

Motto: "Those who have the privilege to know, have the duty to act"

Albert Einstein

No 287- NOVEMBER- DECEMBER 2022

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BILINGUAL-BIMONTHLY PUBLICATION OF GEOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS

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I. EDITORIAL



The Minsk Agreements – a Conundrum Whose Solution Might Contribute to the End of the War in Ukraine

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“Excellence is not a skill. It is an attitude.”

Ralph Marston

When the Minsk Agreements were signed in 2014 and 2015, in Belarus, the signatories tried to agree on a ceasefire between the Ukrainian forces, the separatists in Donbass and those from Eastern Ukraine, supported by Russia. Moreover, the signatories also agreed on an agenda to organise elections in the above-mentioned regions, as well as on a plan for territorial integration within the Ukrainian borders. It became obvious that the original Minsk Agreements largely ended the fighting at that time. However, a new, more extensive war is currently taking place, and violence has increased significantly lately in some parts of Ukraine.

“Yes, the Minsk agreements are gone” – so stated Vladimir Putin on the 22nd of February 2022, two days before the start of the Ukrainian war, when Russia – on Putin’s orders – officially recognised the “republics” of Donetsk and Luhansk. The call to stop recognising the validity of the Minsk Agreements can be seen as the course of action that led to the start of the large-scale invasion of Ukraine, merely two days later. The Russian army constantly attacked and bombed Ukrainian cities. When the *blitzkrieg* failed, a massive bombing campaign started. Despite this, the strategy, even though it caused a lot of casualties (mostly civilians), did not register a massive success – tactically and strategically speaking.

As Russia’s failure to occupy Kiev became clearer and clearer, Moscow turned its attention to achieving its main goal – the occupation and complete take-over of Donbass. Moscow’s next step will probably be the annexation of other adjacent territories, just as it did with Crimea.

As such, at present, actions have been taken and debates have been hosted, that led to Vladimir Putin being accused on an international level of being the one who advocated for the cancellation of the Minsk Agreements, once he recognised the unilateral independence of the self-proclaimed republics. Even more so, he made plans to deploy more Russian troops in these regions, and make them part of Russia’s territory.

In this context, it is important to highlight that before the start of the current conflict in Ukraine, Kiev and Moscow saw the Agreements differently. The Ukrainian government saw them as a means to maintain Ukraine’s territorial integrity and completely re-establish the sovereignty of this country, while agreeing with assigning certain responsibilities to the leaders of the two regions. In contrast, the Kremlin believed the Agreements represented the start of a process that would eventually lead to establishing a Russian-led administration in Luhansk and Donetsk. The regions were to be assigned a special status and then reunited with the rest of the Ukrainian territory. These actions made sure at that time that – according to the Trojan horse strategy – Russia would be able to maintain a certain influence over Ukraine, that would never truly be a sovereign state. Following certain assessments, Duncan Allan¹ – a former British diplomat, and associate fellow with the Russia and Eurasia Programme at Chatham House² – called this irreconcilable divergence, “the Minsk conundrum”.

It became obvious that the main problem of the Minsk Agreements was the different and



Source: <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/31694917.html>

¹Duncan Allan is director of Octant Research & Analysis Ltd, an independent consultancy. For more than 28 years he was a member of the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office’s research analysts’ cadre, working on the countries from the former Soviet Union, particularly Russia and Ukraine. He served at the British Embassies in Moscow and Kyiv. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/our-people/duncan-allan>, accessed on the 18th of October 2022.

²“CH is an independent policy institute and a trusted forum for debate and dialogue. Its research and ideas help people understand how the world changes. It helps people, societies and governments understand and adapt to seismic change. It has been a source of independent analysis, trusted dialogue and influential ideas for one hundred years. Today, at the beginning of the 21st century the think tank continues to offer solutions to global challenges and actively seek to empower the next generation to change their world.” www.chathamhouse.org/about-us, accessed on the 18th of October 2022.

irreconcilable interpretation of Ukraine's sovereignty, whose citizens believe, on one hand, that their country is fully sovereign, and on the other that the Kremlin leaders envisage the limitation or even abolition of this sovereignty. How will they do it? By using their influence in the territories they have already occupied, and have become fully independent, and to such an extent, that it affects Ukraine's sovereignty and decision-making process. In the current context of the evolutions in Ukraine, and taking into account the effects they had on an international level, we should single out views the former British Prime Minister, Liz Truss, expressed before the war, when she was foreign secretary. At that time, she said that Russia, through its actions in Ukraine pinpointed to "the end of the Minsk negotiations process" and highlighted that when "President Vladimir Putin recognised the Popular Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk as independent", he displayed "a fragrant breach of Russian engagements under the Minsk Agreements" and proved "that Russia decided to fight instead of dialogue". As such, Liz Truss made her position known, ever since then that "they [the British] will coordinate their response with their allies and will not have Russia breach its international engagements while remaining unpunished".

It is worth emphasizing that, while the first part of the Minsk Agreements mainly stipulates a ceasefire, prisoner exchange, and withdrawal from the contact line, the second refers to the Ukrainian government regaining control over its eastern border and holding elections in the occupied territories, followed by reintegrating Donbas in Ukraine, through a special statute of autonomy.

After seven years, the two prove that they wish to obtain totally different results, and at the same time, they have opposing views on the Minsk Agreements. It is important to highlight the fact that before the start of the war, representatives from Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany – the so called "Normandy Format" – met on the 10th February 2022 in Berlin, in an attempt to decrease the tensions generated by the Russian military presence around Ukraine.

Enforcing the Minsk Agreements from September 2014 and February 2015 that were to end the war, remained the stated aim of western policies. Nevertheless, their implementation made little progress. Intense activity – dating December 2019, when the heads of state of the "Normandy Format" met after a three years break – did not achieve anything. Attempts to enforce the agreements died, because they wrongly relied on compromise, which was not an option. The Minsk Agreements are caught in a web of unmanageable contradictions coming from both countries – a "Minsk conundrum" – that is, a sovereign Ukraine as the Ukrainians wish, versus limited sovereignty as the Russian leaders ask for?

II. MIDDLE EAST



The Iranian Energy Strategy in the Eurasian Geopolitical Chessboard

Silvia BOLTUC

Over the last few years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has pursued strategies to revive its economy, harshly hit by U.S. sanctions, and relaunch its role as a key logistics and energy hub within the Eurasian continent.

Tehran aimed to implement trade corridors, strategic infrastructures, free economic zones, and trade relations with leading regional actors such as Russia, China, India and Central Asian republics. In addition, Iran launched energy diplomacy, which aims to position the country among international oil and gas exporters. Indeed, Tehran has created a dense network of regional collaborations that could affect the Eurasian geopolitical balance and, possibly, include Iran in the list of countries to which Europe will refer for its energy diversification policy.

Iranian Strategy between the Caucasus and Central Asia

With 17.3 per cent of the world's proven natural gas reserves, Iran is second only to Russia, while Turkmenistan is in sixth place with 3.8%.¹ The largest importer of Turkmen gas is China, giving Beijing substantial geopolitical leverage over Ashgabat.² This has encouraged Turkmenistan's leadership to try to diversify its export destinations and not depend on Beijing.

Although Iran is rich in natural gas, its large fields are located in the country's south, and the north has poor connections with the national pipeline network. As a result, imports of Turkmen gas are vital for northern Iran's region. In 2017, however, Ashgabat blocked the gas supply to Tehran for an outstanding payment of 2 billion dollars, according to Turkmenistan's allegations.³

Following this event, November 28th, 2021, marked one of the most significant results for Tehran's energy strategy in the Eurasian continent.⁴ The five-year dispute with Turkmenistan was eventually unlocked with an agreement involving Azerbaijan, whose reserves of natural gas have been estimated by B.P. at 2,500 billion cubic meters.

After a bilateral meeting between Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and his Azerbaijani counterpart, Ilham Aliyev, on the side-lines of the Organization for Economic Cooperation (ECO) Summit, they signed an agreement for the tripartite gas exchange between Turkmenistan, SOCAR (Azerbaijan) and NIGC (Iran). This document provided that Iran could import from 1.5 to 2 billion cubic meters of gas annually from north-eastern Turkmenistan (Sarakhs region) and supply Iranian gas to Azerbaijan from the northwest of the country (from Astar). Under the agreement, Iran was entitled to a certain amount of the imported gas as an exchange fee. Subsequently, the parties agreed to double the volume of gas trading. According to Iranian oil minister Javad Owji, Iran has the capacity to triple or even quadruple the current volume of gas exchanges between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, and this could be considered the next important step towards the revival of the country's energy diplomacy in the region.

The agreement signed between Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Iran is vital for Tehran, considering the enormous internal energy demand. Indeed, gaining greater energy efficiency is essential for Iran not only to meet the domestic need but also to have a surplus of gas to offer to the European market, counterbalancing the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline proposed project that involved Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan.

The European Union tried to promote an Azerbaijani-Turkmen gas pipeline to further substitute Russian gas by reaching Turkmenistan's natural gas fields. In this perspective, Baku has become an essential player in the European energy strategy, prompting Brussels to sign several agreements with the Azerbaijani leadership in recent years. As a consequence of this trend, to protect its natural gas exports,

¹RusWorldometer (2022) Natural Gas Reserves by Country. <https://www.worldometers.info/gas/gas-reserves-by-country/>.

²Akanksha Meena (2022) Turkmenistan's Energy Relations with China: A Significant Energy Nexus, Modern Diplomacy. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2022/08/14/turkmenistans-energy-relations-with-china-a-significant-energy-nexus>.

³Reuters (2017) Turkmenistan Halts Gas Exports to Iran Over Payment Row, Tehran Says. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-turkmenistan-gas-idUSKBN14LIAC>.

⁴Joshua Kucera (2021) Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Iran Reach Gas Trade Deal, Eurasianet. <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-turkmenistan-and-iran-reach-gas-trade-deal>.

Iran has the imperative of hindering the implementation of the Trans-Caspian project and offering an alternative route to Europe for its gas by exploiting Azerbaijan as a transit country. Notably, in the past, Iran tried to link its natural gas exports to Europe via Turkey by using an existing pipeline; according to the Iranian leadership, this project failed due to obstructionism or little Turkish interest. As a result, Tehran has decided to focus on the Caucasus, especially on Azerbaijan, considering that Baku currently exports its gas produced by the Shah Deniz-2 field in the Caspian Sea to Italy.

As already highlighted, the Iran-Azerbaijan-Turkmenistan trade agreement is vital because it contributes to the stability of gas supply in the northern Iranian provinces of Razavi Khorasan, North Khorasan, South Khorasan, Gilan and Semnan. Energy cooperation with neighbouring countries help to consolidate Tehran's relations with regional players and to relaunch Iranian energy diplomacy. The agreement also laid the foundations for the joint development of the Alborz oil field in the Caspian Sea.

Finally, as Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan are landlocked while Iranian ports have access to deep water and some neighbouring countries that need to import gas, the use of Iran for the transit or exchange of Turkmen and Azerbaijani gas with other players can increase the export capacity from these three states.

Tehran's leadership is aware of the opportunity that the current international energy situation, in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis, offers Iran. Indeed, Ahmad Assadzadeh, Iranian Deputy Oil Minister for International Affairs and Trade, explained how Iran is aware that if he loses the opportunity to export and trade gas now, it is unclear whether he will have more options like the current one in the future. In addition, other routes that threaten the country's interests in the region might be implemented.⁵ Undeniably, reaching a new nuclear deal and lifting sanctions will be essential to enhance its role as a gas supplier and logistic hub within the Eurasian chessboard.

Iranian-Russian Cooperation against the Backdrop of the Conflict in Ukraine

In the regional scenario for Iran, it is essential not to be excluded from the Turkmenistan-Azerbaijan-Europe corridor. On the international level, Tehran can play a crucial role in the post-Ukrainian conflict scenario, mainly by becoming a hub for distributing Russian gas to global markets. In this regard, the second historic date for Iranian energy diplomacy is July 19th, 2022, when the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) and the Russian Gazprom Company signed a 40 billion dollars Memorandum of Understanding for joint investment in oil and gas projects.⁶

According to the director of NIOC, Mohsen Khojasteh-Mehr, the agreement with Gazprom will be the most significant foreign investment commitment in the history of the Iranian oil industry, accounting for a quarter of all investments planned for the Iranian oil sector through 2025.⁷ NIOC and Gazprom will collaborate on the implementation of liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects, the construction of gas pipelines and the natural gas and petroleum product trading agreements between Iran and Russia. The MoU will also cover development projects in several Iranian oil and gas fields, including a 10 billion dollars' project at the Kish and North Pars fields in the Persian Gulf, as well as a 15 billion dollars' project to increase pressure in South Pars, the largest gas field in the world located on Iran's maritime border with Qatar.



Source: <https://news.am/eng/news/724911.html>

Cooperation with Russia is essential since the recently discounted prices of Russian gas threaten Iran to lose its traditional customers, who might now buy gas from Moscow at a lower price.

Energy Cooperation in the Middle East

The Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman are among the richest natural gas resources. Iran and Qatar are, respectively, the second and third countries with the largest gas reserves in the world. Iran shares more than ten gas fields with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and Iraq. These actors have chosen to

⁵IOTC (2022) *Iran Activating Energy Diplomacy*. Iran Activating Energy Diplomacy (iotco.ir).

⁶RIA Novosti (2022) "Газпром" подписал меморандум с Иранской национальной нефтяной компанией. <https://ria.ru/20220719/gazprom-1803400835.html>.

⁷Tasnim (2022) <https://bit.ly/3C651PL> بزرگترین تفاهمنامه نفتی با گازپروم روسیه امضا شد/ سرمایه‌گذاری چندده میلیارد دلاری روس‌ها در میدان نفت و گاز ایران.

develop and extract reserves although the absence of cooperation agreements, triggering disputes over mining rights; This was the case, for example, of the South Pars-North Dome field, shared between Iran and Qatar or the Dorra-Arash field, disputed between Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iran.⁸

Creating an area for inclusive multilateral cooperation in the region could give new impetus to relations between Iran and the GCC countries. Implementing gas pipelines and the connections between the ports that host the large LNG carriers forces the actors involved to fruitful cooperation and avoid conflicts. Finally, one of Iran's leading Middle Eastern partners is Iraq. Iranian gas and electricity power more than a third of the country's energy needs, particularly in the south. Iraq depended so heavily on Iranian energy that former U.S. President Donald Trump had to exempt the country from his policy of "maximum pressure" sanctions on Tehran to prevent the Iraqi network from collapsing.⁹

Conclusion

The pandemic crisis has heavily hit the oil market, prompting countries with high domestic consumption to evaluate strategies and put energy supplies at the top of their political agendas. The situation worsened after the conflict in Ukraine and the Western sanctions imposed on Russia, which caused an energy crisis that prompted international actors to redesign their energy security strategies and pushed them towards new commercial partners able to replace the Russian natural gas supplies.

Iran's huge gas reserves and privileged geographical position close to two of the world's wealthiest areas of energy sources, namely the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea, as well as its access to international waters, allow Tehran to play an influential role in the regional energy market, and possibly in the global one in the near future. If, on the one hand, the Islamic Republic of Iran can be a hub for distributing Russian gas, on the other hand, if Tehran reaches a new nuclear deal with the West, the country might export its natural gas to Europe.

Energy has become a strategic tool in the relations between countries, and Iran has grasped the importance of establishing a well-defined long-term energy diplomacy. In addition to relaunching the petrochemical industry and increasing its activities, this policy aims to penetrate strategic regions and cement the role of Tehran and its relations with key players.

Factors limiting Iranian export capabilities are high and inefficient energy consumption in the domestic and industrial sectors, lack of internal financial resources, inability to attract foreign investment, and U.S. and European sanctions. Furthermore, Iran has been unsuccessful in LNG production, which could change with Russian support, considering that LNG exports are likely to exceed pipeline supplies by 2025, according to the company B.P.

In recent years, Iran has pursued what Iranian energy experts call a 'policy of resilience'. Increasing gas exports is a crucial part of this policy, particularly emphasized in the Oil Industry's 2025 Vision Paper. According to this document, Iran should reach between 8 per cent and 10 per cent of world gas trade compared to the current share of less than 2%. The country's strategy should be to buy as much excess gas as possible from regional players (Turkmenistan, Qatar and Azerbaijan) and export it to consuming countries at a higher price (importers include Armenia, Turkey, Iraq, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Pakistan and Afghanistan).

