

Recent energy shocks demonstrated that dependence is not abstract. It translates into price spikes, industrial shutdowns, budgetary stress, and political instability. Energy dependence is leverage. It constrains foreign-policy choices and forces governments into permanent crisis management.

Strategic autonomy requires energy resilience: diversified supply, protected infrastructure, adequate storage, and the ability to sustain industry and defense under disruption. Without energy, “industrial capacity” is a slogan. Factories do not run on narratives.

Standards, Supply Chains, and the Illusion of “Values”

Europe too often substitutes moral language for capability language. Values matter.

But values do not stop missiles, repair armored vehicles, produce interceptors, or fabricate semiconductors.

The real strategic contest is over **standards and supply chains**: who controls certification regimes, who sets security requirements, who owns the hardware and the code, who manufactures critical inputs, and who can deny them to others.

Autonomy means building leverage, not merely proclaiming independence.

What Real Autonomy Would Require

If Europe wants to stop performing autonomy and start building it, the requirements are concrete:

A defense-industrial surge plan: warm production lines, guaranteed multiyear orders, an energetic -materials strategy, and stockpile objectives tied to realistic wartime consumption.

Procurement reform: fewer national variants, more common munitions standards, accelerated contracting, and a bias for speed and mass over perfection.

Investment in strategic enablers: ISR, space, missile-defense architecture, strategic lift, refueling, secure communications—the capabilities that determine whether forces can actually fight.

Targeted digital sovereignty: secure European cloud capacity for critical services, clear rules for sensitive workloads, and hardened supply chains for chips and cyber tools.

Energy resilience: protection, diversification, storage, and contingency planning that treats energy as a national-security asset.

None of this is glamorous. All of it is decisive.

Manpower and Training: The Forgotten Dimension

Industrial mass is useless without trained people to operate it. Europe faces recruitment shortfalls, uneven readiness, and limited training throughput for high-end skills—air-defense crews, electronic-warfare specialists, maintainers, cyber operators. A serious autonomy agenda would treat personnel as part of the industrial base: expanded training pipelines, reserve structures, maintenance corps, and readiness funded as a standing cost, not a crisis expense.

Finally, autonomy requires decision speed. Europe’s strategic culture too often produces late, lowest-common-denominator choices. In real crises, time is a weapon. If Europe cannot decide fast, it will always outsource the decision to those who can.

Conclusion: Stop Talking About Autonomy if You Won’t Pay for It

Europe is not powerless. But it is structurally dependent—and dependency is the opposite of autonomy.

Strategic autonomy is not a concept. **It is a bill.**

If Europe is unwilling to pay it in factories, stockpiles, enablers, and hard decisions, then it should stop selling the myth.

Because in the real world, sovereignty is not declared.

It is built—and defended.

EUROPE - WESTERN BALKANS



Geopolitical Analysis of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) within the Regional Security Complex – Western Balkans

Vasile Alexandru ARDELEAN (Romania)

Introduction

This paper analyzes the security dynamics in the Western Balkans, using the theoretical framework of the Copenhagen School to demonstrate that this region constitutes a Regional Security Complex (RSC). The analysis starts from the premise that the security of the component states, with Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) as its central point, is so interconnected that no national problem can be solved in isolation from the regional context.

The central argument of the paper argues that BiH represents the core of vulnerability of this complex, where internal fragility is constantly exploited by regional (Serbia and Croatia) and global (Russian Federation) actors. This dynamic was exacerbated by the war in Ukraine, which did not function as a factor of cohesion, but accelerated the internal polarization and secessionist tendencies of the Republika Srpska (RS), transforming the country into a geopolitical battleground.

The paper demonstrates that, although there is a theoretical path towards European integration, BiH remains “captive” between a system of ethno-nationalist patronage and a paralyzed administrative structure, validating the hypothesis that the insecurity of one state in this complex inevitably becomes the insecurity of all.

I Regional Level

1. Do the Western Balkan states form a Regional Security Complex according to Barry Buzan’s criteria?

This paper aims to analyze the security dynamics in the Western Balkans, focusing on the state of



Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2010/10/3/country-profile-bosnia-herzegovina>

¹Barry Buzan și Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 43.

BiH. Thus, it is essential to start from the premise of the Copenhagen School of Thought: security is a rational problem. States do not live in a vacuum, but are geographically and politically conditioned by their neighbors¹.

In the paper *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (2003), Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver define a Regional Security Complex (RSC) as: “[A] set of units whose major processes of securitisation, de-securitisation, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another.”²

Thus, a Regional Security Complex is a group of states whose security concerns and problems are so closely interconnected that the security of one state cannot be analyzed or solved in isolation from the others. In the Western Balkans we have the following states: Croatia, BiH, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania and North Macedonia. Is this group of states so interconnected in terms of security concerns and problems that the security problem of one state cannot be solved without the other states in the region?

The relationship between these states is a very complicated one, Barry Buzan introduces us in his work, the structure of a Regional Security Complex, being the result of the interaction between four key factors: friendship/enmity models, proximity, power distribution and the anarchic structure of the international system³.

First, we have the terms of “Enmity”, that is, *Relationships conditioned by suspicion and fear*, and of “Amity”: *Relationships ranging from genuine friendship to expectations of protection or support*.⁴ Which of these terms have defined the Western Balkans in recent history? With the breakup of Yugoslavia, the Western Balkan space was marked by war, distrust, genocide, ethnic explosions, political tensions, territorial disputes and a state of suspicion towards the new governments that emerged. Thus, we can see that the type of relationship that dominates in this Western Balkan space is Enmity. For example, in the case of BiH, security cannot be taken in isolation from that of Serbia or Croatia, due to such strong cross-border ethnic ties and the recent memory of the conflict. Any instability in Banja Luka (RS) immediately generates insecurity in Sarajevo and activates security reactions in Belgrade and Zagreb. That is why I decided to include Croatia in the Western Balkans, even though it has been part of the EU since 2013, Croatia is a guarantor state of the Dayton Agreement, the Croatian constitution obliges it to protect the Croats in BiH. Any political crisis in Mostar instantly becomes a subject of national security in Zagreb. Also, Croatia has the longest border with BiH, even with its status as a fully integrated state in the EU, Croatia cannot escape the geographical proximity. As long as BiH is the centre of the security complex, Croatia cannot get out of it.

There are also Amity relations in the Western Balkans, but they are much less nuanced and more isolated. For example, the general shared desire to join the European Union (EU), where all the Western Balkan states have already opened negotiations except Kosovo, which due to its complicated status currently only has the status of applicant. We can also observe Amity relations in bilateral relations in the area, for example: between Serbia and Montenegro or Albania and Kosovo, but these relations are usually only bilateral and various sources of dispute can often arise.

Secondly, geographical proximity matters because threats (military, political or environmental) travel much more easily over short distances, and the states in the region are, practically, “condemned” to their neighbourhood, unable to isolate themselves from crises in the immediate vicinity.

Third, the distribution of power (regional polarity) heightens tensions because the Western Balkan region is characterized by a clear asymmetry, where Serbia holds military and political superiority over weaker and fragmented states, such as BiH or Kosovo. This structural inequality transforms mere suspicion (enmity) into a real existential threat for smaller states, which are not as militarily powerful or politically stable.

Last but not least, another constitutive element of the Regional Security Complex in the Western Balkans is the anarchic structure. According to Buzan’s theory, security complexes can only form in an anarchic system, composed of autonomous units (states) that do not subordinate themselves to a formal higher authority⁵. In the case of the Western Balkans, anarchy is the environment that allows the security dilemma to manifest itself. Although there is a strong presence of international actors (EU, NATO), the Balkan states function as distinct political units, responsible for their own survival. This lack of an absolute central authority forces the states to adopt self-help behaviours. For BiH, the regional anarchic structure is problematic: being an internally divided, hyper-decentralized and relatively weak state, it must navigate a competitive regional environment, where its more powerful neighbors (Serbia, Croatia) take advantage of their autonomy to influence the internal Bosnian dynamics, under the pretext of protecting their own ethnicities.

Synthesizing the analysis of the four types of interdependence defined by Buzan (geographical

²*Ibidem*, p. 44.

³*Ibidem*, p. 53.

⁴*Ibidem*, p. 50.

proximity, anarchic structure, asymmetric polarity and social construction dominated by enmity), we can unequivocally state that the Western Balkans constitute a Regional Security Complex. This region is not just a sum of neighbouring states, but a coherent security system, in which interdependence is negative, generated by mutual fear and competition for power. BiH represents the focus of this complex: its internal vulnerability does not remain just a local problem, but automatically becomes a regional problem, activating the security reflexes of the stronger, polarizing states, Serbia and Croatia. At the same time, we can state according to the theoretical grid of the Copenhagen School, that: the states in the Western Balkans are caught in a security dynamic together, validating the hypothesis that the insecurity of one becomes the insecurity of all.

2. What Was the Impact of the War in Ukraine on Your Region? What is the Most Recent Event at the EU/NATO Level that Brought Changes in the Regional Security Dynamics?

Regarding the impact of the war in Ukraine on the region, it acted not as a factor of cohesion, but, paradoxically, the war accelerated internal polarization, especially through the privileged relationship between the Serbian entity (RS) and the Russian Federation. The war in Ukraine was seen as a potential unifying element, an element that would mobilize Bosnian society and the various constituent ethnic groups, as happened in most states on the European continent. Also due to the conflict, many states have strengthened their capacity to govern and respond to destabilizing factors, both external and internal. BiH, on the other hand, with a hyper-decentralized government and administrative structure, seems to have learned nothing from this alarm signal. This was later seen in the internal and external destabilizations caused by both the Russian Federation, in order to slow down European integration, and by Serbia, a traditional ally of Russia. Thus, both Russia and Serbia, through the RS proxy, are trying to destabilize BiH, even to the point of secession, which would mean the end of the BiH project.

From a theoretical perspective, we are witnessing what Vasile Rotaru describes in his analysis of the “instrumentalization of soft power sources” in the immediate vicinity⁶. In the context of the war, Russia moved from simple cultural attraction to aggressively using its ties with local actors to destabilize Europe’s southern flank. For BiH, this meant that the leaders in Banja Luka felt encouraged by Moscow to defy the authority of the central institutions and the High Representative, transforming the country into a proxy geopolitical battlefield. Russia does not need to send tanks to BiH (as it did in Ukraine), because it is much cheaper and more efficient to use M. Dodik to destabilize BiH and the Western Balkans from within. This proxy war mechanism works asymmetrically and extremely effectively for the Kremlin: while Moscow offers the Serbian entity diplomatic protection (including through the right of veto at the UN) and preferential energy resources, the leaders in Banja Luka “pay” by generating artificial crises that paralyze the Bosnian state. It is a low-cost strategy for Russia, which, without deploying troops, manages to maintain a hotbed of instability behind the NATO front, using the political elite in RS to reverse the significance of any Western progress, hard-won by Sarajevo. Thus, cultural and religious affinities, theorized by V. Rotaru, are no longer just bridges of friendship, but are militarized (weaponized) and transformed into instruments of institutional blockage, meant to demonstrate the fragility of the European project in the region⁷.

This dynamic has had a devastating effect on the European path, a reality captured perfectly by the analysis of the Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW) from July 2025, entitled “Bosnia and Herzegovina’s European integration at an impasse”⁸. The study demonstrates how the political alignment of RS with the Kremlin’s narrative effectively blocked the decision-making mechanism in Sarajevo. Far from being just electoral rhetoric, the Serbian entity’s refusal to join the sanctions against Russia created a constitutional deadlock, transforming BiH from a credible candidate for the EU into a state captive of Russian interests. In practice, the war in Ukraine provided the perfect pretext for secessionist tendencies to be masked under the guise of a “neutrality” that, in fact, serves Moscow’s interests in keeping the region in check.

The official confirmation of this failure came with the most recent major event at the European level: the publication of the European Commission’s Autumn 2025 Report⁹. Although the geopolitical context called for an acceleration of enlargement, the report made it very clear that the speed of integration was directly proportional to the degree of Russian influence in Bosnian institutions. The major implication of this

⁶Vasile Rotaru, ‘Forced Attraction? How Russia is Instrumentalizing Its Soft Power Sources in the “Near Abroad”’, *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 65, nr. 1, 2017, pp. 37-48.

⁷*Ibidem*, pp. 40-42.

⁸Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW), *Bosnia and Herzegovina’s European integration at an impasse*, 25 July 2025, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2025-07-25/bosnia-and-herzegovinas-european-integration-impasse>, accessed January 15, 2026.

⁹European Commission, *Bosnia and Herzegovina 2025 Report*, Brussels, 2025, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/5d8fc547-f8f8-456f-84e3_b38998acfafd_en?filename=bosnia-and-herzegovina-report-2025.pdf, accessed January 15, 2026.

report and the events of late 2025 is that Brussels has drawn a red line: the funds from the Growth Plan and the advancement of negotiations are now strictly conditional on the elimination of the “Russian factor” from the domestic political equation. Thus, the war in Ukraine demonstrated that, as long as Banja Luka remains connected to Moscow, BiH’s road to Brussels is, de facto, closed.

II National Level

The analysis of the social and political evolution of BiH in the last decade shows us the image of a state stuck in a perpetual transition, where political paralysis has become not an exception, but a way of governing. If we look back at the last 10 years, we observe a constant regression from aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration to a brutal struggle for the survival of statehood. From an economic and political point of view, BiH is not only a poor country, but it is a textbook example of what the specialized literature calls “state capture”, where public resources are systematically diverted by ethno-nationalist elites to maintain their power¹⁰.

Thus, in order to form a complete picture of the political and economic situation in BiH, it is absolutely necessary to analyse all the data about this state. Interpreting the data provided by the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) 2024 and the Nations in Transit 2024 report, the picture is bleak. BiH is classified as a “hybrid/transitional regime”, characterized by weak democratic institutions that serve only as a facade for clientelistic networks¹¹. The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI 2024) places the country in one of the last places in Europe, an indicator that directly explains the massive exodus of labour and the lack of major foreign investments. Although statistics indicate an increase in GDP per capita (reaching approx. 8,500 USD per capita in 2024)¹², this figure hides a deeply divided reality. Economic growth in BiH is not uniform, but follows a Centre-Periphery model, typical of states with weak governance.

Analysing investments, we observe a sad inequality: according to OSCE data and local statistical agencies, approximately 63% of total foreign direct investment and major economic activity is concentrated in just three administrative centres: Sarajevo, Banja Luka and Mostar¹³. This polarization has created a “two-speed Bosnia”, on the one hand the administrative centres of Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks: Sarajevo Canton and the Banja Luka region, where income opportunities are more than 2 times higher than the national average and where the political and administrative elite is concentrated. On the other hand we have the rest of the country, peripheral cantons such as Una-Sana, Canton 10 or eastern RS, which are facing massive deindustrialization. The lack of economic opportunities here directly fuels the exodus of the population (internal migration to Sarajevo or external to the EU), transforming vast territories into “demographic deserts” vulnerable from a security point of view.

The geopolitical interpretation of these figures indicates that poverty in BiH is not an economic accident, but rather a political tool. Maintaining an economy dependent on the public sector allows the leaders of the three ethnic groups to control the electorate through state jobs. Thus, as the BTI data show, the market economy is dysfunctional not because of a lack of resources, but because of intentional political blockages, which transform any reform initiative into an interminable ethnic negotiation.

Secessionism remains the main threat to BiH’s national security. Secessionism, fuelled also from the outside, draws its foundation from within the constitutional architecture created by the Dayton Agreement. The official document, the “Security Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina”, formally identifies terrorism and organized crime as the main risks to the sovereignty and stability of the Bosnian state, but the document is outpaced by the reality on the ground, being itself a victim of the lack of political consensus¹⁴. The real security problem, with devastating and current implications, is in fact the secessionist project of the RS. As the analysis of the Heinrich Böll Stiftung think-tank emphasizes (2025), the actions of the leader M. Dodik have gone beyond the rhetorical phase, moving on to the creation of parallel institutions (threats to re-establish its own army, non-implementation of the decisions of the Constitutional Court)¹⁵. Thus, these parallel institutions leading to the creation of a parallel state, transform BiH de facto into a “confederation”, formed by two increasingly autonomous entities. This “de facto secession” represents a frozen war that has

¹⁰See: “State capture”, Wikipedia, accessed on January 16, 2026, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_capture.

¹¹Freedom House, *Nations in Transit 2024: Bosnia and Herzegovina*, disponibil online la <https://freedomhouse.org/country/bosnia-and-herzegovina/nations-transit/2024>; coroborat cu Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 Country Report — Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024, disponibil online la <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/BiH>.

¹²World Bank. “GDP per capita (current US\$) – Bosnia and Herzegovina, World Bank Open Data, accessed on January 16, 2026, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=BA>.

¹³OSCE, *Consequences of Economic Inequality on Migration in BiH*, report corroborated with World Bank data on local development, 2024.

¹⁴Security Policy of Bosnia and Herzegovina, official document adopted by the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo, 2006 (updated/contextualized to the level of 2024 through official statements).

¹⁵Heinrich Böll Stiftung, *Deteriorating state crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 19 martie 2025, disponibil online la: <https://www.boell.de/en/2025/03/19/deteriorating-state-crisis-bosnia-and-herzegovina>, accesat la 16 ianuarie 2026.

been politically reignited: by undermining central sovereignty, the Serbian entity is testing the limits of the international community's patience and risks provoking a violent collapse of the state.

BiH's relationship with its neighbours is a complicated one, determined by a regional environment once dominated by generalized distrust. BiH borders, for the most part, to the north, west and south, with Croatia. As I argued in the first part of the text, I strongly believe that Croatia is part of the Western Balkans Regional Security Complex, even if it is part of structures such as NATO or the EU. Buzan argues that the borders of a Regional Security Complex (RSC) are defined by the intensity of security interaction, not by political treaties¹⁶. A state is part of a RSC as long as its major security problems are interconnected with those of its neighbours. And Croatian security problems are strictly interconnected with those of BiH. The Croat minority in the south of the country is a very important issue for Croatia, being responsible for their protection according to the Dayton Agreement. Mostar, together with Sarajevo, jointly form the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), the main entity, along with RS, that make up the Bosnian state. The Croat-Bosniak biome, represented by the FBiH, represents that part of BiH that desires European integration and multi ethnic coexistence, which this model itself shows to be very possible, and Croatia is the main supporter of the FBiH aspirations. Therefore, relations between BiH and Croatia are generally friendly: Croatia firmly supports Sarajevo in its development and European integration and condemns the attempts of the other pole of power, Belgrade, as well as RS, to destabilize the entire regional security complex.

The relationship with Serbia remains defined by deep historical ties and the special relationship with RS. After 1995, the relationship between Belgrade and Sarajevo remained tense, especially after the bloody war in BiH and the attempts at ethnic cleansing led by Slobodan Milošević. Relations have hardly ever warmed up again, as Serbia plays a paternalistic role, using the Serbs in BiH as a lever of regional influence, keeping BiH in a state of dependence and controlled instability. In my opinion, this behaviour is not so much due to geopolitical influence as to the revisionist remnants of the idea of a Greater Serbia from the 1990s, behaviour that evolved and transformed into the situation and relations that we can observe today in the Western Balkans. On the other hand, it is not only Belgrade that has attempted to destabilize BiH; recently Zagreb has become the source of diplomatic tensions. A recent analysis by the IFIMES institute (2025), entitled "Plenković's Undermining of the Fragile Peace in the Western Balkans?", draws attention to the way Zagreb aggressively intervenes in the internal politics of BiH¹⁷. Under the pretext of protecting the rights of Croats, Croatia (an EU/NATO member state) is lobbying for electoral changes that would deepen ethnic segregation. The IFIMES report warns that this approach not only destabilizes BiH, but risks pushing the majority population (Bosnian Muslims) into dangerous isolation, fuelling the feeling that the country is under siege from both sides.

For many years, Montenegro was the "best neighbour" of BiH. Under the leadership of Milo Đukanović, Montenegro recognized the Srebrenica genocide, joined NATO and distanced itself from Serbia¹⁸. For BiH, the border with Montenegro was the only "safe" border, from which no problems came. The change of political regime in Podgorica and the coming to power of coalitions supported by pro-Serb parties (Democratic Front, etc.) changed the facts of the problem a little. Serbian political leaders in Montenegro (e.g. Andrija Mandić) have a very close relationship with M. Dodik (the leader of Serbs in BiH). They visit each other often, participate in controversial holidays (RS Day) and promote the idea of a "Serbian World" (Srpski Svet)¹⁹. From a security perspective, the risk is not a direct military one, but rather a political one. The governmental instability in Montenegro and the identity polarization there serve as a source of inspiration and legitimization for the secessionist agenda of the RS, thus creating a new axis of pressure on the southern flank of BiH.

In conclusion, at the national level, BiH is in a vicious circle. Economic and political data confirm that the state is captured by elites who instrumentalize ethnic fears (Serbian secessionism and masked Croat irredentism) to maintain themselves in power, transforming the country into a security "problem" in the heart of the Balkans.

¹⁶Barry Buzan și Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 47-48.

¹⁷International Institute for Middle East and Balkan Studies (IFIMES), *Bosnia and Herzegovina 2025: Plenković's Undermining of the Fragile Peace in the Western Balkans?*, Ljubljana, 2025, available online at: <https://www.ifimes.org/en/researches/bosnia-and-herzegovina-2025-plenkovics-undermining-of-fragile-peace-in-the-western-balkans/5506>, accessed January 16, 2026.

¹⁸Parliament of Montenegro, *Resolution on the Srebrenica Genocide*, Podgorica, June 17, 2021.

