

GEOSTRATEGIC PULSE

Motto: "Opinions are free, but not mandatory" I.L. Caragiale

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EDITORIAL



The Biden-Putin Meeting. A Renewed Dialogue?

Constantin IACOBIȚĂ

The meeting between Biden and Putin, acclaimed and criticised at the same time in the weeks before, took place in a context that offered the opportunity for the two leaders, and especially for the Kremlin leader, to really clarify the way discussions should be approached and carried out, as well as what could be expected from them.

What has President Vladimir Putin learned from the G7 Summit that took place in Great Britain, the NATO Summit in Brussels and the relevant meetings that the US President had on the side of those events, and what could have been the conclusions reached by the Kremlin leader?

Firstly – and relevant for the depth of the change in Washington’s approach and attitude towards its European allies after four years of Trump presidency – he saw President Biden claiming that “the USA is back” and underscoring its unshakable commitment to Article 5 of the NATO Treaty.

All of the above can be regarded as the main component – assurance for the European allies – of the “positive side” of the scale indicating the strength of the Transatlantic link. To this we can add the fact that Washington and Brussels have agreed to significantly commit themselves to countering the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide and to joining forces against China.

On the “negative side” of the scale, which is in fact to Russia’s advantage, the Kremlin leader could have placed factors with significant potential for exploitation.

Firstly, the fact that the Transatlantic unity remains marred by rifts and lack of trust. The negotiations that President Joe Biden had in Brussels with relevant representatives of the EU did not lead to an arrangement to end the 17 years-old conflict between the two largest aerospace companies – Airbus and Boeing – over subsidies, as hoped. Instead, they ended with a five years-old truce. The terms of the truce, the even thornier issue of taxes imposed by the former President Donald Trump on steel and aluminium imports from the EU, the divergences on data transfers and taxation of carbon-emissions show that the Transatlantic partnership is far from being as strong as the two sides desired.

Secondly, we are referring to the anti-China Transatlantic “front”. During the G7 Summit on the 11th-13th of June, this front seems to have been established to a certain extent, at least on a declarative basis, and during the NATO Summit on the 14th of June it seems to have been formalized – the final communique recognising China as a security risk. However, developments in the past few months at the level of World Trade Organisation and even the talks that took place at the G7 Summit in England show that, at least as far as trade is concerned, there is more alignment between the EU and China than between the EU and the USA. Furthermore, reaching Transatlantic unity against China will depend decisively on France and Germany’s interests, which have China as main market for their exports.

Though, besides these economic aspects, we need to point out that right after NATO stated the intention to change its traditional role – to unite politically and militarily the Transatlantic community against Russia, Beijing announced – through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs – the strengthening of China -Russia ties.

Thirdly, and not necessarily reflecting the weight of the factor, was the fact that the final communique of the latest NATO Summit did not include a clear commitment towards Ukraine. Moreover, during the press conference that followed the NATO Summit, President Joe Biden answered the question regarding Ukraine joining NATO using the phrase “it remains to be seen”. This shows that Washington is being careful not to cross Moscow’s “red lines”.

To somehow complete the picture painted above we should mention the fact that, during the press conference following the latest NATO Summit, President Joe Biden emphasized that he had consulted

with his fellow Allies on the meeting with Vladimir Putin.

In the light of the above, what can be said about the Biden-Putin discussions and their results, as reported by the very two parties who, in the days prior to the meeting have said expectations were low?

The statements and answers given by the two leaders at the press conferences following the meeting confirmed what the parties had expected all along – slow progress.

The most important achievements can be described as follows:

1. The importance and the need for strategic contacts and dialogue at the highest level was reconfirmed and reiterated.
2. The dialogue between the two delegations was consistent, pragmatic, to the point and in a constructive environment.
3. Even though disagreements were numerous, the parties tried to understand each other's points of view.
4. As shown in the joint statement issued by the White House (where the recent extension of *New START* was also underscored), the two parties reiterated their commitment to nuclear stability and agreed to launch, "in the near future", a "Strategic Stability Dialogue" destined to "lay the groundwork for future arms control and risk reduction measures".

To the above we need to mention that Vladimir Putin realised – if he had not done so before the meeting – that the Biden Administration was different from the Trump Administration and even from the Obama Administration – which has consistently promoted the objective of a (unrealistic otherwise) reset of the relationship with Russia.

When it comes to "failures", we can notice:

1. The level of trust between the two is very low, just as seen during the press conferences hosted by the two presidents following the meeting.
2. It is highly unlikely that Vladimir Putin should change his approach and behaviour as far as the overall relationship between Russia and the USA, or with regard to Russia's regional and international policies. If they had reached an understanding on one of the major issues discussed by the two delegations, at least one of the two leaders would have mentioned it.
3. It is also highly unlikely that Ukraine was one of the main topics on the agenda, given the fact that the first part of the European tour of President Biden did not reveal anything encouraging for Ukraine in that respect (we need to keep in mind that the agenda of this year's NATO Summit did not include the NATO-Ukraine and the NATO-Georgia Commissions). And, if the matter had been a priority on the agenda, the "red line" reiterated by Vladimir Putin during his press conference showed that Ukraine did not obtain anything else besides President Biden's statement of support, following the NATO Summit on the 14th of June.

Even if it did not bring major clarifications, the meeting between Biden and Putin has confirmed the desire for strategic dialogue and could have set the ground for a constructive dialogue between the two parties. However, it is equally true that this dialogue can become more difficult, as China (that for the first time was explicitly called a threat to NATO) was included in the equation.

INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

The Pontic-Baltic Rimland or the Containment of the Russian Federation**Cristian BARNA & Adrian POPA**

Neighbouring in its Rimland an anti-totalitarian Europe, marred by its traumatic experiences from the age of the Cold War, is a concerning factor for the Russian Federation.

Being aware of the geopolitical advantages that access to the seas and oceans provides, translated in geopolitical terms into control over the Rimland, the Russian Federation takes actions that facilitate the deployment of its naval forces in this strategic area.

Having a strong fleet is vital for the Russian Federation as it strengthens this country's resilience from the containment policy that could pillory the Eurasian region.[1]



In order to achieve this, the Russian Federation must be able to secure its access to the cold seas in the North and the East, as well as to the warm seas in the South and the West. Thirty years after the collapse of the USSR, the Russian Federation seems determined to seek the advantages of its Rimland that it did not benefit from during the Cold War.

Thus, the Russian Federation aims at being surrounded by 'buffer-zones', such as Kaliningrad, Belarus, Eastern Ukraine, Transnistria, Moldova South Ossetia and Abkhazia, on which it can exert its influence and allow it to access the Baltic, Black and Caspian Seas, while "piercing" the Euro-Atlantic Rimland comprising countries such as Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania or Georgia, situated in its "near abroad".[2]

This is why NATO's expansion and the Russian Federation's intent to protect its "near abroad" in Europe represent the geopolitical factors of a zero-sum game, where the Pontic-Baltic Rimland becomes a "buffer-zone".[3]

For the very same reason, the Russian Federation does not want the coastal states situated by the Baltic and the Black Seas, that were once part of the communist bloc, to be turned by NATO into "buffer states"; a contrary result would enable NATO to take control over the Russian Federation's European Rimland.[4]

The Russian Federation changing its stance with regard to the Pontic-Baltic Rimland implies an aggressive rhetoric that contains accusations of violating air-space[5] and even incidents that limit the freedom of navigation[6] in the Black and Baltic Seas.

The Baltic Sea, an area where the Russian Federation may exert its influence, is inextricably linked to the Kaliningrad enclave, situated between Poland and Lithuania, which has access to the Baltic Sea. Over time, Kaliningrad was a strategic area, where the Russian fleet used to dock, as it was the only European/Russian maritime gateway with waters that did not freeze during winter, allowing it to keep its borders impenetrable to Germany or Poland.[7]

Once the Russian Federation interfered in Ukraine, NATO became aware of the fact that it was facing a different geostrategic context, where the Russian Federation jeopardised the security of NATO's members and allies in the Pontic-Baltic Rimland.

Hence, NATO has strengthened its presence in the Pontic-Baltic region in order to counter the Russian Federations' potential aggressions, making sure at the same time that it kept to the security guarantees offered to its members in the region.

Besides, the 2016 Warsaw Summit was a turning point on how NATO saw its members from the Pontic-Baltic Rimland, as it adopted a different approach regarding the security risks of the countries in the Black and Baltic Seas. "Even though following the annexation of Crimea the Alliance promised to increase its availability in Europe and strengthen its Eastern flank, the 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw focused mainly on the

Baltic Sea.”[8]



www.nato.int

Another reason might be that in the Baltic region, “geography is not on NATO’s side. The Baltic States are on Russia’s western border, near Russian bases, supplies and reinforcements, while NATO forces are mostly in Western Europe and the United States. [...] which means that NATO can’t be counted on to relieve the Baltic nations before Russia has time to entrench.”[9]

Besides, “the shallow waters and narrow straits of the Baltic Sea make it easy to lay mines and hard to manoeuvre warships. Western military experts fear Russia could block the free movement of NATO ships, making it impossible to support the tiny Baltic states in case of a war”.[10]

Not in the least, “the Russians, with the advantage of having significant Russian minorities in the Baltics, can play a probing game similar to the one in Ukraine, if they deem this necessary or useful”.[11]

With regard to the part played by the Black Sea in the Pontic-Baltic equation, this geopolitical area was described as being a “buffer zone that awaits to be taken into account by the Great Powers”, and a “strategic synapse”[12], concepts that suggest that the Black Sea’s significance depends on the interests of the Great Powers present in this “security complex”.

Therefore, over centuries, the strategic importance of the Black Sea was set according to the roles the region played simultaneously – as a “bridge” and as a “border” between former powers and empires and as a “buffer zone” and a “transit area” between Europe and Asia.[13]

Its “key position” as a “geopolitical connection” is given by the straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles, which facilitate the navigation from a “closed sea” to the oceans of our world, and to the Crimean peninsula, a genuine ‘maritime stronghold’.[14]

It is worth mentioning that up until 1991, the

Black Sea was very close to what we may call a “Russian lake” – the launching point of the Soviet naval power to the Mediterranean or the gateway to the warm southern seas.[15]

The collapse of the USSR changed the balance of power in the Black Sea, as the newly-formed countries reduced the coastline of the newly-founded Russian Federation which sought to preserve the pivotal geopolitical part that the USSR played in building and maintaining the “architecture of the shores during the Cold War”.[16]

Statements such as “the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov are in Russia’s area of strategic interest”, or “the Black Sea gives the Russian Federation direct access to the most important global routes” can only highlight the fact that the Russian Federation does not want anyone to interfere with its geostrategic interests in the Black Sea basin.[17]

On the other hand, the Euro-Atlantic geopolitical policy aims at making the Black Sea international by involving extra-regional players (NATO, the EU and the USA), both politically and militarily, and by promoting multilateralism in matters regarding regional security.[18]

Romania and Bulgaria having become NATO members, along with US support for pro-Western, anti-Russian elites in Ukraine and Georgia, make the Russian Federation feel “under siege” and determine this country to act as if it wishes to “tear away” this newly-created component of the Rimland from the Euro-Atlantic influence and draw it under the Euro-Asian sphere of influence.[19]

To the Russian Federation, having an influence on Ukraine and Georgia – given the fleet in the Black Sea, in the Port of Sevastopol, the naval base in Ochamchire (Abkhazia) and the military bases in South Ossetia – represents the strategic stakes of a well-established plan.

Therefore, speaking from a geostrategic perspective, the separatist region in Eastern Ukraine, the Crimean Peninsula, Transnistria (“a bridgehead”,[20] or “a Russian knife in Ukraine’s back”[21]) and the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are parts of a “security corridor” that the Russian Federation has to the Black Sea.[22]

The Black Sea is a “very important geostrategic hub for the Russian Federation[23] because, if it is to claim that it is a Mediterranean power, it must first and foremost prove that is a great Black Sea power”.[24]

This is why “Russia couples its naval superiority in the Black Sea with growing political and military

influence in the surrounding states. [...] Increasing political power combined with a strong military position makes Russia the virtual regional hegemon at this point.[25]

the Montreux Convention.



President Vladimir Putin watching a military exercise in the Black Sea, aboard the missile cruiser ‘Marshal Ustinov’ (Photo: Alexei Druzhinin/Sputnik/Kremlin via Reuters)

According to Ben Hodges, Janusz Bugajski and Peter Doran, “the Black Sea is thus unique in the modern world, being the only open, international body of water where the U.S. Navy accepts the logic that sailing here requires the permission of another.”[29]

In his turn, James Carafano believes that “the US government has concluded that Moscow’s military build-up and expansive diplomatic, political and economic efforts are intended to establish the Black Sea as a power projection platform for the Russian armed forces.”[30]

Besides, according to Alexander Vershbow, “taking into account the political, economic and human rights implications of Russia’s destabilising policies, all NATO members are stakeholders in the security of the Black Sea region. [...] Cooperation between Allies will be the key to coming up with an answer to the security challenges we are facing.”[31]

This is why the US should advocate to strengthen NATO’s presence from the Baltic Sea all the way to the Black Sea: “All this is vital not just to show Putin that America is on watch, but also to show the Europeans that the US will walk the walk when it comes to remaining tough on Russian influence.”[32]

In this scenario, Romania is in a “pole position” to become NATO’s hub in the Black Sea, insofar as ports, navy and missile defence is concerned.

FOOTNOTES

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To achieve this goal, the Russian Federation “is interested in Ukraine losing its access to the Black Sea”[26], and as a consequence, the annexation of Crimea becomes extremely important within the Russian Federation’s power equation in the Black Sea region.

In fact, Crimea has been turned by the Russian Federation into a real strategic *place d’armes* in the Black Sea. The strategic objectives followed by this country when annexing Crimea comprised unconditional control over the Port of Sevastopol – a major hub being used by the Russian Federation to display its naval power to the world, which has proved efficient for naval blockades during the 2008 Russian-Georgian War and for the reinforcement of its military intervention in support of Bashar Al-Assad during the Syrian Civil War [27] – but also to intimidate Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey as a way of discouraging the access of NATO’s naval forces in the Black Sea.[28]

A great challenge for NATO is represented by the current legal status of the Turkish Straits, which does not allow the formation of a major NATO fleet in the Black Sea – a fleet that as of now could not expect significant input from NATO non-coastal countries due to the current provisions of

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Promises Kept

Dr. Ion I. Jinga *collective action. To succeed, it must further*

On 7 May 2021, the UN General Assembly had an informal interactive dialogue with Antonio Guterres, as a candidate presented by Portugal for re-appointment to the position of UN Secretary-General for the 2022-2026 mandate.

Article 97 of the UN Charter provides that *"The Secretary-General shall be appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council"*. Article 35 of the General Assembly resolution 69/321 *"requests the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Security Council to start the process of soliciting candidates for the position of Secretary-General through a joint letter addressed to all Member States"*, and article 39 *"invites Member States to present candidates with proven leadership and managerial abilities, extensive experience in international relations and strong diplomatic, communication and multilingual skills."*

In 2016 there were 13 competitors from three continents, but as the US Ambassador Samantha Power remarked: *"In the end, there was just a candidate whose experience, vision, and versatility across a range of areas proved compelling"*. Now (at least to this day), Antonio Guterres is the only candidate proposed by a UN Member State.



UN Headquarters, New York (source: telegraph.co.uk)

Five years ago, he noted in his vision statement: *"The UN is the institutional expression of the international community, the cornerstone of our international system and the key actor of effective multilateralism. It is the essential instrument of Member States to confront common challenges, manage shared responsibilities and exercise*

collective action. To succeed, it must further strengthen the nexus between peace and security, sustainable development and human rights policies. The focus is on action and the watchword is implementation, implementation, implementation."

Consequently, in 2017 he launched a large scale reform of the UN on three dimensions: development system, peace and security, management. His report *"Shifting the management paradigm in the UN"* (General Assembly resolution 72/492) identified key challenges: slow service delivery; fragmentation in management structures; weak performance management culture; ineffective management of resources; gaps in transparency and accountability; trust deficit between Member States and the Secretariat. Therefore, his reform was guided by two principles: a new contract between the Secretary General and the managers in the field (delegated authority, more transparency), and a contract between the Member States and the UN Secretariat (more freedom of action to the Secretariat, accountability and full control of the Member States over its activity).

