

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

# GEOSTRATEGIC PULSE

No.289, March - April 2023 | [www.pulsulgeostrategic.ro](http://www.pulsulgeostrategic.ro)

## GLOBAL ORDER

The Stake of the Turkish Elections and their Impact on Romania

An Interview with the Historian Ionuț Cojocaru: “I Cannot See Erdoğan Accept a Bad Outcome. Erdoğan Is the State.”

P. 5

## HYBRID WARFARE IN THE DIGITAL ERA

The Psychology of War in the Digital Age. The Impact of the Media and the Social Networks on Conflict Perception

P. 33

## MIDDLE-EAST

BRICS Is Significantly Developing Its Relation with the Countries in the Middle East and Invites Them to a Multipolar Competition

P. 18

## Turning a New Page: The Saudi Arabia-Iran Alliance for Regional Stability

P. 27



CONTENT

Geostrategic Pulse, No. 289, March - April 2023

I. EDITORIAL

1. From Unipolarity to Multipolarity From Multilateralism to Minilateralism - p. 3



II. GLOBAL ORDER

2. The Stake of the Turkish Elections and their Impact on Romania - An Interview with the Historian Ionuț Cojocaru: "I Cannot See Erdoğan Accept a Bad Outcome. Erdoğan Is the State." - p. 5



III. MIDDLE-EAST

3. Israel - A Comparative Analysis between the Politics in the '90s and that of Today: From Centre-Left Parties to Religious, and Centre-Right Parties - p. 10



4. The Fight of the Citizens against Their Own Government: An Overview of the Protests in Israel - p. 13



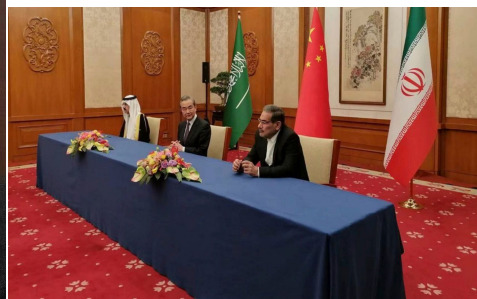
5. Israel in the Eye of the Storm p. 16



6. BRICS Is Significantly Developing Its Relations with the Countries in the Middle East and Invites Them to a Multipolar Competition - p. 18



7. China's Role in the Middle East - p. 24



8. Turning a New Page: The Saudi Arabia - Iran Alliance for Regional Stability - p. 27



IV. INDO-PACIFIC

9. The Balance of Power in the Indo-Pacific. Before and After the War in Ukraine - p. 30

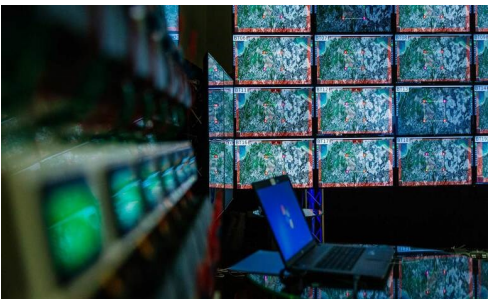


V. HYBRID WARFARE IN THE DIGITAL ERA

10. The Psychology of War in the Digital Age. The Impact of the Media and the Social Networks on How We See Conflicts - p. 33



11. IQ Regression Propaganda & The Hybrid War - p. 36



## I. EDITORIAL



## From Unipolarity to Multipolarity – From Multilateralism to Minilateralism

*PhD. Eng. Stelian TEODORESCU*

*“It’s good to have power, but it’s even better not to need power.”*

*Mahatma Gandhi*

In the context of intense geopolitical and geostrategic developments, there have recently been more intense debates than ever on topics related to terms such as unipolarity, multipolarity, multilateralism, bilateralism, unilateralism and minilateralism. They are interdependent, but very complex concepts within the system of international relations. The global order saw notable changes, and the end of the Cold War marked the start of a unipolar world. But the new millennium and the emergence of multipolarity have generated significant challenges to cooperation. A response to these challenges was the growing popularity of “minilateralism”, an international relations concept that involves small groups of nations working together to address problems or pursue the achievement of common objectives.

A clear example of minilateralism emerged when the United Arab Emirates (UAE), India and France recently announced their joint commitment to work together through a trilateral framework in various areas such as defence, energy and technology. The UAE has also entered minilateral partnerships with India to establish an information and communication technology centre in Ethiopia and with Israel to promote a health care facility in Ghana.

Expert circles point out that one of the advantages of minilateralism is that it can be more adaptable than traditional diplomatic channels. In 2021, India, Israel, the UAE and the US announced a “Partnership for the Future”, which soon became known as the I2U2 format.

While minilateralism has its risks, such as the possibility of exacerbating power imbalances, it also has the potential to be a flexible and innovative approach to diplomacy, particularly in addressing global challen-



Source: <https://www.midwestfarmreport.com/2022/12/29/a-multipolar-world-and-re-globalization/>

ges such as climate change, health care and food security. As such, the rise of middle powers – countries with moderate influence on the international stage – and rapid technological advances make it clear that minilateralism is a viable way forward for countries attempting to address various issues that cannot be addressed separately.

Smaller groups of countries with common problems seem to want faster progress toward specific goals, and minilateralism is likely to combine with or replace multilateralism, wanting more returns on their investments. Minilateralism may become attractive for several reasons. Firstly, minilateral groups tend to have a very well-defined goal, so they are very well suited to making progress with regard to their specific issues. Secondly, since they include fewer countries, minilateral groups facilitate bringing together only those countries or leaders with similar agendas and goals. Thirdly, because mini-lateral groups tend to be more flexible, they can meet and evolve as situations require, rather than having to wait for regular meetings or slow decision-making procedures. All these factors and developments seem to determine and facilitate agreements and initiatives.

Many states seek greater autonomy or seek to connect together with other countries, the current evolving multipolar world becoming far more complicated than anything that has existed so far, simply daring to predict that there will likely be many more competing regional and global power centres.

For the Gulf countries, for example, minilateralism is now a strategic imperative with significant implications for their security, competitiveness and prosperity. The Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy (AGDA) in Abu Dhabi hosted several discussions to explore new partnerships between the UAE, South Korea, Japan, Singapore and Israel. In doing so, the Gulf countries hope to build a network of mini-lateral partnerships that will contribute to their economic growth and stability, while enhancing regional and global security.