¹⁹See the analysis *The 'Serbian World' concept and regional stability*, IFIMES (International Institute for Middle East and Balkan Studies), Ljubljana, 2024; in conjunction with the official statements of the leaders of the Democratic Front regarding the cultural and political unity of the Serbs in the region.

²⁰NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, adopted at the Madrid Summit, p. 10 (reference to the Western Balkans and external interference). ^2 European Commission, *2025 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy*, Brussels, 4 November 2025, available at: https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/2025-enlargement-package-shows-progress-towards-eu-membership-key-enlargement-partners-2025-11-04_en, accessed January 17, 2026.

III Case Study

The most significant event of the year was the final conviction of M. Dodik and his ban on holding public office. The conviction came after the 2024 attempts of the Banja Luka legislature to adopt the “Law on the Immunity of RS Officials from the Decisions of the High Representative”, a move that amounted to a de facto legal secession. This action immediately activated the alert mechanisms described in the NATO Strategic Concept 2022. The Alliance document explicitly defines the Western Balkans region as one of “strategic importance”, where authoritarian actors (Russia) are undermining democracy²⁰. Based on this document, the Alliance interpreted the constitutional crisis in BiH not as an internal dispute, but as the opening of a potential “second front” by Russia. The response was swift and preemptive by reinforcing the EUFOR Althea mission (led by Romanian General Florin-Marian Barbu) with strategic reserve troops, sending a clear signal that any attempt to change the borders would be met militarily, thus nullifying the lever of security blackmail used for decades by Serbian leaders.

M. Dodik was officially dismissed on 18 August 2025, although the trial began in February 2025, when he received the first conviction, but he refused to leave office for six months, defying the decisions of the Sarajevo court. His mandate was forcibly terminated by the Central Election Commission only after the Court of Appeal confirmed the final sentence in early August. Although he was sentenced to one year in prison, M. Dodik is at large. The explanation lies in a legal loophole in the Bosnian legal system: In BiH, prison sentences of up to one year can be converted into a criminal fine, so on 12 August 2025, the court accepted his lawyers’ request to convert the sentence and Dodik paid approximately 36,500 marks (about 18,500 euros) for his freedom. Currently (January 2026), Dodik lives in the RS (most likely at his residence near Banja Luka). Although he no longer holds an official position, he remains the leader of the SNSD party and continues to exert indirect influence on his successor, Siniša Karan.

After Dodik’s dismissal, early elections were held in RS. The result, a narrow victory for Siniša Karan, the pro-Russian candidate from the SNSD (Dodik’s party), offered a lesson in the resilience of political patronage systems. Analysis of the 50.4% vote indicates a deadlocked and divided RS: one half seeking an alternative to international isolation and the other half fearing the dilution of Serbian identity in a centralized state. Karan’s election was essentially a victory for the continuity of the Dodik regime, but under a new persona. The opposition, however, rejected the result, accusing the SNSD of what it claims is yet another case of electoral fraud, a phenomenon that it says is repeated in every election in this entity. Far from being a new beginning, this election confirmed that the old power structures can survive even without their central figure, keeping BiH in a state of deadlock similar to the situation before the dismissal, where Dodik himself declared: “Those who wanted me gone, now have two Dodiks instead of one²¹.”

From the perspective of European integration, the situation of BiH in 2025 is painfully shaped between the declared ambitions and the reality on the ground, the country remaining the “tail” of the Western Balkans, at a time when its neighbors are accelerating towards Brussels. While Montenegro and Albania are making plans to close negotiations in 2026 and 2027 respectively, BiH has turned the integration process into a “non-event”, especially from the perspective of the Bosnian press²². If we look a little beyond the data and technical assessments, the reality is sad, BiH received a readiness score of only 1.7 on a scale of 1 to 5, a tiny increase of 0.03 points compared to the previous year, which places it in last place in the region, even behind Kosovo, which obtained 2.11²³. This stagnation has immediate and stinging financial costs for citizens, beyond the political rhetoric, Brussels has directly penalized the administrative incompetence in Sarajevo by cutting 10% of the funds allocated through the “Reform and Growth Facility”²⁴. The reason is simple and disappointing: the Bosnian authorities were not able to send the “Reform Agenda” necessary for the release of money on time, the document being sent only in September 2025, well after the deadlines. Moreover, the country finds itself in an absurd situation where it wants to join, but has no one to hold the technical discussion, because it has failed to appoint a Chief Negotiator nor to adopt laws essential for justice, such as the Law on Courts or the Law on the Supreme Judicial Council²⁵.

However, there is a reason why the EU continues to keep the door open, and it is geopolitics and security, aspects clearly outlined in both the NATO Strategic Concept, from 2022, and the EU Strategic Compass. BiH has managed to align 100% with the EU’s foreign and security policy in theory, according to the central government in Sarajevo, but in practice, RS has not followed the same path, transforming the dynamics in the Western Balkans. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and non-RS presidency members support the sanctions and vote “yes” in Brussels. Thus, the EU ticks that BiH has “aligned”. Vital in the context of the war in Ukraine and Russian influence in the region, even RS is vehemently opposed.

²¹“Republika Srpska: Karan’s victory cements Dodik’s power,” *Deutsche Welle (DW)*, accesat la 17 ianuarie 2026, <https://www.dw.com/en/republika-srpska-karans-victory-cements-dodiks-power/a-74874269>.

²²Džihic, V. (2025). *Bosnia and the EU enlargement report – A non-event in a non-process. European Western Balkans.*

²³European Commission. (2025). *2025 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy*, p. 30-31 (analysis of comparative scores).

²⁴*Ibidem* p. 18.

²⁵*Ibidem*, p. 6

However, they cannot always block the diplomatic vote in Brussels (or choose to ignore it), but they do block internal implementation, for example, RS entities do not effectively enforce economic restrictions against Russian companies. This alignment, even if only on the Federation side, directly responds to the priorities of the EU Strategic Compass, which sees the Western Balkans as a critical area for European security, where stability is non-negotiable²⁶. Also, in the logic of the NATO Strategic Concept, keeping BiH in the Western orbit is essential to prevent the country from becoming an outpost of Russian destabilization²⁷. Practically, alignment with sanctions and foreign policy has become “like a guarantee” for BiH; without it, Brussels’ patience would probably have run out completely.

Case Study Conclusion

As a conclusion and recapitulation of the regional-national-global points, we will strategically analyse the internal chaos and effects of the war in Ukraine.

Globally, the year 2024-2025 was marked by severe tensions generated by the RS entity and its leader, and the war in Ukraine aggravated the instability in BiH. If in the past the crises in Banja Luka were treated as internal political disputes, the context of the Russian invasion transformed M. Dodik’s secessionism into a direct security threat to NATO’s southern flank. The legislative attempts of RS in 2024 were no longer tolerated precisely because of the NATO Strategic Concept 2022, the allies interpreted Dodik’s legal manoeuvres and decided to be visionary, because a simple nationalist rhetoric can lead to the opening of a potential “second front” by Russia in Europe. This paradigm shift led to a preventive and rapid military response through the EUFOR Althea mission, nullifying the old strategy of Serbian leaders to blackmail the West with instability. In effect, the war in Ukraine forced NATO and the EU to impose a military “red line” in BiH, even as political progress remained stalled.

BiH has also become a testing ground for the resilience of Western institutions in the face of Russian influence. The dilemma of 2025 is the “schizophrenia” of Bosnian foreign policy. The government in Sarajevo votes with the EU in Brussels (supporting sanctions against Russia), which gives the West the diplomatic victory it needs on the global stage. However, on the ground, the RS blocks the actual implementation of these economic sanctions. This diplomatic alignment, although partly unimplemented domestically, has become BiH’s “security guarantee”. The EU and NATO keep the country in the Western orbit not for its democratic performance, but to prevent it from becoming a Russian outpost, according to the priorities of the EU Strategic Compass.

Regionally, BiH has lost its rhythm, becoming the isolated “tail” of the Western Balkans. While Montenegro and Albania are preparing to close negotiations in 2026-2027, BiH has stagnated at a readiness score of 1.7 (on a scale of 1 to 5), surpassed even by Kosovo (2.11). European integration has become a “non-event”. The only regional success is military deterrence. The strengthening of the EUFOR Althea mission (under Romanian command) has sent a clear signal that changing borders is impossible, securing the region even if political dialogue fails.

At the national level, 2025 demonstrated that the political patronage system is stronger than justice or international pressure. Although Dodik’s conviction was presented as a triumph of the rule of law, the finality was cynical. The legal loophole that allowed him to buy his freedom with approximately 18,500 euros showed the limits of the judicial system. Dodik lost his position, but not his power. The early elections and the victory of Siniša Karan (50.4%) confirmed that RS remains captive to the same power structures. The election of a pro-Russian controlled by Dodik shows a divided society, which prefers isolation and protecting identity over integration. As Dodik himself stated, the result was that BiH ended up with “two Dodiks instead of one”. The administrative chaos also had direct financial consequences. The 10% cut in the “Reform and Growth Facility” funds due to the delay in the Reform Agenda and the lack of a Chief Negotiator show a functional inability of the state to manage the accession process, beyond political rhetoric that the most important problem of BiH is identity and administrative-structural. The foundations of the Bosnian state were thought of as an ethnic state and not a civic one. When its own citizens identify more with the local ethnicity, the central federal government is weak, powerless. Bosnians need to learn that you can be Serb, Croat, Bosniak, or Orthodox, Catholic or Muslim and be a citizen of BiH, regardless of other aspects.

Geopolitical Prediction

Considering all the data presented, I hope that the reader now understands the events through multiple lenses and positions, so that the overall picture is a more complex one, because the situation in BiH is not at all a simple one. The structural problems of the Bosnian state are multiple: deep-rooted corruption, the captured state, corrupt institutions, political patronage, oligarchy, external influences, etc. But, I believe

²⁶Council of the European Union. (2022). *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*, p. 15

²⁷NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, adopted at the Madrid Summit, p. 10

These ethnicities and religions have coexisted peacefully for hundreds of years, both during the Ottoman Empire and during the time of Yugoslavia. After all, BiH is a Yugoslav mini-state, where the real problems are poverty and lack of development, and the other is often blamed as a scapegoat, either the government in Sarajevo or the government in Banja Luka. Only by working together can Bosnian South Slavs lead a better life at home in BiH. This is absolutely possible; after all, even the nationalist rhetoric that began in the 1980s is a social construct. Given the violent breakup of Yugoslavia, a sense of mistrust still prevails, but that does not mean that things cannot change.

Also, BiH's fate is, more than ever, linked to that of Serbia. If the nationalist rhetoric currently led by Vučić changes and the Belgrade-Budapest-Bratislava-Moscow axis breaks down (we see clear signs in Hungary, protests in Serbia, and Russia seems exhausted in Ukraine), then it is likely that a possible pro-European government would continue Serbia's path to the EU and resolve the Kosovo dispute, all for a better future together in the EU. On this basis, RS would remain isolated, and a possible pro-European government in Belgrade could reconcile relations with Sarajevo and even make Serbs in BiH more cooperative. The will is there; the pro-Russian candidate from RS, Siniša Karan, won by a narrow margin, the other half, supporting the opposition, namely Branko Blanuša, shows us that these people are fed up with poverty, corruption and conflict and want change. However, I believe that until Serbia resolves its dispute with Kosovo and joins the EU, BiH will not do so either, in any case sooner. Montenegro and Albania will probably be the newest members of the EU, followed by North Macedonia by the end of the decade. Thus, all these states being members of both NATO and the EU, the only states left in the Western Balkans Regional Security Complex will be BiH, Serbia and Kosovo, whose relationship is closely interconnected. The EU wants and shows now, more than ever, that it wants to become a political and military actor on the international stage. The data shows us that the EU will continue to support the Western Balkans on their European path; they have all the necessary mechanisms and tools, as well as the necessary capital. The Russian war machine is exhausted and the economy is in free fall; even the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine are taking concrete steps towards Europe, and at some point Belgrade and Banja Luka will remain isolated if they do not negotiate and change the paradigm.

BiH, together with Kosovo, will probably be the last states in the Western Balkans to join the EU; if the geopolitical context is favourable, as I explained above, most likely sometime towards the end of the 2030s, these states will join the EU. This is the only way for the Western Balkans, and by extension, for BiH, to overcome collective traumas, hatred and poverty. European integration brings prosperity for all, regardless of religion or ethnicity; a future in Europe is a better future.

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EUROPE - WESTERN BALKANS



Securing the Balkan Route: Ankara's Key Role in Regional Stability and Multipolar Dynamics

Mattia Giacinto De SIMONE (Italy)

Introduction:

Turkey has established itself as a regional power, building a solid sphere of influence in the enlarged Mediterranean, while aiming to become a world power. Its status as a regional power lies mainly in its fundamental role as a stabilizer in the Balkans, one of the most dangerous areas in the world in geopolitical terms. In addition, the Balkan route is considered to be the primary land corridor used by migrants from middle-eastern countries to reach the European Union.

Ankara is transitioning from a buffer state for the West to a regional arbiter, thanks to its strategic autonomy and its capability to pursue national interests. Turkey is benefiting from the waning influence of European actors, who have always had difficulties in managing this fragmented region with success. Thanks to multiple diplomatic initiatives Ankara has been able to administer efficiently ethnic and social clefs.

One of Turkey's most important qualities is the ability to pursue effective defense diplomacy, which aims at reaching regional strategic goals. After the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war, Ankara has proposed herself as a valid alternative as an energy gateway for southeast Europe, funding investments in critical infrastructures while influencing the area at a geoeconomic level. This foreign policy model signals the will to consolidate the influence over the region through soft power, offering technological partnership to regional actors. Turkey's move towards neo-Ottomanism aims at excluding major powers from the management of the Balkan Route, minimizing external interferences, and creating a favorable context for its imperial interests.



Source: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkiye-vows-deeper-regional-cooperation-at-2nd-balkan-peace-platform?>

The Strategic Value of the Balkan Route

The primary entry points of this corridor are Bulgaria and Greece, which are the most direct land routes from Turkey, and it proceeds through the core region, composed of North Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Before arriving in Schengen countries, it's possible to reach EU entry points, which are Hungary, Croatia, and Romania. Serbia is the central hub country of the Balkan route, and all the migration flows that pass through this corridor converge here before attempting to enter inside EU territories. In this context, Turkey acts as a gateway¹ by hosting millions of migrants and controlling their access to the entry points of the route, Bulgaria and Greece. By pursuing this policy, Ankara can potentially destabilize Europe by altering the migration flows and contributing to the social divisions inside the continent. This dynamic gives Turkey a strategic advantage and has the possibility of going beyond the simple management of its own borders, by influencing the security dynamics of the whole region. In this context, the EU is forced to conceive of Ankara as a strategic partner in order to avoid the use of the route is finalized to the social destabilization of the continent. This migration policy gives Turkey the opportunity to negotiate with the EU from a position of power and to demonstrate that it can manage critical issues more efficiently than Brussels.

With the United States focused on the Indo-Pacific and the bipolar challenge with China and the EU's attention clustered on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, a power vacuum has emerged in the Balkans. Based on its strategic autonomy doctrine, Ankara has caught the possibility to counter this vacuum by expanding its geopolitical influence. From historical and cultural points of view, this region is perceived as a natural imperial space by Turkey, which allows it to limit China's and Russia's geostrategic expansion initiatives.

Defense Diplomacy

The defense industry has progressively become a cornerstone of Turkish foreign policy. Ankara has incremented the export of high-tech products to partners located in strategic regions. Turkey has mastered the production of UAV drones, naval platforms, and armored vehicles. This industrial policy has a double purpose: firstly, it allows Ankara to produce hard power by itself, a key element to reach strategic autonomy, and it provides the possibility to adopt the defense diplomacy approach, thanks to which it is possible to expand geostrategic projection by exporting arms to key regional partners. Turkey has been able to consolidate its influence over the West Balkans by selling UCAVs (Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles), specifically Bayraktar TB2 and Akinci systems, to Albania, Kosovo, and Romania, by strengthening their defense capabilities and reinforcing the mutual strategic cooperation. These nations are attracted by Turkish exports because it offers high-tech solutions with fewer normative strings compared to EU partners.

Turkey's role in the regional security mechanisms is fundamental, given that it has also provided military training to regional actors, enhancing the interoperability with NATO standards. Ankara has provided high-level formation to Albania and Kosovo², which can be useful to manage urban warfare, and search and rescue activities in multiple scenarios, such as emergencies due to natural disasters and terrorist attacks. In addition, Turkey imposes itself as a reliable institutional actor, by taking part in diplomatic initiatives such as the Balkan Peace Platform, which has had a key role in preserving the stability of the West Balkan space. Turkey has also been able to reach a relevant status in the eyes of NATO in this area by participating in the activities of the alliance, such as the KFOR mission in Kosovo and the EU's operation Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The defense diplomacy has allowed Turkey to become the security guarantor of the region, offering a strategic umbrella to countries of the Balkan corridor. By pursuing this policy, Ankara has contrasted the Russian geostrategic expansion, offering a solid alternative to partners in need to rely upon a regional power able to manage the security dynamics of the Balkan route efficiently.

Energy Diplomacy

Turkey has the ambition to become a relevant global actor in terms of energy furniture. Ankara is already a pivotal transit point for natural gas³, thanks to key projects such as the Trans-Anatolian pipeline and the TurkStream, which allow it to transport gas to the countries of the Balkan corridor. The Turkish geoeconomic expansion is backed by top national companies, such as Cengiz Energy, Fortis Energy, Limak Group, and GridFlex, which focus on renewable energy projects, hydropower and grid infrastructures, and are major investors in the Balkan region. Turkey has the possibility to present itself as a

¹"Balkan route and the European Union: migration, artificial intelligence and the paradox of enlargement", Federico Morra, 2025.

²<https://telegraf.com/en/Kosovo--Albania-and-Turkey-together-in-advanced-training-for-urban-search-and-rescue/>.

reliable energy provider thanks to the investments funded in recent years in order to expand its gas storage capability, with an underground storage system. Energy diplomacy is an important part of Ankara's strategy of strengthening cooperation with countries of the Western Balkans. Thanks to the construction of energy infrastructures, gas furniture, and vast investments from national companies, it is possible to control the security of the region, which is largely influenced by energetic dynamics.

The Turkish geoeconomic expansion in the Balkan space is just a piece of its strategic puzzle. The main goal is to become a major trade energy hub, connecting Middle Eastern countries to European actors through the Balkan corridor. Ankara is already at work to reach this objective by funding projects such as the Sarajevo-Belgrade Highway⁴ and acting through diplomatic means to set new transit deals with other Balkan actors such as Bulgaria and Hungary. Turkey has been able to exploit Moscow's difficulties due to the ongoing conflict in eastern Europe by presenting itself as reliable alternative to Russian gas to Southeast Europe.

A Potential Geopolitical Clash

The Turkish expansion in the Balkan space through defense and energy diplomacy could lead to a possible challenge in the next years. Even though at the moment Ankara is willing to cooperate with major powers in order to preserve the stability, potential interferences by top actors in this region may be conceived as a direct threat to its security. The Balkan route is vital and is deemed a space of natural imperial extension by Turkish strategy. Ankara's foreign policy doctrine may bring it to a geostrategic clash with China, given its ambition to expand its influence on the Western Balkan region with the Belt and Road Initiative. Beijing seeks to consolidate a logistic corridor to build capital-intensive infrastructures. Both offer two different models: Turkey extends its influence through defense and energy diplomacy and, counting on cultural and historical kinship, tries to manage the complexity of the region by promoting social cohesion and cooperation, while China focuses mostly on hard infrastructure, prioritizing a logistics-first approach with the aim of transforming the Balkan route into a transit corridor for Chinese exports to reach EU countries. For both Ankara and Beijing this region has an enormous strategic value. A potential geopolitical clash might erupt in the next few years, with China that needs to extend its influence in this space to be a global power and Turkey that has the necessity to control the route in order to preserve its internal security.

³Lami, B., (2025). *The geopolitics of energy cooperation between Turkey and the Balkans*. *Int. J. Hum. Capital. Urban Manage.*, 10(4): 599-610.

⁴<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/turkish-company-to-build-sarajevo-belgrade-highway/1343263>

EUROPE - BLACK SEA REGION



The Wider Black Sea Region in the Age of Maritime Instability: Naval-Strategic Competition and Energy Security in 2026

Federico BORDONARO (Italy)

Introduction

The Wider Black Sea Region — encompassing the six littoral states of Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria, and Georgia, together with their immediate hinterlands in the South Caucasus, the Danube basin, and the Caspian corridor — occupies a peculiar position in contemporary strategic analysis: it is simultaneously over-reported as a theatre of acute military crisis and under-theorized as a structural feature of the emerging multipolar international order. This article addresses that imbalance. It argues that the Black Sea is not merely a zone of conflict whose dynamics are explicable by reference to the immediate circumstances of the Russo-Ukrainian war, but a *diagnostic site* in which the fundamental structural tensions of the current geopolitical transition — from the unipolar *Pax Maritima* of the post-Cold War era to a contested multipolar configuration — are concentrated and rendered analytically visible with unusual clarity.