Focus was placed on results and on an organizational culture based on accountability, team work, leadership, ethics and integrity, gender balance, morale, and risk appetite. The UN moved from a biannual budget for its programs to an annual budget, enabling a more realistic distribution of resources according to needs. The concept of *"networked multilateralism"* was introduced, in which the UN works hand in hand with regional organizations, international financial institutions, development banks, specialized agencies and civil society, *"in order to bring multilateralism closer to people"*.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a challenging test for the Organization. Antonio Guterres provided exemplary leadership, shaping the UN response according to the *"peace-security-development"* nexus, mobilizing the material and human resources of the system, talking to world leaders and launching initiatives aimed at limiting the crisis. The UN offered humanitarian aid to countries affected by the pandemic, provided water and soap for refugee camps, assisted hospitals and clinics, organized information campaigns and facilitated the transport of medical equipment to 120 countries. The Secretary-General appealed for a ceasefire in international conflicts, launched the

UN Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19, called the G-20 leaders for more resources to keep the global coronavirus pandemic from reaching “*apocalyptic proportions*”, and asked for solidarity and cooperation: “*We need concrete action now, especially for the most vulnerable. It is the only way to stop the pandemic. Solidarity is indeed survival.*” Speaking at the General Assembly Special Session in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic last December, he advocated that the vaccines be made available to all: “*When countries go in their own direction, the virus goes in every direction. In a global crisis, we must meet the expectations of those we serve with unity, solidarity and coordinated global action.*”

Last week, his message as a candidate for the position of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for the 2022-2026 mandate followed the same logic: “*The climate emergency and COVID-19 have exposed the ways in which our fates are connected and the costs of our inability to solve shared problems. Out of immense suffering, we have a once-in-a-lifetime window of opportunity. It requires a reset multilateralism for the new era, based on principles of equity and solidarity. Simply put, the choices we make now will determine our trajectory for decades to come.*” His priorities for the next five years include an enduring response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences; a comprehensive approach on peace and security; peace with nature and climate action; accelerating the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals; ensuring the centrality of human rights; advancing gender equality; rising the challenge of digital transformation; advancing multilateralism.

The election of the UN Secretary-General is always a crucial moment. Candidates should possess professional skills, political acceptance, and acceptability to public opinion. In its top job the UN needs not only a knowledgeable person and a skilled manager. It also needs a visionary leader with moral authority, capable of guiding the Organization through an extraordinary array of global challenges and of leading by example in times when there is no substitute for the United Nations legitimacy.

In his acclaimed memoir “*Promises to Keep*”, the US President Joe Biden confessed that his life’s work *credo* was inspired by his grandfather: “*He wanted me to understand two big things: First, that nobody, no group, is above others. Public servants are obliged to level with everybody, whether or not*

they’ll like what he has to say. And second, that politics was a matter of personal honor. A man’s word is his bond. You give your word, you keep it.”

On 7 May 2021, Antonio Guterres told the General Assembly: “*I feel myself extremely grateful for the extraordinary opportunities I had, and I know how important is to honor them in the service of humanity, for a bigger purpose, and with utmost humility. We exist to serve people. That has guided my whole life*”. He is ready to continue at the helm of the United Nations. The decision lies in the hands of the 193 UN Member States.

Note: *Opinions expressed in this article do not bind the official position of the author.*

Key Questions Driving Dangerous Convergence of China and Russia

Professor Robert SUTTER **Key questions determining future collaboration**

The partnership between Moscow and Beijing has broadened and significantly strengthened during the past decade. President Vladimir Putin and President Xi Jinping support forecasts of closer relations. The momentum is based on:

1. common objectives and values;
2. Russian and Chinese vulnerabilities in the face of U.S. and Western pressures; and
3. opportunities for the two powers to expand their influence at the expense of U.S. and allied powers seen in decline.

It no longer is an “axis of convenience” with limited impact; growing convergence points to *de facto* alliance with broad negative implications for the West.

Russia and China now pose increasingly serious challenges to the U.S. supported order in their respective priority spheres of concern - Russia in Europe and the Middle East, and China in Asia along China’s continental and maritime peripheries. Russia’s challenges involve military and paramilitary actions in Europe and the Middle East, along with cyber and political warfare undermining elections in the United States and Europe, European unity, and NATO solidarity. China undermines U.S. and allied resolve through covert and overt manipulation and influence operations employing economic leverage and propaganda. Chinese cyber attacks focus more on massive theft of information and intellectual property to accelerate China’s drive to dominate world markets in key advanced technology at the expense of leading U.S. and other international companies. Coercion and intimidation of neighbors backed by an impressive buildup of Chinese military and civilian security forces expand Beijing regional control and influence.

Russia and China coordinate their moves and support one another in their respective challenges to the United States, allies and partners. These joint efforts also involve diplomatic, security and economic measures in multilateral forums and bilateral relations involving U.S. opponents in Iran, Syria, North Korea and Venezuela. The two powers also support one another in the face of U.S. and allied complaints and countermeasures regarding Russian and Chinese coercive expansion and other steps challenging regional order and global norms and institutions backed by the United States.

How much do China and Russia need each other?

Russia has become heavily dependent on Chinese economic support, needing China to cope with western sanctions and international isolation. China also is an important partner/collaborator in Russian probes/expansion in Europe and the Middle East and in their mutual resistance to US-led standards in global governance, involving promotion of human rights and democracy, sanctions and other pressures against violations of existing global norms, and setting rules for internet use, space, and international trade, investment and foreign assistance.

China is not nearly as dependent on Russia. Russian energy and military supplies remain important to China. Russian assertive behavior in Europe and Middle East preoccupies the US in ways easing China’s advances in Asia and in other policy arenas. Also, Russia could change and even pose trouble for Beijing, especially as China advances along Russia’s rim and strategic periphery; China works hard to insure Russia is not a source of such trouble.

What are their relative strengths and vulnerabilities?

Russian strengths center on military and political strengths. Moscow is able and willing to take aggressive actions and face-off with the US/West. These steps are backed by nuclear weapons that deter the US and allied countries, and could pose a problem for China. Russia is a recognized leader in the UN Security Council. For China, Russia is a source of needed oil and gas, advanced military technology and cyber expertise. Russia shares common authoritarian values and world outlook with China.

Russian vulnerabilities focus on diplomatic and economic isolation. Moscow has little soft power and a limited tool kit of hard power to advance Russian interests. Despite some strong points, Russia overall remains in economic, social and demographic decline. Ever more dependent on China in the face of US-led sanctions, Russia needs to compromise with Beijing as China spreads its influence and Russian influence declines along Russia’s strategic rim in ways that undermine Russia’s important great power ambitions.

Chinese strengths center on China’s comprehensive economic, political and military power. Beijing has a

wide array of policy tools -both positive and negative - to use in advancing incrementally to regional dominance and global leadership, challenging the US in high technology and military development. Russia is viewed as an important partner, albeit with limited abilities. China is highly integrated into world economy and international governance - the international economy in particular is influenced by what happens in China. China massive ambitions notably in its global Belt and Road Initiative endeavoring to steer world commerce to center on China have reached a stage of directly challenging the US-backed international order through rival regimes and norms and through undermining US-led organizations and alignments.

Chinese vulnerabilities focus on economic interdependence. China remains very dependent on the world and seeks to avoid disruption of vital international economic interchange, including notably with the US. The Trump administration trade tariffs, investment restrictions and export controls continue in the Biden government and remain a major problem for the Chinese government. Beijing also seeks to preserve a stable international environment that it can manipulate from a position of ever growing strengths, especially economic leverage. Achieving stability is hard because China's top priority nearby periphery remains full of areas of important instability and strategic uncertainty as far as China is concerned involving disputes with Japan, Taiwan, India, Korean peninsula, Vietnam, Australia and the South China Sea. Behind this instability is an aroused and deeply suspicious American government, which unlike in the recent past is able and willing to take very negative actions in pressing China to change. Adding to China's international vulnerability are its domestic preoccupations which remain strong. Notably they involve enormous expenditure on domestic control, very difficult problems with Xinjiang and Hong Kong, corruption, pollution, lagging reform of a flawed economic model, and a rapidly aging population.

In what areas will bilateral cooperation most likely deepen in the next 5-10 years?

Many areas of cooperation seem likely to grow because of overlap of interests. And Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping have built close personal ties based on common interests and world views; they will remain in power for the foreseeable future. Areas of cooperation include energy supplies, arms and military technology, and cyber techniques. Both support norms and international institutions at odds with US-favored norms and institutions; they back authoritarian regimes opposed by the West - e.g.

Iran, Syria, North Korea, Venezuela, and they oppose US backed human rights, democracy promotion and related international intervention. Meanwhile, China will continue to advance along the Russian strategic periphery and Russia probably will continue to feel it has to cooperate.

What are the most significant tensions in the relationship?

The growing asymmetrical China-Russia power relationship means that Russia is on a path to playing an ever more subordinate role. This tension will play out notably in traditional areas of Russian influence along its strategic periphery and even in Europe, the Middle East and the Arctic as China's steady incremental expansion undermines Russia's leadership role. To protect its interests and avoid dominance by China, Russia may be increasingly open to compromise that would allow for better ties with the US and West that would improve Russia national capacity and reduce dependence on China.

China's support for Russia's very disruptive expansionism in Europe and the Middle East upsets Chinese development plans in these regions. A combination of regional blowback and US pressures on China to avoid such support for Russia could prompt a Chinese decision to reduce China's support for Russia's disruptive behavior.

Can the West seek advantage in manipulating China and Russia against each other?

Western efforts to woo China or Russia with concessions in order to divide the powers and weaken the alignment face the reality that the main driver of their recent mutual advances has been Western weakness and decline. Under these circumstances, western concessions to China or to Russia are likely to be interpreted as a further sign of weakness, prompting enhanced collaboration among the two powers seeking opportunistic advances. A more prudent course for the time being is for the United States and those many countries with strong interests in curbing the expansionism of Russia and China in Eurasia at their expense to work more closely together in building national power and resolve in a longer term rivalry to counter the challenges coming from Moscow and Beijing.

NOTE: Robert Sutter is a Professor of Practice of International Affairs, George Washington University, USA. The issues raised in this article are treated in his latest book *Chinese Foreign Relations: Power and Policy of an Emerging Global Force* fifth edition (Rowman and Littlefield, 2021)

THE BLACK SEA

Selçuk COLAKOĞLU: "Turkey's current domestic situation and foreign policy indicate an extremely complicated and chaotic picture"

The multitude and diversity of the new military conflicts that have captured the international scene in recent years have produced strong reverberations over the way Turkey foreign policy has been built. In an unstable geopolitical context, with increasingly strong and visible tensions in the international arena, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's election as President of the Republic of Turkey was a turning point, offering new meanings to the security strategy.

Professor Selçuk Colakoğlu, with the Department of International Relations at Yildirim Beyazıt University (YBU) in Ankara, specialized in International Relations and Director of the Turkish Center for Asia Pacific Studies (APAC), has offered his views on *Security of Turkey* in the interview offered to *Geostrategic Pulse Magazine*.



Professor Selçuk Colakoğlu / (C)
The Tokyo Foundation for Policy Research

Geostrategic Pulse: The unfolding great power competition, currently accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, is set to change the nature of international relations in the coming period. In your opinion, what are the main challenges that Turkey will face in the light of the above? To what extent did the pandemic cause a paradigm shift in Turkey's geostrategic approach, with regard to strengthening its domestic resilience?

Selçuk Colakoğlu: The literature of international

relations has had new terms like "corona diplomacy" and "vaccine diplomacy". Achieving personal protective equipment (PPE) was extremely critical for countries in the beginning of the pandemic. Now achieving vaccines first has caused a competition among states. Furthermore, the pandemic has accelerated the global competition between the West and China. The debate on the source of the COVID-19 has still caused friction between Beijing and Western capitals. The United States, Russia, China, and the European Union have tried to expand their influence via vaccine and aid diplomacy across the World. Turkey is also in the middle of vaccine diplomacy. In the initial stage of the pandemic, Ankara used its corona aid to other countries to increase its diplomatic influence. Ankara has also had diverse vaccine contracts with the Chinese Sinovac, Russian Sputnik, and American-German Pfizer-BioNTech. Turkey has so far succeeded in not being part of great powers' competition during the pandemic.

Taking into account Turkey's domestic and foreign policies, how do you see the balance ensured by the national security strategy between the internal and external resilience of the country?

Turkey's domestic and foreign policies have become more interactive recently. The rise of populism and nationalism in domestic politics in recent years has paved the way using foreign policy issues as a leverage to get more popular support for Turkish politicians. On the other hand, using foreign policy issues in domestic politics may have a fire-back to Turkey's economic relations with other countries. Furthermore, the de-institutionalization process in recent years has created a challenge to fix a resilient and full-fledged national security strategy for Turkey.

Turkey's foreign policy was very clearly defined by president Recep Tayyip Erdogan during the AK Party's 7th Ordinary Congress: "We will continue to shape our relations with all the countries, from the U.S. to Russia and from the European Union

to the countries in the Arab geography, in line with Turkey's interests and our nation's expectations. As a country that is located in the heart of Africa, Asia and Europe, we cannot afford to turn our back on either the East or the West. We are well aware of the fact that it is not easy to develop balanced, coherent and long-term cooperation with countries which are in competition or even in conflict with one another at the same time. However, Turkey, with its geographical position, economic interests and inclusive foreign policy vision, has the power and sagacity to achieve this." How will Turkey's agenda and priorities be influenced by the strategic rivalry between the three major powers – USA, China and Russia?

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) changed its ideology from center right "Muslim Democracy" to pro-Muslim Brotherhood "Political Islam" in 2011. Turkey's deterioration of relations with Israel, Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE is related to ruling AKP's pro-Brotherhood policy in the Middle East. The ruling AKP has also formed an anti-West coalition with the far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and a marginal pro-Eurasian association Vatan Party since 2016. This does not mean that Turkey has become an ally of Russia and China. Ankara has used Moscow and Beijing as a leverage for its bargaining with NATO allies. On the other hand, Turkey has bitter differences on some policies with Russia and China too. Ankara's active balancing policy between rival great powers has got some tactical and short-term benefits. But there is a risk that the United States, Russia, and China may consider Turkey as untrustworthy because of its unpredictable and fast changing balancing tactics in Turkish foreign policy.

Ankara has lately committed itself to sustained efforts to restore Turkey's relations with important countries in its regional vicinity, mainly Egypt. What are the motivations behind this shift in Turkey's foreign policy and to what extent do you think a normalization of the relations between Ankara and Cairo is achievable, taking into account the complexity of a regional environment that includes Greece, Cyprus, Libya and others?

Turkey's deepening isolation in the Eastern Mediterranean against the bloc consisting of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Israel, Greece, and the Republic of Cyprus has increased diplomatic and economic costs for Ankara in recent years. Losing

large Turkish export markets in Egypt and Saudi Arabia is another special reason for Ankara to seek normalization with Cairo and Riyadh in recent months. On the other hand, excluding Turkey from regional initiatives like the East Mediterranean Gas Forum is not logical step for their sustainability. Any energy project in the Eastern Mediterranean without Turkey's involvement will be insufficient and less feasible.

The May 5-6 talks in Cairo, chaired by the deputy foreign ministers of the two countries, took place relatively soon after Turkey began to publicly voice its overtures with Egypt in March 2021. The talks focused on the conflict in Libya where Egypt and Turkey have backed opposing sides, the energy rivalry in the Eastern Mediterranean and Ankara's support for the Muslim Brotherhood, which Cairo has designated a terrorist organization. The earlier talks between Ankara and Cairo indicate that fully normalized Turkish-Egyptian relations is not an easy target which can be achieved soon.

In the context of the Syrian war, and with regard to the tensions that keep on occurring at the Greek-Turkish border, how do you assess President Erdogan's policy on migration? To what extent is the government in Ankara able to manage the migration flows?