For the past few years, the world has witnessed the rise in importance of coalitions such as QUAD (Australia, India, Japan and the US), AUKUS (Australia, the United Kingdom and the US), BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), Chip 4 (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and the USA) and many more. The increase in the importance and number of coalitions could be categorized as a historical problem, coalitions being the natural response to three changes in the international order: from unipolarity to multipolarity, from alliances to alignments, and from multilateralism to minilateralism.

Even if the leaders of many of the world's countries seek greater flexibility in their international arrangements, NATO proves its superiority by basing itself on the commitment of a formal multinational treaty and continuing to expand with the admission of Finland – already achieved – and, most likely, Sweden going next. This development is a very logical one now in the context of the Russian aggression in Ukraine and in the context of the common natural tendency of the Member States manage the situation together by monitoring, handling and countering clear threats. It remains to be seen, in the following years, whether such an evolution will be an exception or become the rule.

Alliances tend to be broader than many imagine, and although alliances are usually seen as focused on military cooperation, the truth is that many alliances explicitly include economic, technological, and diplomatic components as well.

In conclusion, we can state that a combination resulting from minilateral and multilateral groupings will generate new types of concepts for the correct description of the new global architecture.

Security is therefore the area where stable and strong alliances like NATO remain beneficial. But where there is a common security threat, as China is seen by Australia, Japan, India and the US for example, new coalitions are already forming. Although QUAD often describes itself as a non-security grouping, the reality is that it represents the most important emerging security coalition in Asia. Security concerns – motivated by the need for a “free and open” Indo-Pacific – led to the creation of mini-laterals such as the India-France-Australia and India-Japan-Australia trilateral dialogues.

Since economic cooperation does not require the same level of political and strategic alignment as military cooperation, emerging economic coalitions are larger and less formal than security coalitions.

Taken together, the shifts from unipolarity to multipolarity, from alliances to alignments, and the combination of multilateralism and minilateralism lead to one major change: the growth of coalitions. Although the exact nature of these groupings will largely depend on decision-making, coalitions are already forming in significant areas, such as security, economics, technology and governance, thus generating diverse coalitions with unique characteristics.

## II. WORLD ORDER - TURKEY



*Prof. PhD. Ionuț Cojocaru*

*Interview conducted by journalist Mihai Cistelican  
and originally published in STIRIPESURSE.RO  
(March 14, 2023)*



*Mihai Cistelican*

### **The Stake of the Turkish Elections and their Impact on Romania An Interview with the Historian Ionuț Cojocaru: “I Cannot See Erdoğan Accept a Bad Outcome. Erdoğan Is the State.”**

**Reporter:** Why are these presidential and parliamentary elections so important and why do we need to pay attention to them?

Ionuț Cojocaru:

The Turkish elections are mostly crucial for the future of the Turkish people. If they chose to be part of an authoritarian regime where everything is managed by a president who strengthened his authority to such an extent that nothing moves without his approval or fights to make a difference, in the hope that the elections on the 14<sup>th</sup> May will take Turkey back to a more democratic regime. They are important to the region because Turkey neighbours Syria, Iran, Iraq and, all the way across the Black Sea, with the Russian Federation. At the same time, Erdoğan’s regime was seriously involved in the Balkans, mostly in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo.

Militarily speaking, Turkey is a NATO Member, and it has significantly invested in combat equipment, and has had the results we all know. At the same time, in today’s NATO, Turkey’s policy is unpredictable. Not to mention purchasing military equipment from the Russian Federation.

As such, the local, parliamentary and presidential elections are all about how Turkey chooses to proceed. If the current president stays, the domestic and foreign policies are predictable enough, and if the Turkish chose change and keep unaltered what is left of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s reforms we will see what happens. Practically, the mentality of today’s Turkey is so close to the East that the secularism promoted by the forefather of the Republic feels like a distant dream.

**Reporter:** Does Recep Tayyip Erdoğan still have a real chance to win the elections? What do Turkish experts you read say?

Ionuț Cojocaru:

It depends on the expert. I still believe that the Turkish president has the first say and I do not believe

he will allow the elections to run their natural course. I cannot see him agree to a bad result. The illusion he is promoting when it comes to democracy may only seem plausible to dreamers.

The media is controlled almost completely. The intellectuals working for the Justice and Development Party are promoted on all stations, where they try to explain how important Erdoğan's actions are. He controls the justice system. The only means of information accessed by the Turkish who wish to read objective news is Twitter. Censorship worked even better after the protests known as Gezi, and Erdoğan's rhetoric is very well rehearsed. After all, he considers himself to be the victim. He is just a man who brought the Turkish hope but also urged them to remember, because revenge is due shortly. If you take a look at the Turkish domestic policy you will see a vengeful president, a president who sent his opponents to prison (S. Demirtaş's case is well known), closed radio and TV stations, newspapers, and everything that was out of bounds.

Today's Turkey has judges, prosecutors and policemen in jail. It also has teachers! Following the 2010 referendum, when he changed 26 articles in the Constitutions with one vote, not with separate votes for each article, Erdoğan increased the number of judges in the Constitutional Court from 11 to 17, and in the other body – the High Council of the Judges and Prosecutors, from 12 to 34. As the appointments were political, he placed his own men in these institutions. After his justice plan worked, he moved on to changes in the media.

For example, in 2002, when the JDP came to power, pro-government companies owned less than 25% of the Turkish media. In 2011 they owned 50% and in 2020, most media companies are owned by trusts that support Erdoğan.

The takeover of the media companies was relatively simple. The government accused the owners of certain trusts of conducting illegal activities and transferred the control of that trust to a regulating body. This body auctioned the trust where supporters of the AKP took part. They received credit from state banks to close the deals.

On another note, today's Turkish media cannot criticise or mock Erdoğan, cannot discuss the corruption accusations, as other politicians used to, politicians such as Demirel, Ecevit, Özal, Yılmaz or Çiller.

His governments invested very much in the movie industry. Films and documentaries on the Ottoman Empire, on the Sultans of yore and their providential role in making a better world can be watched in Romania as well. Erdoğan even has an autobiographical film and a university that is named after him. When I went to Istanbul to see his film in a cinema, it was screened in a special movie theatre with armchairs, unlike the rest of the theatres, where they had chairs. Turkey openly claims that it is the promoter of the Ottoman Empire and feels obligated to restore its power in the sphere of influence it controlled in the past.

As a conclusion, Erdoğan is the State.