In addition, Tehran is studying how to exploit best the challenges and opportunities arising from the ecological transition. A seminar was held in Tehran in September 2022 to introduce Japan's policies to use hydrogen and ammonia to achieve zero carbon emissions by 2050. The conference was held in the presence of Abbas Razmi, Director of Health, Safety and Environment of the NIOC, Yuka Kida, Head of the Economic Department of the Embassy of Japan in Iran, and Masashi Watanabe, Director of Oil and LNG Policy at the Natural Resources and Energy Agency of the Ministry of Economy, Commerce and Industry of Japan. The goal is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and become an environmentally sustainable and competitive industry.

In the future, Iran can become a leading player in the world energy market and thus promote its economic growth and counter the socio-economic problems resulting from sanctions and forced international closure. Pursuing this goal is a geopolitical imperative of Iran which sees the achievement of the nuclear agreement and the improvement of the country's internal production and transport infrastructures as a fundamental step.

⁸Middle East Eye (2022) Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to Develop Gas Field Despite Iran Complaint. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/saudi-arabia-kuwait-iran-develop-gas-field-despite-complaint>.

⁹TASS (2018) США временно освободили Ирак от действия антииранских энергетических санкций. США временно освободили Ирак от действия антииранских энергетических санкций - ТАСС (tass.ru).

III. EUROPE - THE WAR IN UKRAINE



The Fluctuating Relationship between the Russian Federation and Turkey and the World Order in the Context of the War in Ukraine

Prof. PhD. Adriean PÂRLOG

“When you point a finger at someone, there are three fingers pointing back at you”.

Gustav Heinemann

The special military operation (an obvious war), illegal and unprovoked, triggered by the Russian Federation in Ukraine is seen by many international relations experts as the most significant military conflict since the end of World War 2. Many western and Asian views show that the impact of this conflict will cause major changes in the global security arrangements. After the 24th February 2022 the international community unsurprisingly realised that the West became more united and the political dynamic of the non-western world increased, and new groups surfaced: the “Unified West” and the “Global South”. This new state of facts was probably generated by the cascade of crises – sanitary, financial, economic, food, technology, global logistics and especially energy. What seems to be worse is the fact that they appear to deepen, generating an increase in global instability, making major international actors to reposition themselves: China, the Russian Federation, India, Germany, Great Britain, Japan, Australia, Israel, Turkey, Ukraine, Taiwan etc.

The Russian Federation is not the only actor present in the Black Sea region: The European Union, Turkey, NATO and by extension the USA are there as well, however, none can be seen as strategically controlling the area. When the Kremlin illegally annexed Crimea in 2014, it revealed its strategic plan to become a regional hegemon, using the peninsula as an outpost, especially since it militarised it intensively.

Without exaggerating the strategic importance of the Black Sea, and even in the context of the intense military operations occurring in Ukraine, this year, we believe that there are enough arguments that justify a comparison with similar security matters concerning other regions in the world, such as the Baltic Sea basin and the Taiwan Strait.

And again, with regard to the present crisis in Ukraine, we will briefly deal with the current dynamic of the relations between the Russian Federation and Turkey. They are strongly influenced by the behaviour and actions of the two presidents, Putin and Erdogan that seek, independently from each other, to make use of their strengths and seize the opportunities brought out by the realities in the region. In this regard, Russia remains one of Turkey’s main trade partners, including in the energy supply sector. In 2021 Moscow exported in Turkey almost 45% of the latter’s national gas demand, 17% of its oil demand and 40% of its coal demand. In 2022’s second term, compared to the same time last year, Turkey’s total imports from its traditional partners decreased with 4% – China, Germany, Italy and the USA, however, the imports from Russia increased with 6.5%. According to the Sochi agreement, established in the summer of 2022, Turkey agreed to give up paying USD for Russian energy resources. These matters raise serious questions with regard to the long-term impact on the Russia-Turkish bilateral relations, but also on Ankara’s relations with the rest of its trade partners.

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Starting with 2000, the Russian Federation continued its efforts to strengthen its status as a great nuclear power and continues to believe that major global security projects – no matter who starts and supports them – should take into account the fact that it (the successor of the USSR) is USA’s equal, a winner of World War 2, an event that changed the world order, a world order that should be seen as it is in the context of the post-Cold War era as well. After more than two decades when he registered both successes, and a decrease in popularity, President Vladimir Putin seems to be perceived by the public opinion as the “Tsar of Great Russia”, and is in search of a new Russian doctrine, not yet undertaken, but desired, similar to the Monroe Doctrine. Russia’s great problem is its decreased significance in almost all fields, except for the nuclear one (both strategic and tactic).

Following 1994, Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been dominating the domestic political scene of his country, thanks also to the fact that he has won all the elections where he ran – as a local leader, party leader or national leader. As he has very good communication skills, and an ability to reach the Turkish citizens, he reconsidered the concept of Ottoman nationalism, the current reason behind national regeneration. It is based on the increase of interdependence between politics, economy, history, and more recently, technology. In Turkey's today social and political initiatives nostalgic ambitions are a constant in every-day life and make their presence known when publicly accepting the concepts of Ottoman nationalism and neo-Ottoman nationalism as highly reputed legacies. The revival of these concepts also meant the identity adaptation of the Turkish society so it can relate to that of the former Ottoman Empire. Ankara redefined and made operational a set of economic, political and security objectives that redefined the Turkish society and its power tools. Following the Cold War, Turkey agreed to play a new part in the Balkans, Middle East, Crimea, South Caucasus and even Central Asia, where the Turkish legacy endured.



Source: <https://eu.boell.org/en/friends-or-foes-tensions-or-ties-eus-relations-turkey-russia-and-us>

importance, compared to other European regions, which allowed Russia and also China to rethink the economic, political and security implications in the region. The Russian domination in this region is a historic fact, however, Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative has the potential to challenge Moscow in the Black Sea region. These efforts can have a medium and long term impact on Washington's role as the main provider of European security. Russia's special military operation in Ukraine forced the USA to revise its involvement in the region. After the conflict Ukraine has to be reconstructed, while other Eastern-European countries, affected by the Russian invasion, have to allocate extra funds for defence and its infrastructure. USA's effort to re-engage itself in the Black Sea basin should take into consideration a direct cooperation with Turkey, despite the misunderstandings related to recent files – Turkey's acquisition of the S-400 air defence system and sales restriction of the F-35 and modernised F-16 fighter jets. Over time, Turkey had a rather linear relationship with the West, because it wanted to be recognised as a country with western values, which contributed to countering the unpredictability of the USSR and later on of the Russian Federation.

Following the Cold War, there were several armed conflicts that took place in the Black Sea region, (Russian-Georgian War, the First and Second Chechen War the First and Second War between Armenia and Azerbaijan for the Karabakh Range and last but not least the Russian-Ukrainian war), where Turkey did not completely support the countries that opposed Moscow. After the attempted coup in July 2016, in Turkey, the strategic relation between Washington and Ankara became conditioned upon finding a solution for the complex dissents that originated from the frustration of the Turkish president, generated by the USA's support for the Kurdish population, for harbouring the Turkish dissident, Fethullah Gulen and for Washington's involvement in the Syrian war. In turn, Washington is concerned with Turkey's illiberal behaviour and its involvement in various files, related to the tensions between the Greek and the Turkish, to the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa. If Washington included in its engagement in the Black Sea region some of Turkey's regional aspirations, perhaps both could find a solution to decrease the current tensions that reverberate in Ankara. The present Ukrainian war strengthened Turkey's geostrategic importance that projects itself as a natural bridge that levels the hostilities in the region. A Turkey decisively dedicated to NATO that actually cooperates with the USA, which would operate as an honest security broker is essential to a long-term regional stability. At the same time, Ankara's attempt to be a mediator in the negotiations between Russia and Ukraine stirred contradictory reactions in various regional circles of influence, such as Germany, France and Israel, or Great Britain. Ankara increasing its economic ties with Russian companies, Russia's almost illegal grain trade with resources stolen from Ukraine and transported via Turkish ports, Turkey helping certain Russian businesses circumvent sanctions have fuelled

the idea according to which, Ankara is more interested in securing its relation with Moscow than support Ukraine. In 2021, the value of the Turkish trade with the European Union amounted to 179 billion USD, the organisation being Ankara's most important trade partner, while that with Russia amounted to 35 billion USD. Elementary economic logic supports the hypothesis according to which Turkey should prioritise its commercial connections with the West, and avoid their decrease. In case of an additional economic and political arrangement with Moscow, Ankara risks becoming more dependent from Russia, hence distancing itself from the West. Even the project "Turkey as an Energy Hub" could become a strategic risk to all westerners involved. Military acquisitions, hydrocarbon based energy projects, nuclear investments, recurrent visits of the two leaders and Turkey's refusal to impose sanctions on the Russian Federation raise questions with regard to the way Turkey will support its real political status within NATO. Erdogan's refusal to impose sanctions on Russia was motivated by Turkey's energy dependency and the impossibility of the Turkish industry, harshly affected by inflation, to function without imports from Russia. At the same time, the leadership in Ankara was very distant from the parties that agreed several times to mediate the conflict between Kiev and Moscow. This convincing behaviour – juggling between a flexible credibility and political opportunism – raised questions with regard to Turkey's commitment in its relationships with its allies, generating different effects, such as some NATO members refusing to have a military cooperation with Ankara. In the context of the military conflict in Ukraine, Turkey's behaviour wavers between the desire to support Kiev and the caution of avoiding an open conflict with Moscow. Erdogan managed to change its country's vulnerabilities, increased by the instability of the relations between Russia and the West, into viable political-diplomatic shares. Turkey restraining from publicly expressing its opinion with regard to choosing a side, is confirmed by president Erdogan increasing regional stakes, and by the instability of Turkey's regional proximity. Ukraine's defeat or partial division would be an event hard to digest for Turkey, because Russia would become a threat to the entire region. A defeated, unstable Russia would make the Kremlin take revenge and generate a negative impact on the regional, social and economic stability, resonating also in the Balkans, Syria, the Middle East and the Caucasus. A further argument to support the above-expressed ideas is represented by Turkey's privileged position that Erdogan has managed to build – a good offices provider for several bi, and multilateral negotiations on the Ukrainian file in 2022.

In its efforts to mediate the dialogue to end all hostilities between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, president Erdogan risked sending some messages that can affect Turkey's relationship with Washington, directly stating that the USA and other Western countries made Moscow engage on the dangerous path of the confrontations with Ukraine: "The West, and especially the USA ceaselessly attack Russia. Of course, Russia fiercely fights back against these actions", stated Erdogan without offering any further explanations.

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In the context of the security challenges generated by the above-mentioned cascading crises, to which we add the invasion of Ukraine, many state and trans-state actors test the viability of strategic independence and the implications of the de-globalisation processes. It is worth mentioning that for the past years, issues such as energy, the vulnerability of supply chains, the dependency of microelectronics, and of other strategically important mineral resources were in the spotlight, seen as serious matters that do not justify returning to intensive globalisation.

This leads to a major question: does de-globalisation mean the end of multilateralism as a system characterised by stable international institutions with structures based on rules? Recent evolutions – starting with the repeated use of the term "multilateralism", continuing with ad-hoc alliances and the ever often denunciation of the international order dominated by the West, lead to the conclusion that indeed de-globalisation could point out to the danger "multilateralism" is in. This trend is marked by two contradicting inclinations: on one hand, the multilateralism based on rules, with international institutions, is under immense pressure, and on the other hand, summits such as the conferences dedicated to global warming and climate change (Paris, Glasgow, Sharm Al-Sheikh), or the G7 and G20 forums are eagerly awaited. This trend raises a logical question: how will the global security systems be influenced by a new world order that is



Source: <https://institute.global/policy/tbi-globalism-study-multilateralism-dead-long-live-multilateralism>

shaping up to be competitive? One cannot deter the need of the long-awaited democratization of international institutions. While some post-war organisations are strong supporters of national democratization (G7 and G20 for example), others were less successful institutionally speaking (FAO or the Kyoto Protocol) a potential solution could be a flexible, innovative multilateralism that provides a more poignant creativity to present-day international institutions.

By refusing to reform, these institutions diminish their credibility all on their own. Accusations are more and more consistent, while values defining the West such as democracy, human rights, international law, the need to condemn wars etc., remain a moral compass that guides foreign and security policies. However, competences pertaining to the field of extended security and violation of human rights have always been associated with states seen as individual players.

III. EUROPE - THE WAR IN UKRAINE



The Possible Effects and Consequences of the Ukrainian War in the Western Balkans

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Introduction

The world is becoming more and more complex. Countries are dealing with an uncontested reality – the difficulty or impossibility to handle current challenges, especially at a time when the world is changing - an irreversible process, which has many effects on the development of our societies in their entirety.

Most challenges, that occur very quickly and are highly unpredictable, are rather the result of the prejudices and deficiencies in the good governance capabilities. They all contribute directly to the amplification of economic downturn, to the development of uncontrollable migration, to an increased vulnerability of the human societies, to the development of populism and the increase of ethnic conflicts. They tend to erode, degrade, and impose a permanent change of the system of relations, and with it, the political, military, and economic and security systems, both at regional and global levels.

In a globalised, somewhat unpredictable world, events occurring in one place, echo in a different part of the globe. Thus, the Russian-Ukrainian war reverberates not only in the proximity of the two countries involved in the conflict – Central and Eastern Europe – but also farther away, in East Asia for example, where Chinese and Taiwanese leaders, who have a much tensioned relationship, closely follow the fight between the Ukrainians and their Russian invaders. Similarly, in an area much closer to the war zone than East Asia – the Western Balkans – the course of the Russian-Ukrainian war is closely monitored. Various international actors pay very much attention to how Europe reacts to this war, and to what conclusions it reaches as they might reflect on the policies it adopts with regard to other regions.

Hence, the dynamic and the predictability of the current geopolitical and geostrategic environment are highly influenced by the dynamic and changes – seldom misunderstood – of the relationships between the main global players, as well as by an increased leeway and influence coming from new regional actors (state/non-state).

Taking into account the type and uncertainty of the evolutions, but also the results and consequences that occur on a medium and long term, on a regional and global level, we can agree with the German scholar Hans W. Maull, whose stand becomes more and more realistic and contemporary, a stand he expressed in one of his studies. He referred to the start of the change of the world order, and wondered whether we would witness a dissolution or a replacement.¹

The Conflict in Ukraine Has a Major Influence on a Regional and Global Level

Lately, Russia had to change its plan to occupy the whole of Ukraine, once its military operation that started on the 24th February 2022, failed. The invasion started a refugee crisis, the fastest growing in Europe since World War 2. There were 8 million displaced within Ukraine by May, and by the 11th October 2022, there were 7.6 million Ukrainians who had fled the country. The invasion also caused a shortage of food on a global level. We must not leave out the fact that Russia's initial plan was to swiftly subdue Ukraine, politically, economically militarily and informationally. The new situation and the new plan has Russia consolidate its position in the territories it fully occupied so far, with the help of its forces, as well as with that of the separatists. Ever since May 2022 Russian government officials have spoken more and more about annexing occupied territories, referring to the history of the Russian Empire and to the Taorida and Herson governorates established in 1802. As far as the popular republics of Donetsk and Luhansk are concerned, the plan to integrate them in the Russian Federation should be seen as an alteration of the strategy following the signing of the so called Minsk Agreements in 2015 that stipulate that Donbass was to be given a special status inside Ukraine. The self-proclaimed republics and the territories that were taken over since the beginning of the war, technically became part of the Russian Federation. This allowed Moscow to introduce “the special military operation” as a Russian victory and start a new, more violent phase of the “Russian territories unification process”.

¹<https://monitorulapararii.ro/multipolarismul-si-evolutiile-de-securitate-la-nivel-regional-elemente-definitorii-pentru-viitoarea-arhitectura-geopolitica-1-32982>

The separation and the recognition of the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk on the 21st February 2022, and the start of the invasion of Ukraine three days later, fully proved that the authorities in Kremlin eventually gave up the “peace” scenario that they were trying to enforce a few years back and insisted on the “demilitarisation” and “de-nazification” of Ukraine. Actually, Russia proved that its main goal was to end the military cooperation of a country that strengthened its cooperation with the West so that it could join NATO, a country that witnessed on its domestic political scene the growing development of “nationalistic parties and political organisations”. In fact, the Russians actually wanted in the beginning of the so called “special operation” to make the Kiev government surrender so that it could be replaced, thus taking over the entire political, military, economic and last but not least, intelligence activities in Ukraine.