The AKP-MHP government has successfully used the refugee card as a leverage to bargain with the EU. The 2016 EU-Turkey deal has been on track without a big blow. The refugee flow from Turkey to Greece following the Idlib war in March 2020 has been under control by Ankara and Brussels in the end.

The other fact is that people from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, and the Horn of Africa are not covered by the 2016 migration deal. The Syrians in Turkey have settled in Turkish cities with some protection rights, built their own communities and integrated into the Turkish society to a certain level. However, the others have nothing to lose for trying to cross the Turkish-Greek border.

Turkey is now testing its limits to host refugees. Around five million refugees (four million Syrians and one million of different nationalities) have caused a demographic change in many Turkish cities, particularly in those bordering Syria. The Turkish public has become less tolerant to the refugees because of the economic hardships and increasing number of newcomers.

Turkey's geopolitical position has represented, for the past few years, a major advantage in its

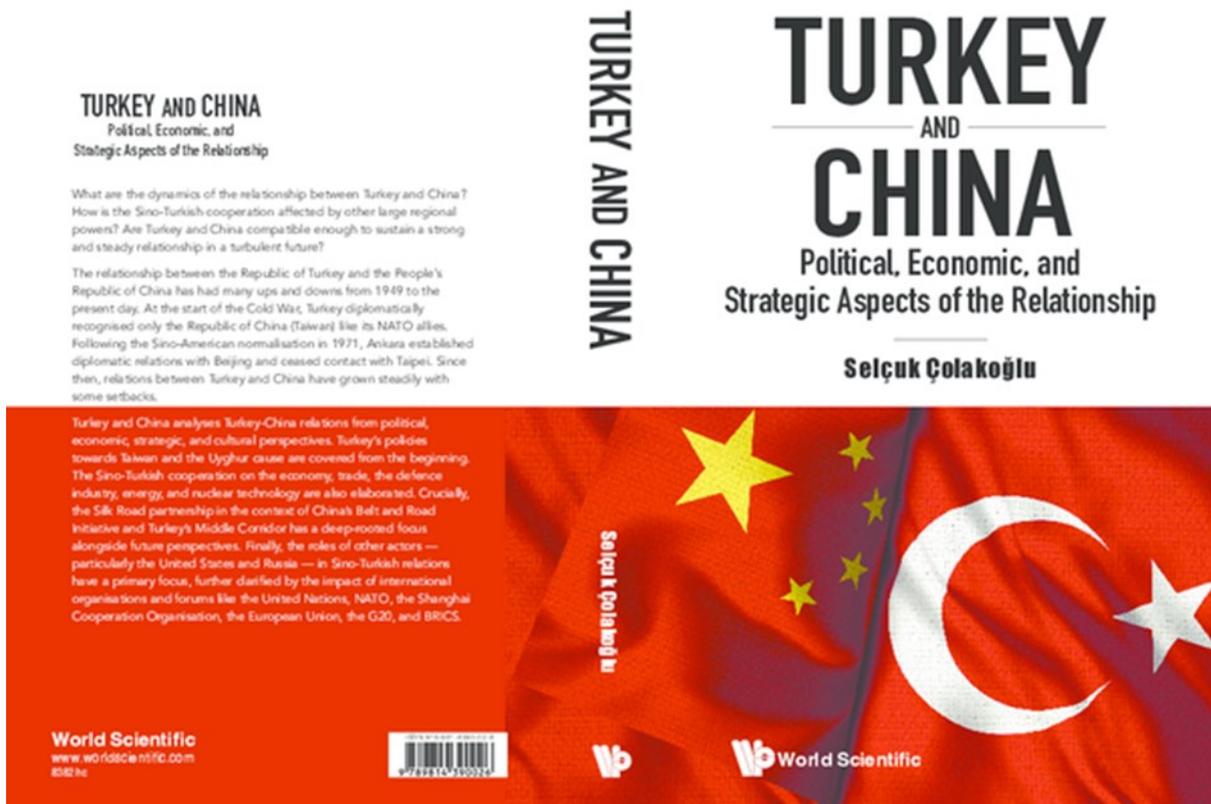
relationship with the European Union. However, the dynamic of the migration flows can also represent a vulnerability to its domestic policy. How do you see this on a medium and long term?

Turkey's economy has been in decline for the last seven years in a row. Turkey's GDP was around \$958 billion in 2013, then it declined to \$650 billion in 2020 according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The Turkish lira depreciation against foreign currencies since 2018 and the pandemic has hit Turkish financial stability hard. The economic downturn and growing unemployment have been diminishing Turkey's absorption capacity for refugees. Around five million refugees will have more economic and social difficulties in Turkey. As the democratic backsliding of Turkey seems the main reason for the economic downturn, it is difficult to find easy solutions for the depressed Turkish economy.

In the current context, do you see as opportune a new association agreement with the European Union? To what extent could establishing a common, gradual agenda contribute to Turkey's integration in the European Union?

Turkey's membership process to the EU has technically continued, but no one from either side believes that Turkey will join the Union in the foreseeable future. On the other hand, Turkey has been part of the EU Customs Union except for agricultural products since 1996, and has a deep-rooted economic integration into the EU. Even the membership process itself is particularly important for Turkey, for its economic stability and credibility. Recent surveys show that around 60% of Turkish people are still in favor of EU membership. This indicates that interdependence between the EU and Turkey forces them to keep their relationship vibrant.

The revision of the 1996 Customs Union is a long-time demand of Ankara after Brussels has signed many FTAs with third countries. Some EU countries were dragging the Turkish demands in recent years. If there is another deal between the EU and Turkey, it will be a balanced approach between the refugee issue and the revision of the Customs Union. However, as long as Turkey's democratic backsliding continues, the Turkey-EU relations will have remained problematic rather than cooperative.



Selçuk Çolakoğlu, *Turkey and China: Political, Economic, and Strategic Aspects of the Relationship*, London: World Scientific, 2021.

The Ottoman Empire's Choice of Allies in World War I

James NOONE

Visegrad, at the border of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires – July 1914

*“The summer of 1914 will remain in the memory of those who lived through it as the most beautiful summer they had ever remembered, for in their consciousness it shone and flamed over a gigantic and dark horizon of suffering and misfortune which stretched into infinity.”**

Ivo Andric – *The Bridge on the Drina*

The State of the Ottoman Military in 1914

Leadership

Perhaps the most fundamental flaw in the Ottoman initial war effort was the confused state of its military leadership. The Supreme Commander of the Turkish military was Enver Pasha, the newly self-ordained “Vice Generalissimo”. Enver became a national hero in 1913 when he recaptured the city of Edirne, a former capital of the Empire, from the Bulgarians. He was a relatively junior officer at the time but being married to the sultan's niece no doubt aided his ambitions. In 1914, he purged more than 1,000 officers from the Army. Some probably were too old, corrupt, or incompetent, but others were likely competent veterans who could have trained and led the raw new draftees. Enver's senior Prussian advisor, Liman von Sanders, considered him to be a fool. The disastrous results of Enver's eastern campaigns attest to Sanders' ability to judge military talent.

Personnel

At the outbreak of war, the Ottomans quickly expanded their military forces from 200,000 to almost 1/2 million men. During the war, 2.8 million men would serve under arms which was about 12% of the population. Although impressive at first blush, it pales in comparison to all other major warring nations. Germany mobilized 13.2 million men. Russia utilized over 15 million men, France raised 8 million, and England mobilize a third of its male labor force, a significant portion of those for its powerful Navy. [1] Moreover, at that time Britain and France still had a huge pool of colonial manpower to draw on. Much of it, such as the Algerians and Indians were reluctant to be drawn into the war against fellow Muslims, but the Indian troops fought very well in Mesopotamia. Many

other crack regiments were raised, particularly among the Anglo volunteers from Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.

Infrastructure

Jeremy Salt, in “The Last Ottoman Wars” aptly describes the state of the Eastern campaign of WWI as “a modern war in its pre-modern setting”[2]. Whereas the French and Germans could rush troops almost directly to the frontline via trains, the Ottomans normally had to transit the last 100 or more miles via unpaved dirt roads which were unpassable during severe weather. Outside of Istanbul and a few other major cities in Western Anatolia, the condition of electrification, medical facilities, banking, and communications were similarly poor. Agriculture, which had been a relative strength, was decimated by the drafting of hundreds of thousands of farmers into the army. An attempt had been made to rebuild the defense industrial base, but it was still in its infancy.

Equipment

Prior to the 19th Century, the Ottomans normally made their own weapons or hired westerners to build them within the Empire. These were manufactured to a very high, if not cutting-edge, standard.[3] After having lost that technical edge to the West they did make a strong effort to modernize their weapons, using mainly German manufacturers. “Unfortunately for the Ottoman Empire, many of the recently purchased arms were lost in the Balkan Wars of 1912–13. The Ottoman Army went to war in 1914 with significant gaps in its arsenal, particularly machine guns and field artillery.”[4] The closing of the Bulgarian and Greek borders at the beginning of the war crippled the Ottoman's ability to resupply, which had a devastating effect, particularly on its artillery. Germany was eventually able to open a supply route through the Balkans, but this never provided sufficient weapons and ammunition for the war effort.

Navy

Except for naval actions in and around the Dardanelles, there was relatively little maritime combat involving the Ottomans. This was especially true after the German battle cruiser *Goeben* and a light cruiser *Breslau* fled the

* Quotation - Ivo Andric, *The Bridge on the Drina*. P. 266

Mediterranean for the safety of the Black Sea. After Gallipoli, Allied maritime operations were largely devoted to blockades managed by the British in the Aegean and the French along the northeastern and Levantine coasts of the Mediterranean. Of note, these two German warships were later sold to the Turkish Navy. This was seen as German compensation for two warships that Britain had built for the Ottomans but commandeered at the outbreak of the war. These additions gave the Ottomans naval supremacy in the Black Sea and ended all Mediterranean maritime intercourse between Russia and her allies. The Sultan's only impactful naval action was his first one. On the morning of 29 October 1914, surprised Russians in the Crimea awoke to the sound of a naval gunfire bombardment. The Ottoman Empire was successfully attacking the Russian Black Sea fleet. Up to that point the German-Ottoman treaty have been a well-kept secret. The Black Sea would become an Ottoman lake for most of the war. We will now examine the Ottoman land campaigns.

Balkan Ghosts

Although some significant combat took place in the Balkans, very little of it directly involved the Ottoman military. The ghost of past Balkan atrocities rose once again, this time with the Austrians, Germans, and Bulgarians facing off against various combinations of Serbs, Brits, French, and Albanians. During the vicious 1915 campaign in the Balkan Mountains, Austrian casualties “amounted to 227,000 out of 450,000 engaged. Serbian losses were approximately 170,000 out of 400,000.”[5] Austria was forced to retreat which could have led to a catastrophic failure of German resupply lines to the Ottomans. However, first Romania and then Bulgaria were encouraged to join the war tipping the balance in the Central Power’s favor and securing its lines of communication. Greece briefly entered the war on the side of Serbia, but in a surprising move King Constantine of Greece fired his pro-allied Prime Minister and made Greece neutral for most of the rest of the war. At this point, the Allies only forward position in the Balkans was at Salonika. That beachhead became tenuous after the Greek withdrawal. In 1917, after the abdication of Constantine, Greece reentered the war on 27 June 1917, but no major offensive resulted.

Defending the Straits

Within days of Turkey’s engagement in the war, the British began a naval campaign to open the

Turkish Straits to Russian and Allied shipping. The campaign’s ultimate goal was no less than the capture of Istanbul and the withdrawal of Turkey from the war. For the Ottoman military, the unquestioned gem of its WWI military performance was its defense of the Turkish Straits. Since this is by far the most well-known aspect of its World War I participation, I will only make a few points. My major observation on both the Dardanelles and Gallipoli is how tenuous these victories had been for the Turks. Its navy was clearly no match for the Allies and particularly for the British. In February 1915, a 42-ship fleet from the West attempted to take Constantinople using naval power alone. This assault had minimal impact on the Turks other than alerting them to the need for greatly improved defenses. Months later, Churchill had assembled a huge Armada to force the passage of the Dardanelles, including 18 battleships which were the most powerful naval vessels of their time. The West’s major mistake was sailing too close to the coastal artillery defending the straits, thus taking major losses including the sinking of three battleships and the crippling of three others. Yet, according to John McDonald, “unknown to the allies, the Turks had almost exhausted their ammunition and the fleet could have proceeded to Constantinople unmolested.”[6]

Similarly, it is very well documented the Australian-New Zealand (ANZAC) amphibious landings at Sulva Bay faced a hellacious Turkish defense led by Mustafa Kemal from the high ground of the Gallipoli Peninsula. For example, when the former coal collier, now troop transport, *River Clyde*, attempted to land its ANZAC troops, only 21 of the 200 men reach the beach unscathed by Turkish bullets.[7] They were quickly bottled up in an ANZAC Cove killing zone. French and British allied invasion forces were only 10 miles away but barely, if at all, engaged. Moreover, even without French or British help, the ANZACs had come within a short sprint of taking the final ridge and controlling Gallipoli. Of course, major credit must be given to the Turkish defense which exceeded all reasonable expectations. By the time the Allies withdrew eight months later, a half million men had perished, almost equally distributed on both sides. The Allies gain nothing. The Turks had defended their homeland and earned huge prestige, but at a terrible price.

The Eastern Campaigns

In December 1914, only months after entering the war, Pasha Enver took control of the 3rd Army for

an assault on the Caucasus. Some might have thought winter was an odd time to be trekking through the mountains of eastern Anatolia, and they would have been correct. The result was eerily reminiscent of the Ottoman campaign to siege Vienna in 1529. Like Suleman, Enver was forced to leave his artillery behind in the deep snow. Both commanders' troops were soon ravaged by disease and short on food. Both then ordered their depleted forces to attack. In 1914 the target was a Russian base called Sarikamish, but unlike Suleman (who was in fact Magnificent) Enver was an amateurish field general. The attacks were terribly coordinated, so the Russians were able to decimate the attackers one at a time. Of the perhaps 100,000 men who took part in the attack 86% were lost. A German officer said the 3rd Army "had suffered a disaster for which their rapidity and completeness is without parallel in military history." [8]

Enver Pasha also had designs, no doubt encouraged by the Germans, on controlling technically neutral Persia, which at that time had arguably its weakest dynasty in its long history.

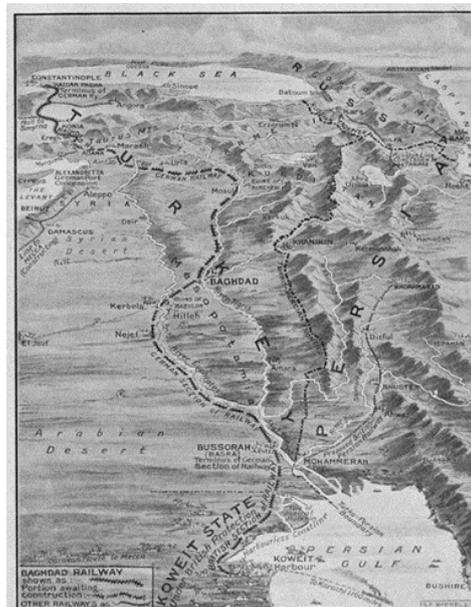
Several battles were fought with success in Western Iran between Russian and Ottoman forces. "These battles destroyed many villages, killed several hundred Iranian civilians, and caused near-famine conditions that probably resulted in the death of several thousand more." [9] The campaign lost steam when promised units of reinforcements had to be rerouted after the defeat at Sarikamish. In May of 1916, Enver Pasha launched a second invasion of Persia. This did enjoy some initial success. The Bolshevik Revolution in November 1917 eventually resulted in the Brest-Litovsk Treaty which at least temporarily resuscitated the Triple Alliance's (Germany, Austro-Hungary, and the Ottoman's) war efforts. It also freed massive numbers of Turkish troops defending against Russia in the Caucasus. Britain feared these forces would be shifted to Mesopotamia to retake Baghdad, which they had only recently recap-tured.