Source: <https://safety4sea.com/new-agreement-sees-the-reinstatement-of-black-sea-security/>

The argument proceeds through several analytical movements. The first is theoretical. The article grounds its analysis in the classical Anglo-American geopolitical tradition — principally in the work of Halford Mackinder, Saul B. Cohen, Jakub Grygiel, and Randall Collins — arguing that this tradition, properly read in its more rigorous and dynamic formulations rather than in its popularized variants, retains a high degree of explanatory power for the current Black Sea crisis. It is Mackinder's (1919) insight about the Black Sea's limited accessibility to external maritime power, Cohen's (2005) conceptualization of the Baltic Sea-Black Sea arc as a potential *Shatterbelt* or *Gateway* depending on how competing geostrategic spheres manage their interface, and Collins' (1986) demonstration that maritime power achieves stable projection only against a background of relative military vacuum — insights developed and extended in the author's previous work (Bordonaro 2023; Bordonaro 2025b) — that furnish the analytical coordinates within which the region's contemporary dynamics become fully intelligible.^{[1][2]}

The second movement is historical. Between 1997 and 2022, the Baltic Sea-Black Sea isthmus underwent a geopolitical transformation of the first order: four successive waves of NATO enlargement brought the Alliance to the shores of the Black Sea, the Bucharest Summit (2008) extended a membership promise to Georgia and Ukraine, the Russo-Georgian war of August 2008 delivered Moscow's first kinetic

answer, and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 — followed by the establishment of a formidable A2/AD architecture on the peninsula — radically altered the regional military balance. Cohen's 2003 warning that the overextension of the Western maritime framework into this convergence zone would generate fragmentation rather than consolidation was confirmed with a precision that few contemporary analyses can match. The full-scale invasion of February 2022 did not rupture the logic of this sequence; it completed it.^{[2][1]}

The third movement is operational and empirical. Ukraine's asymmetric naval campaign from 2022 to 2026 — prosecuted through unmanned surface vehicles, shore-based anti-ship missiles, and drone-guided precision strikes — has produced a fundamental redistribution of sea-denial capability in the Black Sea, forcing the Russian Black Sea Fleet's operational relocation from Sevastopol to Novorossiysk and demonstrating, at considerable empirical cost, both the potential and the structural limits of asymmetric maritime power in an enclosed sea. In parallel, the energy security architecture of the wider region has been reconfigured by the collapse of EU-Russia energy interdependence and the emergence of alternative corridors — the Middle Corridor, the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, the Black Sea Submarine Cable — whose naval-strategic and political implications are inseparable from the military dynamics of the conflict. Turkey's management of the Bosphorus under the Montreux Convention (1936), its aspirations as an energy hub, and its calibrated equidistance between the two geopolitical poles have positioned Ankara as the region's most consequential pivotal actor — a role confirmed by the EU's belated Black Sea Strategy of May 2025 and by the continued failure of the Alliance to develop a coherent collective posture for its three Black Sea member states. The partial maritime ceasefire brokered in the context of U.S.-Russia-Ukraine negotiations in early 2025 underscored both the sea lanes' strategic centrality and the fragility of any arrangement that does not address the underlying structural imbalances of the region. It is against this background — theoretical, historical, operational, and geo-economic — that the following analysis is developed.^{[3][4][5][6][7]}

1. The Black Sea as Diagnostic Site

The Wider Black Sea Region, far from constituting a secondary theatre of contemporary geopolitical competition, functions as its most concentrated and theoretically significant diagnostic site. In a closed sea bounded by the Anatolian littoral to the south, the Crimean peninsula to the north, the Romanian and Bulgarian coastlines to the west, and the volatile South Caucasus to the east, three defining structural features of the current geopolitical transition converge with particular clarity: the erosion of Western maritime supremacy in enclosed and semi-enclosed maritime spaces; the transformation of energy infrastructure into an instrument and object of strategic competition; and the structural impossibility of converting maritime dominance into durable political outcomes on land — the fundamental problem that Jakub Grygiel (2021) identified as the constitutive dilemma of every talassocratic power, and whose empirical manifestation in the Black Sea context this article has sought to trace in detail.^[2]

These three features are not independent phenomena. They are, rather, mutually reinforcing expressions of a single macro-historical transition that one might describe, following the conceptual frame introduced in the essay "The End of *Pax Maritima*" (Bordonaro 2026), as the passage from a unipolar maritime order — in which the Anglo-American world had, since 1945 and with renewed vigor after 1991, exercised preponderant control over the world's sea lanes, energy corridors, and financial networks — to a multipolar configuration in which that preponderance is structurally contested, not necessarily overthrown, but certainly no longer self-sustaining. The Black Sea is where this transition manifests itself most sharply and, for that reason, most instructively.

2. The Theoretical Convergence

A primary objective of this article has been to establish that the classical corpus of Anglo-American geopolitical thought — principally the work of Halford Mackinder, Nicholas Spykman, Saul B. Cohen, and Randall Collins — retains a high degree of explanatory power with respect to the current Black Sea crisis, on condition that it is read not in its popularized and frequently vulgarized version, but in its more nuanced and methodologically rigorous formulations. This is not a trivial qualification. As the author has argued at length in his previous work (Bordonaro 2023), the dominant reception of the classical geopolitical tradition has been marred by a systematic tendency toward oversimplification: Mackinder reduced to the formula of Heartland dominance, Mahan reduced to the equation of sea power with strategic superiority, Collins reduced to a deterministic theory of imperial cycles. Against these reductions, what the Black Sea case confirms is precisely the more complex, dynamic, and frankly tragic vision that animates the best of the classical tradition — a vision in which geography conditions but does not determine political outcomes, in which the advantages of maritime or continental position are real but never permanent, and in which the capacity for strategic error on the part of decision-makers is as historically consequential as any geographical configuration.^[1]

Cohen's contribution is perhaps the most directly pertinent. His concept of the "Eurasian Convergence Zone" — the arc of territories from the Baltic to the Black Sea and the South Caucasus — was developed precisely to capture the ambiguity of a region that could function either as a *Gateway* between geostrategic spheres, facilitating the productive interface of the maritime-commercial world and the continental-Eurasian one, or as a *Shatterbelt*, a zone of permanent fragmentation and proxy conflict generated by the irreconcilable projection of incompatible great-power interests (Cohen 2005). His warning, formulated as early as 2003, that the westward extension of the NATO framework into this convergence zone — and above all its potential inclusion of Ukraine and Georgia — risked producing the second of these outcomes rather than the first (Cohen 2003, pp. 16–19), has been confirmed by the geopolitical trajectory of the past two decades with a precision that few analytical forecasts of the period can match. The 2008 Russo-Georgian war, the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the eastern Ukraine conflict, and the full-scale invasion of February 2022 constitute successive empirical data points in a process that Cohen's framework had anticipated, not on the basis of a deterministic model but on the basis of a structural reading of the region's geopolitical logic.^[2]

What Cohen's framework did not — and could not — fully anticipate was the specific military-technological form that the region's contested character would assume in the 2020s. It is here that a second layer of theoretical reflection becomes indispensable: the analysis of maritime power's structural limitations in enclosed and contested maritime spaces, developed in the author's previous article in relation to the theorizations of Grygiel, Cohen, and Collins (Bordonaro 2023b). The core of that analysis — that maritime power's ability to convert sea control into political outcomes on land is never guaranteed, and that it encounters its most acute limitations precisely in closed seas and against militarily capable continental adversaries — acquires, in the Black Sea context of 2022–2026, an empirical density and urgency that goes well beyond what any of the theoretical texts in question had envisaged.^[2]

3. The Uncrewed Surface Vessel (USV) Revolution as Empirical Test Case

The Ukrainian *Jeune École* of unmanned surface warfare constitutes, in the history of naval strategy, an event of the first order. Over the course of three years, a state without a conventional navy — whose surface fleet was largely sunk, scuttled, or rendered inoperable in the opening weeks of the 2022 invasion — inflicted progressive sea denial on a nuclear-armed power possessing a fleet of frigates, submarines, and cruise-missile-capable vessels, forcing that fleet's principal operating base to relocate from Sevastopol to Novorossiysk and compelling Russian naval units to operate within a narrow coastal band, rarely venturing beyond twenty-five nautical miles from shore (AP 2025). By late 2025, Ukrainian Sea Baby unmanned surface vehicles were attacking not only military assets but the tankers of Russia's sanctions-evading "shadow fleet," targeting the economic lifeline of the Russian war effort with inexpensive expendable systems assembled from commercially available components (Reuters 2025; Howard 2025).^{[4][8]}

This empirical sequence is not simply a case study in asymmetric naval warfare. It is, from the standpoint of the theoretical tradition under examination, a direct experimental test — and partial falsification — of two distinct analytical claims. The first is the claim, implicit in post-2014 Western strategic discourse, that Russia's A2/AD bubble over the Black Sea, anchored in Crimea and integrating S-400 batteries, Iskander missiles, Kalibr cruise missiles, and sophisticated anti-ship systems, had effectively transformed the northern Black Sea into a Russian maritime preserve. The second is the broader classical-realist claim, associated with sea power theory in its most optimistic variants, that technological superiority in conventional platforms translates directly into maritime control. Ukraine's USV campaign has demonstrated, with brutal clarity, that neither claim was valid: the former because the A2/AD architecture, however formidable against conventional naval incursions, proved vulnerable to a swarm-based, low-signature, asymmetric approach operating below its threshold of effective response; the latter because the inversion of scale — in which low-cost expendable systems challenge and progressively degrade billion-dollar assets — represents precisely the kind of technological diffusion that Mackinder had theorized as the long-term equalizer of land and sea power, and that Collins had identified as the mechanism by which positional and resource advantages are gradually eroded (Collins 1986, pp. 173 ff.; Skunstiņš 2026).^{[9][3]}

What the Ukrainian case also demonstrates, however — and this is the point where a tempting but ultimately misleading conclusion must be resisted — is not that maritime power has become irrelevant or that the weaker party has permanently gained the upper hand. The limits of maritime power, as the author has argued elsewhere (Bordonaro 2023b), emerge fatally when states lose their positional and comparative human-resource advantages: this is a theorem about decline and erosion, not about reversal. Russia's Black Sea Fleet, diminished and repositioned as it is, continues to pose a significant threat; Kalibr missiles launched from naval platforms have struck Ukrainian cities throughout the conflict period; and the coercive potential of a power capable of closing sea lanes, mining coastlines, and targeting port infrastructure with standoff weapons has by no means disappeared. What has changed is the distribution of sea-denial capability: where once the Black Sea had been contested between a conventionally superior Russian fleet and the

residual naval presence of NATO's three littoral members, it has now become a space in which multiple forms of sea denial coexist and interact, none of them capable of establishing the durable maritime control that Mahan's classical theory posited as the objective of naval strategy.^{[1][2]}

4. The Montreux Paradox

The persistence of the 1936 Montreux Convention as the governing legal architecture of the Black Sea straits regime deserves particular theoretical attention in this context, since it constitutes one of the most striking instances of the kind of long-cycle geopolitical constraint that the classical tradition had identified but that the post-Cold War triumphalism of the maritime-commercial world had been inclined to underestimate. Turkey's closure of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles to warships of all belligerent nations after February 2022, implemented in strict conformity with the Convention's Article 19, has produced a maritime environment that precisely confirms Mackinder's original insight: the Black Sea is a space of limited accessibility to external maritime power, and its internal security dynamics are ultimately determined not by the naval projection capabilities of non-littoral powers but by the force balance among its littoral states and the strategic choices of its gatekeeper (Mackinder 1919, p. 106).^{[10][11]}

This is not without irony. The very legal architecture negotiated in 1936 to constrain Soviet naval expansion through the Straits has functioned, in the context of the 2022 invasion, as an equally effective constraint on NATO's capacity to reinforce its three Black Sea member states by sea. The EU's May 2025 Black Sea Strategy has been rightly criticized for failing to incorporate the Montreux framework into its connectivity and security architecture, effectively designing a maritime security hub around a legal vacuum that Turkey has the unilateral power to fill with its own interpretations (Tulun 2025; RUSI 2025). This is not a procedural oversight; it is a symptom of the deeper strategic deficit that the author has identified in the Anglo-American geopolitical tradition when confronted with the management of enclosed seas and pivotal regional powers whose interests do not align neatly with either pole of the geopolitical competition.^{[6][12][1][2]}

5. Energy as Strategic Terrain

The energy security dimension of the wider Black Sea region reinforces and deepens the analytical conclusions drawn from the naval-strategic analysis. The co-existence, in a single maritime basin, of Russian energy export infrastructure (TurkStream, Blue Stream, the CPC terminus at Novorossiysk), Western-backed alternative corridors (the Middle Corridor, the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, the Black Sea Submarine Cable initiative), and a growing body of offshore hydrocarbon resources (Romania's Neptun Deep, Turkey's Sakarya field) creates a configuration in which the distinction between military and economic competition is genuinely dissolved — and in which the maritime space itself becomes both the medium and the stake of strategic rivalry (Günay et al. 2025). Ukrainian drone strikes on shadow-fleet tankers from late 2025 onward represent the most visible expression of this dissolution: energy infrastructure is simultaneously a military target, a sanctioned economic asset, and a diplomatic instrument.^[5]

This interpenetration of the military and energy dimensions is not, from the perspective of long-run geopolitical analysis, a novelty. Mahan himself observed, at the turn of the previous century, that sea lanes were always simultaneously arteries of commerce and vectors of strategic power, and that the statesman who failed to grasp this dual nature would consistently misread the stakes of maritime competition (Mahan 1890, p. 28). What is novel in the current Black Sea configuration is the degree to which the collapse of the post-Cold War energy interdependence between Europe and Russia — an interdependence that both Cohen (2003) and the author's own analysis (Bordonaro 2023b) had identified as a potential stabilizing factor, however precarious — has transformed energy geography from a domain of shared economic interest into a terrain of active strategic competition, with consequences that will not be resolved by any ceasefire arrangement of the kind being discussed in diplomatic circles as of early 2026.^{[7][2]}

6. The Black Sea and the End of *Pax Maritima*

The conceptual movement that closes this article returns, by necessity, to the theoretical contribution that is, in the author's view, the most analytically precise and the least frequently cited in the contemporary strategic studies literature: Randall Collins' argument that maritime empires achieve stable expansion only against a background of relative military vacuum in the territories they seek to control (Collins 1986, pp. 173 ff.; Bordonaro 2024). Collins demonstrated, through a sweeping comparative analysis of the world's major maritime empires, that the durability of seaborne power projection has been historically contingent on the organizational and military weakness of the polities at the receiving end of that projection. Conversely, wherever maritime power encountered a militarily capable and geographically coherent continental state, it proved incapable of translating sea control into stable territorial or political outcomes. The partial exception of British imperial longevity, Collins noted, was explained not by any inherent superiority

of maritime power over continental power, but by the extraordinary combination of positional advantage, resource depth, and the relative military vacuum of the extra-European world in the critical phase of expansion — conditions that the twentieth century systematically dissolved (Collins 1986, p. 181).^[2]

Applied to the Black Sea of 2026, this insight yields a conclusion that is simultaneously sobering and clarifying. The Wider Black Sea Region does not present anything resembling a military vacuum. It presents, on the contrary, a zone of high-intensity military competition, asymmetric sea denial, nuclear-backed continental power, pivotal middle-power maneuver, and hybrid conflict across the full spectrum of maritime, terrestrial, cyber, and energy domains. In such an environment, the conversion of maritime capability into durable political outcomes — whether by Russia seeking to impose a closed-sea order, by NATO seeking to maintain freedom of navigation and deterrence, or by Ukraine seeking to use sea denial as a lever toward a negotiated settlement — is not merely difficult in a contingent sense. It is structurally constrained in the way that Collins' theory predicts: no actor in the Black Sea possesses the positional advantage and the resource superiority over all its rivals that would be necessary to establish the kind of regional maritime hegemony that Mahan theorized as the goal of rational naval strategy.^{[1][2]}

The broader implication is not merely regional. If the Black Sea is indeed, as this article has argued, the diagnostic site *par excellence* of the end of *Pax Maritima*, then what it diagnoses is not the defeat of maritime power as such — its continued relevance in deterrence, in energy security, in the maintenance of commercial sea lanes, remains beyond reasonable dispute — but rather the obsolescence of the hegemonic model of maritime order, in which a single dominant thalassocracy guarantees stability through preponderance. The world that is taking shape, in the Black Sea as across the wider international system, is one in which multiple forms of maritime capability coexist without any single actor possessing (at least for now) the positional advantage and diplomatic reach necessary to impose a stable hierarchy. This is the multipolar configuration that Cohen had theorized, that Collins' positional model had anticipated, and that the events of the past decade have brought, with shattering concreteness, to the surface of one of the world's oldest and most contested maritime spaces.^{[13][5][1][2]}

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Notes:

1. See Bordonaro, F. (2023).
2. See Bordonaro, F. (2024).
3. <https://securityanddefence.pl/Technological-maturity-for-Jeune-Ecole-The-case-of-Ukraine-s-naval-strategy,211261,0,2.html>
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-disables-shadow-fleet-vessel-with-sea-drones-black-sea-2025-12-10/>
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AFRICA



From Vulnerability to Resilience: Navigating Africa's Complex Security Environment

Vasileios VLACHOS (Greece)

“From vulnerability to resilience: Africa’s strength lies in its people, its institutions, and their unity.”

Vasileios Vlachos

Introduction

Africa’s security challenges are complex, interconnected, and historically rooted. Political fragility, social pressures, armed non-state actors, and external competition create persistent vulnerabilities, but also opportunities for transformation. Sustainable stability depends on resilient institutions, inclusive governance, empowered citizens, and coordinated regional action.

Communities that actively participate in early warning, conflict prevention, and social cohesion initiatives become partners in shaping safe and resilient societies. Capable and accountable security forces, aligned with regional cooperation, can address threats while respecting human rights and local dynamics.

Ultimately, Africa’s future stability hinges on the synergy between governments, regional institutions, international partners, and its citizens. By addressing root causes, anticipating emerging challenges, and fostering inclusive security, the continent can turn vulnerability into resilience, laying the foundation for peace, development, and sustainable prosperity.



Key Threats and Risk Assessment

Africa’s security landscape is shaped by a convergence of political fragility, social pressures, and violent non-state actors. The key threat vectors can be summarized as follows:

<i>Key Threats and Risk Assessment</i>	
<i>Political Instability and Governance Gaps</i>	<i>External Power Competition</i>
Frequent military coups and contested elections undermine institutional legitimacy.	Russia leverages military contractors and arms transfers to expand influence
Weak civilian oversight of security forces creates accountability gaps.	China's engagement combines economic leverage with security support in select regions
Corruption and elite capture reduce the effectiveness of governance, leaving populations vulnerable to exploitation by insurgents or criminal networks.	The US and EU focus on counterterrorism, stabilization, and capacity-building, while Turkey projects regional influence through military-diplomatic initiatives
<i>Social Pressures and Resource Competition</i>	<i>Emerging Security Domains</i>
Rapid population growth, especially among youth, exacerbates unemployment and social unrest	Cyber threats are increasing as digital infrastructure expands without commensurate protection
Food insecurity and water scarcity increase competition over essential resources	Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea and along critical shipping lanes faces piracy and smuggling challenges
Urbanization without infrastructure planning intensifies vulnerability to civil disorder	Climate change acts as a "threat multiplier," driving migration, resource competition, and social unrest
<i>Military Fragmentation and Non-State Armed Actors</i>	
National militaries often lack the capacity or cohesion to operate across fragmented theaters	
Non-state actors—including terrorist groups, militias, and private military companies—exploit these weaknesses.	
Regions such as the Sahel, Libya, Sudan, and the DRC illustrate overlapping threats where insurgency, terrorism, and organized crime intersect.	

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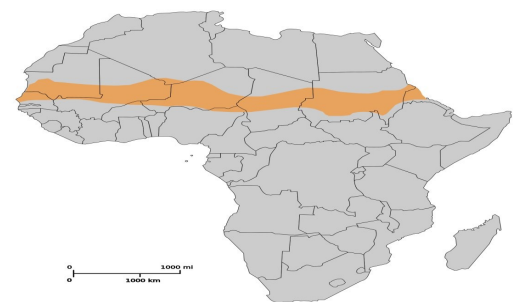
Strategic Implication: Addressing these threats requires an integrated, risk-based approach that aligns political, social, and military tools. Traditional, purely kinetic interventions are insufficient; sustainable stability depends on strengthening institutions, promoting regional cooperation, and mitigating the influence of competing external powers.

Regional Security Dynamics in Africa

Africa's security environment is far from uniform. Threats vary by region, but the interplay between political fragility, social stress, and armed conflict creates overlapping crises that often spill across borders.

The Sahel

The Sahel remains the continent's most acute security hotspot. Military coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger reflect profound governance failures. Terrorist networks, including ISIS affiliates and Al-Qaeda-linked groups, exploit weak state control, porous borders, and local grievances. Cross-border attacks and kidnappings have created a persistent regional security vacuum. International counterterrorism efforts, though significant, are hampered by insufficient local capacity and growing anti-foreign sentiment.



Libya and North Africa

Libya exemplifies the risks of a fractured state with competing militias and external patronage. The conflict has produced a patchwork of armed actors backed by regional and global powers, including Russia, Turkey, and Egypt. Smuggling networks, arms proliferation, and ungoverned coastal areas have transformed the country into a regional destabilizer, affecting the Sahel and the Mediterranean.



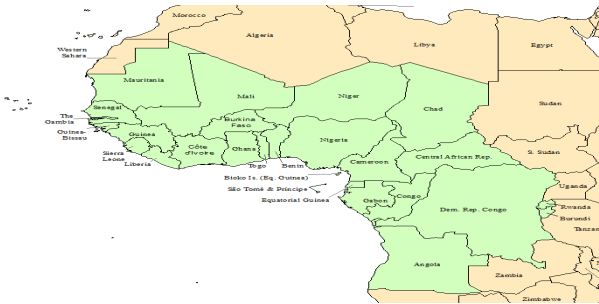
The Horn of Africa

Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia illustrate the combination of state fragility and ethnic-political fragmentation. Armed insurgencies, civil conflicts, and weak institutions create persistent humanitarian and security crises. External actors, including the US, EU, Gulf states, and Turkey, operate with differing agendas, complicating peace and stabilization efforts. The presence of foreign military bases further adds strategic competition to local instability.