Taking into account the evolutions – below expectations – of the fights, Russia’s current purpose is to maintain control over the occupied territories in Southern and Eastern Ukraine. It also intends on re-establishing and ensuring the security and function of the land line between Crimea and Russia and separate Ukraine from the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. Russia understands that to partially attain its goals, the territories must be highly militarised and must maintain a permanent presence of its troops there, in order to have control and permanently destabilise Ukraine’s existential flow. Under such circumstances, we must not ignore the fact that on the 26th May 2022 the Kremlin spokesman, Dmitri Peskov, officially confirmed Russia’s intent to annex the Ukrainian territories it took over, ever since its invasion, on the 24th February. Moscow is waiting for the authorities in Kiev to finally admit they have been occupied and that Russia has claim on these territories, while giving up any attempt to retake them and reintegrate them in the Ukrainian territory.

It is worth mentioning that Russia repeatedly highlighted the fact that the inhabitants of all occupied Ukrainian territories that are now under Russian occupation – not just Donbass – have the right to decide if they wish to be part of Russia. Hence, just as expected, the Kremlin put in practice its intention to try and formalise and legitimise the annexation of the territories that have been abusively and unjustifiably taken in eastern and southern Ukraine. They proceeded by organising mock referendums and by appealing intensively to the Russian partisans and certain “collaborationist” authorities. The implementation of this scenario was presented as a success for Russia, who wanted to consolidate its image on an international level and seem capable to annex territories, as well as weaken the response capabilities of its adversaries.

See that behind this obvious goal – fully taking over the resource exploitation in Ukraine’s Donbass (energy resources but also of the gas transportation system to Europe), one can safely say that the Kremlin’s hidden stakes is to complete the “buffer zone” made of Belarus-Crimea-Abkhazia-South Ossetia, situated between NATO and the Russian Federation. Furthermore, we must not leave out another “buffer zone by extension” made of Serbia and the Bosnian Serb Republic in the Western Balkans.

It becomes clearer and clearer that Russia, having a greater influence on countries such as Georgia and the Republic of Moldova (through Transnistria) and permanently interfering in the Western Balkans, and most recently in Belarus and Kazakhstan, wishes to exert a significant influence in as many former Soviet republics as it can, but also in the entities resulted from the dissolution of former Yugoslavia and strengthen the buffer ring between it and NATO.

The Western Balkans – Still a Possible Scene of the Influences and Confrontations between the West and Russia

Russia’s war in Ukraine had a significant effect on the evolutions of the political, economic and security environments in the six entities in the Western Balkans. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, when Russia invaded Ukraine, Serbian separatists starts showing excess of courage, however their ambitions faulted after the failure and withdrawal of the Russian military forces near Kiev and in eastern Ukraine. Meanwhile. The Serbian President, Aleksandar Vučić, carried on with his duplicitous politics, hoping to maintain a proper environment for balanced evolutions between the West and Russia.

Carefully analysing the situation in the Western Balkans in the context of the war in Ukraine, Russia remains an important player in the Western Balkans, who can significantly influence evolutions in the region, on all levels. Taking



Source: <https://www.veridica.ro/editoriale/balcanii-de-vest-nebunul-da-sahrolul-regiunii-in-confruntarea-lui-vladimir-putin-cu-occidental>

into account that Russia's economic instruments is degrading over time, the war in Ukraine could stimulate Moscow to employ its destabilising means in the Western Balkans as well, aiming to stop the involvement of the EU, NATO and the USA decision-makers in several conflicts and regions. Russia proves it can take advantage of the ethnic cleavages, support ardent nationalist politicians, entangle late reform agendas from various fields, but most of all, create the proper environment for countries to dissolve – one cannot forget the situations that countries such as Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were once in, and one cannot predict the exact evolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo.

Along with the military actions it took in Ukraine, Moscow keeps on hindering the EU integration of the countries in the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and mainly Serbia). Out of the desire to dominate this part of Europe, Russia keeps on interfering NATO and the USA's activities in the region. It insists on nurturing an anti-Western sentiment and increase the level of corruption in the Western Balkans. It also seeks to increase the governing deficiencies of the region and prevent the process of domestic reform, which is a must when it comes to integrating in the Euro-Atlantic economic, political and security structures.

Despite receiving international criticism with regard to its war in Ukraine, the Russian government does not show any sign that it intends to give up its tedious behaviour and the strategies used to draw the local corrupted elites in every entity within the Western Balkans. As such, so long as the war in Ukraine continues and evolutions are harder and harder to predict – regionally and globally speaking – it will turn out that it is high time the leaders in the six entities from the Western Balkans realised that balancing relations between Moscow, Brussels and Washington will be more and more difficult to achieve.

The increased ethnical dissensions, the political, social and security evolutions, as well as the exchange of information in the Western Balkans, together with a large scale disappointment with regard to the slow EU/NATO integration process, create opportunities and provide benefits for Moscow, which manages to disrupt the order and gain control over some entities in the area. We are saying this because the Kremlin's control over the Western Balkans is clearly built on its extended relationship with Serbia, on the refusal to recognise Kosovo's independence, on the influence it has over the northern part of the former Yugoslavian province, on a failed *coup d'état* in Montenegro, that proved the degree of involvement of the Russian intelligence services in the region, on the support of the separatist leaders in the Republika Srpska, and on hidden effort to promote propaganda and spread disinformation in the Western Balkans, with the sole purpose of creating ethnical domestic and regional tensions.

Carefully analysing the set of instruments that Russia employs to orchestrate its plans for the Western Balkans, one can surely see that it relies on much propaganda, disinformation, symbolism and subversion. Russia is very noticeable in the spying games it organises wherever it makes its presence known, including its failed attempt to monitor an Albanian military facility and the attempted cyber-attack in Montenegro, as well as its disinformation and propaganda campaigns and the large-scale involvement in the politics of the region. However, we noticed a first sign of change – Serbia's place in the current international situation, becoming very clear that the Russian war in Ukraine create tensions in the Russian-Serbian relationship. A clear example is that Belgrade recently voted for the march 2022 Resolution of the UN General Assembly, condemning Russia's attack on Ukraine.

The Kosovo File Used by Putin to Justify the Unilateral Declaration of Independence and Annexation of Certain Ukrainian Territories

It is surprising that on the 26th April 2022, Vladimir Putin stated that Russia has the right to recognise the independence of the Popular Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, as well as provide military assistance, justifying his actions with the decision of the UN International Court of Justice to recognise Kosovo, according to which, when exercising the right to self-determination, the territory of a country is not forced to ask for permission in declaring its sovereignty to the country's authorities. Putin drew attention on the UN backing-up his decision, highlighting that "I have personally read all comments – from the legal, administrative political from the USA and Europe. Everybody said the same."

In the same context, Putin highlighted that "very many countries in the world have done the same, including Russia's opponents in the West, as far as Kosovo is concerned. [...] It is a certainty that very many countries in the West recognised its independency." He carried on saying: "I have done the same with respect to Donbass. After doing so, they asked us to provide military assistance with regard to the country that was conducting military operations against it. We had the right to do that, according to Article 51, chapter 7 of the UN Charter."

Serbian nationalists were appalled by the fact that Moscow gave Kosovo's example as a precedent to justify the recognition of the separatist entities Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states. Moreover, Serbia allowed Great Britain and France to use its territory as a transit point for military equipment destined for Ukraine. These evolutions seem to develop in a familiar context, at a time when Russia's *soft power* was successful in Serbia, Russian politicians admitting to having a special affinity for their

“Slavic brothers” in the south and being excited by the relationship between the Russian and Serbian orthodox churches.

The effects of the war in Ukraine and the sudden increase of the tensions between Russia and the EU members, as far as gas supply is concerned, spread in the Western Balkans, even if the general energy dependency from Moscow was not that great, but rather exaggerated for a long time. In May 2022, Serbia signed a three-year contract with Russia for gas supply. Nevertheless, the amount of Serbian gas imports from Russia is relatively small – three billion m³/year. Gas represents less than 15% of Serbia’s energy resources “mix”.

Conclusions and Prognosis with Regard to the Evolutions in the Western Balkans

The Western Balkans have long been in a state of uncertainty as to their prospects vis-à-vis the EU integration process. Nevertheless, it becomes more and more obvious that the West’s biggest leverage in the region – EU integration – has lost its credibility in the past years. It is still possible for Russia to reignite old conflicts between Serbian nationalists and the nationalists from other entities resulted from the break of former Yugoslavia, by being encouraged to retaliate after the losses in BiH and Kosovo. In Republika Srpska there seems to have been a plan that would have pushed the entity towards recession, but it was suspended, and following the evolutions of the war in Ukraine, and the withdrawal of the Russian military forces from the Kiev region. In Montenegro, the political scene was changed when the government supported by the pro-Russian and pro-Serbian parties, fell and new elections were in order.

At the beginning of March 2022, the “Visegrad Insight” magazine published an analysis that foretells the “Future of the Western Balkans – Five Scenarios by 2030”. It came out thanks to the cooperation between Western Balkans and Central Europe experts. Tetiana Poliak-Grujić and Spasimir Domaradzki summarise the five scenarios:

1. The integration of the countries in the Western Balkans in the EU (“Forcing Hand”);
2. Maintaining the status quo – unsatisfactory and unstable (“The Dark Future”);
3. An endless integration negotiation process (“Elusive Europeanization”);
4. A solid economic cooperation that erases almost entirely past complaints (“Western Balkans Defragmentation”);
5. A union to combat global challenges (“Coming Together”).

The context of the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the actions Europe suggests with regard to the Western Balkans increase the affinity for the two contrasting scenarios. The first is the successful “Forcing Hand”, where the EU has an active approach and an effective integration process with reforms in every country. The second is “The Dark Future”, based on the failures of the countries to become part of the EU, political instability, the persistence of ethnical animosities and the rise in the region of Russia and China that have started a hostile and fierce competition with the EU, NATO and the USA.

As a conclusion, given the war in Ukraine, the prospects of the countries in the Western Balkans to integrate in the EU are decreasing rapidly. This complicates the capacity of the entities in the region to address – alongside the EU Member States – regional and global challenges. The region becomes a favourable playground for political, social, economic and domestic crisis. Russia is strengthening its influence and fuels regional conflicts and uses them to its advantage, and the risky economic cooperation with China pushes the entities in the region in a debt trap. The high probability for conflicts in the region to reignite causes an additional fragmentation, generating a direct threat to the stability, security and prosperity of the region.

Today, more than ever, the path the Western Balkans will take depends on the EU and NATO.

III. EUROPE - THE WAR IN UKRAINE



An Interpretation of the War in Ukraine from the Perspective of the Containment Policy

Prof. PhD Cristian BARNA

The Containment Policy – Conceptualisation

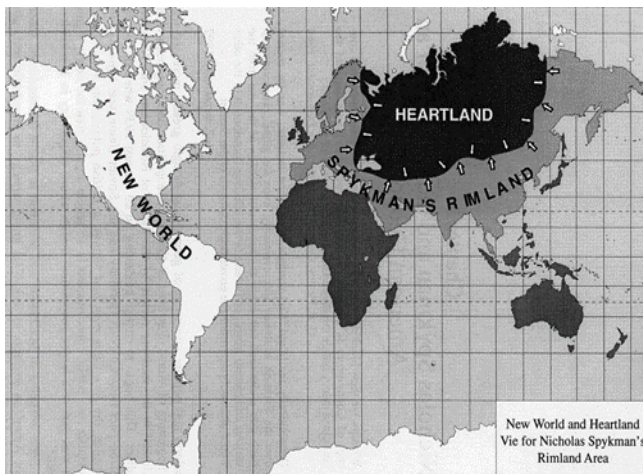
During World War 2, influenced by the works of Alfred Mahan and Halford Mackinder, the US political scientist, Nicholas Spykman, makes his own geostrategic theory known.

The timing of his writings is very important, as the Heartland belonged to the USSR, an ally at the time, while the threat to global security was represented by the Axis Powers that envisaged world domination, including by exerting control over the shores that surrounded the Eurasian Heartland.

Nicholas Spykman revives Alfred Mahan's viewpoint with regard to the geography of the world's poles of power and comes with an alternative to thalassocratic powers, which aim at maintaining control over the Heartland. He came up with the Rimland Theory after taking into consideration the leverage the Eurasian Rimland has over the Heartland it surrounds. Nicholas Spykman brings into the foreground the geostrategic importance of the Rimland, arguing that the Eurasian Heartland is too wide and difficult to control, while exercising power over its Rimland facilitates the management of the routes leading to this land.¹

Appearing to be a critical analysis of Mackinder's geopolitical theory, regarding world domination through the control of the Heartland, the Rimland Theory or the "border geopolitics" is actually an addition to the Heartland Theory.

Just as Saul Cohen remarks, "Spykman's terminology, its detailed, global, geographic context, and political conclusions drawn from his view of the world, show that he inspired himself from Mackinder, whose strategic conclusions he tried to reject [...] In fact, rethinking Mackinder's promising theory, and turning it into *Whomever dominates the Rimland, dominates Eurasia. Whomever dominates Eurasia holds the reins of the world*, shows his source of inspiration and the uniqueness of Spykman's theory."²



Source: https://www.reddit.com/r/MapPorn/comments/bd88yq/illustration_of_a_geostrategic_idea_nicholas_john/

Speaking of the Rimland, Nicholas Spykman refers to the circle that surrounds the Heartland, perceived as a "buffer zone" between sea and land.

The USSR, the Russian Federation and the Containment Policy

The Rimland Theory became a geopolitical concept through which, during the Cold War, the USA came up with the *containment policy* for the USSR. Thus, Mahan and Spykman became the forefathers of Euro-Atlantic concept.³

During the Cold War, the USSR was the Heartland, while the USA controlled the Rimland that surrounded Eurasia and blocked the USSR's access to the seas and oceans. At that time, history proved that the USSR's telurocratic power was not enough for the union to become a hegemon, as the strategic and military advantages and the economic opportunities provided by the control over seas and oceans was stronger than the power of the Heartland.

In the post-Cold War era, the Russian Federation sees itself as the victim of the "entrapment of the Eurasian Heartland", orchestrated by thalassocratic powers, particularly the USA.

The Geopolitical future of the Russian Federation (the USA's as well) are influenced by the events of the Eurasian Heartland, and its Rimland, and by the instability crescent starting from the

¹Mongrenier, Jean Sylvestre: *Federația Rusă amenință oare Occidentul? [Does the Russian Federation Threaten the West?]*, Cartier Publishing, Chisinau, 2010.

²Cohen, Saul Bernard: *Geopolitics of the World System*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Boston, 2015.

³Kissinger, Henry: *Diplomația [Diplomacy]*, All Publishing, Bucharest, 2007.

Mediterranean, continuing with North Africa, and all the way to the Middle East. According to Aleksandr Dugin, the “formation of an empire” that included the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Iran, Armenia, Tajikistan, Belarus and Syria would give the Russian Federation the power to “break the dam” at the Atlantic Ocean and have access to warm seas.⁴

In its European Rimland, being close to a Europe that hates all that is Russian, traumatised by the memories of the Cold War era is reason enough for Russia to be concerned. Being aware of the advantage the access to seas and oceans offers, which in geopolitical terms means exercising control over the Rimland, the Russian Federation is taking actions that enables it to deploy its naval power in its strategic Rimland.

According to Paul Claval, having a strong fleet is vital for the Russian Federation because it can separate it from the pillory the containment policy could put the Eurasian area.⁵

At present, the Russian Federation seems determined to take advantage of its Rimland, it did not benefit from during the Cold War. George Friedman provides an explanation in this regard He believes that the Russian Federation cannot tolerate “tight borders”, because they do not allow it to implement a “deep” defence strategy.

This is why the Russian Federation wants to be surrounded by “buffer zones” such as Kaliningrad, Belarus, south-eastern Ukraine, Transnistria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia on which it can exert its influence and grant access to the Baltic, the Black and the Caspian seas. This means “piercing” the Euro-Atlantic Rimland, made of countries such as Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, the Czech Republic or Romania, situated in the vicinity of the Russian Heartland.⁶

Losing its hegemonic influence over the countries in Central and Eastern Europe, once they joined NATO, was a catastrophe for the Russian Federation, geo-strategically speaking, as this country lost control over a large part of the Pontic-Baltic corridor.

Thus, the Russian Federation was able to come up with a revised policy so it can change the power formula in the Pontic-Baltic Rimland. In this context, it is worth mentioning Vladimir Putin’s stand, made public during the speech he delivered after the annexation of Crimea, in March 2014: “We have every reason to assume that the infamous *containment policy* from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries continues today. They (NATO and the EU) are constantly trying to put us in a corner ... However, there is a limit for everything.”⁷

Because Romania and Bulgaria joined NATO, and the USA showed support for the Ukrainian and Georgian elites that stood against Russia, made the latter feel “besieged”. Its greatest loss was Ukraine, since, according to Brzezinski, the Russian Federation is not an “empire” without Ukraine, however, together they do make up for one.⁸

Hence, geo-strategically speaking, eastern and southern Ukraine, Crimea, Transnistria and the separatist regions – Abkhazia and South Ossetia are part of Russia’s “security corridor” to the Black Sea. In order to achieve this, the Russian Federation needs Ukraine to lose all access to the Black Sea, this is why it is so important for its power formula that the Federation annexes Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherzon, Zaporozhe, and Crimea.