### **Reporter: How much did the earthquake change the course of the Turkish elections?**

Ionuț Cojocaru:

Very much. It practically restored hope to those Turkish citizens who no longer want to hear of Erdoğan. Before the earthquakes, the Turkish president announced the date of the elections on the 14<sup>th</sup> May. It is no random date, but one that reminds of Adnan Menderes. He was the head of the Democratic Party, and won the first free Turkish elections, on the 14<sup>th</sup> May 1950. The coup in 1960 removed him from power as he was murdered. Later on, he was thought of once more and today is presented as a leader who led Turkey effectively. His slogan at the time was simple: ***Enough! The word is to the nation!*** During these elections Erdoğan will loan the slogan and the date is already chosen. It is not the first time that Erdoğan imitates someone.

Besides, he never came up with his own ideas, but borrowed what thought necessary for his political agenda. The reasoning is simple: we are not Europeans. Our past is filled with battles against them. We are Muslims so our place is not with a culture and civilisation that has nothing in common with ours. Realistically speaking he is right.

The fact that the Turkish Constitution includes an article that limits the presidency to two mandates represents an argument as to why the elections will take place in May, not in summer. This logic allows another mandate, the last one, as he promised in 2019, when he said that one would be his last.

After all, what kind of democracy can we speak about, when he has been leading Turkey over 20 years?

This earthquake represents an opportunity for the six opposing parties and for those who have had enough of the current president's regime, for those who have something to say but cannot, for those who wish to live in a country without rising tensions, for those who wish to stop being oppressed by the government's Islamist mindset, for those who can take part in auctions where religion is not a decisive factor, for those who aspire to universal rights and values, for those who are not afraid of imprisonment because the state decided

who was and who was not a terrorist, for those who wish to live believing that they are facing justice for what they did not for their bank accounts or for the institution they work in.

The fact that the president had a late reaction following the earthquake, that people saw how he authorised constructions, without taking into account earthquake requirements (as it is a seismic area) and especially since – during his first media appearance after the event – he issued threats for those who would criticise him, were reasons enough for the undecided to change their minds.

**Reporter: How is it so far? Is the earthquake Erdoğan’s lifeline or his last political playing card?**

Ionuț Cojocaru:

So far, crises have helped Erdoğan. He knew how to take advantage of them and master them. However, Turkey is not a typical country. People surrounding Erdoğan have families, friends that have died in this earthquake. Inflation is high, and everyday life in Turkey is getting harder. The Turkish know that their future depends on today’s leader. It also depends on their courage to change, or not, something in their lives. They know he is vengeful and unforgiving. I believe he will not abandon his power willingly. I cannot see him accepting loss.

During the first hours after the earthquake, when people were extremely angry, he close Twitter which enraged people even more.

**Reporter: There was this rare moment when Erdoğan was heckled during a football match; how often does this happen in Turkey?**

Ionuț Cojocaru:

It is happening more and more often. Actually, when the supporters of the most popular football team in Turkey ask you to leave, it surely makes one think. His coalition partner, the president of the NMP, Devlet Bahçeli, actually asked they should not be seen on TV if they continue to get involved in politics, as if a football supporter who goes to a football match must only speak about football. I know that the following match that took place in Kayseri, the supporters were not allowed to go. It is customary, when things do not go his way, he puts an end to them.

**Reporter: Recep Tayyip Erdoğan did something few do in politics – he said he was “sorry” before the public, after the chaotic intervention of the authorities following the earthquake. How is this perceived by the Turkish, especially when he promoted the image of an authoritarian leader?**

Ionuț Cojocaru:

Those who believe him a democrat are naïve. Those who follow his activity know there are hundreds of occasions when he proved he had nothing to do with democracy. He is a leader that makes public statements at least 300 days a year. From conferences on the cosmos, to democratic values, to the moral behaviour of the Turkish citizen or to what the Turkish must do so they can be better. What art, literature or poetry is good for them. This is already in the minds of the Turkish citizens.

His conferences are teleprompter-read, and he froze many times when it blocked. As far as I know, if I am not mistaken, he said he was sorry twice – the first time to Vladimir Putin, after the downing of the Russian flight, and now. According to the Turkish leader, apologies are useless, so he used them because he knew they would work. They did the first time.

**Reporter: What would Erdoğan’s re-election mean for Turkey? How about for the Turkish-Romanian relations?**

Ionuț Cojocaru:

To Turkey, Erdoğan’s re-election would mean strengthening of his regime and probably the emergence of a dynasty as the one in Azerbaijan, for example. Those who keep on criticising him on Twitter would probably get arrested or scatter around the world just like their former colleagues. Many journalists have been fired, many live in exile. Nevertheless, the Turkish president is liked in Europe, and even in Romania.

Turkey’s relations with Romania are actually Turkey’s relations with Romania, not Turkish-Romanian relations. Turkish investments in Romania are good. Practically, Turkey is Romania’s main investor besides the EU, with somewhere around 10 billion USD.

I could say the Turkish are investing in Romania and the Romanian are investing in Turkey through holidays.

Even if on a cultural level we are fine in relation to Turkey, both the Romanian Embassy and the Romanian Cultural Institute in Istanbul are functioning to such an extent that we can say they are non-existent. The precarious selection of those who represent Romania in Turkey, the lack of interest from the foreign policy centre turned us into a platoon country in Turkey. Besides, when the ministers from Ciucă's cabinet – Grindeanu and Popescu – met with President Erdoğan, they were happier of having been able to meet him, than to actually accomplish something during the meeting. Historically speaking, our oldest relations are with the Ottoman Empire. With the right people the cultural and educational relations would develop naturally.

**Reporter: Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu is the only candidate for the opposition in Turkey, running against Recep Erdoğan. What are his main strengths and weaknesses in the race for the Turkish leadership? Does he have relations with Romania, does he think of it? What would his election mean in relation to Romania?**

Ionuț Cojocaru:

The Group of the European Socialists stated they supported Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu in the presidential elections. I am not convinced that the Social Democratic Party does too. Victor Ponta's relations with Erdoğan are very well known and Sorin Grindeanu's smile during his meeting with Erdoğan makes me believe that the Turkish socialists do not communicate with the Romanian ones.

Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu is 75 years old and he has been leading his party since 2010, a party established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Ever since Erdoğan came to power, his party has been losing all political battles. We must also take into account the context of these losses. Elections are always suspect. For example, see M. Geoană's victory against T. Băsescu. Even if I said that the current Turkish president is authoritarian and does not care for human rights, he changed Turkey a lot since he came to power. He built a lot (buildings, airports, subway, bridges, tunnels, viaducts, mosques – over 10,000, the largest, in Istanbul, will unofficially carry his name etc.), he managed to make Turkey a part of the G20, it is now out of it, but Turkey's GDP, despite the galloping inflation, is still bigger than, say, a group of countries in Eastern Europe.

Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu's advantage is the fact that he hasn't led before. Even though he was the president of his party, he hasn't run against Erdoğan before. I would venture to say that at his age he no longer acts instinctively, but is more mature and collected. As a disadvantage, I would name the media and its AKP troll army, advertising him as an LGBTQ supporter and as a person who wishes to change everything the current president accomplished etc.

As far as Romania is concerned, I believe that change should start from us. Our country is well seen in Turkey, but unfortunately it is not that well known. For example, Romania could bring more Turkish students or could enhance cultural exchanges. Turkey has two institutions in Romania that are promoting the Turkish culture and are doing so at a good pace. On the other hand, however, if you ask me what the Romanian Cultural Institute is doing I could not come up with an answer.

**Reporter: Analyses depict Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu as an unpopular insipid person, who is at an advantage from this point of view – Erdoğan or Kılıçdaroğlu?**

Ionuț Cojocaru:

Erdoğan is clearly at a disadvantage, the current president is the one who changed Turkey considerably and gradually took it out of the European region, leading it towards the East, both when we are referring to mentalities and values. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu represents a secular party who supports universal values, a democratic system and all that it stands for. He states that one of the first decisions he would adopt would be to take these values into account. Furthermore, he said he would go to Brussels and start the European integration process.

**Reporter: 2023 is no ordinary year for Turkey. It celebrates 100 since the Republic of Turkey was established. How do you think Mustafa Kemal Atatürk would have voted during these elections? With whom would he have voted?**

Ionuț Cojocaru:

Sadly, for the Turkish population, the centenary is overshadowed by a terrible earthquake. There are the tens of thousands of dead people, there are those who survived and are forced to live in tents or leave and



live with their relatives in different areas changed their priorities. The elections are an event that will diminish the importance of the Centenary, and President Erdoğan's policy, a president who is the leader of a republic built by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk contrasts with the values that were set out by the first president.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk could not vote for Recep Tayyip Erdoğan because the latter represents the ideas and mentalities the forefather fought against when he was building a new country. Practically Turkey has two kinds of voters – those who partake conservative Islamic values and those who are in favour of a secular society. They are almost equal when it comes to casting their votes, and those who manage to obtain around 10% of the votes are the winners.

**Reporter: Even before the earthquake the Erdoğan administration was already facing two major problems: rising inflation and a large number of Russians settling in the country after the war in Ukraine. How are these issues relevant to the campaign?**

Ionuț Cojocaru:

Daily problems are more important to the Turkish. Of course, inflation is a stressful issue, but the fight for survival and for a better life is more important. In the Turkish mindset the inflation does not have the same meaning as for a European, because the Turkish are used to this kind of inflation. The fact that Turkey remains neutral in the war against Ukraine is not a setback.

**Reporter: How is Erdoğan perceived from the point of view of the “dance” he is carrying on with, when it comes to the war in Ukraine – as he has a good relationship with Russia, as well as with Ukraine?**

Ionuț Cojocaru:

In this respect Erdoğan is seen as an able political player. Turkey's interests are well represented by the fact that Ankara has not chosen a side; furthermore, it is trying to mediate the conflict between the two countries. On the other hand, the diplomatic and economic relations between Moscow and Turkey are important and stopping Russian tourists from going to Turkey would mean great economic losses for Ankara. Consequently, Turkey chose as it saw fit, even if it was under pressure.

**Reporter: Recep Erdoğan survived numerous scandals in Turkey, won so many elections and even survived a coup. Can these elections be seen as his last political test, seeing that he has been in power for 20 years?**

Ionuț Cojocaru:

History proves that leaders come and go. Some are well remembered and some are not. Some, as is for example in the USA or other Western countries lead for one term, others for no more than two, and others are looking for solutions to change constitutions to remain in power seeing themselves as providential. It is true that some do have followers even if their actions are clear.

Erdoğan is Turkey's most representative leader from the Republic, surpassing even Atatürk. Animated by religious fanaticism, he had a plan that made him gradually downplay the values of secularism and took Turkey to the values promoted in the Ottoman Empire. The mandatory study of Islam in schools even for those who are not Muslims, changing Hagia Sophia into a mosque, even if it did not matter to the significance of Islam, getting a generation ready to fight if the leader asks for it, changed Turkey during the past years.

After the attempted coup in 2016, he stated that it helped him immensely. He could establish a state of emergency and get rid of uncomfortable leaders, while making the changes he needed. He prepared Turkey for a brighter future, of course under his guidance. The earthquake seems to have damaged his strategy. If these elections make him a president for the third time, even if the Constitution states he is entitled to only two, he will definitely lead Turkey for as long as he lives.

### III. MIDDLE EAST - ISRAEL



## Israel – A Comparative Analysis between the Politics in the '90s and that of Today: From Centre-Left Parties to Religious, and Centre-Right Parties

*Stanca Andreea Cristina*

### Foreword

As a relatively new state on the global political scene and located in the geopolitical space of the Middle East, Israel's politics is complex and constantly changing. To understand it, one requires context and details regarding some key events.

The pre-state period created the foundation of the state of Israel which proclaimed its independence on May 14, 1948. Jewish immigrants arriving in the Yishuv created political parties and state institutions. This period marked the birth of the left-right political cleavage that shapes Israeli politics.

1977 was a turning point in the dynamics of Israeli politics, when for the first time, Mapai, which later became the Labour Party, (a centre-left party) lost the elections to the Likud Party (centre-right party). The failure in 1973, when Israel was caught by surprise by Egypt and Syria's attack was sanctioned by the electorate. At this point, Likud makes its entrance on the Israeli political scene. As for the Labour Party, its rise would end after 1995, as it becoming increasingly absent from the Knesset<sup>1</sup>. So, in the '90s, Israeli politics was dominated by the two major parties, Likud and the Labour Party, shaping the path of Israeli politics.

For an overall picture, the two periods will be compared from several perspectives: the conflict with the Palestinians, political instability or the vision on the occupied territories.

### What's Particular to the '90s

The 1992 election brought Yitzhak Rabin to the prime minister seat. He was the main Israeli statesman who fought for the settlement of the conflict with the Palestinians, because to him, the territories conquered in the Six-Day War, in 1967, represented a bargaining chip for peace. This was seen not only on the declarative level, but during the negotiations with the Palestine Liberation Organization. That laid the ground for the future withdrawal from the occupied.