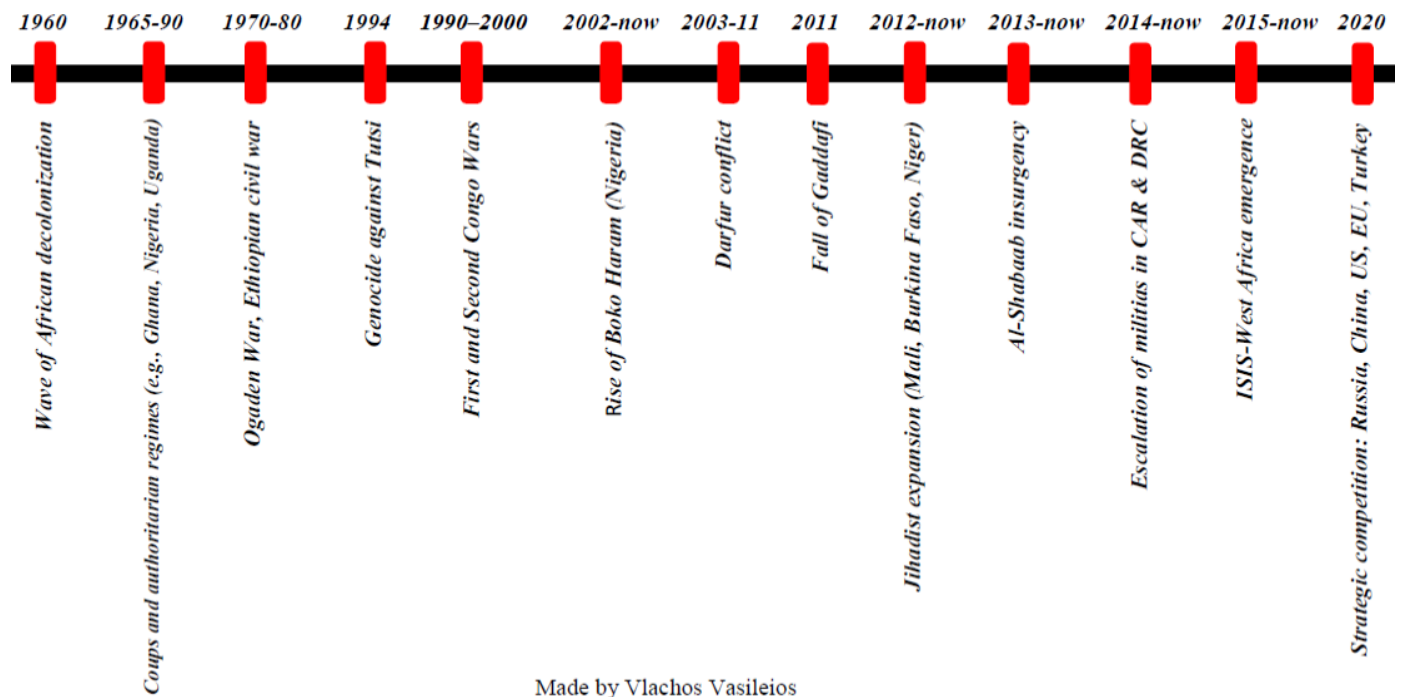


Central and West Africa

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, and the Lake Chad Basin, insurgencies and criminal networks operate alongside fragile national militaries. Resource-driven conflicts, particularly over minerals and land, intersect with broader regional dynamics. Boko Haram, ISIS-West Africa, and local militias exploit governance gaps, while cross-border displacement exacerbates security risks.



Key Historical and Security Events Timeline



Across all regions, historical events from decolonization in the 1960s to contemporary coups and civil wars have left Africa with enduring vulnerabilities: weak governance, contested borders, fragmented militaries, and social pressures. Non-state armed actors thrive where the state is absent or ineffective. External powers operate with competing objectives, which can intensify instability.

Effective regional security requires an **integrated approach**: strengthening institutions, building resilient militaries, fostering regional cooperation, and learning from historical patterns to anticipate threats before they escalate.

Case Studies and Data

To better understand Africa’s security landscape, it is essential to examine concrete examples and supporting data.

Libya (2011–Present)

The fall of Gaddafi in 2011 triggered the collapse of centralized authority. Competing militias and foreign patrons (Russia, Turkey, Egypt) fragmented the state. This led to arms proliferation into the Sahel, fueling terrorist and insurgent activity in Mali and Niger. Maritime routes became less secure, and Libya emerged as a hub for human trafficking and migration to Europe.

Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin (2009–Present)

Boko Haram’s insurgency has caused over 40,000 deaths and displaced more than 2.5 million people across Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Its operations exploit weak governance, porous borders, and local grievances. Regional cooperation under the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) has mitigated some attacks but faces operational and political limitations.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (1996–Present)

The First and Second Congo Wars, coupled with ongoing militia activity, have resulted in an estimated 6 million deaths, making it the deadliest conflict since World War II. Armed groups exploit resource-rich territories, while state forces struggle with limited capacity and corruption. Humanitarian crises and mass displacement continue to undermine regional security.

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Future Trends

Looking ahead, Africa’s security environment is expected to evolve along several key trajectories.

Demographic Pressures

The continent’s youth population will continue to grow, with projections of over 1.2 billion people under 25 by 2030. Without investment in education, employment, and social inclusion, this demographic bulge could amplify unrest and recruitment into armed groups.

Climate Change and Resource Scarcity

Rising temperatures, desertification, and unpredictable rainfall patterns will intensify competition over arable land, water, and food. These environmental pressures are likely to exacerbate migration, displacement, and local conflicts, particularly in the Sahel, Horn of Africa, and Lake Chad Basin.

Evolving Geopolitical Competition

Russia, China, the United States, the European Union, and regional powers will increasingly pursue strategic influence through arms transfers, military advisors, infrastructure projects, and economic leverage. Competition may create proxy dynamics, complicate peacebuilding, and prolong instability.

Regional Cooperation and Institutional Resilience

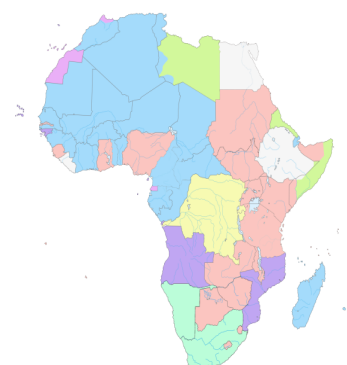
States and regional organizations that prioritize governance, security sector reform, and regional collaboration will be better positioned to manage threats. Multilateral initiatives, when locally owned and strategically aligned, can reduce vulnerability to both internal and external pressures.

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Africa’s security challenges are multifaceted, historically rooted, and continuously evolving. Sustainable stability will require integrated strategies that address governance, social inclusion, military capability, and emerging technological and environmental threats. Only through proactive, locally owned, and regionally coordinated approaches can the continent transform its vulnerabilities into opportunities for resilience and long-term security.

Policy & Strategic Recommendations

Addressing Africa’s complex security challenges requires a multi-dimensional and integrated approach that combines political, social, military, and technological tools. Strengthening governance and political institutions is fundamental: accountable and transparent governance reduces the gaps exploited by armed groups, while civilian oversight of military and security forces helps prevent coups and militarization of politics. Enhancing regional frameworks for conflict mediation, led by the African Union and organizations such as ECOWAS and IGAD, provides early warning, negotiation channels, and mechanisms for crisis management.



Equally critical is the development of resilient and capable security forces. National militaries must become interoperable, with effective intelligence, logistics, and command-control structures capable of responding to insurgencies, terrorism, and cross-border threats. Integration of local security units and community policing enhances legitimacy, builds trust between citizens and the state, and improves situational awareness in complex operational environments.

Addressing the social drivers of instability is central to long-term security. Africa’s rapidly growing and predominantly young population faces widespread unemployment and limited educational opportunities, creating fertile ground for recruitment into extremist or criminal networks. Programs targeting youth employment, vocational training, and education are essential to reduce these risks. Strengthening food and water security mitigates resource-driven conflicts, while promoting social cohesion, inclusive governance, and equitable access to services addresses ethnic, religious, and regional grievances, reducing the potential for social unrest and reinforcing political stability.

Managing external influence is another strategic priority. International support must align with African security and development objectives to avoid exacerbating instability. Transparent multilateral engagement reduces proxy dynamics, while African-led initiatives ensure local ownership and decision-making, increasing the legitimacy and effectiveness of interventions.

Finally, emerging security domains require attention. Expanding cyber defence capabilities, strengthening maritime security along key shipping routes, and incorporating climate adaptation into national and regional security planning are all necessary to address new and evolving threats. Environmental stress, in particular, increasingly acts as a multiplier of social and political instability, linking climate, economic pressures, and security challenges.

In conclusion, Africa is a strategic security theatre where historical grievances, governance weaknesses, social pressures, non-state armed actors, and external competition converge. Sustainable stability depends on resilient institutions, regional ownership, social inclusion, and integrated, risk-based strategies that address root causes of insecurity rather than relying on short-term or externally imposed interventions. For external actors, Africa should be approached not as a theatre for short-term stabilization, but as a long-term strategic partner.

Citizen-Oriented Security Measures

Security in Africa is not solely the responsibility of governments and militaries. Citizens play a critical role in building resilient communities and mitigating risks. Key measures for African citizens include:

Community Awareness and Early Reporting	
Stay informed about local security developments through trusted channel	
Report suspicious activities or threats to local authorities, community leaders, or trusted security networks	
Participation in Local Security Initiatives	
Join community watch programs, neighborhood safety committees, or local volunteer groups that support police and civil authorities.	
Collaborate with civil society organizations to improve safety and social cohesion.	
Emergency Preparedness	
Develop household and community emergency plans for conflict, natural disasters, or displacement	
Maintain basic emergency supplies, communication tools, and evacuation strategies	
Social Cohesion and Conflict Prevention	
Promote dialogue and understanding among different ethnic, religious, and social groups	
Engage in local reconciliation programs to resolve disputes before they escalate	
Digital Safety and Information Resilience	
Verify news and social media information to avoid spreading misinformation or propaganda	
Collaboration with Regional and National Programs	
Participate in vaccination, food security, and disaster response initiatives that strengthen societal resilience	

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Conclusion

Africa's security landscape is shaped by complexity, historical legacies, and interdependent threats. Political fragility, social pressures, non-state actors, and external competition create vulnerabilities but also opportunities for resilience. Sustainable stability requires locally owned, integrated strategies combining governance reform, institutional strengthening, social inclusion, and citizen engagement.

Empowered communities play a central role in long-term security, while capable, accountable security forces, supported by regional cooperation, can address threats effectively. Ultimately, Africa's future stability depends on the synergy between governments, regional institutions, international partners, and citizens, transforming historical vulnerabilities into opportunities for peace, development, and sustainable prosperity.

MIDDLE EAST - IRAN



Historical and Current Developments of the Situation in Iran and Possible Effects Generated at Regional and International Level

PhD. Eng. Stelian TEODORESCU (Romania)

“Success lies where preparation and opportunity meet.”

Bobby Unser

Since the 1980s, Iran has been a key regional adversary of the United States and a more significant challenge than other rivals emerging from various regions of the world. With the results of the 2024 US elections, the US approach to Iran seems to have become a significant issue that has entered the focus of attention of many federal structures in Washington, DC.

Historically, the US and the UK have demonstrated an extremely complex relationship with Iran, recalling the event and key roles played in 1953, when the former Iranian Prime Minister, Mohammad Mosaddegh, was removed from the leadership of Iran. US and British leaders at the time feared that M. Mosaddegh's policies could push Iran closer to the former Soviet Union (USSR) and wanted to protect Western economic interests in the Iranian oil industry.

After the end of World War II, Iran sought to limit its dependence on the West. M. Mosaddegh, a former

nationalist leader, became prime minister in 1951. He pledged to reduce foreign influence over Iran's energy resources, especially oil. At the time, the British-controlled Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) dominated Iran's oil industry. British intelligence agencies warned of the danger of the former USSR's involvement in Iranian politics, with the US concerned about a takeover of Iran, as it bordered former USSR satellite countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. It is therefore no surprise that M. Mosaddegh's ouster in 1953 paved the way for an authoritarian regime dominated by Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Therefore, the removal of M. Mossadegh theoretically and apparently presented the US as a



Source: <https://time.com/7382631/iran-israel-us-war-explainer-trump-middle-east/>

semi-colonial power and, in the same context, created numerous opposition forces in Iran, a key example of this anti-American sentiment being the religious leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

As an ayatollah, the highest ranking leader in the religious hierarchy of Shiite Islam, R. Khomeini developed a political theory of Shiite Islam. His theory envisaged the creation of an Islamic republic governed under sharia law, as understood by Shiite Muslims. R. Khomeini not only sought to transform Iran into a republic, but also wanted to export Shiite Islam to other countries in the region and even the world.

In 1979, after decades of repression of democratic forces in Iran by the Shah and his secret police, the Iranian Revolution broke out. Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was forced into exile after massive Iranian protesters took to the streets demanding his removal. The Iranian military refused to stop the revolution, and there were many opposition organizations that took part in the Iranian Revolution. However, only one Iranian opposition group came to hold all the power - the religious group led by Khomeini. After his removal, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi traveled through several countries before being hospitalized in the United States for cancer treatment. Many Iranians viewed his hospitalization in the United States as evidence that the Americans intended to reinstate him. On November 4, 1979, a group of radical Iranian students stormed the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and took 52 people, including diplomats and embassy staff, hostage, demanding that the Shah be extradited to Iran for trial and punishment. This action and the hostage-taking influenced relations between the United States and Iran for several decades. Diplomatic relations were severed after the Iranian Revolution, and the United States and Iran entered a period of cold war, which at times seemed to be heating up, a perception that has begun to develop even today, as is well known.

Relations between the United States and Iran reached their lowest point when it became clear that Iran had the capabilities to produce nuclear weapons. In the 1990s, there were suspicions about Iran's nuclear weapons program, but in the early 2000s, information emerged about the Natanz¹ uranium enrichment plant and the Arak² heavy water reactor. This information increased global concern about the danger of a global nuclear war, as both facilities could be part of a nuclear weapons program. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) immediately launched an investigation into Iran's ability to develop nuclear weapons.

Generalized economic difficulties and the collapse of the Iranian rial³ currency triggered massive anti-government protests in late December 2025. As unrest spread to all thirty-one provinces of Iran, the regime imposed a nationwide internet blackout, concealing the extreme violence unleashed against the protesters. Following a widespread crackdown by the Iranian government, there have been many and varied unconfirmed figures and figures on the number of protesters killed and the number of cases investigated. US President Donald Trump initially threatened military intervention if Iranian protesters were killed, but later withdrew immediate plans for attack. He has since stepped up his threats of military action if Iran refuses to negotiate over its nuclear weapons program. As the US continued its military buildup in the Middle East, US special envoy Steve Witkoff and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi met in Oman to discuss Iran's nuclear program and other sources of current tensions.

Although the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) limited Iran's nuclear ambitions, its regional ambitions have continued to grow. Iran has persisted in arming and training Shiite militants through its Quds Force—the international arm of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)—which has exacerbated sectarian divisions in the Middle East. Iran has provided military aid and training to the Palestinian militant group Hamas for years, which enabled its attack on Israel on October 7, 2023. The Quds Force has also supplied advanced armed drones to Hezbollah in Lebanon, trained and financed over a

¹The Natanz Nuclear Facility (officially the Shahid Ahmadi Roshan Nuclear Facility) is one of the nuclear facilities in Iran, built near Natanz for the enrichment of uranium. This facility is part of Iran's nuclear program. The underground enrichment facility of this facility is protected by a concrete shield approximately 7.6 m thick. According to Iranian authorities, the gas centrifuges at this facility were built 40–50 meters underground for safety reasons and also to protect them from "a possible air attack". The existence of this nuclear facility was first revealed in 2002 by the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran. Under the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Natanz was to be Iran's sole uranium enrichment site for 15 years, where it was to enrich uranium to 3.67%, in accordance with International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards, including 24-hour monitoring.

²The Arak Nuclear Reactor, or IR-40, is a heavy water nuclear reactor located in northeastern Iran. When it was conceived in 2003, Arak was intended to be a large-scale heavy water producer for Iran. This was of concern due to the utility of heavy water in the production and enrichment of plutonium for military use. Its design origins are unclear, with reports of foreign experts contributing to its construction; the Russian design firm Nikiet reportedly helped design Arak, before withdrawing from the project. Iran began publishing reports on the potential capabilities of the facility in 2007, claiming that it would not be used to produce nuclear materials for military use. Iran granted the IAEA access to the facility in 2009, but refused to provide access to detailed plans; this has made the purpose of the facility unclear. However, upon completion, Arak was believed to be capable of producing about 9 kg of plutonium for military use annually. However, to recover this material, Iran would need a spent fuel reprocessing facility, which it does not possess.

³On February 25, 2026, the approximate conversion of Iranian Rial (IRR) to Romanian Leu (RON) is as follows: 1 Iranian Rial (IRR)=0.00000334 RON.

hundred thousand Shiite fighters in Syria, provided ballistic missiles and drones to the Houthis in Yemen, and helped Shiite militias in Iraq develop essential capabilities for using and launching missiles. The US government considers Iran to be the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism, spending over \$1 billion annually to fund such terrorist activities. There are between 140,000 and 185,000 IRGC-QUDS Force partner forces in Afghanistan, Gaza, Lebanon, Pakistan, Syria and Yemen.

Because the JCPOA only addressed Iran's nuclear program – and not its revisionism or ballistic missile programs – the first Trump administration withdrew the US from the agreement, promising to seek a more comprehensive agreement. It should not be overlooked that in 2018, the Trump administration began reimposing sanctions on the Iranian state and called on European states to also withdraw from the JCPOA as part of a new strategy to isolate Iran. The US sanctions have triggered the worst economic crisis Iran has faced in forty years, cutting Iranian oil exports by more than half.

While the Trump administration pursued a maximum pressure strategy to bring Iran to the negotiating table, the Iranian state began to violate the JCPOA restrictions on its nuclear program, effectively contributing to increasing regional and global tensions. In April 2019, the US designated the IRGC as a terrorist organization. When the Trump administration received intelligence of potential Iranian attacks on US troops, it deployed bombers, aircraft carriers, and additional forces to the Middle East. The following month, six oil tankers near the Strait of Hormuz were attacked, which US government officials blamed on Iran. In late June 2019, Iran shot down a US Global Hawk drone in the Strait of Hormuz; President Trump ordered a cyberattack and the imposition of new sanctions in response. On December 31, Trump blamed Iran for supporting protesters who attempted to occupy the US Embassy in Baghdad. A few days later, tensions reached a peak when the US killed Qasem Soleimani, the commander of Iran's Quds Force, in an airstrike in Baghdad, Iraq. In response, Iran declared that it would no longer abide by the restrictions set out in the nuclear deal and accidentally shot down a Ukrainian passenger plane while on high alert. In late 2020, Trump continued to tighten sanctions, and Iran increased its uranium enrichment levels far beyond the limits of the nuclear deal after one of its top nuclear scientists was killed.

The outbreak of war in October 2023 between Israel and the Iranian-backed Palestinian militant group Hamas escalated tensions between Iran and Israel and, predictably, between Iran and the United States. Certain known and designated terrorist forces backed by Iran have stepped up attacks in protest of Israel's military incursion into the Gaza Strip, including over two hundred attacks on American and Israeli targets in Iraq and Syria. In response, on October 26, 2023, the United States ordered airstrikes on two Iranian-backed facilities, and on February 2, 2024, on eighty-five other Iranian-affiliated targets. The Houthis in Yemen and Hezbollah in Lebanon – both actors in Iran's axis of resistance – have also launched attacks from the Red Sea and on Israel's northern border with Lebanon, raising fears of a regional escalation since then.

In 2024, the confrontation between Israel and Iran shifted from indirect, proxies-based hostilities to direct exchanges of attacks. On April 1, an alleged Israeli airstrike on an Iranian consulate in Damascus, Syria, killed two of its generals and five military advisers. Iran responded by launching over three hundred drone and missile strikes, marking the first time Iran had directly targeted Israel.

Following Israel's assassination of Hamas and Hezbollah leaders, Iran launched 180 ballistic missiles at Israel in October 2024. Israel then launched its largest direct attack on Iran, targeting its air defenses and missile production facilities. Israel's decimation of the Hamas and Hezbollah leadership, coupled with the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria, significantly weakened Iran's axis of resistance in the Middle East in 2024.

Upon his return to office in 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump resumed his maximum pressure campaign against Tehran, while also initiating negotiations on Iran's nuclear program—the first direct U.S.-Iran talks since the U.S. withdrew from the JCPOA nuclear deal in 2018. Israel strongly opposed the negotiations and maintained an unwavering commitment to dismantling Iran's nuclear program. Israeli officials argue that Iran's clandestine efforts to develop nuclear weapons could fundamentally alter the regional balance, posing a direct threat to Israel's survival.

On June 12, 2025, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) declared that Iran was violating its non-proliferation obligations for the first time in twenty years, prompting Iran to announce that it would open a secret uranium enrichment site. The next day, Israel launched a unilateral military strike against Iran, targeting nuclear facilities, missile factories, senior military officials, and nuclear scientists. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi declared the attack “an act of war,” and Iran responded by launching waves of drones and dozens of ballistic missiles. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described the operation as a last-ditch effort to prevent Iran from acquiring and producing nuclear weapons. Although the US administration had recently resumed nuclear negotiations, President Trump has increasingly expressed support for Israel's goals and signaled his openness to regime change in Tehran.