The Geostrategic Significance of the Russian Military Invasion in Ukraine

As the conflict in Ukraine continues, we are witnessing Russia’s interest in Russifying, along with Donbass, southern Ukraine as well, because over there, ever since Crimea was annexed in 2014, we are seeing its militarisation, a focal strategic point for the Russian Federation at the Black Sea. It is where the 17th Russian military fleet is deployed. A fleet that must break through the NATO “circle” surrounding the Black Sea.⁹

Putin wants everything he can ask for, should a treaty for the cessation of hostilities be signed: Ukraine’s surrender, the annexation of New Russia, a Kyiv regime vassal to Russia and the removal of the



⁴Dugin, Alexandr: *Bazele geopoliticii și viitorul geopolitic al Rusiei [Foundations of Geopolitics: The Geopolitical Future of Russia]*, Eurasiatica Publishing, Bucharest, 2011.

⁵Claval, Paul: *Geopolitică și geostrategie. Gândirea politică, spațiul și teritoriul în secolul al XX-lea [Geopolitics and Geostrategy. Political Mindsets, Space and Territory in the 20th Century]*, Corint Publishing, Bucharest, 2001.

⁶Friedman, George: *The Next 100 years. A Forecast for the 21st Century*, The Doubleday Publishing. Group, 2009.

⁷www.kremlin.ru, *The Speech of the President of the Russian Federation, 18th March 2014.*

⁸Neguț, Silviu; Cucu, Vasile; Vlad, Liviu Bogdan: *Geopolitica României [Romanian Geopolitics]*, Transversal Publishing, Târgoviște, 2004.

⁹*Russia Has no Intention to Withdraw Its Fleet from Crimea, For-UA, 22nd February 2012.*

article in the Ukrainian Constitution that refers to Ukraine joining NATO and the EU!

According to Joe Biden, NATO has its hands tied. He said that a different solution to Russian economic sanctions – a financial and military aid for Ukraine, means the start of World War 3. This is why NATO does not send troops in Ukraine. However, it cannot leave it in Russian hands.

NATO defence plans were drawn up way before the conflict started, which makes NATO do its best to prevent a direct conflict with the Russian Federation. Zelensky's request for a NATO no fly zone over Ukraine implies a likely confrontation between NATO's and Russia's air forces! It is obvious that this confrontation would be won by NATO, but the question is to what cost?

A NATO no fly zone means NATO fighter jets flying over a limited area, for a limited period. If this area were Ukraine (including Donbass, where the Russian Federation already has established a no fly zone, claiming it needs to protect the Russophile population from the Ukrainian "neo-Nazi" attacks), it would mean there would be Russian and NATO fighter jets flying over, which would have to fight, in order to complete their missions. What does that mean? Hostile air operations (taking down fighter jets and killing pilots) leading to a direct military conflict that could exacerbate – at least according to Russia's implied threats, which is afraid of a superior NATO air fleet – and even lead to the use of the Russian nuclear arsenal over Ukraine, at least on a tactical level. The alternative for NATO is to provide the Ukrainian military with weapons, to be used against Russian fighter jets and more!

Just like all world leaders, Putin knows that the end of the Ukrainian crisis overwhelmingly depends on peace negotiations between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, impossible to carry on with under the current circumstances!

As far as Putin is concerned, it is obvious that the war in Ukraine does not go as planned, as Russian troops reposition, ceding the territories they occupied, and pursuing a military strategy that adapts, depending on the evolution of hostilities. All indicators point to a war of attrition (the Russian army positioning itself in hope of maintaining the territories they have already occupied), and to the gradual destruction of Ukraine (destruction of energy infrastructure, the blockade of Ukraine's grain exports etc.), all because it dared resist a ruthless invader!

Because, as far as the *containment policy* is concerned, the Russian Federation has already won the Ukrainian territories that ensure the junction of Crimea and Luhansk – a buffer zone for Crimea – several other territories such as the "Independent Republics" of Donetsk and Luhansk, and has managed to cripple Ukraine's economy, seen, ever since the dissolution of the USSR, as a "buffer country" for the expansion of NATO's south-eastern flank!

IV. GLOBAL ORDER AND SECURITY



New International Arrangements – the Energy Security Buffer between the Two Global Macroeconomic Systems

PhD. Eng. Sorin DOBÎRCIANU

Abstract

In an age represented by complicated interests and multiple global crises, the need to have an integrated energy security concept is based on formulas that can generate and deliver global solutions that can serve and immediately meet the needs of the clients, consumers and end-users: government entities, transnational, international and multinational organisations, governments and macro-emerging areas and regions.

It is an art and a privilege to be able to take part in the exclusive dimension of international elites, during these integration stages. They are a component through which one can be part of exclusive solutions and programmes. The purpose of this participation is to become part of the programme, play a role in it and attain the objectives that the players aim at, taking into account the latest global paradigms that have been set through different kinds of arrangements, as well as a new distribution of the energy markets in the two macro systems that limit and restrain the latest games between the West and the East.

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One of the latest achievements in the global energy field is the impact of the use of eastern energy resources, provided with advanced sustainability by the fossil energy component, delivered to destined companies in Europe and Eurasia by key players that operate in the Black Sea-Caspian Sea basins – with emphasis on Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and the Russian Federation, along with their Socar, Murov 1, TRG, Kaz Energy, Kaz Munai Gaz, LukOil, Sibneft, Elkam, Rosneft, Gazprom, Nis Petrol etc. These are current operational models that through the fields of competence they own and operate, manipulate banking leverage models that have a major, large scale, international monopoly impact. The models are integrated in special energy programmes that are based on, and use both API and GOST as global standards.

The existence, preservation and perpetuation of this kind of international critical infrastructure that includes the entire EU consumers' market and the riparian areas of the above-mentioned seas, as well as the currently resized energy markets (due to the latest convergent and divergent strategies), projected and delivered by the American and Russian labs and governments to energy markets such as China, Kazakhstan, to the large area surrounding the lands and archipelagos, riparian to the South China Sea, changed the new plans, strategies and global arrangements that came out in 2022. We are referring to the access and operation of the mineral and energy resources in the Russian Federation – the main supplier – as well as to the geological and geophysical explorations, highly advanced engineering, systematic attempts to access high level technologies, and know-how, to the use of different scientific methods coming from the West, pertaining to drilling, extraction, collection, transport, deposit, refining, processing, capitalisation of oil products according to certain business needs, and updated planning according to the latest western strategies that have modified their policies – mostly between 2014 and 2022, when the Crimean Peninsula was annexed and when Ukraine was invaded.



Danube is crossing Europe connecting Black Sea with North Sea through Rhein River

Moreover, we are noticing bilateral antagonistic attempts of the two ongoing macro systems – western and eastern – to develop in the time to come (December 2022-April 2023) in the buffer zone. They will reveal new tendencies to operate pipeline networks (those that supply raw materials for the economies of the great European powers – the gas delivered by Gazprom), in the context of the 2022-2023 winter, when pumping operations and gas deliveries to the continental and maritime Pan-European system have diminished considerably. Due to political and military reasons, in some pipping areas that supply certain zones, the deliveries have actually been stopped. Hence, the alliances, agreements and conventions that mark and have consecrated the unity and solidarity of the leaderships in the EU, show a different approach aligned to the latest provisions, dispositions, measures, memorandums, protocols, understandings, arrangements and conventions, adapted to the present complex situation, but also to the 2023-2030 period, when European consumers will have alternative energy resources, and when economies affected by the war in Ukraine and by the prolongation and mix of the scenarios developing in the Ukrainian theatre of operations will still be able to “fulfil their needs”.

As an updated conclusion, to the systems and methods of processing resources, in addition to the refining, deposit, shipping, chartering, commercial commodities delivering, we are identifying potential alternative solutions to energy policies – green energy: solar, wind, geothermal, high efficiency cogeneration, trigeneration, nuclear. They are based on the latest technologies and the best solutions in the field – designed, simulated, modelled, ensured, patented, delivered, operated, secured, monitored and serviced by large scale global companies, such as the prestigious US based company, Nuscale that has already opened a subsidiary in Romania - a first.



In the above-painted picture we must observe the circumstance according to which the new system of the movement of the goods and capitals has been revised considerably – formulas, references, the new downstream cartel systems are and will remain subjected to ongoing strategies that have been projected under NATO’s umbrella, which ensures and will secure the complex and vast rebuilding and restructuring process of the entire Ukrainian critical infrastructure.

The actions of the North Atlantic Organisation envisage mostly Russia’s military response strategies in the Ukrainian theatre of operations, on one hand and the new systems of alliances, pending or supplementary, transposed and derivative through BRICS (Kazakhstan-China, Russia-Kazakhstan, Russia-China, Russia-Baltic Sea, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, and Russia-Germany pipelines) or other. They will overlap global political-strategic plans, represented by the scenarios that will involve – starting January 2023 – macro-areas, such as: the South-East China Sea or the Arctic Zone.

As such, Romania’s part in the Black Sea area can reach new dimensions – expert dimensions. Furthermore, with the start of the Ukrainian conflict, it can represent one of NATO and the EU’s major and exclusive strategic outpost, along with Bulgaria and Turkey. This case scenario clearly implies a tenser relationship between the Euro-Atlantic and Russian strategic areas, in which context, both Romania and Turkey can successfully display and carry out special monitoring and control operations in the Black Sea region, where conflicts have been persistent for over a century, and where frozen ones have endured for decades: Chechnya, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Adjara, Transnistria, Dagestan, Crimea or Ingushetia.

Even though Ukraine escalated diplomatic conflicts several times after 1989 in its relationship with Romania, and permanently switched from the Russian East to the Euro-Atlantic West, it is one of the important regional actors. The evolutions in this country had direct and indirect effects on the complex phenomenon where two forces – the East and the West – try to stabilise or destabilise the Black Sea region and the security levels of European energy projects. Even though on one hand Ukraine wishes to leave the Russian sphere of influence, which led to tense relations and moderate military conflicts – the Russian minorities and the pro-Russian population wish to divide the country and unite with the Russian Federation and

move away from the Euro-Atlantic. On the other hand, Kyiv is duplicitous, which causes the Black Sea basin to become unsecure and unstable.

On the southern shore, Turkey, a NATO Member and a pivot in the Alliance, signed a strategic partnership with Russia and Ukraine to secure the Black Sea basin, in the context where Romania can be a credible security supplier, as a Euro-Atlantic country. Nevertheless, the partnerships between Turkey and Russia were meant to protect energy investments, so as not to affect the hydrocarbon deliveries from the former Soviet area to the other Eurasian partners we mentioned above.

As far as Romania is concerned, Russia has been reluctant. It unsuccessfully used a “political weapon”, but it managed to block and boycott regional projects that the Romanians started, such as the oil pipeline Constanta-Trieste (Italy) and the gas pipeline Nabucco.

Beyond the major connotations that important historical events have, which have marked the permanence and discontinuity of the dynamics of historical geostrategic and geopolitical rivalries in the Black Sea region, a pivot, where major interests collide and where the interests of the peoples and civilisations within clash, we have recently witnessed here the failed attempts of major world class energy players such as Chevron or Exxon. They have been forced to retire from the firm programmes that focused on the Romanian continental and maritime energy zones, because of the expanding strategies of other competitors – a macro energy system that managed to annihilate and neutralise the plans of the respective US corporations. The same thing happened to Ford, which after it took over and was operational for a few years – a subsequent product of the investment strategy marked by a sustainable model characterised by complete resilience – was also forced to withdraw from the Central and East-European market. The main reason a fully grown, developed and extensive business in Romania had to withdraw from the market, was inconsistency, the inability of the Romanian authorities to build and provide the US strategic investor – as established before in the bilateral agreements and in government contracts – and the proper road network necessary for a road transit hub as stipulated by the project and the contract, which would ensure and secure the transportation and export of the ford vehicles made in Romania.

Against this poor economic background that marks the lack of cohesion and resilience of the local governing system, in the programmes I highlighted the involvement of certain energy players in the region reduced significantly, which proves and demonstrates the aggressiveness of the activity of the Eastern competitive system that had optimal conditions, was more than permissive and it finally attained its goals and targets by removing its main competitors. Under such deep and complex circumstances, characteristic to the strategic, economic and energy plans in the buffer zone that lies between the two energy macro systems, a major part will be played by the formula that includes the system “the Danube-Black Sea Canal-the Sulina Canal-the Danube Delta and Snake Island”.

After the International Court of Justice in The Hague established and regulated the access and borders of the riparian areas of the continental and maritime plateau of Snake Island, and along with them the access to hydrocarbons and drilling blocks, the context made Romania attractive, not just because it drew the attention of international diplomats, but also because important oil and gas fields were discovered. In the past years, in the Romanian side of the Black Sea, huge deposits of natural gas were discovered and partially exploited. According to moderately optimistic estimates, there are at least 40 billion cubic meters of natural gas reserves, but they could amount to 200 billion – enough to cover Romania’s gas needs for the next decades and enough to export as well.

Challenges will come and will be conditioned, determined and influenced by the strategies of the operations and even by the successes of the Romgaz and Romgaz-Exxon association programmes. An outcome will eventually be adapted and improved by, and with the success of the talks and negotiations started on the occasion of the agendas of the World Petroleum Council, organised in December 2022 in Almaty, Kazakhstan and in Saint Petersburg (2-4 December 2022), in the Russian Federation, where the accent was placed by the rational use of mineral resources in the complex context highlighted in this article.

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IV. GLOBAL ORDER AND SECURITY



Asia's Troubling Dilemmas – the Dilemmas of the Entire World

Viorel ISTICIOAIA-BUDURA

I believe this is good and encouraging news – we are witnessing our world gradually break away from the tensions created by the terrible quarantine that precluded honest judgements. I believe that our power, weary from acknowledging realities is slowly recovering. It grows stronger day by day. I allow myself to believe it comes from afar. From Asia. Why there? Because there, urbanisation is constant. Cities with over one million inhabitants? In Europe there are 18 and in the USA only 10. In Asia there are already more than 300, which in the period between 2023-2030 will contribute with 4.4% to the annual economic growth. Urban clusters will provide the ideal environment for the development of companies and economic activities, generating a faster, cheaper and wider virtuous cycle of the development of products and services. Statistics show that Asia gradually climbs its way up in the global community, encompassing 60% of the world's population, and 40% of the world's GDP, when it comes to purchases, and it will reach 52%, by 2050. Consumerism is rising in the region, reaching half of the global demand, with a ten thousand billion dollars' future market, and with an absorption capacity of 50% of the global business transactions. Who is engaged in this wind of change? Those born between the 1980s and 1996, those *millennials*, representing eight hundred million (as compared to 66 million in the USA and 60 million in Europe). We are referring to a generation that wishes to be educated, to seize opportunities, that is active and constantly optimistic, true to tradition, less defined by age, gender, or regional affiliation, but by dedication, sustained effort, state of mind, and values, inspired by family and community values, highly connected to international realities, a generation that aspires to cultivate relationships, networking beyond national borders, eager to be globally engaged!

To be precise, the good news came with the three summits that took place in three Asian capitals: Bali – the G20 Summit, Bangkok – the APEC Summit, and Phnom Penh – the East Asia Summit. Surprisingly, the three summits that took place in November, were welcomed like a breath of fresh air by the entire world! The leaders that took part in them resumed direct dialogues, talked and shook hands once more. Diplomacy was reawakened after having been dormant during the pandemic. Secondly, we witnessed, surprising to some, that the Asian economy is not defined by the competition between China and the USA, but is an economic trade system, with a certain degree of integration and strengthened by trade agreements (systematically and regrettably overlooked by the USA in the past years), where Chinese cooperation and market play a major part. The Asians present at the reunions, especially those representing emerging economies were concerned with the rivalry and confrontations between the great powers, because they derailed to a malignant competition that implies sanctions, polarity, separation and accession to ideologically defined blocs.