The year 1995 marked one of the most important events in the history of the State of Israel, but also in that of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. With the signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, the conflict seemed to de-escalate. It was the first time the two sides sat at the negotiating table and reached a consensus. Things got complicated because the Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, was assassinated by a Jewish extremist, being accused of treason. His assassination illustrates the fact that the peace negotiations were not accepted by all the members of the Israeli society, and the dialogue with the Palestinians created controversy.



Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/15/briefing/israel-netanyahu.html>

<sup>1</sup> Israeli Parliament

The Oslo Accords led to political instability characterized by repeated changes in the government, short-lived coalitions and leaders with divergent visions. Moreover, economic problems intensified, while Israel was facing inflation and public debt. The need for economic reforms led to the dissatisfaction of the population who revolted against the changes.

Therefore, the political agenda of the first part of the 1990s mainly focused on peace negotiations with the Palestinians in order to resolve the conflict and withdraw from the occupied territories. Although it was the only time in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict when the two sides sat at the negotiating table and managed to reach a compromise, the assassination of Y. Rabin proved that the Israeli society was not necessarily ready for peace and withdrawal from the occupied territories. Furthermore, starting with the end of 1995, the Israeli political climate began to shake, as there was no unified vision on how to approach the conflict and much more.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Current Political Dynamics**

At present, the main leader of the Israeli politics is Benjamin Netanyahu, who has been on the political scene since the '90s. He managed to remain the head of the government, although the latest citizens' protests prove a discrepancy between their wishes and expectations and their Government's actions. Ever since 2009, except for June 2021 to December 2022, Benjamin Netanyahu led the Israeli Government. So Israeli politics is deeply shaped by "Bibi".

The political climate of recent years is turbulent and can be exemplified by several key events such as B. Netanyahu's corruption case, the Knesset's vote to dissolve, before a Government was formed, and the impossibility of creating a governing coalition. In this context, five legislative elections have been held in four years, the last one taking place in November 2022. These aspects are of particular importance in terms of understanding current Israeli politics, as they illustrate political instability and fragmentation and the difficulty to maintain stable coalitions. So, the lack of progress on key issues such as regional security, the conflict with the Palestinians, economic inequality or even the relationship with the United States of America and the European Union are effects of political instability.

Analysing the coalition formed by B. Netanyahu following the latest elections, we see that Israel is led by centre-right, far-right and religious parties. The latter promote an anti-Arab policy. The coalition sees the conflict with the Palestinians and the occupied territories in opposition to the policy of the '90s. If both B. Netanyahu and the parties in his coalition support the idea of Greater Israel and the preservation of the occupied territories, how can there be a de-escalation of the conflict with the Palestinians? Seeing that the parties in power do not prioritize the resolution of the conflict on their political agenda, but maintain a status quo, there are no perspectives for the conflict to settle down in the near future.

At the same time, to what extent would the Israelis want new Oslo-style peace negotiations with the Palestinians? Israeli public opinion is divided on the issue, with polls indicating that 41.5% of the Israeli society want the status quo to be maintained, while 34% want the two-state solution implemented and 14% would accept a bi-state solution.<sup>3</sup> What is important to the state is that there is a significant difference between the voters of the left-wing parties and those of the right-wing parties. For example, 88% of those voting for parties with a leftist ideology would accept the two-state solution, while only 19.5% of voters for right-wing parties would agree with this idea.<sup>4</sup>

Ever since Ariel Sharon in the early 2000s, the policies regarding the occupied territories are in opposition to what was promoted and pursued in the '90s, namely territories in exchange for peace. Not only does Israel today not want to withdraw from the West Bank and East Jerusalem, but new Jewish settlements are constantly established, adding to the frustration of the Palestinians and leading to the escalation of the conflict. Recently, after the February meeting in Aqaba between the Israelis and the representatives of the Palestinian Authority, B. Netanyahu stated that new Jewish settlements would keep on being built in the occupied territories. As expected, the Palestinians responded with violence directed at the Jewish residents near Nablus, two of whom were killed.<sup>5</sup>

Although reporting to the occupied territories was seen differently in terms of withdrawal, both the centre-left Governments of the 1990s and the current coalition contributed to the creation of new Jewish settlements. The chart below shows a progressive increase in the number of Israeli citizens who settled in the new

<sup>2</sup> <https://peacenow.org/en/settlements-watch/settlements-data/population>

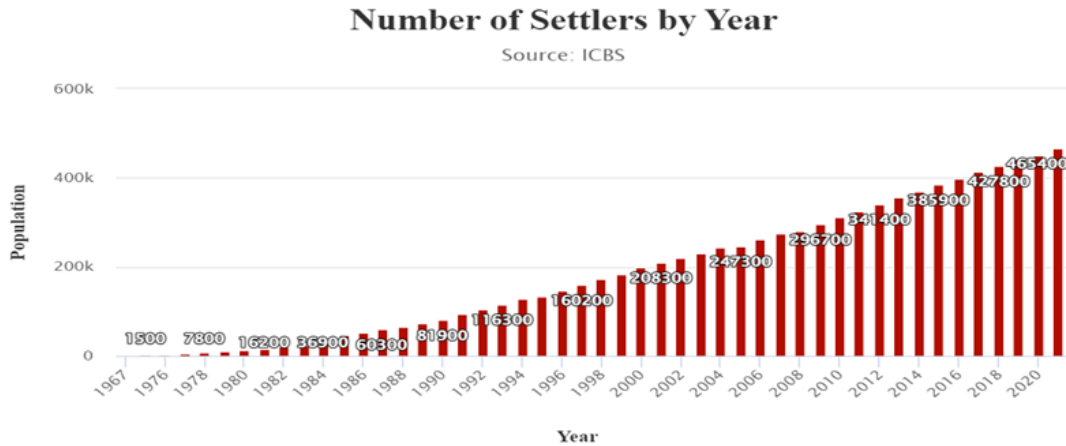
<sup>3</sup> <https://en.idi.org.il/articles/36108>

<sup>4</sup> <https://en.idi.org.il/articles/36108>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/2/27/403>

Jewish settlements in the occupied territories.

On the same note, it is not only Israel's current reporting of the conflict that is controversial, but also how minority rights or even the principles of the rule of law are addressed. For example, currently the ruling coalition includes the Noam Party, whose main priority is the fight against LGBT rights. Another topic, complex and relevant in this sense, is that of the justice reform. As it is considered undemocratic, Israelis protested against this project, organising large-scale protests attended by citizens from various backgrounds and social classes.