After a week of airstrikes between Israel and Iran, the United States intervened directly in the conflict, striking three Iranian nuclear sites at Fordow, Isfahan, and Natanz on June 21, 2025. The Trump

administration claimed that the strikes had significantly hampered Iran's ability to obtain military-grade uranium, but the head of the UN nuclear watchdog assessed that the program had been set back by several months. D. Trump is the first US president to attack another country's nuclear program and the first to explicitly join Israel in attacking an adversary. Iran retaliated on June 23 by launching a missile attack on US forces stationed at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar; no casualties were reported at the time. Trump announced a ceasefire later that day. Although both sides accused each other of continuing the attacks, the ceasefire largely held.

Iran began the new year 2026 with a wave of unrest in major cities, following the devaluation of the national currency and rampant inflation. The Iranian currency was trading at a whopping rate of 1.34 million Iranian rials to the US dollar. The currency crash froze much of daily commerce, forcing bazaar merchants to take to the streets in protest, soon joined by university students. The merchants of the Grand Bazaar have given the impression that they are not ideologically opposed to the Islamic Republic of Iran. In fact, they also played a key role during the 1979 Revolution, closing their shops at the time in response to former Ayatollah Khomeini's call for a national strike against the then-Shah. So it is difficult for the Iranian government and conservative parliament to rightly dismiss the so-called "counter-revolutionaries." But past experiences of economic turmoil in Iran have shown that there is a fine line between calls for economic responsibility and political change. That is because, however, the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran has woven every aspect of life into a narrative of ideological competition with the United States. The chants that targeted mismanagement, corruption, and incompetence soon turned into something much broader: the end of Iran's interventionist regional policy, which has transformed the country into a pariah state.

It is essential to emphasize that the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East has changed significantly since October 2023, as regional actors affiliated with Iran have come under sustained military pressure. Hamas has suffered significant attrition, Hezbollah is proving to be undermined, and the Bashar Al-Assad regime has fallen definitively, as is well known. We can say that the sanctions have made life unbearable in Iran, while the threat of another Israeli and American attack on Iran has proven increasingly likely, a forecast that has proven to be real and confirmed by the current situation in the Middle East.

Internationally, there are still assessments and forecasts that the US will implement large-scale plans and bring about "regime change" in Iran as well. This has encouraged some Iranian protesters, but Washington's commitment to regime change in Iran has for some time seemed deceptive. Although President Trump and many around him have repeatedly suggested that they would favor such change, a concerted effort for regime change – like the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in Iraq – seemed unlikely then, now it seems very likely and very costly. After various military operations carried out in the air and at sea, it seems that the completion of the current conflict in the Middle East would also involve the sending of American and Israeli ground troops, even though President Trump has clearly stated that he is not interested in such operations, his preferred type of military engagement being the surgical type, such as attacking three nuclear facilities in June 2025 and then declaring the end of the war.

Even though the former Iranian Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, and many other figures within the top leadership of Iran have already been eliminated following various very well-planned operations, the regime still in power in Iran proves to be well entrenched, with loyal cadres with personal interests in their survival. Most importantly, however, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) proves to have the necessary means of combat, and the ideological and economic interests to defend the regime from a sudden fall are very developed. In the absence of US troops on the ground, after the initial shock, the IRGC will most likely act to assert its authority and fill the vacuum left by the US and Israeli assassination of Iran's leadership, most likely involving an increase in brute force against dissidents and increased hostility towards the US and Israel.

As a result, the repeated and very well-planned and organized US and Israeli attacks on Iran are being watched with concern in the region. All of these unpredictable developments would threaten to plunge the entire region into a deeper crisis, as the IRGC could continue to threaten to target US assets in the Persian Gulf and beyond. Although Iran's network of proxies is seriously depleted, it can still pose a threat to US bases and troops in Iraq and Kuwait, as well as to the US 5th Fleet Command in Bahrain and US CENTCOM in Qatar. The Strait of Hormuz, a chokepoint for 20% of global oil shipping, is reportedly at risk. Iran has repeatedly threatened to close the strait as a last resort. The beheading of the Iranian Islamic regime could make this response inevitable in the IRGC's mind, hitting the US where it hurts most and raising a daunting prospect: the regional crisis escalating into a global economic crisis.

So, we can say that Tehran shows no interest in giving up its nuclear and missile programs, insisting that they are essential to Iran's security. However, international pressure continues to mount on Iran, and life for ordinary Iranian citizens is becoming increasingly difficult. The government has no economic leverage to address the crisis, but it has the strength to suppress protesters, who are labeled domestically as foreign agents.

In conclusion, we can say that the Middle East has entered its most volatile period since the fall of the Shah in 1979. At the time, the perception was that that event shattered the balance of power in the Middle East by replacing a pro-Western anchor state with a revolutionary theocracy determined to export its ideology to as many parts of the world as possible. That event marked the beginning of a process of developing an immeasurable rivalry confirmed by the history of four decades of war supported through various intermediary entities, sectarian rivalry and strategic instability throughout the Middle East.

The danger generated by today's conflict in the Middle East is not a single spark or a single error in the process of assessing and forecasting the future - it is the convergence of Iran's nuclear opacity, its proxy war, its coercion imposed in various spaces of the region and its growing conviction that a confrontation at the regional level is not only to survive in the created situation, but also to win and impose its own interests in the Middle East and, why not, maybe in other parts of the world, which can be categorized as utopian thinking about a radical transformation of the world, an unrealistic thinking and such an impossible goal to achieve. This is the fundamental threat facing the international system: an Iranian regime that feels emboldened, unmonitored, and unstoppable in its actions. One argument for this could be Iran's public message after the 12-Day War in the summer of 2025, which was that the regime had emerged victorious, remained cohesive, and could absorb much greater costs from other states. This public posture signals a dangerous confidence that Iran can outmaneuver its adversaries in a protracted regional war.

In the same context, in Lebanon, Gaza, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, Iran's proxy network has survived the shocks of the past year and adapted. Hamas, despite catastrophic losses, remains capable of internal repression and has regained control of areas of the Gaza Strip liberated by Israel. Hezbollah, degraded early in the conflict by Israel, has regained some of its raiding capacity and is rebuilding its infrastructure in southern Lebanon. In Iraq, Shiite militias aligned with Tehran are putting pressure on the political system while mobilizing against American and Israeli interests. In Yemen, the Houthis are openly mobilizing tribes under banners demanding "death to America" and "victory to Islam."

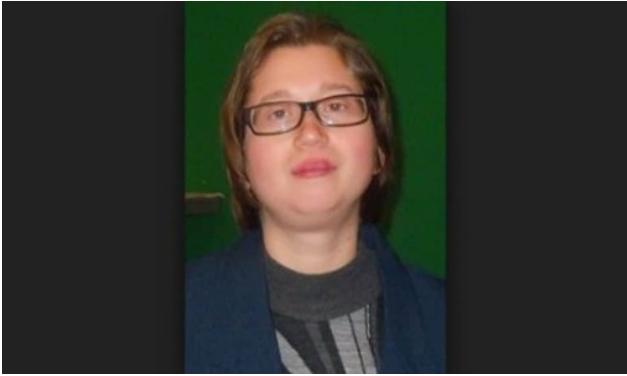
These developments reflect a coordinated Iranian strategy to branch out conflicts with adversaries on multiple fronts, significantly overwhelm decision-making cycles, and create enough ambiguity to mask Tehran's involvement in escalating conflicts. In such a predicted evolutionary context, we cannot help but believe that the perception is induced that the US is overstretched, Israel seen as politically and militarily constrained, and Europe seen as distracted by the war in Ukraine and fragmented internally in the context of decision-making dissensions. Such an induced assessment can be classified as dangerously erroneous and disinformative. As a result, a possible war that Iran wants to wage against Israel would not resemble the recent conflicts in Gaza or Lebanon. It is intended to be larger, faster and much more destructive. All American forces deployed in the Gulf would be targeted, and Israel could face the largest barrage of missiles and drones in its history. The Strait of Hormuz could close, even temporarily, sending global energy markets into chaos, and regional states—Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Iraq—would be forced into conflict whether they wanted to participate or not.

Such a full-scale war in the Middle East would be unmanageable. It would affect supply chains, global inflation, maritime insurance rates, and international energy flows. It would put enormous strain on NATO unity by fundamentally disrupting consensus decision-making, complicate competition among major powers in the Indo-Pacific, and create an opportunity for Russia and China to exploit Western distraction and the tension in the European decision-making and action environment. Such an environment could create an environment that would favor Iranian-backed terrorist entities, most likely to attack targets in Europe, North America, and possibly South America.

Moreover, Iran has spent years perfecting an information warfare program that would become increasingly active and amplified. State-controlled media, cyber units, and disinformation networks through intermediaries would amplify narratives designed to fracture Western public opinion, undermine trust in political circles and governments, and complicate coordinated decision-making. Iran's integration of cyber operations with kinetic planning is now much more sophisticated than during previous escalations, increasing the likelihood that infrastructure in Europe and North America, not just the Middle East, would face massive disruption.

Western middle powers such as Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, too often misled into believing that the effects of Middle Eastern crises were remote, would no longer be perceived as isolated. A major conflict would disrupt global markets, increase inflation, threaten energy security, and force difficult decisions on NATO commitments. Last but not least, we cannot rule out that intelligence, military preparedness, and diplomatic agility could be tested at a time when all of these are already under significant international pressure and are proving to be growing rapidly.

CRISIS OF INTERNATIONAL ORDER



From Liberal Hegemony to Transactional Hegemony: Trump and the Crisis of International Order

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The paper analyzes the transformation of the international order in the context of the Donald Trump administration, focusing on the concepts of the “protection tax” and the “Peace Council”. In the post-war liberal order, American hegemony was legitimized by providing collective security and by promoting multilateral institutions, which functioned as mechanisms of stability and uncertainty reduction. American leadership was perceived as a global public good, and international alliances and agreements were presented as expressions of an order based on shared rules and values. In this framework, peace was considered a result of cooperation and institutions, and American power was combined with normative legitimacy. However, the Trump administration challenged this paradigm. Through the slogan “America First” and a transactional approach, American foreign policy was reoriented towards a model in which security and cooperation are conditioned by financial contributions, political alignment and strategic obedience. The concept of the “protection tax” becomes central to this analysis, as it describes how the US has come to perceive and treat alliances and partnerships as economic relationships, in which the protection provided by Washington is a service that must be paid for. In this model, traditional alliances are evaluated in terms of “profitability” and contributions, and multilateral institutions are perceived as constraints and, consequently, are undermined or ignored.



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Introduction

The international order that took shape after World War II was based on a profoundly original political and ideological construction: the hegemony of a great power was presented not as a form of coercive domination, but as a necessary condition for maintaining global peace and stability. The United States of America, emerging from the conflict as the leading economic, military and political power, managed to legitimize its dominant position through a complex set of multilateral institutions, strategic alliances and international norms that redefined the functioning of the international system. Unlike traditional empires, American hegemony was not based on direct territorial control, but on institutionalized leadership, on rules and on a normative discourse centered on values such as democracy, cooperation and collective security.

This liberal international order was built on the premise that peace could be maintained by

integrating states into a common framework of rules that would limit the arbitrary use of force and reduce the uncertainty inherent in international anarchy. Institutions such as the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank functioned not only as technical instruments of global governance but also as mechanisms for legitimizing American power. Through them, dominance was masked by consensus, and power relations were presented as expressions of international cooperation.

For decades, this system demonstrated a remarkable capacity for adaptation and resilience. Even in the context of the Cold War, characterized by intense ideological and military rivalry, the liberal order led by the United States managed to avoid a major direct conflict between the great powers. Peace, in this sense, was not the complete absence of conflict, but the maintenance of a stable equilibrium, supported by relatively predictable institutions, alliances, and rules. The acceptance of American leadership by allies was based not only on coercion, but also on the perception of a common interest and normative legitimacy.

However, the beginning of the 21st century brought a series of structural transformations that questioned the sustainability of this order. Economic globalization, the rise of new centers of power, such as China, and the political and strategic exhaustion of the United States contributed to the erosion of the post-war liberal consensus. In this context of uncertainty and transition, the Donald Trump administration represented not only a change in political style, but an explicit challenge to the paradigm of liberal hegemony. Under the slogan "America First", Donald Trump articulated a vision of international relations profoundly different from that of his predecessors. American foreign policy was redefined in transactional terms, reducing relations between states to a calculation of immediate costs and benefits. Traditional alliances were reinterpreted as financial burdens, and multilateral institutions were viewed as artificial limitations on American sovereignty. In this vision, the role of the United States is no longer that of guarantor of global order, but of an actor that pursues its own interest without assuming disproportionate responsibilities.

This reorientation of foreign policy has had significant consequences on the way in which peace is conceptualized. In the discourse of the Trump administration, peace is no longer a global public good, the product of cooperation and respect for international rules, but a result of force and pressure exerted by the hegemon. Moreover, security becomes a conditional service, offered in exchange for political loyalty and financial contributions from allied states. This logic introduces a coercive dimension to international relations, which can be metaphorically described as the establishment of a "protection tax" on a global scale.

A central element of this vision is the personalization of power. Foreign policy is no longer mediated primarily by stable institutions, procedures and normative frameworks, but by the will of the American president. This personalization accentuates the unpredictability of the international system and weakens the trust of allies in the commitments of the United States. Peace thus becomes dependent on circumstantial factors and the internal political cycles of the hegemon, which gives it a deeply unstable character.

The fundamental issue raised by this transformation is that of legitimacy. A peace imposed through economic and military coercion may be effective in the short term, but it lacks a normative foundation. Without legitimacy, hegemony risks transforming from accepted leadership into contested dominance, generating resistance, resentment, and balancing tendencies on the part of other international actors.

This paper aims to critically analyze this redefinition of peace and the role of the United States in the international system, focusing on the foreign policy promoted by the Donald Trump administration. The aim of the research is to demonstrate that the transition from a liberal rules-based order to a transactional model, centered on imposing the will of the hegemon and on the establishment of a "protection tax", undermines the long-term stability of the international system.

In this sense, the paper starts from the hypothesis that peace achieved through coercion and transactionalism is structurally fragile and prone to erosion. Through a theoretical analysis inspired by offensive realism, hegemony theories and criticisms of the liberal order, the study aims to highlight the limits of a foreign policy that reduces security to an instrument of geopolitical control. Finally, the research aims to contribute to understanding the long-term implications of this vision on the future of international order and on the real possibilities of maintaining peace in an increasingly fragmented global system.

The international order configured after World War II was based on an apparently paradoxical political and ideological construction: the global dominance of the United States was presented not as a form of coercive hegemony, but as a guarantee of international peace and stability. In the context of the massive destruction caused by the war and the decline of traditional European powers, the USA took over the role of leader of the international system, promoting a model of liberal order based on multilateral institutions, strategic alliances and common norms. This order did not eliminate conflict, but it created a relatively stable framework in which the use of force was, at least theoretically, limited by collectively accepted rules and procedures.

Unlike classical empires, American hegemony was exercised indirectly, through international institutions and a normative discourse centered on values such as democracy, cooperation, and collective security. John Ikenberry emphasizes that the post-war liberal order worked precisely because the United States chose to “bind its own power” to rules and institutions, reducing the fears of allies and conferring legitimacy on American leadership (Ikenberry, 2011). In this sense, peace was presented as a global public good, supported by multilateral commitments and the voluntary acceptance of American leadership.

For several decades, this system demonstrated a remarkable capacity for adaptation. Even during the Cold War, characterized by ideological and military confrontation, the liberal order led by the United States contributed to avoiding direct conflict between the great powers. The acceptance of American hegemony by the allies was not based exclusively on coercion, but also on the perception of a common interest and relative stability. Thus, power was exercised, but rarely displayed explicitly, being “masked” by norms and institutions.

Starting with the 21st century, however, this order entered a phase of increasingly accentuated contestation. Economic globalization, the emergence of new centers of power and the strategic fatigue of the United States contributed to the erosion of the post-war liberal consensus. In this context, the Donald Trump administration represented a significant break with the traditional paradigm of American foreign policy. Under the slogan “America First,” Trump promoted a deeply transactional vision of international relations, in which alliances and multilateral institutions are evaluated almost exclusively in terms of their immediate costs and benefits to the United States.

This approach is part of a classic realist logic, according to which the international system is dominated by competition for power, and cooperation is secondary to national interest. Kenneth Waltz emphasized that, in an anarchic system, states are forced to act primarily for their own security (Waltz, 1979). Donald Trump took this logic to the extreme, rejecting the idea that the United States should assume disproportionate costs to maintain global order. Alliances were reinterpreted as financial burdens, and multilateral commitments as limitations on American sovereignty.

In this discursive framework, the notion of peace is redefined. Peace is no longer conceived as the result of international cooperation and respect for common rules, but as the product of force and pressure exerted by the hegemon. Security becomes a conditional service, offered in exchange for political loyalty and material contributions from allied states. This logic can be interpreted metaphorically as the establishment of a geopolitical “protection tax”, whereby access to stability is conditioned by compliance. John J. Mearsheimer argues that great powers constantly seek to maximize power, and hegemony is seen as the main guarantee of security (Mearsheimer, 2001). Trump’s foreign policy reflects this vision, but in a form lacking the normative dimension that characterized the liberal order.

A defining element of this vision is the personalization of power. Foreign policy is increasingly less mediated by stable institutions and procedures and increasingly dependent on the decisions of the president. This personalization reduces the predictability of the international system and erodes the trust of allies. As Robert Keohane emphasizes, international institutions play an essential role in reducing uncertainty and stabilizing the expectations of state actors (Keohane, 1984). Their weakening increases the risk of conflict and instability.

The Liberal International Order and the Role of the American Hegemon

The international order can be defined as the totality of rules, norms, institutions, and power relations that organize the interactions between states in a system lacking a central authority. Although the international system is, from a structural point of view, anarchic, this does not imply the absence of rules or predictability. As Kenneth Waltz emphasizes, anarchy describes the lack of a world government, not the lack of order, which is determined by the distribution of capabilities between states and their recurrent behaviors (Waltz, 1979). In this sense, the international order always reflects the interests of the dominant actors and is inseparable from the power structure existing at a given time.

After World War II, the United States became the main architect of the international order, benefiting from unprecedented economic and military superiority. Unlike previous historical periods, when great powers maintained order through balance of power or direct imperial domination, the US promoted a model of liberal order, based on multilateral institutions, economic interdependence, and common legal norms. This order did not eliminate power relations, but rather reorganized and legitimized them, transforming dominance into an accepted form of leadership.

John Ikenberry argues that American hegemony was sustainable precisely because its power was “institutionalized”, limited and channeled through international rules and organizations (Ikenberry, 2011). Thus, the liberal order did not function exclusively through coercion, but through a combination of force, consensus, and legitimacy, which allowed for the relative stability of the international system in the long term.

A fundamental pillar of the liberal international order was the concept of collective security, which assumes that the security of a state is inseparable from the security of the other member states of the system. This logic contradicts the strictly realist approach, according to which security is a zero-sum game, and introduces the idea of cooperation as an instrument for conflict prevention. NATO represents the clearest expression of this principle, being built on the commitment to collective defense and the joint assumption of security risks.

The United States was the main guarantor of this system, assuming considerable military, financial and political costs. The American military presence in Europe and other regions of the world functioned as a deterrent mechanism, reducing the likelihood of major conflicts between the great powers. In return, the US obtained important strategic benefits, such as geopolitical influence, privileged access to markets and the ability to shape the global security architecture.

Joseph Nye emphasizes that the success of American hegemony was not based exclusively on military power, but also on the ability to attract and persuade, through the values and institutions promoted – what he calls “soft power” (Nye, 2004). This combination of hard and soft power gave legitimacy to the collective security system and contributed to the maintenance of peace as systemic stability, not as the complete absence of violence.

International institutions played an essential role in the functioning of the post-war liberal order, acting as mechanisms for stabilizing the behavior of states. They reduced uncertainty, created negotiating frameworks, and established relatively predictable rules of interaction. Robert Keohane shows that institutions facilitate cooperation even in an anarchic system, by reducing transaction costs and stabilizing the expectations of state actors (Keohane, 1984).

For the United States, these institutions represented not only instruments of cooperation, but also effective means of exercising indirect power. By establishing the rules of the international game, the hegemon was able to influence the behavior of other states without constantly resorting to military force. This form of structural power allowed the maintenance of order at lower costs and contributed to the sustainability of the system.

At the same time, the acceptance of international institutions functioned as a mechanism for self-limiting American power. By voluntarily submitting to common rules, the US sent a signal of responsibility and predictability, diminishing allies’ fears of possible arbitrary domination. Thus, institutions strengthened the legitimacy of hegemony and transformed power into a factor of stability.

Despite its apparent success, the liberal order has been constantly challenged by theorists of political realism, who believe that norms and institutions cannot cancel the fundamental logic of competition for power. From a realist perspective, states are rational actors concerned primarily with survival, and cooperation is possible only as long as it serves the national interest.

John J. Mearsheimer argues that great powers are structurally constrained to pursue power maximization and regional hegemony, because this is the surest way to guarantee their security (Mearsheimer, 2001). From this perspective, the liberal order is not an expression of genuine cooperation, but a temporary arrangement that reflects the favorable distribution of power in favor of the United States.

The realist critique highlights the fragility of international norms when the interests of the hegemon change. When the costs of leadership are perceived as too high, the rules can be abandoned and the order can quickly erode. This observation becomes extremely relevant for understanding the foreign policy promoted by the Donald Trump administration.