In fact, during the last quarter of 2022, there were geopolitical and geo-economic developments, different in Asia than in Europe, even though they are connected. Almost undetected, Asia entered a period of deep change, characterised only by the intense rivalry between the great powers. Perhaps recent events can also provide a series of lessons learned, most of all for Europeans, who should trust themselves to cultivate political models and values. The crisis in Ukraine, and the long term deficiencies in the relationship with the Russian Federation, regrettably erode the self-sufficiency of developed countries outside Asia. On the other hand, the persistent rhetoric of the “shared” and accepted “values” of the Asian partners, are rather a “wishful thinking”, whose implementation, remains “wishful”, since it frequently collides with the persistent and deep-rooted local and national cultural values. Needless to say, Asian elites are open to liberal principles, and receptive of their virtues, particularly when westerners uphold them and maintain them in the structure of the international order. However, a few years back, Asian governments were visibly faced with the new trends of the western world – a lack of solidarity caused by the pandemic, a more or less furtive promotion of protectionism, de-globalisation and separation promoted by defensive measures – and they realised that interests prevail over professed values.

Obviously, Asia is neither even, nor homogenous. It is a splendid mosaic of nations, cultures and civilisations that have contributed extensively to the history of mankind. Levels of development and

social-economic achievements were defined over time and endure. The economic power of countries such as China, Japan, Republic of Korea or India set them on a trajectory that will ensure Asia's economic dominance by the end of this century. The group of ten from ASAEAN is a fierce, ever growing, perseverant group, whose countries, such as Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines or Malaysia are on the rise. They all wish for a stable, neutral and open international environment. I remember what Basil C. Bitas, a distinguished New York attorney-at-law said: "It is due to their historical journey that both the EU and the ASEAN countries have become aware of the promises and dangers of each turning point in history!".

Most likely, we have reached such a turning point! This is why I dare assume that Asian countries are among those most careful and responsive to global trends. Of course they are concerned, just like us Europeans, with the consequences of the conflict in Ukraine and the impact of the sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation, sanctions that are harder to manage. More than that, Asian countries are worried, troubled and interested at the same time with what the Fourth Industrial Revolution brings, with the fluctuations and complications of the extended competition between different political systems, with the ever-changing ideologies of international relations, with the decline of multilateral diplomacy and with the consequences of climate change. The crises in Afghanistan, Ukraine, Iraq, Syria and many others prove the complete failure of forceful, coercive, military solutions. Most Asian countries believe that the great powers strategic competition must be constructive, limited and calibrated. The realities of the past years show that it remains a zero sum game, where strategic restrictions and constraints are dominant. We are witnessing a competition where excellence and winners are unacceptable, a malignant rivalry gradually collecting restrictive measures and sanctions that seem to point out a strategy dedicated to smothering opponents, who in fact compete on parallel lanes.

Regional order is subjected to new pressure, forced to acquiesce divisive ideologies, even though realities can hardly be clearly defined – as black or white. The narrative of some US officials takes Asians by surprise, as it refers to the determination of marginalizing China and promoting cooperation only occasionally and selectively. This is because in Asia political and public spheres are also marked by the different views of the regional order, not only by contrasting and opposing ideologies. Theories from different corners of the world that favour counterbalancing and excluding China are surprising, and are seen as defective. Certainly, it is easy to see that they are carefully outfitted and disguised as simplifications, conventional delimitations that have a seemingly easy, accessible, and legitimate ideology. However, they do not address Asian dilemmas, but aggravate them. There is a persisting question that concerns them: How is it that we can find our way in an increasingly crowded, complicated, interdependent and competitive world?

As a diplomat, an observer with memories and conclusions drawn following my extensive experience (over four decades in the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European External Action Service), I truly believe that we are entering the season of dialogue, negotiation and political-diplomatic solutions. Why? In the regional scene I have just reviewed, I believe the West and the East – beyond the debatable or conventional borders of what the two signify – will experience, for decades to come, an intensified interaction. This new mutual adjustment and balance can generate the elements of the new international order. Let us hope that they will not pertain to the simplified, diverging debilitating logic of confrontations and polarisation, a scenario consumed by the Cold War period, but rather take advantage of all possible convergences and cooperation potential. I feel and, at the same time, I must honestly admit that we need an increased exchange of ideas and opinions from different national and doctrinal points of view. This is the only way we can rid ourselves of clichés and stereotypes, overtake traditional mind-sets, including Eurocentric ones, and encourage a route towards new ideas and partnerships that nations, cultures and continents can benefit from.

In the end, I venture to highlight that the present publication and the reflection effort it honestly makes, serves this ambitious and noble purpose.

IV. GLOBAL ORDER AND SECURITY



Geostrategic Imperatives in a Transforming Global Order

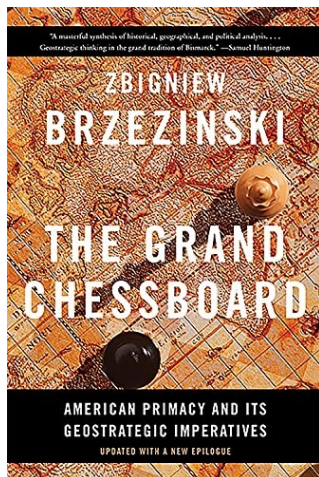
Greg SIMONS

“America has no permanent friends or enemies, only interests.”

Henry Kissinger

Introduction

The US found itself the uncontested superpower and global hegemon, where US-led Western capitalism and liberalism prevailed in the late 20th century. US geopolitical and political powers are intertwined and interdependent. As the 21st century has progressed, there have been transformations noted in the global political and geopolitical order, where the US has encountered a number of setbacks in international relations and has been increasingly challenged by other powers. This has challenged the perception of the US and its perceived global role. There have been questions posed, such as is the process of the relative US decline stoppable or not. These are highly debated questions in practitioner and academic debates. As such, this poses the question in this moment of geopolitical transformation, are Brzezinski’s geostrategic imperatives still relevant and what role do they play now?



Source: <https://www.amazon.com/Grand-Chessboard-American-Geostrategic-Imperatives/dp/046509435X>

This short article is divided into four sections. The first section covers Brzezinski’s geostrategic imperatives from the Grand Chessboard. Section two then gives a brief overview of the various arguments concerning the nature and quality of the global geopolitical transformation. In the third section, the relevance of those geostrategic imperatives in the contemporary context is analysed. Then in the fourth and final section, a brief prognosis and possible outcomes of geopolitical transformation are presented.

Brzezinski’s Geostrategic Imperatives in a Unipolar Order

The United States-led Western order considered itself as a winner of the Cold War and a successful outcome of the zero-sum game translated in the US as the uncontested superpower and sole global hegemon that could shape the world as it deemed fit. In order to consolidate and expand its advantageous geopolitical position the three grand imperatives of imperial geostrategy were outlined. Brzezinski (1997: 40) stated the need “to prevent collusion and maintain security dependence among the vassals, to keep tributaries pliant and protected, and to keep the barbarians from coming together.” Historical lessons from empires and civilizations were used to guide a successful foreign and security policy path to consolidate and expand its unipolar moment.

Brzezinski’s thinking also provides a useful illustration and lesson of *applied geopolitics*. When it comes to defining and understanding how theories and concepts are applied in the world, it is from the lens and perspective of heavily theoretical abstract academic definitions. Therefore, different theoretical academic schools classify them as *classical geopolitics* or *critical geopolitics*, rather than the pragmatic and practical intentions of policy makers and practitioners. In terms of the pragmatic significance and desired effect of *applied geopolitics*, we refer to the ability of an actor to regulate and manage people, places, events and processes in international relations (Flint, 2017) through the application of policy in the physical realm (to achieve its own interests or prevent others from achieving their own) or through representations in the information realm (to affect various actors’ cognitive conclusions).

The 21st Century’s Geopolitical Transformation

In a world where Francis Fukuyama declared the “end of history” as a representation of the global order, he only referred to the presumed end state of mankind’s progress with the Cold War, the “victory”

of the global political hegemony of Liberalism and the geopolitical hegemony of the USA's unipolarity. However, new challengers gradually emerged, not state-based actors, but rather non-state actors that challenged US hegemony in key global regions as the Middle East and North Africa. The challenge from terrorist actors, such as Al Qaeda, which used military operations to support information operations (the opposite of most Western state-actors) were weaker militarily, but were able to better project the perception of influence and power. This challenge manifested in the 11th September 2001 attacks and created the Global War on Terrorism (also known as "The Endless Wars"¹), which has drained Western political, economic and military powers. The Western order became entangled in its wars of choice, which has had profound effects on the relative power balance at the global level of international relations.

Starting with 2008 and the Georgian-Russian War, it also became apparent that state-based actors challenging the hegemony of the US were in the process of re-emerging in contemporary geopolitics. Events in Eastern Europe and East Asia have seen US policies attempt to address the issue of state challengers through representations (such as Obama's "Asia Pivot" and the "New Cold War") and through attempts to secure the supremacy of the Western-centric US unipolar order against an emerging Non-Western-centric multipolar order. Cooley and Nexon (2020) characterize the situation as the US exit from global hegemony, which needs to be given careful consideration as how to best manage the decline. Whereas Brooks and Wohlforth (2016) argue that the US is more resilient in terms of its ability to manage the current challengers and crises, but must refocus and understand what its core interests are in order to avoid overextension. Kissinger (2015: 371) stated that "a reassessment of the concept of balance of power is in order. In theory, the balance of power should be quite calculable; in practice, it has proven extremely difficult to harmonize a country's calculations with those of other states and achieve a common recognition of limits." Thus for every action in international relations, there are other reactions – a relativity law of power in global geopolitics, where careful consideration to policy actions needs to be given, to anticipate reactions by other actors.

The Relevance of Brzezinski's Geostrategic Imperatives in a Transforming Global Order

Biden (2020) declared the intention of taking back US global leadership, however this declaration seems to ignore a number of domestic and foreign constraints and restraints. This intention in terms of pragmatically regulating and managing processes in international relations by practitioners and policymakers relies on attempting to enforce the three geostrategic imperatives envisaged by Brzezinski a quarter of a century ago, in a vastly different geopolitical configuration and balance of power.

The geopolitical and political realms are interconnected and mutually influencing/reinforcing each other, where US geopolitical hegemony is aligned and supported by global liberalism. Given liberalism's current attack on the foundations of Western civilization, especially the values and ideals that enabled its rise to global power and influence, cancel culture and wokeism as a form of cultural Marxism can very likely accelerate Western decline. The primary source of rot and erosion of the Western order and influence is internal in origin, which is in keeping in the decline and fall of historical empires and civilizations. Central and Eastern Europe are geopolitically aligned with the Western order as a means to buffer from Russian influence. However, the region is more socially and culturally conservative and does not share Western "liberal" values, which are seen as being alien.² Therefore, the contemporary culture wars in the West, in the form of Marxist identity politics bound by wokeism and cancel culture are likely to work against the first two of the geostrategic imperatives from inside the US-led Western order, and encourage the third imperative by those actors external to it.

Now to shift to the external element of the geostrategic imperatives linked to challenging the transforming global order. Mearsheimer (2021) noted that no power likes to sit idly by as other powers grow in influence and strength at their expense. The US does not like to see the rise of the multipolar order at the expense of its unipolar order. Hence, it felt compelled to try and limit or halt the rise. In terms of formulating policy responses, one of the open source products to spell out an avenue was the RAND report on various cost imposing options (economic, political and military) on Russia, which could lead to the country's overextension (Dobbins et al., 2019). Other strategies are being applied against China and other states from the Non-Western-centric world. However, such strategies create imbalances in the global order and costs are born by all parties and not only the actor attempting to impose costs, especially in the highly integrated liberal order built upon the ideals of multiculturalism and globalisation.

¹20 Years of "Endless Wars": The Legacy of 9/11, ISPI, <https://www.ispionline.it/it/publicazione/twenty-years-endless-wars-legacy-911-31622>, 10 September 2021 (accessed 12 October 2022).

²Niño, J., *Wokeism Could Provoke a Global Anti-American Backlash*, Mises Institute, <https://mises.org/wire/wokism-could-provoke-global-anti-american-backlash>, 3 February 2022 (accessed 12 October 2022).

Kissinger is currently warning about a growing disequilibrium and “a dangerous lack of strategic purpose in US foreign policy.”³ Policies and approaches produce cause and effect, which are currently being witnessed in a very spectacular geopolitical display.

Future Prognosis for the Process of Transformation

The US is attempting to preserve the Western-centric US unipolar order, opposing the current challenge posed by the Non-Western-centric multipolar order. However, the application of its geostrategic imperatives is not very successful. It does not seem to have a clear foreign policy agenda, but rather a desire to preserve the current geopolitical hegemony. This is problematic due to the various political, social, economic and military problems and challenges faced by the Western world, resulting in a relative weakening and decline of the capability and capacity of the Western order (including Western civilization itself) to survive, let alone thrive.

The hot and cold conflicts that have resulted from the steps taken by the US to take back global leadership are creating further instability that erodes the soft and hard power capability and capacity of the Western order. Take for example the recent endeavours in Afghanistan, which have further eroded the credibility of the US as an unchallengeable global hegemon. This has had a cascading geopolitical effect on the Russia-Ukraine War and the tensions between Taiwan and China. It is also the reason why OPEC (including US allies) has refused to take the financial costs of US-led geo-economic policy against Russia with the oil price cap proposal, why countries like India and many others refuse to side with the US global diplomatic pressure and accuse Russia for attacking Ukraine. US attempts to further pressure other international is likely to create greater resentment and resistance.

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IV. GLOBAL ORDER AND SECURITY



The Protection of Critical Infrastructures, a Challenge for Governmental and Intergovernmental Actions at a Global Level

PhD. Cosmin DUMITRESCU

The identification of critical infrastructures – an important strategic objective at a national, regional and European level – is the first primary aspect that should be taken into account when implementing any strategy for the protection of this type of infrastructure and when strategy elements and implementation tactics are considered.

Apart from the sectoral criteria, which divide critical infrastructure elements according to where they belong, legally and normatively – energy, transport, financial environment, chemical industry, water, food security, health and space – critical infrastructures are identified and quantified according to the impact they have on society and economy, when a possible destruction or partial or total failure occurs. In establishing and applying the evaluation criteria if this impact, we take into account the following aspects:

- From the point of view of the possible victims of the damage; the complete or partial inoperability; the number of victims (dead or injured), their age, the positions in society and the consequences their absence has on the immediate functioning of the institutions, or entities the deceased or injured can no longer coordinate.
- The economic impact is the most visible consequence on a society when the protection of critical infrastructures fails, but only when taking into account the number and status of the victims. The economic losses caused by the destruction of critical infrastructures are significant not only by their number, which can be assessed relatively quickly, but also by the domino effect of the “horizontal and vertical” losses of all economic elements linked to the destroyed or malfunctioned infrastructures. Damage to system components in areas such as energy supply, communications, financial-banking or transport are relevant – we see today how affected Ukraine is by the destruction of its critical energy infrastructure due to Russia’s illegal military aggression.



- Economic security is a criterion related to the direct economic impact of the destruction of a critical infrastructure and is related to the potential occurrence of a serious systemic danger at the level of different fields of activity. They have serious consequences on collateral sectors. For example, when nuclear reactor at Fukushima in Japan, was destroyed – due to an earthquake and a tsunami – the disastrous consequences were not limited to Japan's national energy system. By the way, the natural and technological catastrophe had a disastrous effect on the Japanese national economy as electricity users suffered massive losses. It also impacted the security of the economic system because of the consequences from the Japanese and worldwide financial markets. The assets traded at the Tokyo stock exchange suffered major losses. All listed companies that did not have the time to stop their transactions were hit. We are currently witnessing the threats of the vulnerabilities that appeared due to the armed hostilities occurring around the Ukrainian nuclear power plant at Zaporozhe.