Source: <https://peacenow.org.il/en/settlements-watch/settlements-data/construction><sup>6</sup>

## Conclusions

The findings support the fact that in terms of prospects for the resolution of this conflict, the flourishing period from three decades ago is a far cry from the current dynamics of Israeli politics. The strategies have changed, the conflict has become much more complex, there are several Palestinian factions fighting for the Palestinian cause, and the Israeli political environment is shaped by parties that see things very differently from what was promoted during the Oslo Accords.

So, why would the current Government want to resolve the conflict if the ideology of the ruling parties is not in line with the solution of the two countries and at the same time seeing that their electorate wants to maintain the status quo? At the same time, should a centre-left coalition come to power, would a dialogue with the Palestinians still be possible? The recurring events where Israel is attacked by Hamas or Hezbollah or the violence between the IDF<sup>7</sup> and the Palestinian who reside in the occupied territories prove that there still is tension between the two camps, a situation that cannot de-escalate without the involvement of both sides. The question is the following: to what extent do the parties involved in the conflict want the de-escalation of the conflict and how prepared and united are the Palestinian formations for a unified vision in order to support the Palestinian cause?

## Bibliography

1. <https://peacenow.org.il/en/settlements-watch/settlements-data/construction> accessed on 16.04.2023;
2. <https://en.idi.org.il/articles/36108> accessed on 16.04.2023;
3. <https://peacenow.org.il/en/settlements-watch/settlements-data/population> accessed on 18.04.2023;
4. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/2/27/403> accessed on 18.04.2023.

<sup>6</sup> <https://peacenow.org.il/en/settlements-watch/settlements-data/construction>

<sup>7</sup> Israeli Defence Forces

### III. MIDDLE EAST - ISRAEL



## The Fight of the Citizens against Their Own Government: An Overview of the Protests in Israel

Stanca Andreea Cristina

### Foreword

The judicial reform has long been a focus of Israeli politics. The powers of Israel's Supreme Court create controversy in the political environment, being considered by right-wing or religious parties as biased towards the Israeli left. Centre-left, centre-right and religious parties have distinct visions regarding the occupied territories and the creation of new Jewish settlements. Therefore, the decisions of the Supreme Court regarding the limitation of the number of new settlements are not in accordance with the conceptions of the political leaders of the Israeli right, who are partisans of Greater Israel. Moreover, there are also controversies regarding the autonomy of ultra-Orthodox communities. In this context, religious parties do not agree with court rulings that would affect the practices of the Haredi community.

The reform of the justice system is on the governing agenda of the Israeli leading coalition, as for these parties this matter is highly important. This is how the project aimed at changing the competences and limiting the authority of the Supreme Court was born. In addition, the coalition drafted other bills aimed at emphasizing the authority of the Rabbinical Court, changing the way to dissolve the Parliament or investigating politicians in criminal cases.

For democratic reasons related to the principles of the rule of law, civil society revolts against the project proposed by the government led by Benjamin Netanyahu. At the same time, there are also reactions from the international community that disapprove of the reform, many criticizing the fact that a regime change is being attempted. It is in this context that one of the most important mobilizations of Israeli civil society takes place.



Source: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-show-of-force-200000-urge-govt-not-to-abandon-overhaul-amid-compromise-talks/>

### The Current Judicial System

As basic principles make the whole judicial system, we shall only name the main ones. Their change leads to reshaping the entire system and implicitly to the separation of powers.

One of the main provisions of the reform refers to the Judicial Selection Commission. Currently, there are nine members in this commission: three judges from the Supreme Court, two representatives of the Bar, two representatives of the Knesset<sup>1</sup> and two ministers.<sup>2</sup> With regard to the selection of Supreme Court justices, they need 7 out of 9 votes to be approved. This is the main element that has given rise to controversies, since the Israeli right believes that consensus only takes place when they are in government, while in periods when left-wing parties rule, decisions are unilateral.

<sup>1</sup> The Israeli Parliament

<sup>2</sup> <https://en.idi.org.il/articles/46674>

Furthermore, at this time, the Knesset must agree with the decisions of the Supreme Court when they say that a certain law is unconstitutional. Therefore, the proposed laws and the actions taken by state institutions are subject to the judicial control of the Supreme Court, which can consider them inconsistent with the fundamental laws of the state, and consequently, cancel them.

Within the new Government formed by Benjamin Netanyahu there are far-right formations that have the opportunity for the first time to express and implement their vision. Even if their vision is criticized and creates controversy, the Government leader supports this reform to balance the separation of powers in the state. An important aspect worth mentioning is the fact that the Prime Minister is being investigated for acts of corruption, so he does not have the right to participate actively in this reform project, this increases the citizens' unrest. Among the proposed changes there is a bill that supports a ban on criminal proceedings against sitting prime ministers.

The reasoning used is of a populist nature, as it refers to the citizens who democratically elected the leaders in power, therefore the legislature and the executive should have increased powers. B. Netanyahu stated at the beginning of the year that "Millions of people took to the streets to vote in the elections. One of the main subjects they voted on was the reform of the judicial system."<sup>3</sup> Through this argument, the Government leader tries to legitimize the need for change, but for the Israeli society it was not solid enough to agree with the reform.

The reform of the legal system provides for a series of changes that limit the powers of the Supreme Court, assigning increased powers to the Knesset. Under the provisions of the reform, Parliament could ignore the decisions of the Supreme Court when it decides that certain laws are unconstitutional. So, the Knesset could approve the law only by a majority vote of its members. Additionally, the project foresees changing the role of legal advisors in the ministries – they can only provide recommendations to the ministers.

Given the structure of the governing coalition, within the reform plan there are also bills intended to give increased authority to the Rabbinical Court. According to the draft, this institution could act in civil disputes by applying religious laws. The decisions of the Supreme Court regarding the ultra-orthodox community motivated the religious parties in the direction of reforming the judicial system. In this context, the dispute between religious and leftist parties can be exemplified, the former using the argument of the involvement of the leaders of the Israeli left in shaping the decisions of the Supreme Court. Therefore, for them it is important to limit the authority of the Court and increase the power of the rabbinical institution. At the same time, for religious and historical reasons, religious and right-wing parties fight for the preservation of the occupied territories and the formation of new Jewish settlements. The Supreme Court, like the United Nations (UN) and not only, criticizes this practice, a fact that leads to the dissatisfaction of the visionary parties of Greater Israel.