A central element of the stability of the liberal order has been the perception that the benefits of cooperation outweigh the costs. Over time, however, the idea that the United States bears a disproportionate burden for maintaining global security began to take shape in American political discourse. This perception was amplified by domestic factors, such as political polarization and economic pressures, and was politically exploited by Donald Trump.

Trump has presented alliances and international institutions as mechanisms through which other states take advantage of American generosity, transforming leadership into a creditor-debtor relationship. This shift in discourse reflects a profound transformation in the way hegemony is perceived: from a global responsibility to an unjust burden.

Once hegemony is perceived as exploited, its legitimacy begins to erode. In this context, the liberal order becomes vulnerable not only to external pressures but also to internal contestations, which paves the way for a transactional redefinition of international peace and security.

Peace within the liberal order has never been absolute, but it has been characterized by a high degree of systemic stability. This stability has been based on the hegemon’s military superiority, the dense network of alliances, and the normative institutional framework. Together, these factors have significantly raised the costs of major conflict, discouraging escalation.

Peace thus understood is inseparable from legitimacy. When hegemony is perceived as just and predictable, it contributes to stability. When the hegemon gives up the normative dimension and reduces

international relations to power transactions, peace becomes conditional and fragile.

Donald Trump and the Break from the Liberal Paradigm of American Foreign Policy

Donald Trump's rise to the presidency of the United States represented not only a change in leadership, but also a paradigm shift in American strategic thinking. Until the early 2000s, American foreign policy was dominated by a broad consensus that considered maintaining the liberal international order not only a strategic interest but also a moral obligation. Within this framework, the United States built and consolidated a complex institutional architecture that combined collective security, an open economy, and the promotion of democratic values. Traditionally, this was justified by the idea that global stability was a public good that also benefited the United States, and that American leadership was essential for maintaining this stability.

"America First" did not emerge as a technical doctrine, but as a reaction to the perception that the post-war international order had become too costly and too unprofitable for Americans. In his speech, Trump insisted that the United States had "paid too much" for the security of others and that allies "were not contributing enough." This rhetoric was seen as a condemnation of American leadership as a whole, not just specific policies. In essence, Trump rejected the idea that American hegemony should be tied to global responsibility and long-term stability. Instead, he promoted a vision of national interest as immediate and quantifiable, in which costs must be recouped quickly and directly.

From a theoretical perspective, this approach marks a return to hard realism, in which international cooperation is possible only to the extent that it is profitable for states. Values, norms, and long-term commitments are subordinated to a transactional calculation. In this sense, "America First" is not just a political slogan, but a reinterpretation of the nature of international relations, in which the liberal order is perceived as an unnecessary constraint, and hegemony must become more "selfish" and pragmatic.

Transactionalism has become, under the Trump administration, the main operating logic in foreign policy. In this vision, states are not partners in a cooperative architecture, but economic actors who must constantly justify the benefits they bring to the hegemon. International relations are viewed as a sum of transactions, and alliances become renegotiable contracts, in which financial contribution is the main indicator of utility.

This logic is clearly reflected in the way Trump has approached international organizations and alliances. Instead of seeing them as structures that consolidate stability, he has perceived them as instruments through which other states "benefit" from American generosity. Collective security has therefore been reinterpreted as a service that must be paid for. In essence, Trump has transformed foreign policy into a constant negotiation, in which each actor must demonstrate that it is "profitable" for the US.

Transactionalism has profound consequences for the stability of the international system. First, it reduces predictability. When commitments are not based on norms and institutions, but on momentary calculations, states cannot anticipate with certainty the reactions of the hegemon. Second, it undermines the cohesion of alliances. If protection is not credibly guaranteed, allied states are forced to recalibrate their security strategies, increase their military spending, or seek alternatives. Third, it increases the risk of regional proliferation, as states that feel vulnerable may decide to develop autonomous defense capabilities.

NATO has been one of the main areas where Trump's foreign policy has caused major tensions. The issue of member states' financial contributions is not new, but the way Trump has approached this issue has been unprecedented. He has repeatedly suggested that the US could refuse to honor its collective defense commitment to states that "do not pay enough," thus undermining the fundamental principle of the alliance.

This position changes the essence of NATO: from a security community based on solidarity and mutual commitments, to a contractual arrangement in which protection is conditional. Instead of functioning as a credible deterrent mechanism, the alliance risks becoming an instrument of economic pressure. This reinterpretation of collective security has major implications for the stability of Europe. If European states begin to doubt the credibility of American guarantees, they may be tempted to strengthen their military capabilities, seek alternative alliances or even move closer to Russia to avoid a strategic vacuum.

In addition, Trump's rhetoric has accelerated the process of strategic reconfiguration in Europe. In many European capitals, the debate on the need for an autonomous European defense has intensified. This is not only a reaction to Trump, but also a signal that European states are reconsidering their dependence on the United States. In this sense, Trump's foreign policy has had paradoxical effects: while it has weakened NATO's credibility, it has also stimulated the drive for strategic autonomy in Europe.

A key component of Trump's foreign policy has been a tough approach towards China. Unlike previous administrations, which promoted economic integration as a tool for stabilization, Trump believed that China had profited from trade and access to the American market without playing by the rules fairly. In this logic, the US launched a trade war based on tariffs and sanctions, which was justified by the idea of

“equalizing economic relations”.

This approach again reflects transactionalism: the relationship with China is not seen as a complex one, with economic, geopolitical and normative dimensions, but as a “profit–cost” negotiation. Furthermore, Trump has redefined strategic competition as a struggle for economic and military superiority, rather than as an interdependent relationship that can be managed through multilateral institutions.

The consequences of this policy are multiple. First, the trade war has affected global supply chains and generated uncertainty in the world economy. Second, it has accelerated the decoupling trends between the US and Chinese economies, which may lead to a division of the global economic system. Third, it has intensified strategic competition, contributing to a more pronounced geopolitical polarization.

Another eloquent example of the Trumpist approach is the US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – JCPOA) and the resumption of economic sanctions. The agreement, negotiated in 2015 under the Obama administration, was perceived by Trump as a deficient treaty that did not sufficiently protect American interests and allowed Iran to develop militarily in the long term. The withdrawal from the JCPOA was justified by the argument that economic sanctions would force Iran to return to the negotiating table under more favorable conditions.

This policy reflects a logic of “maximum pressure”, in which sanctions are used as the main foreign policy instrument. Traditionally, sanctions have been a complementary tool, used to create political and economic costs, but not as a substitute for negotiation. Under Trump, sanctions have become a central tool, and negotiations have been conditioned by a position of strength.

The consequences of this policy are ambivalent. On the one hand, sanctions have increased economic pressure on Iran and isolated the regime. On the other hand, the withdrawal from the JCPOA has weakened the credibility of American commitments and stimulated the acceleration of the Iranian nuclear program. In addition, it has contributed to increasing tensions in the region, with the risk of military escalation.

The relationship with North Korea is a clear example of the extreme personalization of foreign policy. Trump chose to address the North Korean nuclear issue through direct meetings with leader Kim Jong-un, emphasizing the importance of “chemistry” between leaders and personal negotiation. This approach was seen as a novelty, compared to traditional diplomacy, which is based on institutionalized negotiations and teams of experts.

While the meetings have at times reduced rhetoric and created a framework for dialogue, the underlying policy has remained inconsistent. Trump has alternated threats and sanctions with praise and promises of a “special relationship,” which has created uncertainty in the region. In strategic terms, this approach raises the question of credibility: if decisions are dependent on personal relationships, there is no guarantee that they will be upheld over time or by subsequent administrations.

A defining aspect of the Trump administration has been the perception of international institutions as obstacles. Withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, the JCPOA, UNESCO, and other organizations has been justified by the argument that these agreements are unfair and impose unnecessary costs on the United States. In this regard, Trump has rejected the idea that the rules-based international order is an instrument of stability. Instead, he has promoted unilateralism, asserting that the United States must act independently and assert its interests through force.

This approach undermines the rules-based international order and sets a dangerous precedent. If the hegemon can abandon agreements at will, then the legitimacy of international rules is eroded. Furthermore, withdrawing from agreements reduces the international community’s ability to coordinate responses to global problems, such as climate change, nuclear proliferation, or pandemics.

Trump has repeatedly argued that his approach has helped maintain peace, citing the absence of major conflicts during his term. However, this “peace” is an imposed one, based on deterrence, economic pressure, and explicit threats. It is not the result of a consensus or a stable institutional framework, but of the hegemon’s ability to impose conditions.

From a theoretical perspective, imposed peace lacks normative legitimacy. It does not resolve the root causes of conflicts, but rather temporarily suspends them. In the absence of consensus and common rules, stability becomes dependent on the maintenance of power relations and the continuity of the hegemon’s foreign policy, which gives it a fragile and conjunctural character.

This part of the article highlighted how the Donald Trump administration has produced a significant break with the liberal paradigm of American foreign policy. By promoting transactionalism, personalizing power, and conditioning security, Trump has redefined peace as an instrument of geopolitical control. This shift is not just a temporary deviation, but a symptom of the broader crisis of the liberal international order.

The “Protection Tax” and the Imposition of Will: The Mechanisms of Trumpist Hegemony

This paradigm shift is based on a reinterpretation of the national interest. Instead of being

understood as a set of long-term objectives related to stability, predictability and order, the national interest becomes an immediate calculation of costs and benefits. In this context, alliances are no longer considered instruments of stability, but economic relationships in which protection is offered only in exchange for a financial contribution. This logic is clearly visible in the way Trump has approached NATO. Traditionally, discussions on defense spending were held within institutions, with an emphasis on capacity building and the equitable distribution of responsibilities. Trump, however, broke with this tradition, transforming the discussion into a public threat: if you do not pay enough, the US may not honor its collective defense commitment.

In the Asia-Pacific, the logic of the “protection fee” has manifested itself in similar pressures on traditional allies. Japan, South Korea and Australia have been subjected to a process of renegotiation of the terms of the US military presence, with demands for increased financial contributions. Traditionally, such negotiations are treated as part of a strategy of adjusting responsibilities according to regional developments. In a region where stability depends on the credibility of American guarantees in the face of a rising China, this approach has generated uncertainty. Allies may be tempted to negotiate with Beijing to ensure their security or to autonomously increase their military capabilities, which can lead to an arms spiral and intensify competition. In addition, pressure on allies may be interpreted by China as a signal of American incoherence, which may encourage more aggressive actions in the region. In this sense, the “protection tax” in the Asia-Pacific not only undermines alliances, but can destabilize the entire regional strategic balance. In the economic field, the concept of “protectionist tariffs” takes on a more literal form through the use of tariffs and sanctions as central instruments of foreign policy. Under the Trump administration, trade has been transformed into an instrument of geopolitical pressure, and tariffs have been used not only to correct trade imbalances, but as a means of negotiation and discipline. In relations with China, tariffs have been presented as a “payment” that China must bear for access to the American market and to correct practices considered unfair. In relations with Europe, tariffs have been used as leverage to obtain concessions in trade negotiations. This approach transforms trade from a mechanism of interdependence and stability into an instrument of coercion. In theoretical terms, this represents a form of economic “hard power”, in which market access becomes a currency of exchange. The consequences are multiple: destabilizing global supply chains, increasing uncertainty in the global economic environment, and stimulating the formation of alternative economic blocs, which can reduce American influence. In addition, the use of tariffs and sanctions as foreign policy instruments can erode the legitimacy of the US as a predictable economic actor, since partners can no longer anticipate the rules of the game.

A key element for the functioning of the “protection tax” is the imposition of the will of the hegemon. In the Trump administration, this was facilitated by the personalization of political decision-making and an orientation towards direct diplomacy, without the involvement of traditional institutions. Major decisions were announced and negotiated by the president, often through public statements and social networks, and the formal decision-making process, based on experts and consultations, was often ignored. In this context, the “peace council” can be understood as a metaphor for a world in which decisions on global security are concentrated in the hands of a single actor, and partners are put in the position of accepting or refusing the imposed conditions. This personalization of power reduces the role of international institutions and professional diplomacy, which undermines the predictability and coherence of foreign policy. In addition, it increases the risk of escalation, as decisions can be made quickly and without consultation, and reactions can be impulsive. In an interdependent world, where the consequences of decisions are global, personalization of power amplifies the vulnerability of the international system.

Another essential dimension of the “protection tax” is how it is perceived by the states that benefit from American security. In many cases, Trump’s speech was perceived as a form of public humiliation, in which allies were treated as debtors. This perception has important domestic political effects in the states concerned, fueling nationalist and Eurosceptic discourse, but also tendencies to withdraw from alliances. Furthermore, the fact that the “protection tax” is discussed publicly and not just within institutions creates a dynamic of electoral competition in allied states, where leaders are forced to respond to domestic pressures and reassess their security strategies. Thus, US foreign policy is no longer just an external factor, but becomes a catalyst for domestic political change in allied states.

The erosion of international institutions is a direct consequence of the application of the “protection tax”. If protection becomes a paid service, the institutions that mediated cooperation and legitimized the order become irrelevant. Withdrawals from international agreements (such as the Paris Agreement or the JCPOA) and constant criticism of multilateral organizations have served to undermine the legitimacy of these institutions. This not only reduces the capacity to coordinate responses to global problems, but also sets a dangerous precedent: if the hegemon can abandon the rules when it suits him, why shouldn’t other powers do the same? In this sense, the “protection tax” is not only a practice of disciplining allies, but also an instrument of reconfiguring the international order, in which the rules are subordinated to the will of the hegemon.

In the long run, this policy has structural effects on the international order. First, it contributes to the fragmentation of alliances and the increase of regional autonomy. States that no longer feel protected may seek to build their own capabilities or to move closer to other powers, which leads to a reconfiguration of the strategic balance. Second, it weakens international institutions, as they are perceived as irrelevant or as instruments of control. Third, it intensifies geopolitical competition, as states seek to maximize advantages in the absence of a common framework. In this sense, Trumpist policy can be understood as a form of “disorder” of the international system, in which stability is replaced by a precarious balance of power and threats. The international order thus becomes more vulnerable to crises, and peace becomes dependent on the coercive power of the hegemon.

The “protection tax” and the imposition of will represent two facets of the same transformation: international security and cooperation are converted into conditional relations, in which the hegemon imposes costs and benefits from strategic advantages. By introducing the logic of the “protection tax” into NATO, Asia, and economic relations, Trump has redefined peace as a good that must be paid for and undermined the legitimacy of the liberal order. The personalization of political decision-making has facilitated the imposition of the will of the hegemon, reducing the role of institutions and increasing the volatility of the system. Instead of consolidating stability, this policy risks weakening the international order, accelerating fragmentation and geopolitical competition, and its consequences are felt not only in the strategic plan, but also in the perception of the legitimacy of American power.

This paradigm shift is based on a reinterpretation of national interest. Instead of being understood as a set of long-term objectives related to stability, predictability and order, national interest becomes an immediate calculation of costs and benefits. In this context, alliances are no longer considered instruments of stability, but economic relationships in which protection is provided only in exchange for a financial contribution. This logic is clearly visible in the way Trump has approached NATO. Traditionally, discussions on defense spending were conducted within institutions, with an emphasis on capacity building and the equitable distribution of responsibilities. However, Trump has broken with this tradition, transforming the discussion into a public threat: if you do not pay enough, the US may not honor its collective defense commitment.

In the Asia-Pacific, the logic of the “protection fee” has manifested itself in similar pressures on traditional allies. Japan, South Korea and Australia have been subjected to a process of renegotiating the terms of the US military presence, with demands for increased financial contributions. Traditionally, such negotiations are treated as part of a strategy of adjusting responsibilities according to regional developments. Under Trump, however, they have been transformed into a form of subtle blackmail: “if you don’t pay more, we can’t stay.” In a region where stability depends on the credibility of American guarantees in the face of a rising China, this approach has generated uncertainty. Allies may be tempted to negotiate with Beijing to ensure their security or to autonomously increase their military capabilities, which can lead to an arms race and intensify competition. In addition, pressure on allies may be interpreted by China as a signal of American incoherence, which may encourage more aggressive actions in the region. In this sense, the “protection tax” in the Asia-Pacific not only undermines alliances, but can destabilize the entire regional strategic balance.

In the economic field, the concept of the “protection tax” takes on a more literal form through the use of tariffs and sanctions as central instruments of foreign policy. Under the Trump administration, trade has been transformed into an instrument of geopolitical pressure, and tariffs have been used not only to correct trade imbalances, but as a means of negotiation and discipline. In the relationship with China, tariffs have been presented as a “payment” that China must bear for access to the American market and to correct practices considered unfair. In relations with Europe, tariffs have been used as leverage to obtain concessions in trade negotiations. This approach transforms trade from a mechanism of interdependence and stability into an instrument of coercion. In theoretical terms, this represents a form of economic “hard power”, in which market access becomes a currency of exchange. The consequences are multiple: destabilizing global supply chains, increasing uncertainty in the global economic environment, and stimulating the formation of alternative economic blocs, which can reduce American influence. In addition, the use of tariffs and sanctions as foreign policy tools can erode the legitimacy of the US as a predictable economic actor, because partners can no longer anticipate the rules of the game.

In addition, the analysis of Trumpist policy must explicitly introduce the concept of the “Peace Council”, as an informal decision-making mechanism that reflects the personalization and concentration of power in the hands of the American president. In the liberal order, peace was ensured through a set of institutions and norms that distributed decisions and responsibilities. In contrast, the “Peace Council” of the Trump era can be understood as a framework of power in which the United States imposes rules and conditions, and major security decisions are taken unilaterally or in controlled bilateral relations. In this metaphor, the Council is not an official body, but a way of functioning of the international system: the United States positions itself as the arbiter of security, and the rest of the world is forced to accept the

imposed conditions. The “Peace Council protection fee” does not only refer to money, but also to political and strategic compliance. States that wish to benefit from American protection must align themselves with Washington’s agenda, support American positions in international fora, and accept sanctions or pressure against American adversaries. Thus, the Peace Council functions as a disciplinary mechanism, in which protection becomes an instrument of geopolitical control.

This dimension of the “protection tax” is visible in the way the Trump administration has treated international organizations and multilateral instruments. Trump has adopted an openly critical position towards the UN, NATO, the EU and other bodies, presenting them as structures that limit American sovereignty and allow other states to profit from the US. Withdrawals from agreements such as the Paris Agreement or the JCPOA, but also criticism of the WHO, have been interpreted as signals that international rules are not sacred and that they can be abandoned when they do not serve American interests.

A key element for the functioning of the “protection tax” is the imposition of the will of the hegemon. In the Trump administration, this has been facilitated by the personalization of political decision-making and an orientation towards direct diplomacy, without the involvement of traditional institutions. Major decisions were announced and negotiated by the president, often through public statements and social media, and the formal decision-making process, based on experts and consultations, was often ignored. In this context, the “peace council” can be understood as a metaphor for a world in which decisions on global security are concentrated in the hands of a single actor, and partners are put in a position to accept or refuse the imposed conditions. This personalization of power reduces the role of international institutions and professional diplomacy, which undermines the predictability and coherence of foreign policy. In addition, it increases the risk of escalation, as decisions can be made quickly and without consultation, and reactions can be impulsive. In an interdependent world, where the consequences of decisions are global, the personalization of power amplifies the vulnerability of the international system.

Another essential dimension of the “protection tax” is how it is perceived by the states that benefit from American security. In many cases, Trump’s speech was perceived as a form of public humiliation, in which allies were treated as debtors. This perception has important domestic political effects in the respective states, fueling nationalist and Eurosceptic discussions, but also tendencies to withdraw from alliances. In addition, the fact that the “protection tax” is discussed publicly and not only within institutions creates a dynamic of electoral competition in allied states, where leaders are forced to respond to domestic pressures and reassess their security strategies. Thus, US foreign policy is no longer just an external factor, but becomes a catalyst for domestic political changes in allied states.

In the long term, this policy has structural effects on the international order. First, it contributes to the fragmentation of alliances and the increase of regional autonomy. States that no longer feel protected may seek to build their own capabilities or to move closer to other powers, which leads to a reconfiguration of the strategic balance. Second, it weakens international institutions, as they are perceived as irrelevant or as instruments of control. Third, it intensifies geopolitical competition, as states seek to maximize advantages in the absence of a common framework. In this sense, Trumpist policy can be understood as a form of “disordering” of the international system, in which stability is replaced by a precarious balance of power and threats. The international order thus becomes more vulnerable to crises, and peace becomes dependent on the coercive power of the hegemon.

The “protection tax” and the imposition of will are two facets of the same transformation: international security and cooperation are converted into conditional relationships, in which the hegemon imposes costs and benefits from strategic advantages. By introducing the logic of the “protection tax” in NATO, in Asia and in economic relations, Trump has redefined peace as a good that must be paid for and undermined the legitimacy of the liberal order. The personalization of political decision-making has facilitated the imposition of the hegemon’s will, reducing the role of institutions and increasing the volatility of the system. Instead of consolidating stability, this policy risks weakening the international order, accelerating fragmentation and geopolitical competition, and its consequences are felt not only in the strategic plan, but also in the perception of the legitimacy of American power.

The Instruments of the “Protection Tax” in the Practice of Trump’s Foreign Policy: NATO, Economic Sanctions and the Construction of an Order Based on Conditionality

We have so far analyzed how Trump’s foreign policy has redefined security as a conditional service, and the “protection tax” has become a useful metaphor for understanding the transformation of international relations into a transactional system. In this chapter, the approach becomes more concrete: it examines the instruments through which this logic has been implemented in practice. The focus is on NATO, economic sanctions, trade tariffs and how they have been used not only as foreign policy instruments, but as means of disciplining partners and consolidating American will within the “Peace Council”.