- The physical suffering caused by the destruction of critical infrastructure is an important indicator in identifying critical infrastructures. It is one of the potential causes that leads to the existence of other indicators that can have a much greater negative influence on the system. Therefore, people's physical suffering, its degree and the number of the people affected either immediately or subsequently, on a short, medium and long term, is relevant, for example, for the destruction of some nuclear capacities which, through the impact caused by radioactive radiation, can cause physical suffering to a very large number of people, on a very long term. It is the same with damaged medical infrastructures in any kind of urban areas. The inability to provide medical assistance can cause significant physical pain to social groups that depend on medical infrastructures and emergency services where these infrastructures are actually located.
- The disruption of daily life may seem less important than the destruction of critical infrastructures, but this aspect is essential, due to the domino effect it has on the psychology of social groups, as well as on the economy, as it can render it inactive.
- The level of trust in public and private institutions responsible for security, safety and public health is one of the most important indicators on which infrastructures can be classified as critical or not. In fact, international terrorism primarily aims at destroying critical infrastructures, undermining the trust of the population in public institutions and the state. The social and economic life of nations and their individuals depends on the public services made available by the countries and their institutions, which ensure the exercise of the citizens' subjective rights in a safe and secure environment. Conditions of security and safety. Should the population be deprived of these basic public services automatically leads to a lack of trust in the countries' abilities to provide their citizens with the necessary living conditions.
- Public health is one of the most important factors that ensure the character of critical infrastructures. Calculating the impact, the destruction of infrastructures has on public health is relatively easy to do, if the objective is establishing the critical nature of the infrastructures. Blocking infrastructures with the purpose of depriving the population of prophylactic, emergency and medical assistance services, or creating the proper environment for the outbreak of an epidemic or pandemic by destroying or damaging certain infrastructures, can show the quality of critical infrastructures. All these aspects were unfortunately brought to light in the first period of the COVID pandemic.
- The impact on the security of a country in case of destruction or temporary or permanent malfunction accurately shows the quality of critical infrastructures or infrastructure element. The lack of control of some elements of the national energy systems, the lack of energy supply, traffic paralysis, the breakdown of the civil or military defence systems at normal, the long-term blockage of the national financial-banking systems, can be prime examples of the consequences and their disastrous effects. They endanger the very security of countries so easily that they can prevent national critical infrastructures from working, even for very short periods.
- The potential negative consequences on national defences are decisive when characterizing critical infrastructures, which when destroyed or broken they can endanger nations. When the airspace, naval or land monitoring systems malfunction, a nation can become the victim of a foreign or domestic armed aggression. Moreover, if domestic national security systems do not work properly, the specific activity of the internal security and intelligence agencies is hindered or, at least, rendered ineffective so the national defence infrastructure can be endangered.
- The consequences on public institutions in the event of the destruction of a certain infrastructure is a different measure that authorities must take into account when they assess quality of critical infrastructure on a legislative and normative level. The extent to which the destruction of some infrastructures can render state institutions inoperable or temporarily unavailable, inefficient, poorly operable is a key indicator for the type of critical infrastructures.
- The violation of the national territory as a direct or indirect consequence of the destruction or collapse of the infrastructure elements of the military and civil security systems of a country is a valuable indicator when determining the character of critical infrastructures. This indicator does not refer only situations created by military aggressions such as invasions, but also cases when the infrastructures of border authorities become inoperative for various reasons. Thus, the illegal crossing of the border takes place, and persons may endanger public safety by resorting to criminal acts, organised crime or even terrorism, as has happened in Europe for the past years. Ensuring good, efficient and whole national border security infrastructure is the basic principle that allow a country to become a Schengen member. Romania is successfully meeting the requirements.
- The fact that it can outrage the public opinion and cause panic following its destruction can an infrastructure qualify as critical. Such effects can have a significant impact on the function of democratic institutions, subjected to pressures because of the instability of the social order. This instability can be caused by panic and by the social and political consequences arising at the level of the public opinion, civil organisations and political parties. Under these circumstances, due to the destruction of critical

infrastructures, there is a negative impact on the national morale of a country in crisis, having psychological, social and political consequences.

- The loss of credibility of national commercial or industrial brands following the destruction of critical infrastructures represents an important indicator in the process of evaluating the criticality of infrastructures. Even if it concerns an aspect of the image of some entities, usually from the private sector, the discrediting of important brands and products in a nation, a region or a sector of activity can have disastrous consequences on the business environment, on the economy and even on the credibility of the authorities who ordered the use of products whose quality is called into question in case of emergency situations.

- The possible geopolitical impact of the destruction of critical infrastructures allows national authorities to determine whether they are critical or not for the respective country.

The US Administration – in a country that has a very good management system of critical infrastructures regulated by the National Strategy for Homeland Security¹ issued by the Department of Homeland Security of the United States – has identified and regulated eleven sectors it considers as critical. It has also added five areas it initially named as *key resources*:

- food and agriculture;
- the water;
- public health;
- emergency services;
- defence industry;
- information and telecommunications;
- energy;
- transports;
- the banking and financial system;
- hazardous materials industry and chemical industry;
- postal and shipping services;
- national monuments and symbols;
- nuclear power plants;
- dams and dam installations;
- government buildings;
- basic commercial heritage (commercial and critical manufacturing).

According to the National Infrastructure Protection Plan, the Department of Homeland Security of the United States of America has regulated the establishment and operation of a national structure that integrates all institutional and material resources designated for the protection of critical infrastructures. It involves both the private sector and state governments, territorial and local authorities, as well as non-governmental organizations and the federal government. The same national plan² establishes the government agencies responsible for building and implementing critical infrastructure protection policies, as well as all other actors involved, on a federal, state, and local level.

In G7, the group of the seven most industrialised nations, the focus on protecting critical infrastructures started from the fact that most of them are controlled and managed by computer systems. Consequently, they issued a document³, where all parties undertake to harmonize the management of the systems protecting critical infrastructures. It includes a set of good practices aimed at optimizing the protection systems of critical IT infrastructures. It also identifies the sectors and defines the concept of critical infrastructure as follows:

- an organization, even a public administration, equipped with its own physical and IT structures, systems, networks, services and assets;
- an organization that is very important for the economic, political and social life of a nation, which, in the event of its destruction, suspension or block, may have a negative impact on a country's social life, public health and safety, economic development and function.

The same G7 guide defines the following sectors as critical infrastructures: energy – natural gas, oil, electricity, etc., information and communication technology, finance, public health (which also includes the infrastructure related to the food and water supply of the population and economic infrastructures), transport and logistics, civil aviation facilities, railways, roads, government and public administration and

¹Homeland Security Council, *National Strategy for Homeland Security*, October 2007, accessed on 27.05.2016; http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/nat_strat_homelandsecurity_2007.pdf.

²Department of Homeland Security, *National Infrastructures Protection Plan*, 2009, accessed on 27.05.2016; http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/NIPP_Plan.pdf.

³*Best Practices for Improving Critical Information Infrastructures Protection in Collaboration of Governmental Bodies with Operators of Critical Information Infrastructures*, Concluzii G7.

emergency assistance organizations (which ensure the protection and rescue of victims, firefighters and other civil and military structures with competences in these areas).

The European Union followed the lead of all the Member States and, having the example of the United States of America, in 2006 it had the European Commission publish a document/directive⁴, which identifies and defines critical European infrastructures and assesses the need to improve their protection measures and procedures. The text of the directive, there are eleven sectors that manage critical infrastructures:

- energy, which includes the infrastructures that manage the oil and natural gas production and transport sectors, refining, usage, storage and distribution through the pipeline network;
- the nuclear industry through its infrastructure that deals with production, storage and the processing of nuclear substances;
- information and communication technology, which includes an already large number of infrastructures such as: installations for the protection of computer systems and networks, control systems and automation tools, the Internet network, land and mobile telecommunications installations, radio and navigation facilities, satellite communication and mass media radio-TV infrastructures;
- water, through the drinking water supply infrastructure, water quality and quantity control;
- food, through the supply infrastructure and preservation of standard food safety and security conditions;
- the financial system, through the infrastructure dedicated to IT systems for the payment and authorization of financial operations and the regulatory and control systems of the financial markets;
- transport, through road, rail, air, river and sea transport infrastructure;
- the chemical industry sector, through the infrastructure of production, storage and processing of chemical substances and through the pipeline transport networks of chemical substances;
- space, through all telecommunications and defence infrastructure of all countries that have the capabilities and research structures that identify risks in the sectors described above.

When comparing the sectors labelled as critical infrastructure systems in the United States of America, by the group of the seven most industrialized countries of the world and the European Union, we can easily see similarities between sectors considered essential for societies anywhere in the world. This leads to an almost common approach at the global level.

In the case of the European Union, several sectors are missing that are present in the other two. Because they do not have relevance at a transnational level, only at the level of the Member States, they were no longer considered critical sectors for the entire European Union. Thus, the sectors that are not included in the European Union's critical infrastructure protection strategy are: government structures, transport and expeditions, emergency services, found in the G7 good practices guide, and in the protection strategy of the critical infrastructures of the United States of America. The national monuments and symbols, the defence industry, commercial infrastructures and the critical manufacturing industry are missing as well. We find them only in the United States of America as they are specific to national approaches. On the other hand, in the case of the American system and in the good practices of the G7, there are no regulatory correspondences for the critical infrastructures related to space and scientific research, elements that the European Union prioritizes. They are regulated at a European level as critical infrastructures. In recommending the good practices for the protection of critical infrastructures, the G7 does not include the infrastructure sectors that manage the water supply, nuclear materials' industry, food security, chemical industry, space and scientific research infrastructures.

In the context of the security challenges Romania faces because of the threats and the direct pressure exerted by the military aggression of the Russian Federation on Ukraine, taking place at a relatively short distance from Romania's borders, and due to the threats and vulnerabilities specific to the hybrid war waged by several world powers through information technology and can at any time trigger serious attacks on critical infrastructures, our country is practically obliged to issue, implement and integrate a system of protective measures and the means to implement them to counter the risks and neutralize any attack and threat against any type of critical infrastructure. Local, regional, national, macro-regional, European and international inter-institutional cooperation is vital.

⁴Directive of the Council on the identification and designation of European Critical Infrastructure and the assessment of the need to improve their protection, Brussels, 12.12.2006.

V. THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION



Why is Vladimir Putin a Dictator?

Prof. PhD. Nicolae RADU

How true is the statement of the former German ambassador to Moscow, Rüdiger von Fritsch, who said that “Putin wishes to change the world order? Did he ask us to get on our knees, so he can have more influence over Europe.”?¹ Who wanted, and still wants Ukraine to be part of a European architecture connected to NATO? Is NATO’s continuous expansion a reason for war or does it aim at destabilising Russia? How is it that the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, was “unfriended” by the EU heads of state, following the “formula” used in Muammar Gaddafi’s case?! Does promoting Vladimir Putin’s image as a dictator – after the former USSR dictator Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin – open a roadmap to peace?

The art of war insists on patience and knowing the weaknesses and strengths of the enemy! What does a dictator mean? According to Cambridge Dictionary, the dictator is “a leader who has complete power in a country and has not been elected by the people” or “a person who gives orders and behaves as if they have complete power”,² a synonym with tyrant or despot.³ Vladimir Putin can be included in the gallery of state figures that was labelled as a dictator, just like Adolf Hitler, the German chancellor, Mao Zedong, the Chinese leader, Saddam Hussain, the Iraqi president, or Nicolae Ceausescu, the Romanian president etc.

What makes Vladimir Putin a dictator? The brutal suppression of progressive movements, violation of human rights, lack of democratic elections – all the features of a dictatorship. Does the Russian leader in the Kremlin relate to them? How much does the war in Ukraine legitimise the complete change of the European market? How much peace do we need, and how much profit? The removal of the Russian president from the Kremlin is seen, perhaps too soon, as just a matter of time! Who desires this removal?

As far as interests are concerned, is re-establishing its Great Power status and the expansion of its influence, that Russia lost over 31 years ago, with the dissolution of the USSR, reason enough to start the war in Ukraine, and argument enough for Vladimir Putin to be labelled as a “dictator”?

One can say anything about the Russian president, including the fact that he is a “smooth operator”! His psychological profile is a complex one! “Putin takes it step by step! He was an intelligence officer! He is an unfaltering model! You learn to think a certain way, to establish a certain course of action and start it at the proper moment, whenever you are almost certain of success! Putin thinks this way! Whenever the West takes action, Putin answers promptly.”⁴ Under this psychological framework, the thoughts of the former German ambassador to Moscow, Rüdiger von Fritsch, with regard to Vladimir Putin, compel us to be objective: “Putin is neither mad, nor mentally deranged, nor irrational.



Source: <https://news.umich.edu/putting-putin-in-his-place-a-dictator-at-war/>

¹<https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/actualitate/putin-nu-e-nebun-cum-cred-oamenii-ne-ar-fi-prea-usor-daca-ar-fi-asa-interviu-cu-fostul-ambasador-al-germaniei-la-moscova.html>, accessed on 04.11.2022.

²<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/dictator>, accessed on 16.11.2022.

³Idem.

⁴Idem.

This would make it too easy for us. We must be aware of the fact that he lives, decides and acts according to a completely different mind-set. We must understand this so we can withstand him.”⁵

Vladimir Putin has been leading Russia for 23 years. His “portfolio” includes espionage missions that took place between 1985 and 1989, including in the German Democratic Republic. He graduated from the Leningrad State University, where he studied law. He is a judo master and speaks three foreign languages. In 2007 he was “Time” magazine’s person of the year. He was seen as an extraordinary leader, who restored Russia’s former glory and international political power.⁶

How is it that a leader who has a strong influence on the “World Order” can be considered a dictator? How important is “to demonize” a leader? Does the fight over the control of resources and market dominance compensate for the need of democracy in Ukraine or Europe?

At present, Vladimir Putin is serving his fourth term as the president of the Russian Federation. He became Russia’s acting president on the 31st October 1999, once the former president Boris Yeltsin resigned. In 2000 Vladimir Putin won the presidential elections. In 2004 he was re-elected for a second term. Because of the term limits in the Constitution, Vladimir Putin could not run for a third mandate (2008). Following the victory of his successor, Dmitri Medvedev, whom he supported, Putin became Russia’s prime minister. He served from May 2008, until March 2012. Following the elections in 2012, Vladimir Putin became the president of the Russian Federation for another six years (once the Constitution was changed). In March 2018, Vladimir Putin was re-elected as the president of the Russian Federation, for another six years. Theoretically he could stay in the Kremlin until 2036.⁷

Without intending to be out of sync or disrespectful towards the truth or the law, one must not forget that a spy is known for his cold blood and loyalty to his country! “Vladimir Putin is known as an intelligence man, a realist, devoted to Russia, whose agendas are to the letter, based on facts, highly objective, which make up a large-scale plan for a Russia of the future.”⁸ Russia’s main concern is Russia itself.⁹ Who should believe that Vladimir Putin does not think of Russia? Whom does this bother so much that aggressiveness has replaced diplomacy? What is the meaning of a spy who betrays his country? What is the meaning of a president who abandons his people?

If the former German chancellor, Angela Merkel “calmly united an entire continent at a time when countries were increasingly divided”,¹⁰ “Putin and his men wish to rebuild Russia and turn it into a great power of global influence.”¹¹ Placing the Russian flag with the double-headed eagle on the bottom of the polar sea, by the end of the 2007 summer is “a grand gesture, meaning that the Russian continental shelf – and all its underground riches – stretches all the way to the pole.”¹²

Who Wishes to Destabilise Europe?

Trolls/influencers, more or less strategically bound, possibly interested in prolonging warfare (including information warfare), and promoting aggressive messages, are posting information very hard to verify, according to which the Russian president, Vladimir Putin suffers from Parkinson’s disease, or has pancreatic cancer. Although, according to William Burns, the director of the CIA, “there is no information with regard to Vladimir Putin being in poor health.”¹³

Who Is Promoting All This Fake News?

The military strategist, Sun Tzu provides real insight with regard to using terrain and weather conditions to its own advantage, employing spies, but also making and keeping alliances! How many of those involved in the war in Ukraine take into account the real reasons behind the fight for resource control that started in the name of democracy?

Who Loses and Who Benefits from the War in Ukraine?

Is the EU’s “availability” for different gas suppliers, accidental? The fact that public or secret alli-

⁵<https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/actualitate/putin-nu-e-nebun-cum-cred-oamenii-ne-ar-fi-prea-usor-daca-ar-fi-asa-interviu-cu-fostul-ambasador-al-germaniei-la-moscova.html>, accessed on 04.11.2022

⁶Stumer, Michael, *Putin și noua Rusie [Putin and the New Russia]*, Litera International Publishing, Bucharest, 2009

⁷Taras B., Ignatenko, *Actorii invaziei din Ucraina. De la Zelenski la Zalatov, via Putin [The Actors of the Invasion of Ukraine. From Zelensky to Zalatov, via Putin]*, Neverland Publishing, 2022.

⁸Stumer, Michael, *Cited Works*.

⁹Trenin, Dimitri, *Russia Redefines Itself and Its Relations with the West*, in, “The Washington Quarterly”, 2007.

¹⁰Marton, Kati, *Doamna Cancelar. Remarcabila odisee a Angelei Merkel, [The Lady Chancellor. Angela Merkel’s Remarkable Odyssey]*, Litera Publishing, Bucharest, 2022.

¹¹Stumer, Michael, *Cited Works*.

¹²Idem.

¹³William Burns, in, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62246914>, accessed on 29.10.2022.¹

ances have undermined Russia's position as the leader of the European gas market cannot be overlooked! The energy routes have been redrawn once Ukraine was invaded. The EU's sanctions against Russia, Europe's main gas supplier, until the start of the war, diminished Russian imports by 90%.