### **The Reaction of the Civil Society**

The political agenda of the new government that has been leading the country since last year displeased Israeli citizens ever since the beginning of their rule. What we must mention, is that before the protests that started on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January, there were also resignations in protest among the Israeli elites. In December, Yael German quit from her position as the ambassador in Paris, motivating her choice with the fact that the current government "keeps on implementing policies that are extremely different from what she believes in".<sup>4</sup> This resignation represented the start of the protests of the Israeli elites, while the academia wrote letters of protests. Taking into account the key role of the reservists in the Israeli Armed Forces, their protests are highly relevant. Just like the academia and the politicians, they signed a petition where they protested against the reform.

At the same time, the supporters of the reform also mobilized, both through demonstrations and through open letters, motivating the need to change the judicial system. In March, 120 teachers signed a letter stating that "The judicial reform is essential".<sup>5</sup>

Although the Israeli society is divided on this issue, it is important to look at the numbers. Demonstrations began on the 7<sup>th</sup> January in Tel Aviv, when more than 20,000 citizens marked the beginning of a series of protests that have not yet ended. Moreover, on the 11<sup>th</sup> March, more than 200,000 people protested in the city

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-shrugs-off-protest-says-millions-of-voters-demanded-judicial-overhaul/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog\\_entry/israeli-ambassador-to-france-yael-german-resigns-in-protest-of-incoming-government/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/israeli-ambassador-to-france-yael-german-resigns-in-protest-of-incoming-government/)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/skeblcaci>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/12/huge-crowds-protest-israels-judicial-changes-for-10th-week>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/skeblcaci>

of Tel Aviv alone.<sup>6</sup> This is not an isolated example, but tens or hundreds of thousands of people protested during this period.

The reform projects have not only led to demonstrations or open letters, but there have also led to strikes that heighten the discontent of all sectors of the Israeli society. At the end of March, one of the most important Israeli institutions, the Histadrut<sup>7</sup>, established more than a century ago, announced a strike in protest against this reform.

Therefore, the reform aroused the reaction of the elites, of academics, diplomats or politicians, trade unions and last but not least the hundreds of thousands of the citizens that have been protesting almost every day for 15 weeks.

### Conclusions

The reaction of the Israeli society proved to be essential in shaping the future of the Israeli democracy. For the time being, B. Netanyahu announced he stopped the reform project that has been harshly criticised due to the attempt to change the regime or populism.

So what could be the possible developments of the Israeli politics? Considering the citizens' protests against the justice reform, their dissatisfaction can be met by voting in the next elections. There is a precedent in 1977 when the Labour Party lost the election for the first time in the context of the Yom Kippur surprise attack.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, considering the fact that B. Netanyahu's mandate is only in the beginning, the citizens' dissatisfaction might diminish over time so that the parties in the coalition will form a new Government.

At the same time, this reform can also mean an alarm that will mobilize citizens to choose a new direction for their own country and implicitly for the preservation of democracy, Israel being recognized as the only democracy in the Middle East.

### Bibliography

1. <https://en.idi.org.il/articles/46674>, accessed on 19.04.2023;
  2. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-shrugs-off-protest-says-millions-of-voters-demanded-judicial-overhaul/> accessed on 19.04.2023;
  3. [https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog\\_entry/israeli-ambassador-to-france-yael-german-resigns-in-protest-of-incoming-government/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/israeli-ambassador-to-france-yael-german-resigns-in-protest-of-incoming-government/) accessed on 19.04.2023;
  4. <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/skeblcaci>, accessed on 19.04.2023;
- <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/12/huge-crowds-protest-israels-judicial-changes-for-10th-week>, accessed on 19.04.2023.

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/12/huge-crowds-protest-israels-judicial-changes-for-10th-week>

<sup>7</sup> Histadrut or The General Workers' Organization of Israel is Israel's national trade union centre and represents the majority of trade unionists in Israel. Founded in December 1920 in Mandatory Palestine, it soon became one of the most powerful institutions in the Yishuv (the body of Jewish residents of the region before the establishment of the state). Today, it has 800,000 members.

<sup>8</sup> The war started on the 6<sup>th</sup> October 1973, when the Arab coalition launched a joint surprise attack against Israel on the holy day of Yom Kippur that coincided with the tenth day of the Holy Month of Ramadan of that year. The attack of the Egyptian and Syrian forces surprised even the USA.

### III. MIDDLE EAST - ISRAEL



## Israel in the Eye of the Storm

*Eva J. Koulouriotis (Grecia)*

On April 8, an Iranian-backed Palestinian militia called Liwa al-Quds (Jerusalem Brigade) fired about six Grad missiles in two waves from Syrian territory toward northern Israel. This dangerous escalation came just days after Hamas fired about forty Grad and Katyusha rockets from southern Lebanon into the Galilee regions of northern Israel. In these two attacks, the Israel Defence Forces responded with limited airstrikes targeting locations in southern Lebanon, southern Syria and the region of the Syrian capital, Damascus.

On the other hand, officials of the Lebanese Hezbollah militia and the Palestinian Hamas spoke of a strategy that began to work on the basis of the so-called axis of resistance (which is Iran and the militias that support it in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine). The title of this strategy is “the unification of the arenas of resistance”. So where is the Israeli-Iranian conflict headed in light of this new reality?

At the outset, it must be emphasised that the Middle East in general is experiencing fundamental changes and fluctuations in the relations of the capitals there. These changes are directly linked to larger changes taking place in the world in light of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the rise of China, alongside an incoherent and less stringent US policy than it was at the start of the current millennium. Given the strategic relations between Washington and major countries in the Middle East, led by Israel and Saudi Arabia, any American retreat, even temporary, will reflect on allies and enemies alike. The new Iranian scene must be analysed on this basis.

### The Iranian Scene

Undoubtedly, the turn-to-the-East strategy, which many Iranian officials have mentioned, led by the current Iranian President, Ibrahim Raisi, is beginning to bear fruit. Iranian-Russian relations have clearly contributed to the development of the Islamic Republic’s military capabilities, while the development of Iran-China relations has provided significant economic support that has been translated into a geopolitical rise in the Middle East, which has reached its peak recently due to Tehran’s denial on the European offer to return to the negotiating table on the issue of its nuclear program.

On the other hand, the long Iranian military arm, represented by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), has increased its movements and attacks on various fronts in the Middle East. This overconfidence of



*Source: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/cross-border-fire-gaza-after-israeli-police-raid-al-aqsa-mosque-2023-04-05/>*



Iran, which has recently pushed it to escalate against Israel on the fronts of Lebanon, Syria, and Gaza, can be seen as a sign of the rise of the Eastern lobby (Russia, China and Iran) in the Middle East at its expense western lobby (USA, NATO). This confidence in the East Bank is matched with a mix of erratic foreign policies on the other side.