Regarding NATO, Donald Trump's speech has been one of direct criticism and pressure. Traditionally, NATO has operated on the basis of a balance between the strategic interests of the United States and the commitment to collective security. For the US, NATO was an essential instrument in maintaining European stability and counterbalancing Soviet influence, and after 1991, in consolidating the European order and liberal values. Under Trump, however, the alliance has been reinterpreted as a "club" in which states benefit from protection without paying accordingly. This reinterpretation is not just a matter of rhetoric, but a way of rewriting the logic of the alliance: from solidarity to payment, from collective security to contract. In political practice, this has translated into public pressure on European leaders, by conditioning American support on increased military spending, and by maintaining a rhetoric that suggested that the US might not intervene in the event of an attack on a non-paying ally. This rhetoric has had a destabilizing effect, as it has undermined the credibility of guarantees and created uncertainty among allies. In strategic terms, credibility is essential for deterrence. If an adversary perceives that the American commitment is conditional and negotiable, he may be tempted to exploit this weakness. Thus, the "protection tax" becomes not only an instrument of discipline, but also a source of strategic risk.

Outside NATO, Trump's policy has used economic sanctions as the central instrument of the "protection tax". Sanctions have been applied not only against states considered adversaries, such as Iran, Venezuela or North Korea, but also as a means of pressure on allies. In relations with Europe, sanctions have been used in the context of energy projects, especially in the case of Nord Stream 2, and have been presented as a way to force European states to align with the American agenda. In theory, sanctions are an instrument of "soft coercion", but under Trump they have been used in a harder way, as an instrument of discipline. This fits the logic of the "Peace Council", in which protection is offered only to those who accept the imposed conditions. Sanctions thus become a form of indirect "tax": if you don't comply, you pay in economic losses and isolation. With regard to China, trade tariffs have become a central tool of American foreign policy. Instead of being used solely to correct trade imbalances, tariffs have been transformed into a geopolitical weapon. In the Trumpist vision, China is not just an economic competitor, but a strategic threat, and tariffs are a means to restrict growth and force concessions. This approach reflects an economic logic of "protectionist tariffs": access to the American market becomes conditional on China's behavior. In addition, tariffs have had a contagion effect on the global economy, affecting supply chains and creating uncertainty in the business environment. In an interdependent economic system, such policies can produce adverse effects for the power of the hegemon itself, as they destabilize markets and reduce predictability. Regarding the "Peace Council", it should be emphasized that this is not only a conceptual metaphor, but also an instrument of legitimization of foreign policy. Through discourse and actions, the Trump administration has built an image of the US as a "global policeman" that offers protection but demands obedience in return. In this logic, protection is not a right, but a privilege. Allies must comply, and adversaries must be sanctioned. This image was amplified by the use of the public environment and social networks, in which foreign policy decisions were communicated directly to the public, without institutional filters. Thus, the "Peace Council" becomes a mechanism of global governance by imposition, in which legitimacy is not obtained through consensus, but through force and pressure.

Another important tool of the "protection tax" is the conditionality of military and economic aid. Throughout the history of international relations, aid has been a tool for consolidating influence and stabilizing. Under Trump, aid has often been conditioned on political alignment or the adoption of certain policies. In some cases, this has been justified by the need to prevent corruption or ensure better efficiency in spending. In reality, however, conditionality has been used as a disciplinary tool, in which protection and support become rewards for compliance. In strategic terms, this can have a number of adverse effects: weakening trust in the US, increasing resentment, and stimulating geopolitical alternatives. In addition, conditionality of aid can lead to a less predictable foreign policy, since states cannot anticipate the criteria and conditions that will be imposed.

Fundamentally, all of these tools contribute to transforming the international order into a system based on conditionality. Instead of being a set of rules and institutions governing cooperation, the order becomes a set of relationships in which the hegemon decides who benefits from protection and under what conditions. This reduces the role of multilateral institutions and reinforces unilateral logic. In terms of stability, this has ambivalent effects: in the short term, it can create a form of order based on fear and deterrence, but in the long term, it undermines the legitimacy and cohesion of the system. In addition, it increases the risk that other powers will challenge American hegemony, as its legitimacy is diminished and alliances are weakened.

The "protection tax" is not just a conceptual metaphor, but a mode of operation of Trumpist foreign policy, which uses concrete instruments such as pressure on NATO, economic sanctions, tariffs and aid conditioning. The "Peace Council" functions as an informal mechanism for imposing the will of the hegemon, in which protection is offered only in exchange for compliance. This logic of transactionalism is transforming the international order, undermining institutions, and increasing the risk of long-term

instability. The next chapter will examine how these dynamics affect the global order and what prospects exist for the future of the international system.

Consequences for the International Order and Future Prospects: Between the “Protection Tax” and the Weakening of Hegemony

In recent decades, the liberal international order has operated on the basis of a combination of power and legitimacy. Within this system, the hegemon – traditionally the United States – assumed significant costs for maintaining collective security, economic stability and the functioning of multilateral institutions. In this paradigm, American leadership was not only a manifestation of brute force, but also a normative commitment: protection and stability were offered as public goods, and international alliances and institutions were presented as expressions of a rules-based order. In theory, American hegemony had a dual role: as a guarantor of security and a builder of legitimacy. However, during the Trump administration, this model has been challenged and reconstructed in the form of a transactional foreign policy, in which security becomes a paid service, and the “protection tax” and the “Peace Council” are transformed into metaphors of a coercive hegemony.

This shift is not just a reaction to economic changes or geopolitical developments, but also a manifestation of an internal crisis of the liberal order. In the analysis of international relations, structural realism suggests that hegemons inevitably face dilemmas related to costs and benefits. In John Mearsheimer’s view, American hegemony is supported by the national interest, and withdrawal or reduction of commitments can be a natural consequence of the logic of power (Mearsheimer, 2018). However, Trump has accelerated and radicalized this logic, transforming it into an explicit policy of reducing responsibilities and conditioning protection. In this sense, the “protection tax” is not just a metaphor, but a practical manifestation of a realist orientation that ignores the costs of legitimacy and stability.

Regarding international institutions, G. John Ikenberry’s analysis is relevant for understanding the mechanisms of legitimization of the liberal order. Ikenberry argues that the liberal order is based on institutions that create common rules and reduce uncertainty, so that the power of the hegemon is combined with a stable normative framework (Ikenberry, 2011). However, Trump’s policy has eroded this combination, as institutions have been perceived as limiting American sovereignty and have been treated as “obstacles” to be overcome. Withdrawals from international agreements, criticism of the UN, WHO or EU and unilateral approaches to global issues have weakened the capacity of institutions to function as mediators of cooperation. Instead of being centers of legitimation, institutions have become objects of negotiation and, in some cases, targets of pressure. Thus, the international order is not only more unstable, but also less legitimate, because rules are treated as optional and depend on the goodwill of the hegemon.

Another essential aspect is the impact on the credibility of security guarantees. In theory, collective security only works if commitments are perceived as credible by potential adversaries. In this sense, the concept of the “peace council” becomes relevant, as it highlights a transformation of decision-making mechanisms: instead of multilateral institutions, decisions are centralized in the hands of the American leader, and protection is offered conditionally. In this context, the “Peace Council protection fee” is not only a financial payment, but also a political compliance. Allies are obliged to support American positions and align themselves with Washington’s agenda in order to benefit from support. This logic reduces predictability and reinforces the idea that security is an instrument of pressure, not a public good.

The consequences of this dynamic are multiple. First, it accelerates the fragmentation of alliances. States that can no longer count on American protection in a secure and stable manner are forced to reassess their security strategies. Some will try to develop autonomous capabilities, while others will look for new partners. In Europe, for example, discussions on strategic autonomy and increased defense spending have been fueled by Trumpist rhetoric. In Asia, alliances with Japan and South Korea have come under pressure, and regional states have begun to recalibrate their relations with China. This reconfiguration is not just a change in alliances, but also a change in the logic of security: stability becomes dependent on regional balances, not on global hegemony. Second, the “protectionist tariff” and “Peace Council” policies also affect the dynamics of great power rivalry. China, in particular, can exploit perceptions of American weakness and incoherence to consolidate its regional and global influence. In power competition theory, rivalry is fueled by perceptions of the adversary’s intentions and capabilities. If the US is perceived as unstable or as a power that may withdraw support, competition intensifies as regional actors adjust their behavior to the new reality. In this sense, Trump’s policies can be interpreted as accelerating American withdrawal and the rise of other powers, thus contributing to a more multipolar and competitive world. Third, these policies have implications for the global legitimacy of the US. Within the liberal order, the hegemon’s legitimacy is built by respecting the rules and promoting shared values. In contrast, Trump’s policies have emphasized the “brute power” dimension and reduced the normative dimension. In theory, this can generate a paradox: although the hegemon remains militarily and economically strong, its

legitimacy is eroding, which reduces its ability to influence the behavior of other states through non-coercive means. This can lead to a world in which power is exercised more through pressure and less through consensus, which, paradoxically, can increase the risk of conflict.

In light of these changes, it is essential to ask whether the liberal order can be reconfigured or whether we are witnessing a transition to a new order. In the literature of international relations, the existence of an order depends on the ability of actors to build and maintain common rules. If the hegemon gives up its role as guarantor and treats cooperation as a transaction, the order becomes fragile. However, this does not necessarily mean that the order falls apart completely. Alternatively, we may witness a reconfiguration of the order, in which institutions and alliances adapt to the new reality. In this perspective, the “protection tax” can be a transitional mechanism, forcing states to assume greater responsibilities, but also to create new forms of cooperation.

In conclusion, Trump’s foreign policy has highlighted the limits of the liberal order and accentuated the vulnerabilities of American hegemony. By introducing the logic of the “protection tax” and the “Peace Council”, security has become a conditional service, and international cooperation has been undermined by a transactional orientation. The effects of this policy are felt in the fragmentation of alliances, the intensification of rivalries, and the erosion of the hegemon’s legitimacy. Ultimately, the international order is at a turning point: it will either reconfigure itself through institutional adaptation and consolidation, or it will evolve towards a more competitive and less stable world. Regardless of the scenario, the “protection tax” and the “Peace Council” remain essential concepts for understanding an era in which power and legitimacy are in the balance.

Conclusions and Perspectives: Between the Crisis of the Liberal Order and the Evolution of the “Peace Council”

The previous chapters have shown that the Donald Trump administration represented a major break with the paradigm of the post-war liberal order. Through the “America First” policy, the emphasis on transactionalism and the conditionality of protection, Trump has redefined the way in which the United States exercises its hegemony. The concept of the “protection tax” has been used as an analytical metaphor to describe the transformation of security from a global public good into a service provided in exchange for payments, whether financial or political. In this logic, the “Peace Council” is no longer a multilateral negotiation space, but an informal mechanism for imposing the will of the hegemon, in which states must comply in order to benefit from protection. This transformation has profound consequences for the stability, legitimacy and future of the international order.

First, Trump’s policy has undermined the idea that American hegemony is a public good. In the liberal order, American leadership was justified by its ability to ensure stability and by promoting shared values. The costs assumed were seen as strategic investments that maintain balance and prevent the escalation of conflicts. Under Trump, however, the costs have become a burden, and the benefits must be recovered through “taxes.” This paradigm shift reduces the legitimacy of the hegemon, because protection is no longer offered as an expression of responsibility, but as an instrument of pressure. In addition, it transforms alliances into a balance of power, in which states are treated as beneficiaries who must pay to remain protected. This logic can lead to the erosion of trust and the fragmentation of coalitions, because states may perceive the US as an unstable and predictable partner.

Second, the “protection tax” has effects on strategic stability. The credibility of security guarantees is essential for maintaining peace, because deterrence only works if adversaries believe that protection will be provided. By conditioning protection, Trump has created uncertainty, and adversaries may perceive opportunities for exploitation. In addition, allied states may be forced to develop autonomous capabilities or seek strategic alternatives, which may intensify regional competition. In this sense, Trump’s policy can be interpreted as a factor contributing to a more multipolar and unstable world, in which the order is more fragmented and prone to conflict.

Third, the “Peace Council” and the personalization of political decision-making represent a transformation of the way peace is built and maintained. In the liberal order, peace was the result of a set of institutions and rules that distributed power and responsibilities. In contrast, in the Trump model, peace is the result of the will of the hegemon and its ability to impose conditions. This personalization has negative consequences for predictability and stability, as decisions can be made arbitrarily and without consultation. In addition, it reduces the role of diplomacy and institutions, which affects the system’s ability to manage crises and build consensus.

Fourth, Trump’s policy has undermined multilateral cooperation, which has implications for the international community’s ability to manage global problems. Problems such as climate change, the pandemic, nuclear proliferation, or humanitarian crises require coordinated solutions and functioning institutions. By withdrawing from agreements and undermining institutions, Trump has weakened the

global capacity to respond effectively to these challenges. In this sense, the “protection tax” also becomes a “responsibility tax,” in which the US refuses to assume its role as global leader, leaving the problems to worsen and become more difficult to solve in the future.

Fifth, Trump’s policies have accelerated the process of reconfiguring the international order. As American hegemony is challenged and its legitimacy diminished, other powers are stepping up their efforts to build alternatives. China, in particular, has promoted initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative and has consolidated influence in Asia, Africa, and Europe. Russia has exploited the fragility of alliances and used hybrid instruments to expand its influence. In this changing world, the American “Peace Council” can be perceived as a mechanism for imposition, but not as a guarantor of stability. As a result, the international order is reconfiguring towards a competitive multipolarity, in which institutions are weaker and rules are negotiated on a case-by-case basis.

It is important to analyze the future prospects of this evolution. First, there is the possibility that the liberal order will reconfigure itself, by strengthening institutions and redefining the role of the hegemon. In this variant, the “protection tax” could be replaced by a logic of shared responsibility, in which costs are shared and protection is provided on the basis of mutual commitments. Second, the international order is likely to evolve towards a multipolar system, in which power is distributed among several actors and institutions are weaker. In this scenario, the “Peace Council” could be replaced by a system of regional balances and strategic competition. Third, there is the risk of a period of increased instability, in which competition between great powers intensifies and in which global crises become more difficult to manage due to the lack of a clear leader and functional institutions.

In conclusion, Trump’s foreign policy has had a profound impact on the international order, as it has introduced the logic of the “protection tax” and the “Peace Council” into global security mechanisms. This transformation has undermined the legitimacy of the hegemon, increased strategic uncertainty, and weakened multilateral cooperation. In a world where power is increasingly contested, the international order is in a moment of transition, and its future depends on the ability of actors to rebuild common rules and restore trust. In this sense, the “protection tax” remains a relevant metaphor for understanding an era in which security is conditional and peace is imposed, and the “Peace Council” reflects a world in which the hegemon exercises its power through pressure and control, rather than through consensus and legitimacy.

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ASIA - SOUTH CHINA SEA REGION



The South China Sea: Regional Tensions and China's Strategic Moves

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Introduction

The Nine-Dash Line is a maritime boundary first published on Chinese maps in 1949, outlining Beijing's claim over roughly 90 percent of the South China Sea. From the outset, this unilateral claim has been challenged by other coastal states, including Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, and the Philippines. The general rule extending territorial waters to 200 nautical miles from a state's coastline has not resolved the dispute or satisfied any of the parties involved. The roots of the conflict lie in the sea's strategic location, its rich marine biodiversity, and its significant reserves of oil and natural gas. The South China Sea is bordered by China to the north, the Philippines to the east, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei to the south, and Vietnam to the west. It can be accessed through four straits, all of which are relatively easy to block, adding to its strategic importance.



Source: <https://www.chinausfocus.com/peace-security/what-kind-of-south-china-sea-does-china-need>

Despite decades of intensive and often exploitative fishing practices, the South China Sea continues to sustain abundant populations of fish, crustaceans, and other marine organisms. These resources are vitally important for the food security of the region, providing a primary source of protein for millions of inhabitants living in the densely populated coastal areas of China, Vietnam, the Philippines, and other littoral states. Fishing, both industrial and artisanal, supports local economies, employment, and cultural practices, making the maritime ecosystem an indispensable component of regional livelihoods.

Significant reserves of oil and natural gas are located beneath the seabed - including hydrocarbons, oil and natural gas, which have attracted significant interest from both coastal and external powers. These energy resources not only enhance the economic value of the area but also increase its geostrategic

importance, as control over such reserves could contribute to national energy security and influence regional power dynamics. The presence of hydrocarbons thus intensifies competition and underpins the broader strategic significance of the South China Sea, making it a focal point of both economic exploitation and military posturing. In sum, the combination of rich marine biodiversity and valuable subsurface resources renders these waters critical for sustenance, economic development, and strategic planning, shaping the policies and maritime strategies of the surrounding states.

According to estimates by the Energy Information Administration, local resources may amount to 11 billion barrels of crude oil and 190 trillion cubic meters of natural gas. The United States Geological Survey has estimated the hydrocarbon resources of the South China Sea at 21.6 billion barrels of crude oil and 299 trillion cubic meters of natural gas, while the China National Offshore Oil Corporation has assessed them at 17 billion barrels of crude oil and 498 trillion cubic meters of natural gas.

Course of Events

In 1958, China declared claims to the “islands of the southern sea,” but did not undertake active measures to seize them. It was not until 1974, after the end of United States intervention in Vietnam, that China, as a result of an armed operation, occupied the Paracel Islands. On the roughly 100 islets of the Spratly Islands, small forces from China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Philippines, and Vietnam are stationed. An icon of these forces is an American transport ship from World War II, transferred after the war to the Philippine Navy and deliberately grounded in 1999 on Second Thomas Shoal. It currently serves as a permanent outpost of the Philippine Marine Corps. In recent years, Chinese maritime forces have repeatedly carried out calibrated, symbolic attacks against the vessel in question, most notably through the use of high-pressure water cannons. Although coercive and confrontational, these actions have been deliberately limited in their lethality. By avoiding the deployment of their full kinetic capabilities, Chinese authorities demonstrate a strategy of controlled escalation characteristic of grey-zone operations - asserting maritime claims and applying pressure while remaining below the threshold of open armed conflict.

This restrained approach contrasts with earlier, more violent episodes in the region. In 1988, Chinese forces sank a Vietnamese transport ship during clashes in the Spratly Islands, causing significant casualties and marking a decisive use of force to consolidate territorial control. Contemporary confrontations, however, tend to take the form of low-intensity skirmishes. Firearms are generally avoided; instead, participants have resorted to improvised means such as knives, batons, and fire axes in close-quarters encounters. Such incidents reflect a persistent but carefully managed state of confrontation. While both sides seek to assert their claims and demonstrate resolve, they simultaneously attempt to prevent escalation into a broader military conflict, thereby maintaining a volatile yet controlled security environment.

In order to balance the potential of American aircraft carriers, and making use of numerous shoals, reefs, and rocks, China has been building artificial islands (the “Great Sand Wall”) large enough to accommodate runways for combat aircraft. These full-scale airfields, with runways capable of handling Shenyang J-11 BH/BSH fighters, Xian JH-7A strike aircraft (fighter-bombers), and KJ-500 early warning aircraft, are additionally equipped with hangars, aircraft weapons storage facilities, technical support infrastructure, as well as barracks and shelters for stationed personnel.

In 2016, the Philippines brought a case before the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, challenging Chinese claims. The Tribunal ruled that the claims of the People’s Republic of China were inconsistent with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea PRC rejected the Tribunal’s ruling, citing historical grounds. At present, international diplomatic pressure is ongoing in an effort to compel the PRC to comply with the decision, but it has not produced the expected results.

An interesting issue is the use of maps as a tool of propaganda. Chinese passports include outlines of the country’s borders that encompass, among other things, territories disputed with India as well as all of the islands in the South China Sea. Officials dismissed reports in Vietnamese media claiming that, following The Hague tribunal’s ruling against Beijing on 12 July 2016, Vietnam would no longer stamp passports displaying the South China Sea demarcation commonly referred to as the nine-dash line. [1]

Global geonavigation systems face significant difficulties in providing geographical names; for marketing reasons, they tend to maintain neutrality and political correctness. Google Maps approaches the issue flexibly, displaying different affiliations of disputed territories on maps tailored to specific markets. Apple Inc. Apple Maps has addressed the problem in a more simple way by removing all names, and when searching for any related term, the message “server error, try again later” is displayed.

Perspectives

By 2050, China aims to develop a naval force capable of engaging in a near-peer confrontation with the US Navy. This objective forms part of a broader strategic vision to transform the People’s Liberation

Army Navy into a world-class maritime force, able not only to defend China's immediate periphery but also to project power beyond the first and second island chains. During the annual meeting of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping emphasised that "China needs self-reliance in science and technology in order to better compete with the West in military readiness, economic growth, and many other areas." This statement reflects Beijing's conviction that technological autonomy is a prerequisite for strategic parity, particularly in advanced naval platforms, space-based systems, cyber capabilities, and integrated command-and-control structures.

At present, only the United States Navy maintains the comprehensive technical and logistical capacity to conduct sustained, large-scale maritime operations on a truly global scale, operating in close proximity to potential theatres of conflict. Consequently, China's long-term naval modernisation programme should be understood not merely as regional force expansion, but as a deliberate effort to erode the structural asymmetry that has underpinned US maritime dominance since the end of the Cold War.