China makes its presence known among the main gas exporters to Europe. It has ongoing contracts through JAVO and SINOPEC, ensuring around 7% of the gas consumption of the countries in the EU. One must remember that alliances are not easily forgotten! China is buying LNG from Russia, while it increases its gas export for Europe, deliveries reaching a record-high. Legitimately intervening on the European market as an LNG "emergency supplier", the USA became the world's largest exporter of LNG. Almost 68% of the US LNG exports went to Europe in the first half of 2022, as compared to 35% in 2021.

Under the circumstances where "the EU and its State Members are united in their unwavering efforts to support Ukraine, and firmly stand against Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression"¹⁴, when the "Paris Peace Forum" took place between the 11th and 12th November 2022, several leaders asked for immediate negotiations to stop the war between Russia and Ukraine! Should this be a coincidence that almost 270 days after the war started, the Americans ask for negotiations with Russia? Who should be upset by the alternative for peace?

In this context why did the Romanian minister of defence have to resign, following his statement according to which "the war will go on, the only chance for peace is negotiating with Russia"? The Romanian president highlighted the fact that the opinions expressed by the Romanian defence minister were not in accordance with Romania, the EU and NATO's official stances, suggesting that the minister should have read the press, especially when no one can strike deals over Ukrainian territories and over Ukraine itself! Understandable or not, the opinions of the defence minister seemed to have upset the Romanian opposition that immediately intervened, stating that encouraging Ukraine to negotiate "fuels Russian propaganda and prejudices Romania's partnership with the EU and NATO"¹⁵

How can we explain the fact that the Biden Administration encourages peace negotiations with Russia, even if president Vladimir Putin remains in power? Who will acquiesce to a possible new strategic formula? How will Romania's loyalty be rewarded? What do we learn from political psychology? Why do traitors are mostly forgiven by their rulers, including foreigners, while dictators are executed?

"A nation can survive its fools, and even the ambitious. But it cannot survive treason from within. An enemy at the gates is less formidable, for he is known and carries his banner openly. But the traitor moves amongst those within the gate freely [...]. For the traitor appears not a traitor; he speaks in accents familiar to his victims, and he wears their face and their arguments [...]. He rots the soul of a nation, he works secretly and unknown in the night to undermine the pillars of the city, he infects the body politic so that it can no longer resist. A murderer is less to fear. The traitor is the plague."¹⁶

Who Encourages Change? A Traitor or a Dictator?

Personal attacks and the manipulation of the public opinion do not solve the issue of the war! Who has to gain by promoting the phrase "Vladimir Putin is a dictator"? What happens if, starting tomorrow, Vladimir Putin will be relabelled by the Great Powers and change from a dictator to a leader concerned with the fate of his own nation? Let us remember Winston Churchill's line: there are "no lasting friends, no lasting enemies, only lasting interests"!

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¹⁴<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion>, accessed on 07.11.2022

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V. THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION



Russia and the Montreux Convention – Complete Control over the Black Sea

PhD. Eng. Stelian TEODORESCU

“That which hurts, also instructs.”

Benjamin Franklin

The Black Sea is an area that captured Russia and China’s interest, and engaged them in a fierce competition with other geopolitical players and pivots.

When international debates and analysis refer to the evolutions in the Black Sea region,¹ they specifically talk about its riparian countries – Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Ukraine and the Russian Federation. However, we must not leave out that certain sources include the Republic of Moldova as well, because its southern borders lie very close to the Black Sea, accessed through the Dniester Estuary² and the Danube. Previous studies do not refer only to these countries, but also to Armenia and Azerbaijan, countries that belong to the same wider Black Sea region, even if they are landlocked – thus the reference to a wider Black Sea region.

Starting with 2014 the security environment in the Black Sea region worsened significantly, and we are referring to Russia’s desire to control its areas of influence once more.

To Russia the Black Sea has a vital strategic meaning so it can maintain and exert its global power and influence and it is steadfast when it comes to preserving its self-interest in the area.

With increased efforts and intensive actions, Russia gradually and swiftly drew the Black Sea region in its area of influence and control. These actions proved very important in achieving its strategic goal – imposing its global power status on a regional and global level, a key move in its competition against the USA, NATO, the EU, China and other international actors. Russia’s current strategy is aligned with its intent to intensify its actions that consolidate its position as a global leader of the Eurasian power pole. Under such circumstances, when implementing – in its regions of interest – its current foreign policy agenda, and taking diverse security related actions on the international scene, Moscow proves it gives a great importance to the Black Sea region.

In the same context with Russia’s intentions and actions, China proves it has a significant presence in the region as well, especially on an economic level. At the same time, it is also involved in politics and intelligence. With such an “offensive”, China sees the potential of the region and makes its interests known in various fields. It keeps on going, through its Belt and Road Initiative. In March 2022, no less than 147 countries signed an MOU in this respect. It also keeps on going through the current “15+1” format which reunites, along with Beijing, ten EU Member States, including Romania and Bulgaria, Black Sea riparian states, as well as five other countries outside the EU (all Western Balkans states). However, looking at China’s initiatives one must not forget that three Baltic states withdrew from the former “18+1” format – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

China proves once more that it is very present in Eastern Europe, including in the Black Sea region, which is duly noted. It also generated intensive debates with regard to its expanding influence in the region, a region Russia is highly interested in. Therefore, international analysts are looking for answers to some key questions: Is Beijing’s soft power the only concept in the region? Can we refer to a smart power in different parts of Europe, including in the Black Sea region? What else do we need so we can further

¹It lies between Europe and Asia. Through the Karachi Strait it is tied to the Sea of Azov, through the Bosphorus, to the Sea of Marmara, and through the Dardanelles Strait, to the Aegean Sea, hence to the Mediterranean Sea.

²The Dniester Estuary is a lagoon in the north-east of the Black Sea. The river flows into it, making it a maritime area. It has a surface of 360 km² and it is three meters deep. The water flow amounts to 0,54 km³ (the waters are slightly salted). It had an abundance of fish. It is connected to the Black Sea through the Strait of Tsargrad.

understand China's soft and smart power capabilities in the region? As we well know, the notion of soft power, made known by Joseph Nye in the 1990s refers to "the ability to affect others by attraction, rather than persuasion, coercion or payment", these last three methods are what Russia is famous for.

In his well-known book, "The Grand Chessboard", the Polish born, American strategist, Zbigniew Brzezinski, defined geostrategic players, as "countries that have both the ability and the will to exert power or influence beyond their borders, in order to change the current geopolitical state". By the end of the 1990s, he identified five active geostrategic players in Eurasia – at that time they were Russia, China, India, Germany and France.

The American author later defined a second set of international players. They were named geopolitical pivots, "countries whose importance came not from their power and motivation, but rather from the importance of their geographical position and from the consequences of their potentially vulnerable position, according to the interests and behaviour of geostrategic players". At that time, he pointed out Turkey, Iran, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and South Korea as geopolitical pivots.



Nevertheless, taking carefully into account all evolutions, we can say that both Turkey and Iran have been at certain times active international players, geo-strategically speaking, and in the same context, we can highlight that it is clear that Turkey can now be seen as a geostrategic player per se.

The Russian warship Admiral Makarov

Source: <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/black-sea-russia-turkey/>

The Montreux Convention – Accessing the Black Sea – Ardent Debates

History shows that centuries of war have been waged for the control of the Black Sea region, for the ins and outs of the ships on a vast waterway. Exerting control is a key element to ensuring power and influence over the entire region. Geography allowed the Ottoman Empire and later, Turkey to have a major influence in the region, because it created the proper environment and the opportunity to exercise control over two important crossings – the Dardanelles Strait that connects the Sea of Marmara, and the Aegean Sea – and the Bosphorus Strait, that connects the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara. Clearly, having control over the access and the period that foreign vessels spend in the Black Sea – with the exception of the ships belonging to Black Sea riparian countries – turned the basin into a "Turkish lake" for three centuries, an objective that seemingly Russia aspires to. It wishes to turn the region into a "Russian lake". In the same context, we must not leave out the fact that the Ottoman domination of the Black Sea ended in 1774 after it wrongly decided to join Poland in the war against Russia.

The rule to keep the straits closed to all warships continued until the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, only a year after the establishment of the Soviet Union.³ The treaty established the right of free passage for all ships – even warships, however only during peace time. In addition, an International Strait Commission was established, in order to monitor the compliance with the different regulations of the treaty, which included demilitarization issues. By 1931, Turkey was even more concerned with the fact that that demilitarisation clause from the Treaty of Lausanne was incompatible with Turkey's legitimate right to self-defence. The collective security system designed at that time by the League of Nations, started to fall apart after Germany remilitarised and Italy invaded Abyssinia.⁴ This fundamental change of circumstances allowed Turkey then to bring back to the table the issue of the straits. It happened during a conference that took place in Montreux⁵, in Switzerland, in 1936, between the 22nd of June and the 21st of July. Thus, the Montreux Convention came into being, an agreement that allowed Turkey to have control over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, attended by Turkey, the USSR, Great Britain, France, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, former Yugoslavia, Australia and Japan.

³The Soviet Union was a state that lay in most of northern Eurasia and existed between 1922 to 1991.

⁴*Abyssinia (Al-Habash)* is a region in the Horn of Africa It was situated in the northern part of current Ethiopia, east of Sudan, and Eritrea. It is inhabited by Abyssinians or Habasha.

⁵The Montreux Strait Convention, often known as the Montreux Convention is an international agreement that establishes how and who governs over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits. It was signed on the 20th of July 1936 at the Montreux Palace in Switzerland. It was enforced on the 9th of November 1936 and it deals with the long debated issue of who should control the vital strategic connection between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea.

The conference was convened by Turkey to review the strait agreement, enforced at the conference in Lausanne between 1922 and 1923. Italy refused to take part as the countries present supported international sanctions imposed on Italy, because of Ethiopia.

As such, the Montreux Convention in 1936 allowed Turkey to remilitarise and control the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits once more, straits that were firmly under its sovereignty, but the agreement that regulated the passage and time the ships spent and used for their activities in the Black Sea favoured the Soviet domination in this very important region. Moreover, taking into consideration the unpredictable evolutions of the past years, and, implicitly, Russia's increased level of domination in the Black Sea, we can truly say that inevitably and indirectly, this Montreux Convention offers Russia, now the only strategic player, the ability to dominate the Black Sea basin, and implicitly establish the area and legislation that favour possible hostile actions against Black Sea riparian countries.

At first, the purpose of the Convention was to prevent the Great Powers competition and armed conflict by controlling the ins and outs, as well as the size of the warships that request access in the Black Sea. Even though it was adopted to provide security and stability in the region, at present, in the context of the occupation of a country in the Black Sea basin, Russia is heavily taking advantage of the provisions of the Montreux Convention to become the only power that has the ability to dominate the Black Sea region. Nevertheless, we can say that Russia has done nothing but establish a favourable environment in order to control warnings, threats and, when desired, attack and occupy of some of the countries in the Black Sea basin. As such, we can say that Russia's policies, manoeuvres and military operations from 2008 until now, hindered the access in the Black Sea and that is why, on an international level, some believe that it was high time that the text of the Montreux Convention were analysed debated and updated.

Why? The provisions of the Montreux Convention contrast with the principles of the free military navigation, in open sea waters, established centuries earlier. This so called special rights of the riparian countries from the Black Sea basin, actually apply only to Russia and Turkey. According to many voices, these privileges go against the modern principles of international maritime law, who argue that they breach the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which lays down the right of free passage through international straits (Article 38).

In the same context, we must not forget that Russia has forever sought to close the Black Sea basin to all, except for the riparian countries. Now, practically Georgia and Ukraine are not official parties of the Montreux Convention, because it was signed by the Soviet Union, and Russia is its only successor. Nevertheless, as countries on the Black sea coast both should be included, as the region has a high geostrategic value, a key node for global resources – and we are referring to hydrocarbons and the transit infrastructure that delivers energy resources to other countries.

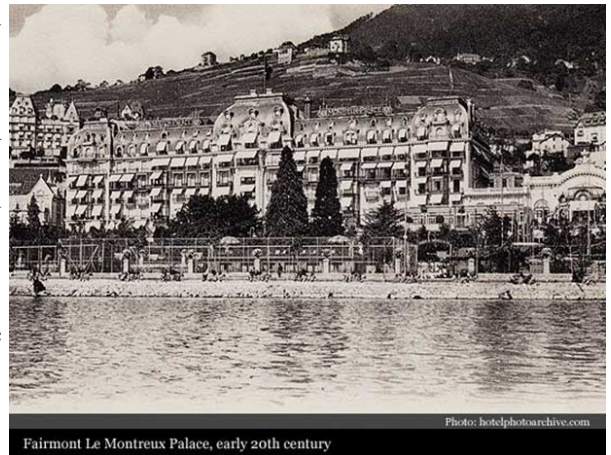
The Black Sea region is one of Russia's gateways to other regions, such as the Aegean Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East and Africa. It became clear that Russia also seeks to influence and take advantage of these regions, as an attempt to maintain its status as a global power.

Therefore, the current military and security situations in the region give the USA and NATO more reasons to develop coherent strategies, based on actions, in order to control Russia's aggression against Ukraine and ensure the security of the Black Sea region. The NATO Summit in Madrid in 2022, highlighted the importance of the Black Sea region, and many decisions were adopted with regard to it. The US Congress considered taking important decisions to enhance the security in the Black Sea area.

The Three Seas Initiative, a Key Initiative for the Future of the Black Sea

The Three Seas Initiative, also known as the Baltic-Adriatic-Black Seas Initiative is a twelve states forum that lie from the north, from The Baltic Sea, to the south, to the Adriatic and the Black Sea, in Central and Eastern Europe.

The US House of Representatives supported the Three Seas Initiative and stated that it would allocate one billion USD to this project. The initiative is a flexible platform that was established in 2015. It includes twelve EU Members, situated between the Adriatic, the Baltic and the Black Sea – Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, The Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania Slovakia and Slovenia. The Summit in Dubrovnik, in 2016 was the first of its kind, under the auspices of the Initiative, followed by the one in Warsaw, in 2017, Bucharest (17-18 September 2018), Brdo in 2019, Tallinn (online) in 2020, and Sofia in 2021. At the seventh Summit in Riga, that took place on the 20th June 2022,



Fairmont Le Montreux Palace, early 20th century

Photo: hotelphotoarchive.com

Source: <https://www.historichotelsthenandnow.com/palacemontreux.html>

Ukraine was given the status of “participating partner”, a de facto member of this Initiative.

Marcy Kaptur and Adam Kizinger issued a statement after the US House of Representatives unanimously adopted the resolution that supports the Three Seas Initiative. Its common goal is to promote the independence and resilience of the energy, digital, and transportation infrastructure, by financing altogether new infrastructure projects, increasing the connectivity between the Adriatic, Baltic and Black Seas, and countering Russia and China’s influence in the region.

It is worth mentioning that two of the twelve nations, Romania and Bulgaria are situated in the Black Sea basin, and the main objective of this system is to support energy and infrastructure projects, as well as generate a positive effect in its immediate proximity.

The members of the Three Seas Initiative are also NATO members, except for Austria, and are close allies to the USA, especially Poland and Romania, which host US military bases. It looks like the members of the Initiative could represent vital partners for the US diplomacy in its efforts to diminish Russia and China’s influence in the Black Sea region. The cooperation between the USA and the countries in the initiative will significantly depend on the security challenges in the region.

Ever since the fifth summit of the platform ended in Tallinn, in October 2020, this cooperation format, which was initially designed to provide extra connectivity and support for the infrastructure of the new EU Member States, seems to have an added value – a mechanism used to counter Russia and China’s efforts to exert an even higher influence over Central and Eastern Europe, and implicitly over the Black Sea region. The launching and support of this initiative prove that the American Administration and the other countries involved in the Three Seas Initiative, wish to present it as an instrument employed for countering China’s so-called “15+1” format.

Conclusions

The unsolved issues caused by Russia’s involvement in Georgia, in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the permanent state of insecurity at Ukraine’s eastern borders turned the Black Sea basin into a geographical area where all kinds of competitions and confrontations seem to intensify, while being manipulated by all sorts of geostrategic players and geopolitical pivots.

It is safe to say that this fierce competition between the East and the West started when, back in 2008, Russia quickly recognised the autonomy of Georgia’s two provinces, Abkhazia and Ossetia, at the same time when NATO announced that it intended to make Ukraine and Georgia part of the Alliance. This process continued, causing tensions in the Black Sea region and on an international level. They reached a critical point when Russia occupied and annexed Crimea in 2014 and invaded Ukraine, in 2022 – an ongoing war.