The Mesopotamian Campaign

In early November 1914, a British Army consisting mostly of Indian troops was eager to protect British oil supplies in the Persian Gulf. After some initial resistance, they quickly took the al Fao Peninsula and Basra, a port on the Euphrates River just north of the Persian Gulf. Their combination of land and naval artillery proved to be too much for the Ottoman defenders. British casualties were about 350 men while the Turks lost more than 1000. The Ottoman commander was so

distraught that he shot himself.[10]

At that point, the British had only two reinforced divisions at Basra. Nonetheless, a British force of 10,000 men preceded north in an effort to take Baghdad. They were met by a slightly larger Turkish force at the town of Kut. The Turkish defenders fought well but were forced to retreat in good order towards Baghdad. Although he had taken more than 1,200 casualties and received no reinforcements, the British commander was ordered to proceed north. Enroute, he encountered well-entrenched Turkish defenders with almost twice his force's numbers. His only advantage was that, for the first time, 7 military aircraft had arrived in Mesopotamia and provided air support to him. The British managed to siege and initially hold additional ground against the superiorly sized force. However, after taking almost 40% casualties they retreated back to Kut. A British relief column for Kut was skillfully blocked by the Turkish 6th Army, commanded by the German General Colmar von der Goltz. After four months and near starvation, the British at Kut surrendered more than 8,000 troops, including 6,000 Indian soldiers. In addition, the relief column suffered more than 21,000 casualties. The British eventually mustered another attempt at Baghdad using 166,000, mostly Indian, troops. The Turks then fought a very professional retreat from Kut to Baghdad. They eventually fell to the British but might have held out if the reinforcements promised them under the Yilderim plan had arrived. Those troops had been diverted to the Levant theater of operations.[11] The Ottomans eventually lost Mesopotamia but made the British pay the horrific price of 92,501 casualties.



The Levant Campaign

The Turk's Levant campaign was initially planned because logistical support for Gallipoli came from bases in Egypt, a former Ottoman client state which Britain had occupied in 1869. Moreover, if successful, it would deny the British access to the Suez Canal. The canal was the lifeline to British possessions in the Persian Gulf, and to India, "the Jewel in the Crown" of the British Empire. In 1915, the Ottoman commander Dejemal Pasha enjoyed initial success when he led a force of 22,000 men from Beersheba (in modern day central Israel) across the Sinai Peninsula. This force did not cross the canal, but their mere presence created the danger that prevented the British from shifting more troops towards Gallipoli. The military situation turned into a hot and dusty stalemate until the Arab revolt broke out further south in the now Saudi Arabian region of Hejaz. Hussein, the Grand Sharif of Mecca, proclaimed Arab independence and began to receive British assistance via Captain T.E. Lawrence (aka Lawrence of Arabia).

Following the disastrous Gallipoli campaign, British attention also shifted to the Middle East. They knew the Russian declaration of peace by Vladimir Lenin would free up massive numbers of Turkish troops in the Caucasus and Persia. Britain feared these forces would be used in Mesopotamia to retake the recently captured city of Baghdad. Therefore, an offensive along the Levantine coast would divert Turkish forces to Palestine and relieve pressure on Baghdad. Most importantly, the war in Western Europe was not going well and civilian morale was flagging. Although two previous attempts to take Gaza had failed, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George told his new commanding general, Sir Edmund Allenby, that "he wanted Jerusalem as a Christmas present for the British nation." Allenby's first step in achieving that prize would be to dismantle the Turk's Gaza-to-Beersheba line of defense. Once this was achieved and Jerusalem captured, the Ottoman defenses in the Levant began to crumble.

A DIME Analysis

Now that we have established the baseline on Ottoman military capabilities in 1914 and also have reviewed their actual performance during the war, let us examine the wisdom of their decision to become a belligerent by assessing the following factors: diplomacy, intelligence, the military, and the economy.

Diplomacy

Why did the Sublime Porte[12] choose to align with the Germans? In "The Fall of the Ottomans", Eugene Rogan argues "German and Ottoman friendship ran relatively deep." [13] He cites the 1898 state visit by Kaiser Wilhelm II as a turning point. The Kaiser pledged perpetual friendship, perhaps because he calculated that the 300 million Muslims who venerated the Caliph might make for good allies. The Germans wanted to make Constantinople their base for a jihad (holy war) against the British. Moreover, the Ottoman territories could be a significant obstacle between Britain and its most critical colony, India, while also letting the Germans enter the great game in Central Asia. For both these and economic reasons, by 1911 the German ambassador to the Sublime Porte referred to the Ottoman as being a German, "political, military, and economic sphere of interest." [14]

Germany's main strategic objective was to draw Russian resources away from its east-ern front. The German-Ottoman relationship had been built over the course of decades as German engineers contributed to the development of railroads in southeastern Europe, Turkey, and the Middle East. Of course, the Germans also would benefit from any difficulties the British experienced in their holdings in India, Mesopotamia, the Persian Gulf, and Egypt.

Within a week of the war's declaration, a German archaeologist named Curt Pruffer arrived in Istanbul. Although truly an accomplished archaeologist, he was also a German spy. He would later be named the German "Lawrence". To his surprise, the German ambassador and military attaché told him there were great divisions within the Sublime Porte on whether to join the German war effort. Moreover, the attaché assessed the Turks to be militarily weak. He especially noted the lack of adequate defensive preparations in the Dardanelles. Nonetheless, both men wished to persuade the Ottomans to join the German war effort, even though they assessed that in the Sublime Porte only the Pro-German Turkish war minister, Enver Pasha, actually favored such a move. [15]

Germany said Turkey, "was expected not only to defend the Straits and to protect her quarters at great distances, but conquer Persia, make Egypt independent, prepare for the emergence of independent states in the Trans-Caucuses, threaten India from Afghanistan if possible, and in addition furnish active assistance in the European

theater.”[16] In short, Germany thought it had much to gain. [17],[18]

These factors made the Ottomans an attractive ally for Germany. But why did the Sublime Porte decide on this risky alliance? Talat Pasha, the Minister of Interior, thus described the Ottoman diplomatic situation in 1914, “Turkey needed to join one of the country groups so that it could organize its domestic administration, strengthen and maintain its commerce and industry, expand its railroads, in short, to survive and to preserve its existence.”[19] Based on that reasoning, with its resources largely drained after years of fighting in the Balkans and in Libya, the Ottoman Empire would need an alliance with European powers, but which ones?

Certainly, the Ottoman leadership’s personal preference played a large part in siding with Germany. Enver Pasha had conducted his military studies in Germany and spoke German.[20] As noted above, they had also benefited significantly from German investments and infrastructure projects. The Ottoman Empire also entered the war with the hope of recovering some lost Balkan territories. Yet another factor must have weighed on the Sultan’s mind. Germany was encouraging Romania and Bulgaria to join the Central Powers. Therefore, if the Ottomans were to side with the Triple Entente, they could immediately have both Russia and Balkan armies on their doorsteps. Its remaining toehold in Europe would have been threatened.

The Turks’ dream was that with powerful allies some of the lost territories of the Empire could be recovered and its status as one of the major actors of European politics could be restored. That said, they did not have many reasonable alternatives for allies. Almost up to the outbreak of war the Ottomans were cultivating a potential alliance with the British, French, and the Russians. Surprisingly, late in the Summer of 1914, Enver was still negotiating an alliance with the Russians, even after they had already signed a secret treaty with the Germans on August 2nd. [21] However, Russia was their historical enemy and France was a close ally of Russia. Their best hope of entering that alliance would have been with British sponsorship.

Since the Crimean War (1854-56) the United Kingdom had been a major proponent for sustaining the Ottoman Empire which was also known as the “Sick Man of Europe”. In 1908 the secular “Young Turks” felt deep ideological ties to the West. However, more conservative Turkish

nationalists were skeptical, pointing to a string of Muslim territorial losses to European nations in the Balkans and the Italian invasion of modern-day Libya. Moreover, the Sublime Porte was also concerned by the historical Russian desire for Turkish lands, especially the strategic access to the Mediterranean Sea which could be afforded by control of the Turkish Straits. In the end, the British assessed the Turks would not add much to the Allied war effort and might, in fact, be a drag (by that same reasoning, they underestimated the Turkish forces at Gallipoli, as well as in the Levant and Mesopotamia).

Intelligence

From a military intelligence (MI) perspective, neither side had been well prepared prior to the outbreak of war, although Turkish military intelligence capabilities are difficult to judge. Very little has been written in English on this subject. Few of the relevant Turkish documents have ever been translated into English. The topic is, however, covered in a book entitled *Yildirim*, published in 1920. Written by a former member of the Turkish General Staff, it covers the involvement of the Turkish *Yildirim* (Thunderbolt) Army Group in their Levant Campaign.[22]

Initially, the Turks were almost totally dependent on German technical intelligence. Turkish assessments in *Yilderim* indicate they had weak MI analytical capabilities. In sharp contrast, deception and counterintelligence (CI) were Turkish strengths and an Ottoman tradition. They were particularly good at camouflaging military locations such as artillery batteries, although this became less useful as the allies increasingly relied on high fidelity aerial imagery rather than the visual observations of pilots. By 1915, the Ottomans had already put a clamp on outgoing communications. The Germans attempted to stir up Arab revolts against British authority. This in turn led to a robust British counterintelligence (CI) presence. Realizing the need to highlight issues of more local concern and to inject Anti-Western messaging. The German spy, Curt Prufer created seven Pro-Turkish, Arabic-language newspapers and set up propaganda rooms in major cities in which the locals could view this material. His goal was no less than a jihad.

As it deployed against the Ottomans, most of Britain’s intelligence capabilities and processes were modern, but its official knowledge of the Ottoman Empire was almost non-existent. In 1929, Sir Winston Churchill wrote in *The Aftermath*, “I can recall no great sector of policy about which the

British government was less completely informed than the Turkish". The reasons for such ignorance by British politicians are unclear. For example, British admiral Arthur Limpus had been reorganizing the Turkish Navy right up to the outbreak of World War I.[i] In fact, he served as Commander in Chief of the Ottoman Navy. Clearly, there were at least some senior officials in Britain with a deep understanding of the Turkish military. Yet, Lord Kitchener had so little regard for the Empire's forces he made little effort to study its tactics or capabilities. Fortunately for the British, they did actively pursue British civilians who could offer deep insights into the Arab world. Unfortunately, the government also set up convoluted intelligence structures for Expeditionary Forces. This problem first raised its head at Gallipoli. Communications were haphazard and the Allied maps of the Peninsula were both out of date and inaccurate.

The British soon developed very active spy networks, using Bedouin across the desert and Jewish settlers of Palestine along the coast. Captain Lawrence fed invaluable HUMINT reports into this network and his Bedouin also benefited from it.^a

The Germans were initially more technically proficient in Signals intelligence (SIGINT) and clearly had communication security superior to that of the British, but that changed as the war progressed. British and French spy ships started collecting SIGINT while patrolling the Mediterranean coast and reconnaissance aircraft plucked it from the sky. A prized British possession was a high-tech device called a Wire-less Compass. Modified for military use by the famed scientist Guglielmo Marconi, the compass enabled intelligence officers to locate the source of enemy radio transmissions. It was particularly useful in identifying and targeting Ottoman military headquarters.¹⁵

Perhaps surprisingly, this war had an early version of communications intelligence (COMINT). Both sides tapped into newly erected telephone lines and listened to unsecured conversations.[23] In sum, British military intelligence was initially heavily flawed, but it improved over time and eventually gave the Allies a decisive edge. By 1918, German-Turkish intelligence could only be deemed as totally inadequate.

Military

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the formerly dominant Ottoman military had deteriorated enough

that the word "Ottoman" was not even mentioned in Carl von Clausewitz's 1832 classic military treatise, *On War*. Perhaps their greatest weakness was a scotoma concerning the individual Ottoman soldier's capability vis-a-vis the West. After close observation of the Turks, the great Prussian General von Moltke wrote, "A Turk will concede without hesitation that Europeans are superior to his nation in science, skill, wealth, daring and strength, without it ever or occurring to him that a Frank[24] might therefore put himself on par with a Muslim." [25] As a direct result of such shortcomings, they lost most of their European territories. By allying with Germany, Enver Pasha's grandiose vision of enlarging the Empire seemed obtainable. Using this "carrot" the Germans pushed the Ottomans beyond their military capabilities, for example by encouraging reckless campaigns into Persia and against the Suez Canal. Thus, overextending the Turks and contributing to a weekend state by the end of the war.

Quality military leadership did sustain the Turks for much of the war and goes well beyond Mustafa Kamal's famous order to have his men "die" at Gallipoli. Competent German advisors such as General von Sanders at Gallipoli stood in sharp contrast to Enver Pasha's botching of the Eastern Campaigns. The talents and dedication of the broader Turkish officer corps should not be underestimated. Ottoman military training produced many fine officers. "The military system, despite the minimal attention of historians, pre-dated the civil system and was always better funded and more carefully organized." [26] Who knows how many of Turkey's best and brightest young officers died quite early in the war while defending the Turkish straits? [27] How many more sage veterans had been purged by Enver in 1914? Had Enver Pasha paid greater heed to his senior staff's professional military advice, the outcomes in the Caucasus and the Levant could have been much more beneficial.

In many ways the Ottoman military performance exceeded expectations despite poor political leadership, weapon and manpower shortfalls, and logistical nightmares. One must not forget that they were greatly war weary even before the Archduke's assassination. Eugene Rogan noted, "In the aftermath of the wars in Libya and the Balkans, men of military age have been discreetly fleeing the Ottoman Empire to avoid the draft. In 1913 immigration to North America and South America increased by 70% over previous years. American Council officials claimed that most immigrants

were young men evading military service.”[28]

The Ottoman leadership also had misplaced strategic military priorities such as protecting “railroads to nowhere”. Of note, T.E. Lawrence strongly supported keeping the rail line to Medina open. He correctly estimated the Turks would make the error of using 20,000 men to guard the line. Those soldiers would therefore not be able to be deployed against the British elsewhere.

Economic

In *Arming the Sultan: German Arms Trade and Personal Diplomacy in the Ottoman Empire Before World War I*, Naci Yorulmaz assessed the Ottoman arms industry as largely self-sufficient for the first 3/4 of the 19th century, albeit producing inferior quality weapons. From that point up through World War I, Germany managed to dominate the production of Ottoman arms. Yorulmaz argues German sales successes resulted not from the quality of the German weapons (which was in fact quite good), but rather from personal bonds between senior German and Ottoman officials. Germany's industrial might at the beginning of World War I was further enhanced by the capture of the French industrial heartland. The Central Powers were generally quite efficient, squeezing as much as they could via “siege economies”. Germany also provided much more than just political support. It had been very active in trying to both modernize and organized the Ottoman army and had made major financial investments in the Ottoman economy and infrastructure. The most famous of which were the aforementioned rail line from Berlin to Baghdad and a lesser, though important, route down the Levant with an objective of reaching Mecca. Of note, the first train for Berlin left Baghdad on June 1st, 1914 just days before the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand.

A longer war definitely favored the Allies. Britain at that time controlled almost 20% of the earth's surface and the Triple Entente powers had three times the resources and five times the population of their enemies.[29] Moreover, “Britain radicalized the war, for it fought differently from the continental belligerents as the world's premier naval power with control of sea lanes, coaling station, and underwater telegraph cables, it used economic warfare proactively as a means to strangle its enemies.”[30] That was all before the rising industrial powerhouse, America, even entered the war.

Economically, by 1914 the Ottoman Empire was a mere shadow of its former greatness. Its control

over major trade routes had long ago dried up as had the taxes and booty derived from its voracious territorial expansion. Prior to the war, a third of all Ottoman tax revenues was already being used to repay crushing foreign debts.[31] Tax revenues dropped by 20% and most European banks started recalling their loans within months of mobilization. [32] Moreover, mobilizing a major slice of the male labor force had predictably devastating impacts on the Ottoman's agricultural productivity, as well as its already unimpressive industrial capacity. These factors, compounded by Allied maritime and land-based control of trade routes, increasingly starved the Ottoman of the resources needed to support both the military and the civilian populations.

Conclusions

The Ottoman's loss in World War I was not necessarily a foregone conclusion. Yet, it seems to be the logical progression in a decline which had begun with the unsuccessful second siege of Vienna in 1683. At that point, the Empire had achieved its greatest territorial gains in Europe. It would subsequently spend centuries dealing with the technological, economic, and military ascendance of the West.