Beyond the development of conventional naval warfare assets such as aircraft carriers, destroyers, frigates, and submarines, the People's Republic of China is adapting thousands of small fishing vessels for military purposes. Chinese maritime militia deployments averaged 241 vessels per day last year, "the highest level measured in any year". [2] In 2024, the daily average stood at 232 vessels. These vessels, while not officially part of the Chinese navy, constitute a significant advantage due to their sheer numbers and their crews' extensive familiarity with the operational environment, particularly in comparison with the fleets of Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, and the United States. "A classic grey zone threat, shadow fleet activity remains below the threshold of armed conflict, yet beyond the effective reach of law enforcement." [3]

The United States maintains a high-intensity and persistent military presence in the South China Sea, reflecting the region's centrality to global trade, alliance credibility, and the broader balance of power in the Indo-Pacific. This presence is not episodic but structural, embedded in long-term strategic planning and force posture adjustments designed to deter coercion, reassure partners, and uphold what Washington defines as a rules-based maritime order. A core component of this posture consists of Freedom of Navigation Operations, conducted to challenge what the United States considers excessive maritime claims, particularly those advanced by China. These operations are designed to assert navigational rights and freedoms consistent with international law, especially the principles codified in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, even though the United States itself has not formally ratified the convention. By sailing and flying in areas subject to disputed claims, US forces aim to prevent the consolidation of *de facto* control that could, over time, solidify into accepted practice.

Beyond FONOPs, the United States conducts extensive aerial and maritime reconnaissance missions, enhancing maritime domain awareness and monitoring military developments on contested features. Carrier strike groups and amphibious ready groups regularly operate in or transit through the South China Sea, signalling both power projection capability and the ability to sustain high-end naval operations in proximity to potential flashpoints. These deployments are frequently integrated with joint and combined exercises involving regional allies and partners, most notably the Philippines, as well as Japan and Australia. Such exercises serve not only tactical and operational purposes but also political ones, reinforcing alliance commitments and improving interoperability in scenarios ranging from humanitarian assistance to high-intensity conflict.

Conclusions

The dispute over the South China Sea remains one of the most complex and strategically significant conflicts in contemporary international relations. Taken together, this sustained military engagement reflects a deliberate strategy of presence, signalling, and deterrence. It underscores Washington's assessment that the South China Sea constitutes a critical arena in the evolving strategic competition between the United States and China, where military posture, legal interpretation, and alliance management intersect. Although the dispute over the basin continues *de iure*, *de facto* control is exercised by China. An authoritarian government that does not need to focus on successive elections can plan decades ahead. The project of asserting control over the South China Sea is an excellent illustration of Chinese political strategy - a series of seemingly insignificant actions that, over the years, produce a cumulative and spectacular effect. This strategy is characteristic of grey-zone operations, where coercion is applied below the threshold of open conflict. As noted by the Royal United Services Institute, such activities are "a classic grey zone threat, shadow fleet activity remains below the threshold of armed conflict, yet beyond the effective reach of law enforcement" [3]. The deployment of Chinese maritime militia and other quasi-civilian vessels exemplifies this approach, allowing Beijing to exert influence, challenge rival claimants, and consolidate control while avoiding direct military confrontation.

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- [3] <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/old-ships-modern-menace-how-tackle-worlds-shadow-fleets>

DETERRENCE CAPACITY - ESSENTIAL IN EUROPE

Sleepwalkers Are Once Again at the Helm of Europe!

PhD. Jean MARSIA (Belgium)

It should be noted that in 2026, the maintenance of peace through international law is even more illusory than in 1914. In 2002, the United States of America terminated the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty¹, which had maintained the stability of nuclear deterrence since 1972. They, together with Russia, abrogated the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty in 2019. The Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was denounced by Russia in 2023. The New START treaty², limiting nuclear arsenals, ended on 5 February 2026. China, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel, which have nuclear weapons, are not bound by any treaty.

Only the Ability to Deter Can Maintain peace

Having a deterrent capability is therefore essential to maintain peace. Deterrence means knowing how to persuade potential aggressors that we will be ready to use weapons of mass



Source: <https://defense.info/global-dynamics/2025/02/what-future-for-the-eu-in-the-post-ukraine-international-order/>

¹An Anti-Ballistic Missile is a missile that can be launched to counter a nuclear or non-nuclear ICBM. ICBMs can be intercepted in three phases of their trajectory: the launch phase, the intermediate phase, or the terminal phase. An Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) is a ballistic missile with a range greater than 5,500 kilometers, designed primarily for the delivery of nuclear weapons (the delivery of one or more thermonuclear warheads). Conventional, chemical, and biological weapons can also be launched with varying effectiveness, but have never been deployed on ICBMs.

²New START was a nuclear arms reduction treaty between the United States and Russia, officially known as the Measures for Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms. It was signed on April 8, 2010 in Prague, and, after ratification, entered into force on February 5, 2011. New START replaced the Moscow Treaty (SORT), which was due to expire in December 2012. It followed START I, which expired in December 2009; the proposed START II, which never entered into force; and START III, for which negotiations were never concluded. The treaty called for a halving of the number of strategic nuclear missile launchers. It also called for a new inspection and verification regime to replace the SORT mechanism. It did not limit the number of operationally inactive nuclear warheads that could be stored, which was in the thousands. On February 21, 2023, Russia suspended its participation in New START. However, it did not withdraw from the treaty and clarified that it would continue to adhere to the numerical limits set out in the treaty. On February 5, 2026, the treaty officially expired.

destruction in the event of an attack on our vital interests. This is to affirm that we will make use of the right of self-defence.

France is the only European country to have an autonomous deterrence, because on the one hand, the constitution of the Fifth Republic of 4 October 1958 established a chain of command that went from the head of State, commander-in-chief of the armed forces, to the lowest military echelons; on the other hand, thanks to the efforts of Pierre Mendès-France, then Charles de Gaulle and his successors. France has a strike force, effective since 1964 for the air component, and since 1972 for the submarine component³.

Unlike NATO, which follows the nuclear doctrine of graduated response, adopted in 1962 by the United States of America, so that thousands of American nuclear weapons can be used according to the level of threat present, France deters from the weak to the strong, on the basis of its 290 nuclear warheads⁴. Its 4 nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines each carry 16 ballistic missiles with a range of about 10,000 kilometres, each carrying 6 warheads of 100 kt⁵. Each head is equivalent to 7 times Hiroshima. Its two Rafale squadrons armed with 54 cruise missiles, which carry a warhead of 250 to 300 kt (20 times Hiroshima) up to about 500 kilometres, would serve to issue a final warning and open a strategic dialogue. Being, if necessary, ready to respond without delay to an attack on its vital interests, France can deter.

If my calculation is correct, France's strike capacity is equivalent to 3,768 times Hiroshima. It is understandable why Putin told Chirac that France and its 70 million inhabitants are sanctuaried, but that French deterrence does not extend to Europe. I will come back to this.

The strategic thinking of successive presidents of the French Republic has evolved since de Gaulle. In his 2020 speech at the École Militaire, Macron spoke in general terms about the European dimension of France's vital interests. On March 2, 2026, on Île Longue⁶, near Brest, which is the base for nuclear ballistic missile submarines, Macron began by noting that the Russian threat has increased: Iskander ballistic missiles have been deployed in Königsberg-Kaliningrad for several years; hypersonic Orechnik have been deployed in Belarus since the end of 2025. He added that Russia is developing nuclear-powered missiles that are supposed to fly without a time limit, and nuclear torpedoes, that it intends to send nuclear weapons into space. He also said that Xi's China wants to have as many weapons as the United States of America, that India, Pakistan, North Korea are increasing their strategic forces and that armed conflicts, below the nuclear threshold, have taken place between India and China, and then between India and Pakistan.

For Macron, Trump's return to power on 20 January 2025 has made NATO's protection less certain for Europe, and prompted France and the United Kingdom to sign, on July 10, 2025, the Northwood Declaration on the coordination of their nuclear forces⁷. On 2 March 2026, Macron also recalled the efforts made since 2017 to replace its submarines⁸, renew its missiles and nuclear warheads, and increase the number of them. He recalled the weakness of conventional forces in Europe, particularly for satellites and radars that detect and track threatening missiles, for defence against aircraft, missiles and drones, as well as for striking in the great depths, which avoids crossing the nuclear threshold too quickly.

The problem is that the cost of French deterrence amounts to more than 7 billion € per year, i.e. a third of the expenditure on equipping its armed forces. The disastrous state of French public finances makes it impossible to drastically increase the defence budget: according to Mathieu Pigasse, in two five-year terms of Mr. Macron, the public debt will have increased by 1,000 billion € and a million additional French people will have fallen below the poverty line.

The Resurgence of Sleepwalking?

Mr. Macron is aware that he does not have the means to carry out his defence policy and that his conventional forces will remain anaemic. That is why, in exchange for an increased effort by partners in these areas, he offered, on 2 March, to extend to Europe the protection that its strike force gives to France, in particular by dispersing strategic air forces deep into the European continent, by allowing visits to strategic sites and by organising joint exercises. According to him, this would allow Europeans to regain

³It no longer has a terrestrial component.

⁴Mr. Macron said on 2 March 2026, that he wants to increase this number.

⁵100 kt (Knots) = 185.2 Kilometers/hour.

⁶See Louis Gautier, "La dissuasion avancée: Emmanuel Macron a-t-il européanisé la doctrine nucléaire française ?" (Advanced deterrence: Has Emmanuel Macron Europeanized the French nuclear doctrine?) and Macron's full speech at Île Longue in Le Grand Continent, March 2, 2026, Jean Marsia Archives.

⁷Britain decided in 2021 to increase its nuclear arsenal by 40% to have 260 warheads deployed.

⁸The Invincible, under construction in Cherbourg, will sail in 2036.

control of their own destiny, while contributing to NATO's deterrence, according to him, in accordance with the Ottawa Declaration of the Atlantic Council of 1974 and the communiqué of the Atlantic Council meeting in Warsaw in 2016. I don't have the same reading of it.

On the one hand, this extension is contradictory to the fact that there will be no sharing on the part of France of the definition of vital interests, the ultimate decision, nor its planning, nor its implementation. On the other hand, Macron pretends not to know that Putin told Chirac that he is convinced that a French president will not risk the destruction of Lyon to protect Tallinn, that of Marseille to preserve Riga, and that of Bordeaux to guarantee Vilnius. Putin is still in power, and, as far as I know, he hasn't changed his mind.

Mr. Macron denies this reality, he seems to prefer to be sleepwalking, according to Professor Clark's expression. His book published a dozen years ago⁹, showed how, in five weeks, after the Sarajevo assassination on June 28, 1914, the world plunged into a war that killed millions, put an end to three empires, and began the decline of Europe, because its rulers of the time walked towards danger like sleepwalkers.

Other sleepwalkers, including Chamberlain and Daladier, made the Second World War inevitable, from the negotiation of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 to Pearl Harbor in 1941, via Munich in 1938. Still others, notably Stalin, Roosevelt, Truman and Churchill, at Yalta and Potsdam in 1945, created the conditions for the outbreak of the Cold War in 1946, which was cold only in Europe: it claimed countless victims in Asia, Africa and Latin America. When the implosion of the USSR put an end to it in 1991, other sleepwalkers, Americans, Russians, Chinese and Europeans, instead of setting up a world governance more effective than that of the United Nations to ensure peacekeeping, began the return to war, initially hybrid, that Putin, invited to the Munich Security Conference, initiated on February 9, 2007. Since then, the world has gone from bad to worse.

Sleepwalking seems contagious

On 2 March 2026, Macron and Merz announced the establishment of a high-level steering group, although the French president remains the only one to decide. This reduces France's deterrent capacity, as potential aggressors begin to doubt that the French president will be ready without delay to use weapons of mass destruction in the event of an attack on his country's vital interests. He risks wasting time consulting with the Chancellor, as well as with the heads of government of Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Sweden, Norway and Denmark, who said they were joining the dialogue with France, after it allowed its partners to participate in exercises, and announced that planes of the strategic forces could be stationed at the allies. The latter no doubt hope, like the Danish prime minister, "to have better access to information and strategic decisions", which risks further weakening French deterrence. The head of the Belgian government therefore wrongly believes that the approach "is part of the strengthening of European security and defence".

Not only are sleepwalkers in the European Council not doing enough to implement the recommendations of the 2024 Letta, Draghi and Niinistö reports, in order to halt Europe's economic and scientific decline, and its growing dependence, but they are proving dangerous for peacekeeping. It is high time for European leaders to make a U-turn and convert to Gaullism¹⁰. De Gaulle did the right thing, the other European leaders have so far refrained from doing so. However, what is valid for France is also valid for Europe. In his speech of 27 April 1965, General de Gaulle stressed that: "From the point of view of security, our independence requires, in the atomic age in which we live, that we have the means to deter a possible aggressor ourselves, without prejudice to our alliances, but without our allies holding our destiny in their hands."

What Conclusion Can Be Drawn from This?

It is urgent that European citizens concerned about peacekeeping wake their sleepwalking leaders from their sleepwalks, otherwise we will be increasingly in danger, dependent and poor.

European deterrence requires a common vision of the threats posed by potential adversaries, including Russia, China, Turkey and now the United States of America, as well as a common doctrine on

⁹Christopher M. Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*, London, Penguin Books, 2013, translated by Marie-Anne de Béru, *Les Somnambules. Summer 1914: How Europe Walked Towards War*, Paris, Flammarion, 2015.

¹⁰The principles and policies of Charles de Gaulle, characterized by their conservatism, nationalism, and advocacy of centralized government.

how to confront these threats. Vision and doctrine can only be defined by a Europe that is politically united, sovereign, autonomous and independent. The repeated vetoes by Hungary, in particular, because it is no longer the only dissident, show that the European Council is not taking this path at all.

However, without a European State, without a European president elected by direct universal suffrage in two rounds, there will be in Europe no collective security, no common defence, no deterrence. Only such a president could persuade potential aggressors that we will be prepared to use weapons of mass destruction if our vital interests are harmed. The question of how to acquire these will only arise in concrete terms when a European politico-military chain of command has been set up, from the head of State, commander-in-chief of the armed forces, to the lowest military echelons, on the basis of a federal constitution. What France did in the 1960s, Europe could do again.

A federal Europe could put an end to our economic and scientific downgrading and reduce our vulnerabilities, by making the European common good prevail over the particular interests of nation States, so that Europe can live in peace in an increasingly insecure world. The S€D does not despair of obtaining the agreement of a first European government to initiate the federative process and it is committed to supporting its efforts.

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- October 2020 – July 2023 University of Warsaw, Bachelor of Arts, Interdisciplinary American Studies in English;
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Certificates:

- Certificate in Advanced English - April 2019, University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate;
- Diplomatic Skills Masterclass - April 2021, European Academy of Diplomacy, Warsaw;
- Excellence-in-ReSTI training – January - June 2021, Charles University, Prague;
- Certificate in International Diplomacy - July 2022, Washington International Diplomatic Academy, DC;

Citizen Politics in America: Public Opinion, Elections, Interest Groups and the Media - December 2022, HarvardX.

Experience:

- January 12 – April 30, 2022 - Research associate “long-term public diplomacy strategy to address tensions in the US and China relationship” project Harvard Belfer Center;
- December 10, 2021 - May 3, 2022 - Intern Jane Timken for Ohio - Contacted several thousand voters, she conducted over 150 political surveys, did opposition research, wrote 2 letters to the editor;
- February 24 - May 24, 2022 - Intern Casimir Pulaski Foundation - Prepared a database of 560 Polish Senators and MEPs, researched the military operations in Ukraine, collected information on over 10 decisions of the European Union authorities after the outburst of the conflict, acquired two sponsors for the annual Warsaw Security Forum conference, welcomed over 200 foreign guests at the airport and logistically planned safe transportation to the conference hotel for each of them;
- January 21 - April 30, 2025 - Professional Observer Congresswoman Beth van Duyne’s office - Shadowed and observed over 10 Congressional briefings, office meetings, and Committee hearings, conducted conversations with over 1000 constituents, prepared 15 Bill memorandums, led 10 Capitol tours;
- August 1, 2025 – Present - Program Coordinator “American Integrated Deterrence” World Affairs Council of Miami - Coordinated the project focused on U.S. and NATO deterrence strategies, authored analytical briefs and white papers on the US defense posture, liaised with senior fellows and policymakers to promote U.S.–CEE strategic dialogue.





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He is highly experienced Security Professional with a strong background in corporate, hospitality, and high-profile event protection. Proven track record in risk assessment, loss prevention, and team leadership. Skilled in managing diverse security operations for luxury hotels, resorts, and private enterprises while ensuring compliance with international safety standards. He has extensive experience in Security Operations & Supervision, Risk Assessment & Incident Management, VIP & Executive Protection, Loss Prevention Strategies, CCTV & Access Control Systems, Team Leadership & Training, Crisis & Emergency Response.

He has attended and graduated numerous specialized studies in the country and abroad and obtained licenses and certificates of graduation in various fields such as: Security Risk Management, Psychological First Aid (Johns Hopkins University/USA), Understanding and Managing the Stresses of

Police Work (University of Toronto/Canada), COSHH Manager Certification (The Knights of Safety), Open-source Intelligence (Institute of Governance in Basel/Switzerland), Certificate in Disaster Preparedness (University of Pittsburgh), HB1143 Firearms Safety Training Course (Washington Civil Rights Association/USA).



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She is proficient in devising and managing information gathering systems for collecting data on policies and impacts. She has excellent interpersonal, analytical and public communications skills.

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

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





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Aldo MUNGO (Belgium)

*Aldo Mungo is a recognized specialist in strategic studies and the doctrine of air power employment, with expertise built over more than thirty years in specialized defense journalism. After completing studies in political science and international relations at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB), he quickly turned toward the defense and armaments sector. In 1984, he founded the monthly magazine *Carnets de Vol*, dedicated to military aviation, which he directed and relocated to Paris in 1986. From 1989 onward, he served as editor-in-chief and editorialist of the monthly *Armées & Défense* (the French edition of the Israeli-American magazine *Defense Update*). Both publications rapidly became essential references in military, industrial, and institutional circles. He held these roles until 2011, when he returned definitively to Belgium. His recognized expertise led to his selection as an auditor at the Institut des Hautes Études de Défense Nationale (IHEDN) in Paris (1988–1989 session), where he deepened his knowledge of defense policy, strategy, armaments, and the economics of defense. In 1990, the French Air Force General Staff integrated him into a six-week advanced training program at the US Air Force Weapons School, as part of the Red Flag exercise at Nellis Air Force Base (Nevada). Embedded within a French detachment, he took part in intensive, realistic combat-air training missions, benefiting from cutting-edge real-time performance analysis tools (RFMDS) and access to vast training ranges, including classified areas. Today, Aldo-Michel Mungo is still regarded as one of the leading civilian experts on the military doctrine of air vector employment. His analyses and contributions focus primarily on strategic, tactical, and technological developments in air power and defense.*





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- European Institutions and Multilevel Governance
- Public Policies and European Affairs
- Diplomacy and International Negotiations
- Geopolitics and International Security
- European and Public International Law
- Political Analysis and Strategy Development
- Institutional Communication and Advocacy
- European Projects and Institutional Management
- Critical Thinking, Social Research and Academic Writing

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- In-depth studies in public international law, providing knowledge on the legal mechanisms involved in the management of international conflicts.
- Analysis of regional studies, including the EU's strategic neighborhood, to understand geopolitical and regional contexts.
- Courses in conflict analysis and conflict resolution models, developing practical skills in interpreting and resolving international disputes.
- Exploration of major themes of world politics, to deepen the dynamics of contemporary international relations.
- Learning the theory of international relations, contributing to the development of an interdisciplinary perspective between law, political science and strategic analysis.
- Development of a critical and integrated perspective on international cooperation and conflict resolution strategies in the global environment.

Professional experience:

- Şimleu Silvaniei City Hall – Romania, Public Administration Intern – April 3, 2023 – April 24, 2023
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Bucharest, Romania, North Africa and Middle East Department
- Intern at the MFA – North Africa and Middle East – July 20, 2025 – September 20, 2025

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- June 20, 2021 – July 10, 2021 - Erasmus+ Vocational Education and Training (VET), Spain;
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- May 22, 2025 – May 29, 2025 - Erasmus+ Training Course, Estonia;
- July 7, 2025 – July 15, 2025 - Erasmus+ Youth Exchange, Spain.





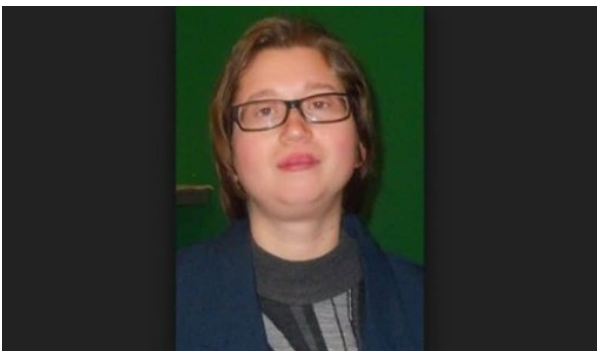
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Colonel (Ret.) PhD. Jean MARSIA (Belgium)



He is President of the European Defense Society INPA (S€D). He graduated in 1975 from the Royal Military School in Brussels, obtaining a master's degree in Social and Military Sciences. After several posts in the logistics corps of the land forces, he obtained an additional master's degree in Administrative Science. He was then selected for the School of Military Administration. He served in the General Staff of Defense in several positions related to the management of financial resources and procurement. In 1999, he became an advisor to the Minister of Defense, primarily responsible for military procurement, scientific research and education. In 2003, he was appointed director of the Royal Military School, where he served until his retirement in 2009. He then became a PhD student at the Free University of Brussels. From January 2013 to October 2014, he was Defense Adviser to the Belgian Prime Minister. In 2015, he became a Doctor of Political Science at the Free University of Brussels and a Doctor of Social and Military Sciences at the Royal Military School.

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