From a Western point of view, the Black sea basin is so important that it should not be completely controlled and dominated by Russia and Turkey. As far as the transfer of energy resources is concerned, the Black Sea, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles are very important. The economic significance of the Black Sea – tied to the Sea of Marmara and to the Mediterranean – is highlighted by the fact that the Black Sea region represents a very important transit route for the transportation of oil and gas from Russia and other Caspian Sea riparian states, to Europe and Africa.

V. THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION



Russia and China – Their Cooperation in the Context of Dependency and Their Own Geopolitical and Geostrategic Interests

PhD.Eng. Stelian TEODORESCU

"Sometimes you succeed... and sometimes you learn "

Robert Kiyosaki

Foreword

In the context of the current evolutions on a regional and global level, and taking into account China and Russia's proximity, both countries seem, at first glance, perfectly matched, politically, militarily, from a security point of view, and lately economically. We could say that Russia and China have been playing for a few years as two countries that share a common interest when it comes to regional and international security. Furthermore, they both seem to embrace and promote multilateralism. We say this because the countries seek to maintain stability and control the evolutions of all other entities in their immediate vicinity, and implicitly they both abhor the unipolar world.

Nevertheless, a significant analysis of the stage of change of the geopolitical architecture, brings out, as it should have, more pronounced, a sense of competition. The most relevant example to this extent is Europe, which has become the sphere of influence and action of international actors, such as Russia and China that currently expand their own foreign and competition policies in various European regions.

The Energy Resources are the Reasons behind the Growing Cooperation between China and Russia

In the context of the latest evolutions on a global level, China appears as an ally that got close to Such an evaluation is supported by solid evidence, gathered from bilateral trade flow, the increase of energy resources delivered by Russia to China, an increased cooperation in other fields, such as agriculture and aerospace industry. In 2021, the value of the trade between China and Russia reached 147 billion USD. Six months after the war in Ukraine started, the trade flow between the two increased by almost 30%, as compared to the same time last year. According to Chinese customs stats, Russia exported 8.4 million tons of oil to China, the month of May registering a record high, overtaking Saudi Arabia, and becoming the largest oil supplier to China. They registered a 55% increase, compared with the 5.4 million tons from last year. Moreover, Russia's pipeline gas deliveries to China, increased by 65% during the first six months of 2022, as compared to 2021. Ever since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, China's expenditure for the energy imports coming from Russia increased to 35 billion USD as opposed to 20 billion USD last year.



Source: <https://www.cotidianul.ro/dupa-ce-a-imbogatit-rusia-ue-face-la-fel-cu-china/>

At present, we can easily notice that Moscow's main objective is strengthening its energy alliance

with Beijing, as it has a tense relationship with the West; they disagree on various matters, not to mention that it started the war in Ukraine. Under these circumstances, Russia agreed to sign a 30 years-long contract with China, where it will deliver natural gas, via the “Powers of Siberia 2” a new pipeline that is 2,600 km long and originates from the Bovanenkovo and Kharasavey gas fields, in Yamal. This is Moscow’s confirmation that it intends to replace Nord Stream 2 – which was destined to supply gas to Europe – with a different pipeline to China, an aspect that Moscow and Beijing have been discussing for a few years now. In 2014, the Russian Gazprom and the China National Petroleum Corporation signed a 400 billion dollars’ agreement, for a period of 30 years, to start the construction of the “Power of Siberia” project (3,000 km in Russia and 5,000 km in China). The implementation of the gas transportation project will enable China to receive up to 38 billion cubic meters of gas a year, once it reaches maximum capacity in 2025. Russia is already sending gas to China through its pipeline “Power of Siberia 1”. It started in 2019, and in 2021, the export to China registered 16.5 billion cubic meters.

As far as the Russian-Chinese energy cooperation is concerned, in the first part of the above-mentioned project is concerned, the “Power of Siberia 1” pipeline, that officially started to function in 2019, repeatedly exceeded the amount of gas it delivered to China, and this year it is expected to reach 20 billion cubic meters. According to the agenda of the programme, when it is finished, the “Power of Siberia 2” pipeline is expected to deliver 50 billion cubic meters of gas a year. According to what Zhang Hanhui, the Chinese ambassador to Moscow, stated at the beginning of this year, the ratio of the national Chinese currency (RMB) in the bilateral agreements between China and Russia grew from 3.1% in 2014, to 17.5% in 2020. According to Russian public records, the ratio of the bilateral trade agreements in RMB or rubbles between China and Russia can reach 45%-65%. The Chinese government has also made efforts to promote the Chinese-Russian cooperation in North-Eastern China, in “Manchuria”, or “Inner Manchuria” and in its three provinces, Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning (the cooperation will intensify mostly in Heilongjiang), as well as in the Russian Far East, where they share a border of almost 4,300 km.

Beijing hopes this will contribute to the “revitalisation of the three provinces in the north-east”, postponed for too long, especially with regard to energy resources, to establishing China’s strategic energy reserves, to agricultural commodities, and production and construction projects. According to the Chinese official media, the Russian Far East lacks the necessary work force for agricultural production, and 30% from the foreign work force in the region comes from China.

The Russia-Chinese space cooperation is largely seen as an important field in the strategic partnership between the two, reaching a new strong development stage. We are referring mostly to lunar explorations, human spaceflight, satellite navigation, or Earth observation, but to other space applications. In 2021, China and Russia signed a memorandum of understanding to build an international scientific research space station on the Moon. As the USA based China Aerospace Studies Institute reported, despite China’s recent progress in aerospace technologies and aviation and its focus on engine design, it can still benefit substantially from Russian technology in this field. It is important to highlight the fact that prominent leaders of the Chinese aerospace industry have studied in Russia.

It is obvious that it’s been 26 years since China and Russia have been having a “strategic cooperation partnership” (signed in 1996), and 21 years since the Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation (signed in 2001). It is true that the media describe the relations between the two great powers, China and Russia as “the best in history”. Nevertheless, various other communication channels highlight that centuries of rivalries have somewhat generated a deep mistrust that can reactivate once China’s global influence grows and Russia’s economy and diplomacy fall. This can be regarded as a complicated situation that can alter the so-called “equal partnership”.

China Puts Its Own Geopolitical and Geostrategic Interest above All Others

Taking a closer look at recent evolutions, one can see that China’s Russian gas imports have grown during the first eight months of this year, while the LNG has reached a record high. The activities of the Chinese energy companies have intensified and diversified in order to take advantage of the price increase on the international market. However, it became clear that from China’s point of view and judging by its attitude, building and maintaining a good relationship or even a more special partnership with Russia should not be at the expense of developing relations with other countries, or groups of countries. We are referring here mostly to western countries, especially to the EU, that – of late – has proven to be China’s largest economic partner.

Hence, taking into account China’s geopolitical and geostrategic interests and its vision on the world order in the post-Cold War era, we can safely say that there are differences between the policies, strategies and objectives set in Moscow and Beijing. China has been labelled lately as a rising global power, which has benefited a lot from economic globalization, while Russia’s general development slowed down significantly. In the context of international evolutions, it made it stay behind, which confirms even more what the former US president Barack Obama said about Russia in 2014 – that it was

merely a “regional power.” As such, in international environments, the so-called Chinese-Russian “strategic partnership” does not seem to rise up to the parties’ expectations. Chinese observers sometimes characterised the relations between China and Russia as being warm at a government level and cold at the base. They are more mature politically speaking, not economically speaking. A fundamental problem of the Chinese-Russian relation seems to be the difference between Chinese and Russian mentalities. Nevertheless, there are three common ideas in the opinions expressed by the Chinese decision makers and analysts, with regard to the China-Russia partnership, pragmatism, lack of political trust on a regional and international level, and the common factor to consider – the USA.

Considering all this, this is how the Ukrainian war drew attention on the Chinese-Russian relationship. On the 4th February 2022, a few weeks before Russia invaded Ukraine, President Xi Jinping and President Vladimir Putin met and issued a common historical statement where they said that their bilateral relation is “limitless” that “there are no forbidden areas of cooperation” between the two countries, as their relations strengthened significantly in the past years. The Chinese President, Xi Jinping and the Russian President Vladimir Putin seem to enjoy a close work relationship, which stimulates the high-level cooperation between the two nations. Moreover, the two also cooperate based on their common views on the so-called threats coming from the USA and its allies. Moscow and Beijing see them as trying to undermine them. Furthermore, we must not forget that the relationship between the two is very complex and costly for both parties, however, at the same time we must take into account the fact that the leaders in Beijing and Moscow seem to consider that the benefits are higher than the costs. We must not forget that the current equation might change and, after a while, and depending on global evolutions, results might not lead to a “win-win” relationship between Russia and China.

Yet, the close diplomatic activity between the two countries is high, and can be seen as the most significant of these present times. In the UN and in other organisations the two countries may not always agree, but they never oppose publicly. Russian and Chinese diplomats work together to change debates and influence results. However, Russia keeps on making efforts to identify a viable framework so it can manage China’s rise. Despite Moscow’s close relationship with Beijing, it proves it is careful with China’s multilateral initiatives, and sometimes even angry with China’s control reaching Russia’s sphere of influence. As such, Russia actually blocked the efforts to change the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in an economic club or a free trade area, because it would have strengthened China’s influence in Central Asia. When China announced the establishment of the Asian International Investment Bank, in 2014, Russia refused to join at first. As China continues to grow, Russia’s international role remains limited, because of its small economic development, and risks ending up in a difficult position, as a junior partner to China. Consequently, despite the relations between Beijing and Moscow from the past years, there still is a considerable amount of strategic mistrust between the two countries. The Chinese strategic mistrust mainly comes from the history of the relationship between the two countries, a history where the Russian Empire was perceived as more powerful and the Soviet Union took advantage of a weaker China.

It became obvious that Russia is taking into consideration all kinds of lasting structural factors – especially geography – that are reason for concern that a stronger China could violate its interests and would take advantage of Russia’s ever growing weaknesses. Moscow’s concerns are raised by a strategic culture that contributes to the development of its ambitions as a great power but also to the dissatisfaction of being one of China’s junior regional partners.

Where Is Russia’s Relationship with China Headed?

In the past, the relationship between the two countries was based by the rivalry between the western countries. A sign with regard to China’s relationship with Russia was given on the 27th October 2022, when the Chinese foreign minister, Wang Yi told his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov about China’s wish to strengthen the relationship between Beijing and Moscow. At that time, the Chinese representative showed his support for Vladimir Putin and his intentions to unite and lead the Russian people towards “surpassing all obstacles” and “restoring Russia’s status as a great power on the international scene”. Moreover, in the context of “Russia’s special operation in Ukraine”, Beijing has never fully supported the economic sanctions that the USA imposed on Russia, and the Chinese leaders claimed that NATO’s expansion to the East is the main reason behind the Russian aggression in Ukraine, therefore, Beijing never condemned it.

Yet, despite the position China adopted then, it made another public, one with regard to the Russian-Ukrainian war, when the German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz visited China in November 2022, who said China was a great power, stating – following a discussion with the Chinese Prime Minister – that Berlin and Beijing agree that Russia’s threats regarding the use of nuclear weapons are “unacceptable” and such an attack would cross a “red line” in international relations. In his turn, the Chinese Prime Minister, Li Keqiang stated that he agreed with Germany on the need of finding a new solution to “swiftly ending” the war in Ukraine. “We cannot afford a new escalation of the conflict” said Li Keqiang, urging

Russia and Ukraine to restart negotiations and find a diplomatic solution.

It became evident that after the relations between China and Russia returned to normal in 1989, they officially solved their long-lasting border conflict, and Moscow started expressing its support or neutrality regarding sensitive matters such as Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang. Nevertheless, Moscow's decades of antagonistic behaviour on a regional and global level are still seen as suspicious in China. While some of the positive expectations in the development of the relations between China and Russia are highly unlikely to occur, the two countries will avoid antagonising each other in public and they will make sure they will reach their common goals to stabilise their relationship. However, it can reach tensions on specific matters, but it is relatively resistant to long time damages, due to the pragmatism of both countries and to the desire to negotiate behind closed doors, the political differences and differences of opinion. China and Russia will continue to be pragmatic partners of convenience, not partners who share strategic interests and deeper, common views on the world. In the following years, even though the relations will remain strong on a diplomatic level, the two cornerstones of the two-decade long partnership – military and energy cooperation – will remain sensitive and when they will come across significant ruptures in the relationship, to China, Russia's importance will diminish considerably.

As a Conclusion It Is Safe to Say that...

The economic prognosis of the International Monetary Fund expect that China's GDP will rise to almost 30 trillion USD by 2027, while Russia's will be way below 2 trillion USD. Hence, Russia's economic standstill will make it less important as an economic partner to any other country. In 2020 Russia represented only 2% of China's trade (imports and exports). By comparison, China was Russia's largest economic partner, with almost 18% of Russian trade going to that country. As a conclusion, it is safe to say that, if nothing major happens, Russia will lose its importance in the following decades, more notably, as China reduces its fossil fuel consumption.

Russia's standstill or economic and technological downfall will significantly influence its military power that traditionally was a key source to its power and influence on a regional and global level. In 2021, Russia practically spent militarily the same amount of money as in 2014 – almost 64 billion USD. China's military budget increased with over 47% during this period – from 183 billion USD to 270 billion USD. Such an evolution sends clear signals that the unpredictable could become predictable and it will have multiple implications. In the past decades, Beijing saw Russia as an important military partner in the competition against the USA and its allies, however Russia's defence expenses will hang up heavy over China and Russia's collective ability to continue their military cooperation.

It is unclear whether or when the power difference between the two could become a threat to their relationship. If Russia's power diminishes, and its western isolation continues, Moscow could come to the conclusion that it has no choice but to follow China under the circumstances imposed by Beijing.

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Romanian Embassy in Japan (1992–1996), chief of staff of the prime minister (1990–1992), press attaché at the Romanian Embassy in the Republic of Poland. Chinese (1985–1990), diplomat in the MFA (1978–1985). He received numerous orders and distinctions: Order of the Rising Sun with Gold and Silver Star awarded by the Government of Japan (2020), Ambassador Medal of Friendship awarded by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (2011), Order of Diplomatic Merit of the Republic of Korea (2002), Knight Order of Faithful Service awarded by the President of Romania (2000), Diplomat of the Year 2010, prize awarded by Nine O'clock newspaper. He also has a rich teaching experience supporting numerous courses in the diplomatic field.



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Greg graduated with a PhD from the University of Canterbury in 2004, in 2015 became Associate Professor at the, Uppsala University, Sweden. Greg Simons is currently a researcher at the Institute for Russian and Eurasian Studies (IRES) at Uppsala University and a lecturer at the Department of Communication Science at Turība University in Riga, Latvia. His research interests include the changing political dynamics and relationships, mass media, public diplomacy, information warfare, hybrid warfare and subversion, organised persuasive communication, political marketing, crisis management communications, media and armed conflict, and the Russian Orthodox Church. He also researched the relationships and connections between information, politics and armed conflict more broadly, such as the GWOT and Arab

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He is the Consul General of Romania in Los Angeles (USA). A career diplomat, with a degree in law, in foreign languages and a doctorate in management, he previously headed the Consular Section of the Romanian Embassy in Rome, the National Centre for Diplomatic and Service Passports within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Romanian Consulate in Castellon de la Plana - Spain and the Consulate General of Romania in Trieste - Italy. He worked as a teacher at the Romanian Diplomatic Institute, at the Consular Training and Training Centre of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and represented Romania in expert committees of the European Council and the European Commission in Brussels. He has published papers on consular regulation, emergency and disaster management, and security studies. Specialist and connoisseur of English, Italian, Spanish and French languages.



Prof.PhD. Nicolae RADU

He held important positions in the national security system such as: head of the Psychological Expertise Centre within the PSS, Authorized Director of the Psycho-sociology Centre of the Ministry of Interior, advisor to the state secretary in Ministry of Interior; advisor in the Supreme Defense Council of the Country, Presidential Administration; spokesperson of the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" Police Academy. Nicolae Radu is a PhD professor. within the "Spiru Haret" University in Bucharest. Since 2018, as an associate professor, he has taught courses in Leadership, Specialized Laboratory - Information Services, Military Psychopathology at the University in Bucharest. Since 2015, Nicolae Radu has been a qualified PhD supervisor for Information and National Security at the "Carol I" National Defence University. Currently, Nicolae Radu has operational concerns in the area of intelligence, prevention and combating terrorism, but also in the area of applied psychology for personnel destined for special missions such as Sayeret Matkal within the Israel Elite Special Forces Unit and General Staff Reconnaissance Unit 269.



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



“GEOSTRATEGIC PULSE” - founded in 2007

Bimonthly bilingual bulletin

Publishers: Pompilia VLĂDESCU și Stelian TEODORESCU

- București -

ISSN: 1843-701X

Cover: own production

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