Diplomatically and culturally the Ottomans misplayed their two “key cards,” its Sultanate and Caliphate. Early in the war, the Ottomans rounded up and executed Arab intellectuals and Muslim leaders in Beirut and Damascus. With their German allies, they terrorized and alienated Muslim, Jewish, and Christian villagers. In sharp contrast, a more culturally attuned Lawrence successfully argued against a massive allied invasion force which would be seen as another crusade. He then rallied Muslim Bedouins to his side and made them a significant unconventional force. Similarly, as his Levant campaign closed in on Jerusalem in 1917, General Allenby ordered no artillery be fired at the city. The leader of the first Christian army to enter Jerusalem since 1087, did so humbly and on foot. He guaranteed access to the holy sites to all religions and the only flag he let fly over the city was that of the Red Cross.[33]

There were certainly pockets of outstanding Turkish military performances such as the Gallipoli and Mesopotamia campaigns, however, any objective assessment of the Ottoman military in 1914 should have led to a decision to remain neutral during the war. Even with an infusion of experienced German senior officers, the military was neither equipped, nor trained, nor possessed of sufficient military intelligence to be successful in

an early 20th Century military conflict. It is certainly true that several of the Western allies also had severe military weaknesses, but this is where the economic aspect of the DIME analysis is so critical. The Ottomans, and even the Germans, did not have a sufficient resource base to win a protracted war. In sum, they were not well prepared for a true Yilderim (lightning) war which they would need to win before the West could fully mobilize and attract the Americans onto their side. They also did not have the manpower, industrial base, nor the political leadership to be successful over the longer term. The Ottoman decision to go to war led to the greatest loss of civilian life of any of the participants in World War I (20%) and the creation of twenty-seven successor states at last count.[34] I have to wonder if an early defeat in the Dardanelles might have actually been beneficial for the Ottomans. Clearly, given the Western avarice chronicled in Sykes-Picot another documents, the Ottoman Empire would not have survived intact. Yet, it could have been spared almost four more years of devastating personnel and economic losses. It would have also severed German supply lines and taken tremendous pressure off of British possessions in Egypt, the Persian Gulf, and South Asia. An early withdrawal could have shortened the overall length of the war and dampened Allied thirst for vengeance in the dismembering of the Anatolian heartland. A rising Russia could have also given the war weary French and British incentive to prop up the non-threatening "sick man" for at least a bit longer. Such a scenario would have almost certainly precluded the rise of Attaturk and taken the Turks on a significantly different path than they experienced in the 20th and early 21st century.

What might have happened if the Ottomans had allied with the West? Certainly, no one could have foreseen a "Black Swan" event such as the Bolshevik revolution. Could anyone have reasonably predicted America's eventual entry into the war? Regardless, a Western alliance certainly would have avoided the devastating Turkish campaigns at Gallipoli, with the Russians, and in the Middle East. True, the Ottomans would still have had a Balkan front, especially after Bulgaria aligned with Germany, but consider how much pressure even a fraction of the eventual 2.8 million men in the Ottoman army could have put on Germany. Combine this with the effect of Russia and Britain not having to commit troops to a Turkish front. This would have almost certainly have led to a quicker allied victory. Perhaps the

Bolshevik Revolution, which was partially caused by Russia's huge military manpower losses, never takes place. But this is all speculation on possible alternate histories.

What does seem clear is that three basic paths were open to the Ottomans in the summer of 1914: a) ally with the West, b) ally with the Central Powers, or c) remain neutral. The first was problematic given a lack of enthusiasm by Britain and France. But only one of the three paths was likely to lead to disastrous consequences for the Empire. Unfortunately for the Turks, that was the path the Ottomans chose.

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FOOTNOTES

[1] Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, p. 57

[2] Salt, *The Last Ottoman Wars*, p. 5

[3] For example, the massive cannons used against the walls of Constantinople in 1453 were designed and built by a Hungarian named Urban.

[4] Weapons of the Ottoman Army - The Ottoman Empire | NZHistory, New Zealand history online

[5] Ernest and Trevor Dupuy, *The Encyclopedia of Military History*, p. 942

[6] John McDonald, *Great Battlefields of the World*, p. 138.

[7] Michael E. Haskew, *Great Military Disasters*, p.75

[8] David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*, p.121

[9] Iran and the First World War, www.iranreview.org/content/Documents/Iran-and-the-First-World-War.htm

[10] Salt, p. 186

[11] Dupuy, p. 952-975

[12] The Sublime Porte was basically the most senior level of the Ottoman government.

[13] Eugene Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*, p.34.

[14] Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, p.335

[15] McKale, Curt Profer: German Diplomat from the

Kaiser to Hitler, p.26

[16] Ahmad, *The Young Turks and the Ottoman Nationalities*, p.127

[17] In *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*, Paul Kennedy argues that the German decision to seek an alliance may have actually backfired on the Kaiser. Although controlling the straits stop Russia from exporting grain and importing munitions, Kennedy notes that Russia did not have very much excess grain nor were there munitions to spare in the West [17].

[18] The Turkish Straits are probably the least important of Alfred Thayer Mahan's strategic naval chokepoints. The narrowness of the Straits makes them relatively easy to mine and the power of the British Navy could have stopped any power projection from the Turkish Navy into the Mediterranean. Granted, possession of the Straits did maintain communication and logistical links between Berlin, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and the Levant.

[19] Alan Woods, *The First World War: A Marxist Analysis of the Great Slaughter* (2019) ch. 8.

[20] Henry P. Williams III, *East and West: Where the Twain Meet* (2019) New Degree Press p.215

[21] Salt, p. 172

[22] The author, Husayn Husnu Emir, said he was inspired to write the book because he previously could only learn about Turkish military history by reading the works of foreigners.

[23] The encryption used to counter this threat mainly consisted of time-honored letter substitution codes, but the addition of a second layer of mathematical encryption guaranteed much higher security.

¹⁷ The resulting improvement in COMSEC led to a requirement for increasingly sophisticated code breakers.

[24] "Frank" was a generic Turkish reference to Europeans dating from the time of the Crusades.

[25] Keegan p.39

[26] Michael Provence, *The Last Ottoman Generation*, p.18

[27] The Ottomans held no monopoly on senior military incompetence. Prior to the war, a Turkish general had major concerns about confronting British soldiers, who they assessed to "fight like tigers". In reply, a German general reportedly said, "True, but they are led by donkeys". The unquestioned low point of British leadership took place at Gallipoli. British mismanagement of the amphibious landings and subsequent battles goes down as one of the greatest military disasters of all time. Winston Churchill was hardly an unbiased observer of this campaign, but he was able to aptly characterize the decision of General Sir Charles Monroe to evacuate the Peninsula, "he came, he saw, he capitulated." [27]

[28] Rogan, p. 54

[29] Alexander Watson, *Ring of Steel*, (Basic Books, 2014), P. 208

[30] Ibid

[31] Salt, p. 190

[32] Rogan, p. 57

[33] John Thom Spach, *Allenby in the Last Crusade*, *Military History Magazine*. March 1996, pages 27-28.

[34] Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914: The Ottoman Empire in the First World War* <https://www.insightturkey.com/book-reviews/the-Ottoman-road-to-war-in-1914-the-Ottoman-empire-and-the-first-world-war>

Defense Reform in Ukraine: The Leadership Challenge

Volodymyr HAVRYLOV



Source: Euromaidan Press

The Russian military buildup along the Ukrainian border in March - May 2021 was another reminder of Ukraine's urgent need to reform its defense and security sector. And yet, despite the continued tense situation in the region, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy failed to mention anything about the country's defense and security reforms while announcing his administration's priorities during his annual press conference on May 20. This passive stance of the senior political leadership regarding military problems is felt in the slow-paced change in the Ukrainian defense and security sector despite assistance from foreign advisors. A lack of initiative, low motivation, incompetence, and pervasive "Soviet thinking" in the top ranks of the Armed Forces continue to hamper Ukrainian military reforms.

The latest "National Security Strategy of Ukraine" was approved on September 14, 2020 (see EDM, September 24, 2020), months overdue; and the "Military Security Strategy" was only adopted on March 25, 2021 (see EDM, May 25, 2021). The reform of the territorial defense system, which has not changed since 2013 and no longer meets current challenges, has also been delayed (see EDM, February 23, 2021). The reason is the incompatibility of the proposed models with the available resources - an echo of analogous struggles of Soviet planning methods. The first draft law on territorial defense (Rada.gov.ua, December 16, 2020) was returned by the Ukrainian parliament's budget committee for revision in April 2021 due to "inadequate financial and economic

calculations" (Rada.gov.ua, April 14, 2021). Financial experts were unable to determine where to find the additional \$500 million needed to create and maintain territorial defense forces when even the current Armed Forces' levels were being underfunded.

On May 25, 2021, the president of Ukraine submitted a draft law "On the Fundamentals of National Resistance" with his proposed reforms to the Parliament (Rada.gov.ua, May 25, 2021). This version anticipates an increase in the size of the Armed Forces along with additional defense appropriations. The current 2021 Ministry of Defense budget is approximately \$4.2 billion, 74 percent of which is designated for servicing personnel and training, while 26 percent goes to the development of weapons and infrastructure (Armyinform.com.ua, April 14). This allocation is closely in line with the defense expenditure structures of some North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries, like Italy or Greece (Nato.int, March 16). However, a further increase in the defense budget is unrealistic without corresponding economic growth. Therefore, Ukraine's military-political leadership has no choice but to look for other, more creative and economically stable models of defense organization. The process may also require a qualitatively different leadership.

The transition to new, NATO-compatible defense procurement procedures, as required by the Ukrainian law "On Defense Procurement" (Rada.gov.ua, July 17, 2020), is being executed slowly, again due to the human factor. The government issued corresponding regulations only in April 2021, and President Zelenskyy approved the basic indicators of the state defense order for 2021-2023 only on March 30, 2021. This will inevitably lead to a rush in defense procurement and inefficient use of already limited resources in 2021. The planning document "Implementation of the Lessons Learned Doctrine" (Ukrmilitary.com, July 15, 2020), developed with the help of NATO experts and approved by the chief of the General Staff, is progressing but only moderately—mainly due to insufficient appreciation of its significance among the service chiefs and unit commanders. All this reflects a career management system crisis that allows residual Soviet mentality to survive at the

highest levels of both the defense ministry and the General Staff.

The need for changes to personnel policy has been mentioned in Ukrainian conceptual defense reform documents since 2016. For instance, the 2016 “Concept for the Development of the Defense and Security Sector of Ukraine” provided for the “implementation of European principles of career management” in the Armed Forces by the end of 2017 and “giving preference to those educated in EU [European Union] and NATO member states” (Rada.gov.ua, March 14, 2016). None of this has been implemented, possibly because many of the country’s military leaders did not meet these standards. As of 2021, only a few Ukrainian officers in leadership positions within the Armed Forces have received military training certificates from NATO countries or are able to communicate in English (see Jamestown.org, March 25, 2021).

In the new “Military Security Strategy” of Ukraine, the issue of “the transformation of professional culture based on NATO principles and standards in defense force management systems” is not considered urgent; it appears only within a list of long-term priorities (Rada.gov.ua, April 25). As of June 2021, the Ministry of Defense’s concept for a military personnel policy is still under development.

On May 18, the expert group of the defense ministry’s Directorate of Defense Policy, charged with developing personnel policy, published an interim report pointing out that “the current personnel management system is inefficient and opaque, requires constant hands-on adjustment, [and] does not encourage the career and professional growth of service personnel” (Facebook.com/DefencePolicyDirectorateMODU, May 18). The experts stress the need to build a personnel management system based on the principles operating in the armed forces of NATO member states. Adherence to these principles will inevitably require personnel changes in the top echelons of the military leadership.

It was, therefore, quite indicative that almost immediately after the publication of the report, the Directorate of Defense Policy dissolved this group of experts and, in doing so, revealed the reluctance of the Armed Forces’ leadership to conduct reforms of the personnel management system (Facebook.com/DefencePolicyDirectorateMODU, May 20).

Ukraine’s partners in NATO are aware of this

problem and are trying to encourage the Ukrainian military-political leadership to take more active steps to reform the personnel management system. Not coincidentally, the list of prerequisites for the provision of the second half of the United States government’s military assistance to Ukraine for 2021 includes “the improvement of human resources management, including support of career management reforms” (Congress.gov, January 1).

Given its limited resources, Ukraine needs to be extremely creative in defining a model for its defense. This process requires a fundamental change in the culture of defense management and a new quality of military leadership stripped of Soviet thinking. Such a change cannot be achieved without reforming personnel policy as well as decisive leadership on the part of the supreme commander-in-chief - the president of Ukraine.

NOTE: The article was first published on 2nd June 2021 by The Jamestown Foundation.

Four Setbacks to Western Credibility in Ukraine

Vladimir SOCOR first and foremost, along with German-Russian special relations.

Part One



Laying of Nord Stream Two pipeline (Source: AFP)

Within the last three weeks, a series of decisions by leading Western powers seem to indicate a downgrading of Ukraine on the scale of Western policy priorities. Taken partly in deference to Russia, these decisions risk demotivating Ukrainian reform efforts (hesitant though these are) and eroding Western credibility in Ukraine.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has scrapped the meeting of the NATO-Ukraine and NATO-Georgia commissions that had been envisaged to be held during the Alliance's upcoming summit in Brussels. United States President Joseph Biden's administration has decided to exempt the Russian-owned Nord Stream Two subsea pipeline from US sanctions, thus effectively greenlighting that project as a favor to Russia and Germany and at the expense of other countries' interests, first and foremost Ukraine's. The German and French governments have given Kyiv reason to conclude that their position is weakening in the "Normandy" negotiations with Russia on the war in Ukraine's east. And US Secretary of State Antony Blinken gave Ukraine's concerns the short shrift when meeting with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov in Reykjavik, preparatory to a Biden-Putin summit.

Some of those decisions seem to be in line with preexisting Western policies, but mostly they seem related to the launch of a new "reset" of sorts in US-Russia relations—the second such reset in Biden's career. This initiative also tends to redefine the transatlantic consensus on a low common denominator that would accommodate Germany

Prior to Biden's overture to Putin, the US president himself as well as Blinken and the administration generally had repeatedly asserted that the Nord Stream Two project was "a bad deal for Germany, for Ukraine, for our Central and East European allies and partners... As multiple U.S. administrations have made clear, this pipeline is a Russian geopolitical project intended to divide Europe and weaken European energy security. The Biden administration is committed to complying with that legislation [US Congress – mandated sanctions]. Any entity involved in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline risks U.S. sanctions and should immediately abandon work on the pipeline" (State.gov, March 18). Washington had defined this issue all along not merely as a Ukrainian but as a European and transatlantic issue; and the administration had acted in alignment with a bipartisan majority in Congress.

On May 19, however, the Biden administration announced its decision to "waive" those sanctions – i.e., exempt the Gazprom-owned Nord Stream 2 AG project operating company from sanctions. Timed exactly to the day of the Blinken-Lavrov meeting that "set the table" for the Biden-Putin summit, the exemption from US sanctions would allow the final stage of pipeline construction on the Baltic seabed to be completed in a matter of months. This would enable Russia to divert its natural gas export flow away from Ukraine's gas transportation system (with potentially fatal effects on this national asset), deprive Ukraine of some \$2 billion annually in transit fees (see EDM, February 1), and remove a restraining factor against Russian or proxy military operations into Ukraine's interior (see below).

Washington had not provided Kyiv with advance notice of the decision to greenlight Nord Stream Two. A writing on the wall could have been discerned when Blinken, in Kyiv on May 6, toned down the objections to Nord Stream Two, apparently reflecting the Biden administration's reconsideration of the issue (see EDM, May 6, 10).

The Ukrainian state authorities and civil society (often critical of the authorities) share a sense of alarm over the Biden administration's decision; and they view it as an unwarranted political concession to Russia.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy regards the lifting of sanctions on Nord Stream Two as a “defeat of the United States, a personal defeat of President Biden in terms of standing up to Russia [...] a major Russian geopolitical victory, and a redistribution of power and influence [in Europe].” Zelenskyy is “personally worried about possible tradeoffs” at the Biden-Putin summit affecting Ukraine, he admitted during the press conference on the second anniversary of his presidency. He had asked Blinken during his Kyiv visit for Washington to coordinate with Kyiv regarding Ukrainian issues ahead of the Biden-Putin summit (Ukrinform, May 20, 21).

Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba regards it as “a defeat of American diplomacy if Nord Stream Two is completed after all.” Kuleba has announced that Kyiv “will fight on to stop the completion of this project” (Interfax-Ukraine, May 21; Ukrinform, May 26). According to Kuleba’s immediate predecessor as foreign minister, Pavlo Klimkin, the US decision came as “a blow to the gut” to Ukraine. Nevertheless, “any signs of a crisis of confidence between Ukraine and the United States would be the worst thing that could happen at this time” (Facebook.com/PavloKlimkin.ua, May 20).

According to a widely shared view among Ukrainian officials and analysts, Ukraine’s gas transit system functions not only as an economic asset, but also as a political deterrent to full-scale Russian military aggression inside Ukraine beyond the existing conflict theater. Once this gas transit system no longer carries large volumes from Russia to Europe, serving both sides, Western Europe’s direct material stake in Ukraine’s security could decline, and Russia could become less inhibited about using its own or proxy forces to advance into Ukraine’s interior or destabilize it (Novoye Vremya, May 21; Ukrinform, May 22)

On May 20, a large representative group of Ukrainian political, cultural, and civil society figures, “gravely alarmed by the decision to waive the application of sanctions on Nord Stream Two,” appealed to the United States to reconsider this decision (Kyiv Post, May 20). On May 21, the Ukrainian parliament’s plenum appealed to both chambers of the US Congress “to use all the legislative instruments at their disposal for a full and irreversible stop to the Nord Stream Two project... The only mechanism to ensure that Russia does not use Nord Stream Two as an energy weapon is to fully block its completion and commissioning” (UNIAN, May 21). Ukraine’s just-

arrived ambassador, Oksana Markarova, is consulting with members of Congress on possible steps to block the Nord Stream Two project (Ukrinform, May 26).

The eminent analyst Mikhaylo Honchar reflects a widespread view in Ukraine’s pro-Western civil society: “They are rubbing their hands in Russia. They feel that the US White House’s sanctions-lifting is another display of weakness, after Biden took the step to call Putin... Given that the Biden administration declared the fight against transnational corruption as a priority, it looks strange that they lifted the sanctions on this Russian company [Gazprom-owned Nord Stream 2 AG] that promotes the Schröderization of European politicians” (Ukrinform, May 21).

Blinken demonstratively downplayed Ukraine’s (and others’) concerns when meeting in Reykjavik with Lavrov, so as not to risk jeopardizing Biden’s meeting with Putin. The US State Department’s readout puts Ukraine in the third place among the issues Blinken raised, after the Arctic and climate agenda and requesting the release of two US citizens held in Russia. (As Russian opposition members noted, Blinken requested the release of Paul Whelan and Trevor Reed, but merely and curtly registered concern for the health of Alexei Navalny further down the readout.) Blinken expressed “deep concern regarding Russia’s continued military deployments in and near Ukraine”; he failed to mention, however, the occupation of Crimea, the ongoing low-intensity war in Ukraine’s east (and Russia’s ceasefire breaches there), or Russia’s obstructions to commercial navigation in the Black Sea near Ukraine (State.gov, May 19).

According to the “senior official’s” briefing after the Blinken-Lavrov meeting, the US side raised these issues, in this order: Arctic, Climate Change–Paris Accords, Syria, Karabakh and Armenia–Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Iran (nuclear anti-proliferation), Korean Peninsula, and Cyber security. “Moderator: Ukraine? Senior State Department Official: And Ukraine, yeah” (State.gov, May 19).

Part Two

Along with United States President Joseph Biden greenlighting Gazprom’s Nord Stream Two project, and Secretary of State Antony Blinken giving Ukraine’s concerns the short shrift preparatory to Biden’s meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

(NATO) has unexpectedly toned down its endorsement of Ukraine's ambition to join the Alliance in the future; while Germany and France have given Kyiv reason to conclude that their position is weakening vis-à-vis Russia in the "Normandy" negotiations on the war in Ukraine's east.



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (left) with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy
(Source: Emerging Europe)

NATO has scrapped the meeting of the NATO-Ukraine and NATO-Georgia commissions that had been envisaged to be held during the Alliance's June 14 summit in Brussels. The North Atlantic Council on the ambassadorial level decided, on May 6, against inviting partner countries to attend the summit. Kyiv has pleaded in vain with NATO to reconsider this decision. Ukraine was prepared to submit yet again its case for a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) at this summit. Ukraine's MAP application is now postponed indefinitely.

This decision is hurting NATO's collective credibility (as distinct from that of certain individual member countries) in Ukraine. Membership via a MAP had been officially promised since 2008, and repeated annually since then with diminishing intent to deliver. The United States traditionally led a minority group of member countries supporting Ukraine's aspirations; but this year, the Biden administration has toned it down. Blinken communicated this change while in Kyiv in early May, but President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his closest entourage did not or could not register the message. Instead, they raised public expectations unrealistically ahead of NATO's summit. Failing expectations management generates disappointment and, potentially, NATO-skepticism in Ukraine, playing into Russia's hands (see EDM, May 6, 10).

NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoană

omitted the standard references to MAP, membership prospects, or even the Alliance's 2008 promise when receiving successive Ukrainian delegations at NATO Headquarters, ahead of the summit. Geoană, a senior Romanian diplomat, has for many years promoted NATO's enlargement and presence in the Black Sea region. NATO's readouts of those Ukrainian visits (Nato.int, May 18, 27), however, dropped those standard references, apparently reflecting a negative rethinking in the Alliance at this time. The scrapping of the NATO-Ukraine and NATO-Georgia commissions' meetings also raise questions about the North Atlantic Alliance's willingness to establish more than a token presence in the Black Sea region. Reinstating the open-door pledge in the summit's final communique will not, in itself, suffice to shore up credibility unless specific actions are indicated toward that end.

Ukrainian officials committed to the Euro-Atlantic agenda are expressing their disappointment publicly in unprecedentedly strong terms: "Thirteen years have passed since the 2008 summit's decision, and no step has been made to open NATO's door to Ukraine. That decision has been gathering dust for 13 years," Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba has remonstrated (Ukrinform, May 26). As he observed, this year would have been the most appropriate timing for NATO to approve a Ukrainian MAP, considering that Ukraine is standing up to Russia's threats. And against that background, "How can you not invite Ukraine [at least] to attend this summit? We cannot understand at all: how could you not find a format for Ukraine's attendance?" (UNIAN, May 26). And according to Deputy Foreign Minister Vasyl Bodnar, "The story about NATO's open door to Ukraine is no longer credible in Ukraine. We need a clear timeframe for the signing of a MAP and then a clear membership perspective" (Ukrinform, May 22).

A group of Ukrainian non-governmental organizations promoting Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration (and conscious of the country's unedifying performance) candidly observes in a collective statement, "NATO lacks a consensus for offering membership to Ukraine even if Ukraine carried out the reforms impeccably." This is because "some [NATO] countries are afraid of antagonizing Russia or keep trying to appease Russia; some governments are afraid of their own voters' possible reaction [to NATO enlargement]; and some do not believe in the authenticity of Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic choice. Publicly, however,

they would only speak about disappointment with the tempo of Ukraine's reforms" (Ukrainyska Pravda, May 20).

Germany and France are acting within NATO against a Ukrainian MAP, but are acting in their own name outside the European Union as mediators of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine in the "Normandy" forum. Berlin and Paris do not distinguish between the aggressor Russia and the aggressed Ukraine in the ongoing war. They even equivocate on whether Russia is a party to the conflict. This official equidistance has made it possible for Berlin and Paris to tilt *de facto* in Russia's favor in the quadripartite negotiations. But the tilt does not suffice to meet Russia's appetites, the Franco-German mediation has consequently failed, and Kyiv has lost confidence in the Normandy process.

At his recent press conference on the second anniversary of his presidency, Volodymyr Zelenskyy argued that Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Emmanuel Macron "ought to support Ukraine more strongly... Their position has become weaker vis-à-vis Russia of late." Zelenskyy attributed that weakening to the general economic situation and pressure from business interests on Berlin and Paris to ease the sanctions on Russia. (President.gov.ua, May 20).

In a German press interview yesterday (May 31), Zelenskyy complained that Berlin and Paris are sticking to a "diplomacy of caution [...] afraid to acknowledge that Russia is a party to this conflict." Zelenskyy called yet again for enlarging the Normandy forum by adding countries more apt to meet Ukraine's concerns. Unprecedentedly, he asked Germany to sell defensive military equipment, including lethal, to Ukraine. And he called for the first time on Germany and France to exert "strong pressure on Russia in the Normandy format" in order to end the war on the basis of a German-French-Ukrainian plan (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, May 31; Ukrinform, June 1).

Such complaints and pleas may be deemed unrealistic and futile. They may also serve as alibis for Zelenskyy's own quest to negotiate bilaterally with President Putin (see EDM, April 22, 28, 29, May 3). But one way or the other, appeals of this sort do speak for Ukraine, testifying to its loss of confidence in the Normandy process.

Ukraine must focus on alternatives to the ever-elusive NATO MAP and the failed Normandy process. The United States, United Kingdom and Canada have been acting as an informal group

providing invaluable assistance to Ukraine's armed forces. This effort has grown in the last few years without requiring NATO's collective political approval. Ukraine can, thus, seek the continuing expansion of military assistance from this informal coalition of the willing. Ukraine also needs US political engagement for conflict-settlement in Ukraine's east in line with Ukraine's interests, therefore to discard the Minsk and Normandy processes. The Biden administration, meanwhile, has unpredictably swerved to another "reset" of relations with Russia. Pursuing this reset while still practicing *de facto* containment will be a test on this administration.

NOTE: The article was first published in Eurasia Daily Monitor (EDM) Volume: 18, Issue: 85 (Part One) and Issue: 86 (Part Two)

Blinken's Debut in Ukraine: A Case for Managing Expectations

Vladimir SOCOR

Part One



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy (left) and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Kyiv, May 6
(Source: Reuters)

Antony Blinken is visiting Kyiv today (May 6) on his first bilateral visit as US Secretary of State to a European country (Ukrainyans Pravda, May 6). This choice should have been foreordained in view of Ukraine's pivotal significance to the power balance in Europe and the containment of Russia.

Should the Joseph Biden administration confirm the containment goal as part of its overall strategy in Europe, it will be able to take the lead in developing a strategic partnership with Ukraine on foundations laid during the Donald Trump administration. The latter supplied lethal military equipment that had previously been withheld to Ukraine and launched major training programs for the Ukrainian army, drawing on bipartisan Congressional backing. The Trump administration also moved decisively with bipartisan support to block Gazprom's Nord Stream Two pipeline project, adverse to European energy security generally and Ukraine's national interests in particular.

Developing a full-fledged US-Ukraine strategic partnership under the Biden administration would presuppose continuity with those policies on military assistance and energy security. It also presupposes Washington's return to mentoring and supporting Ukraine in the diplomatic negotiations aimed at ending Russia's occupation of Ukrainian territories. The appointment of a US ambassador in Kyiv is also long overdue.

Those are the expectations that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the government, and civil society in Ukraine have voiced since the Biden administration took office and that were presented to Blinken in Kyiv today (Ukrinform, Unian, May 6).

Some of Kyiv's expectations confront the United States with the problem of expectation management. Conversely, Zelenskyy's delusional hopes to end Russia's aggression through bilateral negotiations with President Vladimir Putin (see EDM, April 28, 29, May 3) necessitate hands-on US mentoring in Kyiv before any damage is incurred.

In the run-up to Blinken's visit, Ukrainian officials from Zelenskyy on down redoubled calls to add the United States to the existing "Normandy" format of negotiations (Russia, Ukraine, Germany, France). It is a sign of President Zelenskyy's nervousness and impatience to "end the war" that he is reaching out directly to the Kremlin while asking the US to join the Normandy format at the same time (The Financial Times, President.gov.ua, April 26).

Adding the United States to the Normandy format is not only impossible but would harm Ukraine's interests if that move were achieved. Moscow would undoubtedly veto Washington's entry into this group. Berlin and Paris would also oppose it for reasons of their own. They would not want to end up in Washington's shadow if the latter joins the Normandy group. German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron are deeply invested politically in the Normandy process: the exiting Merkel for a career-crowning success, the re-electable Macron for seizing the center-stage from Merkel and playing mediator between Europe and Russia.

On the other hand, should Washington hypothetically be accepted into the group, it would have to take into account Berlin's and Paris's cautious, concession-prone attitude toward Moscow. This would require Washington to adjust its position to a lower common denominator with Berlin and Paris. Furthermore, if admitted into the Normandy process, the United States would have to adopt the "acquis" of documents that form the basis of this seven-year process, beginning with the Minsk "agreements" aimed at reinserting the Russian-controlled Donetsk and Luhansk back into

Ukraine on Russian-imposed terms. Ukraine would be far better off if the United States resumes an active diplomatic role unencumbered by the Minsk “agreements” and the Normandy *acquis* (Tetiana Sylina, “Non-Format,” *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia*, April 27).

US diplomat Kurt Volker performed outstandingly as Special Representative in negotiations outside the Normandy format—albeit in consultation with Berlin and Paris—from July 2017 through September 2019. The Special Representative’s post became, however, a collateral casualty to Washington’s political turmoil. Ukrainian officials hope for a US Special Representative to be appointed who might emulate Volker’s performance. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba has expressed hope that the State Department would itself select and appoint that special representative (RFE/RL, May 2).

The post of US ambassador in Kyiv has been vacant for the last two years. To speed up the ambassadorial appointment, some Ukrainian officials suggest elevating the current *chargé d’affaires*, Christina Kwien, to a full-fledged ambassador, so as to obviate the lengthy nomination and confirmation process in Washington. Ukrainian parliamentary leaders proposed this solution during their meeting with Blinken and his delegation today (Ukrinform, May 6).

Part Two



Source: Odessa Journal

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his closest entourage sometimes raise public expectations of what the United States can deliver to Ukraine to unrealistically high levels. Furthermore, they tend to discount the close relationship between what the US is actually delivering to Ukraine and the latter’s

own performance on economic and governance reforms. These twin tendencies of Zelenskyy’s team can generate public disappointment after undue expectations, confronting the US with a problem of expectation management in Ukraine (see Part One in EDM, June 6).

President Zelenskyy has decided that Ukraine would ask the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to initiate the process of adopting a Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Ukraine at the Alliance’s upcoming summit (June 14). Zelenskyy publicly asked the visiting US Secretary of State Antony Blinken for Washington to support Ukraine’s move at this summit. Zelenskyy’s closest adviser, Andriy Yermak, announced after the talks, “We have received again today [May 6] the confirmation of full US support for Ukraine to receive a MAP” (Ukrinform, May 6). This goal, however, remains unrealistic due to entrenched opposition in much of Western Europe, which US support, no matter how persistent, is unlikely to overcome any time soon. Taking this fact into account, Blinken as well as the State Department’s briefings on his visit used the general term “Euro-Atlantic aspirations” (State.gov, May 5–7) rather than referring specifically to a Membership Action Plan. Unduly raising public hopes in a MAP year after year can only result in another disappointment and, ultimately, NATO-skepticism in Ukraine, playing into Russia’s hands.

Fortuitously, on May 6 (the day of Blinken’s Kyiv visit), the North Atlantic Council at the ambassadorial level decided that NATO’s June 14 summit in Brussels will be held without the attendance of partner countries such as Ukraine (Ukrinform, May 8). The US and a few member countries are set to promote Ukraine’s aspirations at the summit in Ukraine’s absence. Meanwhile, Kyiv has left the post of Ukraine’s ambassador to NATO vacant since August 2019. For their part, NATO officials suggest that Ukraine should make best use of its recently (since June 2020) gained status as an Enhanced Opportunities Partner (EOP). This is no substitute for a MAP, however; neither has EOP’s relevance to Ukraine been fully tested in practice. Ukraine’s main source of military equipment, assistance and training is not NATO as such, but the United States on a bilateral basis as well as a coalition-of-the-willing comprised mainly of the US, the United Kingdom and Canada. These arrangements outside NATO’s official framework (thus, not requiring its collective political approval) look set to continue and potentially expand.

According to Blinken in Kyiv, the United States is prepared to expand security cooperation and defense assistance to ensure that Ukraine has the means to defend itself against Russian aggression (RFE/RL, May 6). Ukrainian officials submitted specific requests, including for air defense systems, during this visit. Yermak had earlier ventured to raise the level of expectations, publicly calling on the US to deploy or deliver Patriot missiles to Ukraine, apparently without prior coordination with Washington (Censor.net, April 13).

The Ukrainian parliamentary leader of the pro-presidential Servant of the People party, David Arakhamia, brought up the possibility of a US-Ukraine bilateral agreement on strategic-military cooperation during Blinken's visit (Ukrinform, May 6). This may have lifted a curtain's corner on Zelenskyy's cryptic remark at the concluding joint briefing: "We discussed the possibility of a very serious bilateral agreement. But this is a matter for the future; it is too early to discuss details" (State.gov, May 6). The option for Ukraine to seek the status of Major Non-NATO Ally of the United States has also come up for discussion in Kyiv. Such proposals may gain added relevance for Ukraine in the aftermath of NATO's upcoming summit and will deserve serious exploration at the professional level outside the political arena.

It is a worrisome sign for Ukraine (and not only for it) that the US side has stopped short of reaffirming its strong opposition to Gazprom's Nord Stream Two natural gas pipeline project during Blinken's visit (see Part One in EDM, May 6). Such restraint is another instance of expectations management. The Joseph Biden administration seems to be procrastinating on applying the available sanctions capable of blocking Nord Stream Two. Instead, the administration seems to be deferring to German interests in Gazprom's project; and possibly also to Russia's own interests in the run-up to the Biden-requested meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Inflicting a *coup de grace* on Nord Stream Two by US sanctions might also kill the summit planned for June. According to Russia's ambassador in Berlin, Sergei Nechayev, construction work on Nord Stream Two could be completed by September, if the weather is favorable (TASS citing Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland, May 8). Completion of Nord Stream Two would heavily hit Ukraine financially and more broadly strategically. The state company Naftohaz stands to lose several billion dollars in annual revenue in that case.

Yet the Zelenskyy administration has hit its own interests and reputation in the run-up to Blinken's visit (and without regard for it) by purging Naftohaz CEO Andriy Kobolev and the Supervisory Board for obscure reasons, in violation of corporate governance norms. The president (or his entourage), furthermore, has appointed Herman Halushchenko as energy minister, notwithstanding his ties with Andriy Derkach, who is viewed in Ukraine and the US as an agent of Russian influence and has therefore been sanctioned by the United States (Dzerkalo Tyzhnia, May 7). This move has undermined the Zelenskyy administration's own arguments (otherwise undoubtedly valid) for the US to block the Nord Stream Two project.

NOTE: The article was first published in Eurasia Daily Monitor (EDM) Volume: 18 Issue: 73 (Part One) and Issue:74 (Part Two).

Coronavirus Challenging Human Rights in The Mediterranean Region: Case Study (Morocco and Turkey)

Dr. Mohammed Issam LAAROUSSI

Abstract

Since the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), new measures and policies has been deployed in the North Africa and Mediterranean region in hasty efforts to save lives and have the pandemic under control, and at the same time save economies and prepare for recovery. This global public health emergency is requiring a global response with far reaching consequences for economic, social and political lives.

The American and European countries as well have faced the most unprecedented health crisis in modern time; therefore, they were also scrambling for ways to limit the impact of such an unseen and widespread pandemic in modern days. Since the beginning of the outbreak, 87 states – both authoritarian and established democracies – have declared emergencies enforcing laws to curb the spread of the virus, which sometimes implies derogations from international human rights conventions.

In this paper, we aim to focus on Morocco`s and Turkish experiences in dealing with the pandemic and the repercussions of enforcing some of the policies on human rights. Morocco and Turkey, although they share similar approaches in handling the pandemic, and their adopted responses enforcing lockdown and curfews under the public health emergency laws, many differences in respect of human rights are obvious and we will point out through this study.

In Morocco, with the extension of the lockdown measures, Moroccans are increasingly worrisome about the political and economic implications of the pandemic. There is widespread feeling of uncertainty about the impact of the pandemic on the economic ramifications and human rights. The spread of COVID-19 provides an avenue through which the state is not only able to control and diffuse existing political tensions; but the powerful tide of nationalism, in times of insecurity, yields the ability to reinstate a renewed and shared understanding of the nation.

Turkey, a neighboring country although, under

the same impact of the pandemic, did not introduce a state of emergency. It can be said that the measures (curfews, bans on travel between cities, closure of certain business) are within acceptable limits. The recent reforms and public investments in healthcare, shows that Turkey managed to flatten the curve of infections and limiting all repercussions of the COVID-19, gained the praise and recognition from the World Health Organization, WHO, for its “vigilant, cautious” measures. Turkey’s handling of the coronavirus pandemic could have been an opportunity to reduce polarization and restore public trust in the government. Turkey has instead further restricted fundamental rights and used purposefully polarizing political maneuvers to further divide society. Instead of unity, public trust and open debate, the result is division, restriction, and censorship.

Introduction

The world is facing an unprecedented health and economic crisis as a result of COVID-19. At its core is a global public health emergency on a scale not seen for a century, requiring a global response with far-reaching consequences for our economic, social and political lives. The priority is to save lives. In view of the exceptional situation and to preserve life, countries have no choice but to adopt extraordinary measures. Extensive lockdowns, adopted to slow transmission of the virus restrict by necessity freedom of movement and, in the process, freedom to enjoy many other human rights. Such measures can inadvertently affect people’s livelihoods and security, their access to health care (not only for COVID-19), to food, water and sanitation, work, education – as well as to leisure. Measures need to be taken to mitigate any such unintended consequences. (1)

The COVID-19 crisis is a brutal reminder of the importance of ensuring lasting progress with respect to social rights enjoyment, particularly through the development of universal public health services. The pandemic shows in practical terms the indivisibility of human rights. The spread of the pandemic and the handling of the consequent new systems implemented in what seems to curb the

spread of the pandemic have shed a question mark on the balance between protection of lives and the respect of human rights. UN Secretary General António Guterres was among the first to raise the alarm about possible human rights implications of government measures to fight COVID-19.(2) As many as 87 states worldwide have declared a state of emergency to curb the spread of the virus, (3) which could imply a spread of certain derogations from international human rights conventions and violations that could go undetected.

In the North Africa and the Mediterranean region, the same measures and policies have been deployed since the spread of the virus. The European countries have faced the most unprecedented health crisis in the modern time. The coronavirus pandemic is questioning the EU capabilities to curb the crisis. The Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio urges EU unity against the coronavirus threat, defends his government's response to the epidemic despite a record death toll, and talks about missing being able to hug people. He declared that Europe must give an "unequivocal, strong and adequate" response to the coronavirus pandemic, or its future will be at risk (4).

In the North Africa, the governments have adopted emergency laws to put limitations to some human rights in order to protect lives, however many calls are rising to show a strong criticism toward authoritarian regimes that seize the opportunity to calm down the social malaise by banning all kind of social demonstrations. In this paper we aim to examine the human rights conditions during the coronavirus crisis in Morocco and Turkey, mentioning some similarities and differences between the two Mediterranean countries in dealing with coronavirus pandemic and their responses toward the respect of human rights during the lockdown.

Morocco Human Rights: The Trojan Horse

Despite being a self-styled constitutional monarchy, King Mohammed VI exercises direct or indirect control over all aspects of Morocco's government. The Moroccan monarch has proven himself to be a resilient leader who has at times promised democratic reforms. He describes his style of leadership as "change in continuity." (5)

Intissar Fakir, a fellow in the Middle East Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, noted in a recent roundtable discussion organized by the Elcano

Royal Institute, a Spanish think tank that the Morocco's Monarch strong grip on power has allowed Morocco to take swift, even drastic measures without having to go through the institutional gymnastics and partisan squabbles that sometimes characterize democratic systems. Particularly in the case of the pandemic, his hands-on involvement has contrasted with the royal palace's preferred public image. Generally, the court stays away "from the day-to-day management, even as it is clear to everyone in the country that the monarchy is in charge of all aspects of policy in the country." (6)

Action began with early border closures. Authorities shut down air and sea links with Spain and France on March 13. That same day, schools, cafes, restaurants, bars, cinemas, sports facilities and other public spaces were closed. The Supreme Council of Ulemas, Morocco's highest religious institution, which is controlled by the state, issued a fatwa, or religious edict to close all mosques. The government announced the suspension of all international flights to and out of Morocco. Rabat declared a "health state of emergency" that went into effect on March 20 and included a nationwide lockdown, along with a nightly curfew enforced by police and armored vehicles. Movement between cities was also banned.

The border closure went much further than most other countries, as it blocked Morocco's own citizens from returning home. The 100 migrants who made the desperate journey from Spain in April were just a drop in the bucket compared to the 38,000 Moroccans who have been stranded abroad, mostly in Europe. Most countries have worked to bring back their own citizens by chartering flights, leading many Moroccans who were abroad when the borders closed to feel abandoned by their country. (7)

As mentioned in the World report 2021, Morocco cracked down harder on social media commentators, artists, and journalists critical of the monarchy. Despite a press code devoid of prison sentences as punishment, authorities continue to resort to penal code articles to imprison critics. Before protests and public meetings were prohibited to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus, authorities had already banned several public meetings of opposition groups and continued to impede the activities of some human rights groups. Laws restricting individual freedoms remained in effect. (8)

Since Morocco's Hirak or protest movement

erupted in late 2016, the Moroccan Association for Protection of Human Rights, known by its French acronym AMDH has documented more than 1,000 cases of political detention throughout the country. (9) The detainees include protesters, human rights activists, trade unionists, and university students. The AMDH central bureau says hundreds have received a royal pardon, while many others have completed their sentences, leaving about one hundred currently jailed for political motives. (10)

The International law guarantees everyone the right to the highest attainable standard of health. However, restrictions on some rights can be justified when they have a legal basis, based on scientific evidence and neither arbitrary nor discriminatory in application, of limited duration, respectful of human dignity, subject to review, and proportionate to achieve the objective. (11) According to Morocco's official narrative, the Coronavirus containment measures outlined in the decrees seem to be fully in compliance with the limitations imposed by the international law on exercising those fundamental rights.

They have been adopted by law, with the legitimate aim of protecting public health from a pandemic and are both necessary and proportionate. Moroccan officials have explained that the measures, which limit social contacts, are not only adequate but have proven to be the only effective measures to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Moreover, the measures imposed by the Moroccan government are strictly limited (materially and in time) to the exigencies of the situation. (12) According to local journalists, lockdowns have made it impossible for them and for civil society activists to conduct on-the-ground research and investigations.

The United Nations Human Rights Office voiced concern about more than a dozen countries that have declared states of emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic where police have arrested or detained hundreds of thousands of people and killed others. The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet has listed Morocco, among 15 countries, as a violator of human rights during the pandemic time. Bachelet also highlighted police and other security forces in those countries "are using excessive and sometimes deadly force to enforce lockdowns and curfews."(13)

Authorities continued to impede the work of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH), the country's largest human rights group. The

AMDH said that, as of September 2020, 79 of its 99 local branches faced a situation where authorities had declined to process their administrative formalities, impeding their ability to carry out functions like opening new bank accounts or renting space.

According to the AMDH, authorities banned at least 20 public meetings, public protests and other public events called for by opposition groups or parties across the country, in January and February. The authorities banned public protests as part of a package of measures to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Inside the coalition government, the Moroccan measures have also ignited some criticism. Islamist Minister for Human Rights Mustafa Ramid has argued corruption in Morocco is no less dangerous than Coronavirus in threatening the country's security and stability. He stated: "If spread in a society, corrupts its political institutions, spoils its economic climate, and affects the principle of the rule of law and the achievement of justice... It is impossible to imagine a democracy with corruption. There are elected people circumventing and receiving bribes without leaving any traces. They may enter with zero dirhams and come out with a billion dirhams because of the absence of a legal framework for illicit enrichment. Fighting corruption cannot be achieved by establishing institutions, but rather by reviewing all legislations and ridding them of rent and discrimination between citizens." (14)

With the extension of the lockdown measures, Moroccans are increasingly worrisome about the economic implications of the pandemic. There is widespread feeling of uncertainty about the impact of the pandemic of the economic ramifications. (15) The Moroccan government sent a letter to the European Union on March 26 predicting significant losses in tourism, automobile, and textile industries in 2020. It highlighted how the EU accounts for more than 58 percent of Moroccan exports, 59 percent of foreign direct investments (FDI), and 70 percent of Morocco's tourism industry. While Morocco has not yet experienced the full effects of the virus on its economy, the expected decrease from European markets will soon be felt domestically.(16)

Morocco: Protecting Lives and Wining Hearts

Morocco's initial success was due to its government proactive actions to contain the outbreak as early as March, most notably by suspending air and maritime travel and

implementing a strict general lockdown. The lockdown and social distancing measures worked in the initial phase but have not been respected across all cities and neighborhoods since. In May, domestic actors lamented what many perceived as an unofficial partial lockdown (respected by some but not all citizens. (17)

In the first two weeks of the confinement, human rights activists spoke out against incidents of violence employed by security officers vis-à-vis people defying lockdown rules, fearing that a rise in authoritarianism was underway. (18) This may have prompted authorities to reign in officers and may explain the laxer approach in implementing lockdown rules subsequently. Overall, nine months after the outbreak hit the kingdom, the situation is drastically worse than what would have been expected in the first few months of the outbreak. Morocco's outlook in the March-April 2020 period was positive as the government seemed in control of the situation. By November 2020, the numbers of new cases and deaths had reached an all-time high which points to the situation getting out of hand. In terms of the organizational response of the Moroccan government, the decision-making process remains opaque. Experts agree that the king, the makhzen (i.e., the deep state), and the Ministry of Interior are spearheading the response, while the prime minister is more of a figurehead. (19) There seems to be lack of communication between key decision-makers in the palace and the government headed by the prime minister.

Early in the course of the pandemic, Moroccan authorities were able to implement fairly rigorous confinement orders with little or no resistance from the population. There were no large-scale protests documented in Morocco during initial stages of the pandemic. In early August, however, health care workers affiliated with the *Union Marocaine du Travail* (UMT) staged national protests demanding better wages and working conditions while protesting the government's decision to cancel their annual leave. (20) Overworked medical professionals protested again in September, a month that also saw protests by staff of the national carrier, Royal Air Maroc, following significant layoffs. By and large, protests have focused on the economic frustrations of workers rather than anger over pandemic closures or political decisions by the government.

The Moroccan authorities' pursuit of winning the hearts and the minds of their local citizens appears to be effective so far. The Coronavirus pandemic

provides an avenue through which the state is not only able to control and diffuse existing political tensions; but the powerful tide of nationalism, in times of insecurity, yields the ability to reinstate a renewed and shared understanding of the nation. Yet this approach might be short-lived considering the weak healthcare infrastructure systems and the public's low levels of trust in political institutions. Whether we see uprisings or a tighter union between the state and people remains highly contingent upon the levels of repression deployed and, more importantly, the state's ability to absorb the crisis. (21)

Turkey: Autocratic Regime on its Way

In the first phase of the crisis, Turkey had a higher number of confirmed COVID-19 cases than China, Italy or Spain reported at the same stage of their outbreaks. (22) However, Turkey has performed strikingly better in limiting the effect of COVID-19 pandemic than most of the countries in the world. Indeed, Turkey has reported 156,827 COVID-19 cases and 4461 deaths, with over 1,650,135 tests completed, and ranked 9th in total cases per one million and ranked 60th in total tests per 1 million people in the world. (23)

It is interesting to note that Turkey performs strikingly better than most of the developed countries in Europe with a fatality rate of 2.8%, recovery rate of 77.3%, and critical cases treated under Intensive Care Units (ICU) is just 0.4% of all cases (24). How has Turkey, as one of the world's fastest-growing outbreaks which could soon become like Italy, or worse (25), clearly averted a much bigger disaster and fits in the category of several countries that responded fairly quickly with testing, tracing, isolation and movement restrictions ... that have been quite effective in reducing the viral spread? (26)

The COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey has enabled the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to deepen his autocratic rule by silencing critics and rapidly passing restrictive new laws to limit dissent, Human Rights Watch said today in its World Report 2021.

In terms of rights and freedoms, the fundamental problem in Turkey is the erosion of the rule of law, which has reached unparalleled levels especially since the attempted *coup d'état* on 15 July 2016. Since then, the human rights situation has sharply deteriorated, and human rights abuses have been seen in a wide range of sectors not previously affected. Human rights defenders in Turkey undergo various forms of reprisals, discrimination,

harassment and attacks. However, it is not possible to argue that the COVID-19 pandemic particularly worsened the situation in terms of rule of law.

Turkey did not introduce a state of emergency due to COVID-19, but the main problem regarding the measures adopted in relation to the pandemic is the process of decision making. (27)

It can be said that the measures (curfews, bans on travel between cities, closure of certain business) are within acceptable limits.

A body, called the "science council", which is composed of healthcare professionals and academics, suggests the necessary measures to the government and then the government adopts the measures. However certain groups, such as the Turkish Medical Union, are not included in the science council, probably because of their dissident political position. This creates a problem in terms of transparency, pluralism and accountability (28).

Another issue regarding the measures is how they are introduced. Some of the measures, such as curfews and travel bans, bring very serious restrictions regarding fundamental rights and freedoms. But they are introduced as presidential decrees or government communiques, not as laws after parliamentary discussions.

In fact, the pandemic has added new dimensions to the day-to-day difficulties already experienced by journalists and members of the public who express their right to free speech online. It was already dangerous to speak out on social media in Turkey due to these "pre-existing conditions." Even high-school students were not spared detention after posting critical views of Turkey's government on social media (29).

Turkey remains "Not Free" in Freedom House's 2020 Freedom in the World index (30) in large part due to the level of retribution against exercising one's right to free expression. Many of those safeguards for rights protections in Turkey had been stripped away before COVID-19 took hold. In 2016, following a failed military coup attempt, over 150 media outlets were shuttered, and thousands of journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens were jailed under allegations of participation in terrorist activities (30).

However, this shift comes with significant public concerns about, and anxiety around, censorship, surveillance and untrustworthy information. Sixty-nine per cent of respondents expressed concern about the effects of censorship in Turkey, and 64 per cent revealed that they were worried about the government monitoring their online activities.

Thirty-five per cent of those who expressed concern about these issues were specifically troubled by the government's concealment of rights abuses (31).

Turkey's Tentative to Restore Public Trust

Turkey's handling of the coronavirus pandemic could have been an opportunity to reduce polarization and restore public trust in the government. The recent reforms and public investments in healthcare shows that - while Turkey did an excellent job in flattening the curve of infections, gaining praise from the World Health Organization (WHO) for its "vigilant, cautious" measures - Turkey has further restricted fundamental rights and used purposefully polarizing political maneuvers to further divide society. Instead of unity, public trust and open debate, the result is division, restriction, and censorship (32).

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has spread around the world at a time when the Mediterranean and the African regions are under great pressures of various kinds. The responses of both Morocco and Turkey to the threat of the new coronavirus, added to the international context that the pandemic is generating, have the potential to aggravate some of the existing problems. The current global emergency could turn socio-economic challenges into political crises and intensify the demands for change that are spreading through various countries in the Middle East and the Maghreb. Until an effective vaccine against the pandemic is made available, the economic and social cost of the drastic restrictions being imposed by Morocco's and Turkey's governments may be overwhelming and, ultimately, unbearable.

In fact, all the scholars cannot generate the same view about the complexity of the question of human rights during the Coronavirus pandemic.

The international human rights reports have listed Morocco, among other countries, as a violator of human rights during the pandemic. However, Morocco's strategy of containing the spread of coronavirus was praised by certain European political figures and media outlets. In the same context, the World Health Organization (WHO) highlighted the success of Morocco's vaccination campaign, congratulating the Kingdom for the progress made in this field. The same appreciation has been given to the Turkish's experience in

dealing with the pandemic, as WHO has praised the measures taken by Ankara to face the pandemic with respect to human rights. (33)

Finally, it's necessary to mention that this pandemic is affecting human life across borders, nationalities, age and color; the impact has been greatly proportional in many ways to how prompt local decision-making in handling the pandemic and enforcing policies are put in place. For Morocco and Turkey, the coming weeks and months are crucial as security governance tackles the multi-layered challenges of COVID-19. The outbreak will inevitably be defeated. Today, this pandemic offers an opportunity for serious and new thinking about the political priorities, to review the economic development reforms within national institutions, and to reconstruct a new social inquiry that enhances coordination between local business, national enterprises and upgrades Morocco's economic-political structure among its community with respect of human rights. (34)

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THE MIDDLE EAST

What Warming Egypt-Turkey Ties Could Mean for the Middle East**Eva J. KOULOURIOTIS**

Cairo's allies, from Abu Dhabi to Athens, are apprehensive about revived Turkey ties. [Getty]

Earlier in April, Turkey announced that Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu would pay a visit to Cairo next month. The trip may well be the beginning of a new chapter in Turkish-Egyptian relations that could also pave the way for changes in the wider region.

Talks between the two sides at the level of intelligence began last summer but developed diplomatically in March, when the first actual steps took place towards normalising ties which had been completely severed since Egypt's coup in July 2013.

Egypt's maritime deal with Greece last summer, which established the partial demarcation of sea boundaries between the two countries, indicated to Ankara that Cairo respected the Turkish continental shelf, leaving the door open to reconciliation, which began a process of communication between their respective intelligence agencies.

Regardless of who took the first step, the thaw in ties between Egypt and Turkey will inevitably extend to other areas in which both countries play a crucial role, at both the regional and international level.

In Libya, Turkey and Egypt support two different sides in the conflict. Ankara played an important and decisive role in ending the siege of the capital, Tripoli, and helped to tilt the balance of power in favour of the Government of National Accord (GNA).

Egypt's direct military intervention in favour of the Libyan parliament in Tobruk and General

Khalifa Haftar, meanwhile, helped to calm the conflict, leading to the signing of a general ceasefire and eventually to the formation of a joint Libyan government led by Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh and Mohamed al-Menfi as head of the Libyan Presidential Council.

Of course, these positive steps in no way mean the end of the conflict, as seen in the US annual threat assessment released earlier this month by the US intelligence community. The report cautions that the Libyan civil war will continue throughout 2021 despite political progress, and that the conflict might even escalate. The trajectory of events in Libya could, however, be closely connected to the results of ongoing Turkish-Egyptian talks.

Cairo, through its military presence in eastern Libya, is able to control developments there and the important Turkish role in Tripoli can reduce the level of any tensions that may arise. The two countries therefore have the potential to push for a political solution, while protecting their interests on the ground, in a way that no other regional or European actors involved in Libya could do.

According to officials from the two countries, the maritime border between Egypt and Turkey is a priority and a starting point for talks between both sides. This issue and its consequences will be reflected in tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, and more specifically in Athens. Following the announcement of the start of diplomatic talks between the two countries, the Greek foreign minister visited his Egyptian counterpart three times, while the Greek prime minister also met with President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Cairo. These successive visits illustrate the anxiety and fear of the current Greek government about the impact of this rapprochement on the map of the Eastern Mediterranean.

Any Turkish-Egyptian agreement on a direct maritime border between them will have three implications. The first is that a new accord, following the memorandum of understanding with Tripoli in late 2019, will support the Turkish narrative on maritime rights in the Eastern Mediterranean. The second is that there will be no maritime borders between Greece and Cyprus, while the third is the inevitability of a Turkish role in the Eastmed pipeline project to transport gas

from Israel to southern Europe.

This new reality will not be accepted by Athens, which will reject it, just as it did with the Turkish-Libyan memorandum. Greece will then try to raise the level of tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean to support its position.

Furthermore, it is likely that Greek-Egyptian relations will decline following any Turkish-Egyptian rapprochement. The fact that Egypt was not invited to a recent joint meeting of the foreign ministers of Cyprus, Greece, the UAE and Israel symbolises in a sense that this negative atmosphere has already begun.

In the wider Middle East, tensions rose in sensitive areas after Joe Biden's arrival to the White House, as Houthi militia rockets and drones hit the territory of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, from the capital Riyadh to Jizan in the south. The Iran-Israel shadow war also escalated at sea, with the possibility of a dramatic expansion, especially after Israel's attack on the Iranian nuclear reactor at Natanz. Meanwhile, nuclear talks between the US, Europe, and Iran are still pending.

This complex situation will be directly affected by the Turkish-Egyptian rapprochement. Saudi Arabia, which is taking its own steps towards normalisation with Ankara, will be more encouraged to re-establish relations with Turkey due to the need for military support, considering the situation in Yemen and tensions with Tehran. Earlier this week, Turkey said it was seeking to repair relations with Riyadh, even adding that it respected a Saudi court's decision regarding Jamal Khashoggi's killing, indicating a shift in tone for bilateral relations.

equation of the conflict with Tehran in the region. In this scenario, the starting point will be the normalisation of Turkey-Egypt relations.

Certainly, the current steps Ankara and Cairo are taking are important in beginning the process. However, it is still too early to predict the future of these talks, as the positions of both capitals are in many respects contradictory. In addition, Cairo's allies - from Abu Dhabi to Athens - are apprehensive about any rapprochement taking place, as it could undermine their strategic plans.

The Turkish foreign minister's visit to Cairo in May could be decisive; it could either be the key to ending the dispute, or could halt progress altogether.

All of this is taking place under the shadow of a new US administration that has had a negative view of Turkey since the Obama-led administration and does not see eye-to-eye with the Egyptian regime. This reality, however, is an important incentive that could also push Ankara and Cairo closer together.

NOTE: The article was first published on The New Arab World on 29 April 2021.



thenewarab.com

As the region begins to see the rebuilding of new alliances, starting with the normalisation between the UAE and Israel, which may expand to include Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, Ankara's accession to the alliance will have a significant impact on the

The Last Hours Before Returning to the Nuclear Deal

Eva J. KOULOURIOTIS

Prior to the start of the 6th round in Vienna, delegations taking part in closed-door talks between Western countries led by Washington on the one hand and Iran on the other, made a sudden pause. The widespread perception is that Washington is returning to the nuclear deal that Trump pulled out of, while the course of negotiations has taken a new direction which is to push Tehran back to the previous nuclear deal, which in turn extended the base of negotiations to include other files in the Middle East, the most important of which are Israel and Iran's influence in the region.

First of all, it should be emphasized that the confidential information that will be agreed will be particularly important in determining the course of the next four years in the Middle East in general. This conclusion can be drawn from the observation of the events before the signing of the nuclear deal in 2015, which included US and Iranian promises regarding Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen. The most important question before the next round of talks is what will be the concessions of the US and Iran, while the return to the nuclear agreement is more likely to be announced at the end of the negotiations.

Usually, when it comes to Iran, there are always files that are directly affected by any changes, plans or agreements to which Tehran is a party. One of the most important is Iran's influence in many Middle Eastern countries, plus its nuclear and missile program, and finally Tel Aviv's vision for its national security. Therefore, each issue must be read separately and the possibilities of being affected by any new nuclear deal with Iran must be analysed in detail.

Iran's Nuclear Program

First of all, it should be emphasized that in Iran there are two parties that sometimes struggle to impose their vision on each other and to convince the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. The first party is represented by the military lobby led by the generals of the Revolutionary Guards. The other lobby consists of moderates and is represented by Foreign Ministry officials, led by Javad Zarif. After the assassination of General Soleimani, the influence of the military wing was affected, in favour of the diplomatic wing. But the arrival of Biden and the Democrats in the White House has

helped diversify Tehran's mood, where the debate today is that Iran is in no hurry to return to the nuclear deal and give up uranium enrichment it has achieved in recent months. In fact, given a US government open to concessions to Tehran and without the courage to take military action, why not take advantage of this reality and push for the production of a nuclear bomb?

This debate has been and continues to be the reason for the delay in returning to the nuclear deal so far. Washington, from the first round of talks in Vienna, was ready to lift sanctions and return to the 2015 agreement, but the difference of opinion inside Iran delayed it due to a conflict that is far from the forefront between Khamenei's two wings. This Iranian internal conflict was recently made public through leaks from an interview with the Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, who seriously damaged his reputation in Iran and in the eyes of the Supreme Leader, who publicly criticized him immediately.

In light of this reality, with Iran balancing its diplomatic and military camps and delaying its decisions, Washington has been pressured to make more concessions on other issues. Most likely, Iran will publicly return to the agreement and make promises to reduce uranium enrichment, but secretly and in the underground tunnels of its nuclear power plants things will be completely different.

The Ballistic Program

This is one of the first archives to be waived by Washington and its Western allies. Discussing whether Tehran will stop developing its ballistic program has become absurd or even irrational. Iran, through the Revolutionary Guards, has expanded to Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, where it has developed production centres in all these countries. Even Hamas, which is besieged in Gaza Strip and monitored 24 hours a day by the Israeli Mossad, has been able to develop a ballistic missile program in cooperation with Tehran, as seen during the recent Gaza conflict with the Qassam 250 rockets. It is more likely that Washington will not set conditions for this program, so it is certain that development in this area will continue beyond the next agreement.

Influence in the Area

The hottest topic in the region is Yemen. The US

envoy to Yemen is still in a round of talks between Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Oman, where he met with the Houthi representative. It is clear that the Biden administration, whose first decision on the Middle East was to remove the Houthis from the Washington terrorist lists to which were included by Trump less than a month before Biden arrived at the White House. This shows that this administration is closer to satisfying the views of Tehran and its Houthi allies in Yemen in the context of any forthcoming agreement and will likely be among the undisclosed clauses. The most likely formula would be a joint government in which the Houthis have considerable influence.

In Syria and Lebanon, the situation is not very different from that in Yemen. Iran's presence in Syria, whether militarily or financially, will not change despite Israeli promises for the opposite, while Tehran will work to pressure Washington to reduce economic sanctions on Assad and his militias, and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Israel

It is important to note that the recent formation of a national unity government in Tel Aviv, without Netanyahu, is directly linked to the negotiations in Vienna between Washington and Tehran. In my

opinion, the Israeli lobby in Washington played a key role in pushing Lapid and Bennett to form a coalition government to oust Netanyahu as prime minister. The Biden administration has been confronted with Netanyahu's anti-Iranian moves since its arrival, most notably targeting the Iranian Natanz reactor despite US calls for calm and the subsequent military escalation in Gaza. All this contributed to the breach of trust between the two sides. This was clear from Netanyahu's recent statements when he stressed that "if Israel was forced to choose between its national security (meaning Iran's nuclear threat) and its American allies, Israel would choose its national security." The new Israeli government would be less confrontational with Iran and more willing to focus on domestic issues and the Palestinians.

Although the new nuclear deal may be seen by some as an opportunity to calm down and control the tense atmosphere in the region, my personal view differs from this perception. What will happen is more polarization of views between one side led by Iran and the other side led by the Israeli far right and its Arab allies in Abu Dhabi. Most likely any calm in the coming period will be a prelude to a new storm whose sparks will start from the Iranian hands in the region.



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“GEOSTRATEGIC PULSE” - founded in 2007
Bilingual Publication of Geopolitical Analysis, edited by
INGEPO Consulting - Bucharest
www.pulsulgeostrategic.ro; Tel: +4-031 1011934
J40/4984/2019, CUI RO19298677

Editor-in-Chief: Constantin IACOBÎȚĂ

Assistant Editor: Vladimir-Adrian COSTEA

Assistant Editor: Pompilia VLĂDESCU

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ISSN: 1844-167X

Cover: Self Editing

SUBSCRIPTIONS (1 Year) - 599 LEI

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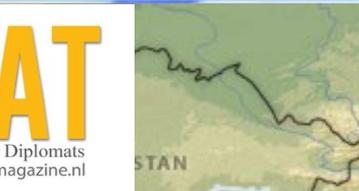


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