### **The Scene in Israel**

In Israel, there are complications related to two levels. The first is external. With Netanyahu's victory in the recent elections and the formation of a right-wing government, and extremist figures assuming high positions in the government, Israel's relations with its most important ally in Washington have deteriorated. Democrats in the White House clearly do not support this administration and are unhappy with its domestic and regional policies in general. This tension with Washington was reflected in Israel's prestige regionally, as the normalisation process with neighbouring Arab countries was interrupted.

As for complications at home, the Netanyahu government's proposed judicial overhaul has created a rift with the opposition and led citizens to massive protest rallies, demonstrating the internal division.

These internal and external complications have clearly affected Israel's military deterrence, and despite occasional military strikes by the Israeli Armed Forces inside Syrian territory, the weaknesses of the Netanyahu government are being exploited by its enemies, led by Iran.

Officials in Israel know that any military action against the Hamas and Jihad militias in Gaza will produce results no different from those produced by the latest round of clashes in May 2021. Also, the Lebanese front has become more complex, especially after the signing of the maritime border demarcation agreement and Israel's desire to become an important energy country. The capabilities of the Lebanese Hezbollah militia allow it to strike the natural gas pumping platforms in the strategic Karish field in any possible round of military escalation with Israel. As for striking Iran's nuclear programme, it is a suicidal step without a green light and explicit American support. This military backdrop literally ties the hands of the Netanyahu government.

Today, Israel finds itself in the eye of a Tehran-led storm whose reach stretches from Natanz in Iran to Sana'a in Yemen, passing through Baghdad, Damascus, the suburbs of Beirut and Gaza. A storm through which the Islamic Republic of Iran is working to impose a new reality on the Middle East, in which Washington is a pawn in the shadow of the rising Chinese player. Meanwhile Israel is turning from a country that imposes its vision to one that watches with fear for Tehran's next move.

### III. MIDDLE EAST- BRICS



## **BRICS Is Significantly Developing Its Relations with the Countries in the Middle East and Invites Them to a Multipolar Competition**

*PhD. Eng. Stelian TEODORESCU*

*“Learn to focus only on the present moment. The past can’t be changed, so it’s pointless to reflect on it unless you want to make sure you don’t repeat the mistakes. The future is the result of your actions today. So learn from the past to act better in the present and thus succeed in the future.”*

*Jordan Lejuwaan*

### **Foreword**

The dynamics and predictability of the current geopolitical and geostrategic environment are strongly influenced by the sometimes incomprehensible dynamics and transformations of the relations between the main global actors, as well as by the increased freedom of action and the influence of new regional actors (state or non-state).<sup>1</sup>

Taking into account the type and unpredictability of the evolutions, but also the medium and long-term results and consequences, the position of the German scholar, Hanns W. Maull, expressed in one of his studies, becomes more and more realistic and up-to-date. He referred to the start of the transformation of the world order by asking the question: “dissolution or replacement?”<sup>2</sup>

It is very clear that geopolitics offers not only an overview of the map that represents the political interests of state and non-state actors, but can help us in the process of integrating actions, events and consequences generated especially at a regional level, and perceived at a global level. Moreover, geopolitics offers international actors a favourable framework for analysing the dynamics of evolutions, the development and correlation of likely scenarios, as well as for clear assessments, necessary for adopting the best decisions and having the fairest stands to be put into practice.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Multipolarism and regional security developments, defining elements for the future geopolitical architecture” - Defence and Security Monitor, August 17, 2020, Stelian Teodorescu, <https://monitorulapararii.ro/multipolarismum-si-evolutiile-de-securitate-la-regional-level-defining-elements-for-the-future-geopolitical-architecture-1-32982>.

<sup>2</sup> “Multipolarism and regional security developments, defining elements for the future geopolitical architecture” - Defence and Security Monitor, August 17, 2020, Stelian Teodorescu, <https://monitorulapararii.ro/multipolarismum-si-evolutiile-de-securitate-la-regional-level-defining-elements-for-the-future-geopolitical-architecture-1-32982>.

<sup>3</sup> “Multipolarism and regional security developments, defining elements for the future geopolitical architecture” - Defence and Security Monitor, August 17, 2020, Stelian Teodorescu, <https://monitorulapararii.ro/multipolarismum-si-evolutiile-de-securitate-la-regional-level-defining-elements-for-the-future-geopolitical-architecture-1-32982>.

## BRICS – A New Entity Exerting a Significant Influence on the Global Stage

The British economist who, in 2001, when he was the chief economist of the multinational investment bank, Goldman Sachs<sup>4</sup>, Terence James O'Neill<sup>5</sup> (baron O'Neill of Gatley, born on the 17<sup>th</sup> March 1957) became famous worldwide, as he came up with the acronym BRIC, as the name of a new group of rapidly developing states – Brazil, Russia, India and China, a group that became challenging and increasingly competitive for the G7 states (economically, technologically and militarily developed countries: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Great Britain and the USA).

It is very interesting to point out here that the BRIC was initially formed of four states very diverse, politically, economically, socially and militarily speaking. At the time, the four countries had sustained high economic growth rates, and the BRIC label represented economic optimism regarding the future of those nations. Opponents of the name and composition of this new group of states pointed out that the four were too diverse to stand together and that was really just Goldman Sachs' marketing strategy.

What at the time was perceived or perhaps started as a marketing game to encourage investors, later turned into a platform for intergovernmental cooperation similar to the G7. In 2009, the four nations met for their first summit in Yekaterinburg, Russia, and in 2010, South Africa was invited to join the group, adding an "S" to the name; the group is now called BRICS.

The acronym BRICS began as a somewhat optimistic term to describe what were the fastest growing economies in the world at the time. It is important to highlight that this BRICS group encompasses almost 42% of the world's population, 27% of the world's surface and 32% of the world's GDP. Now these nations are trying to become more and more powerful and establish themselves as an alternative to the existing international financial and political forums. "The founding myth of emerging economies is gone", confirmed Günther Maihold, deputy director of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, or SWP. "BRICS countries are living their geopolitical moment". Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa are trying to position themselves as representatives of the Global South, providing "an alternative model to the G7", but we must not leave out that the G7 is an "informal forum" of the heads of state of the most advanced economies in the world.

South Africa will chair the BRICS Summit in 2023, where, according to reports, they will discuss the issue of expansion, by including more countries from the world, especially those in the Middle East, one of them being Saudi Arabia. Other countries that have expressed interest in joining the group are Turkey, Egypt, Argentina and Iran. Many international analyses point out that Saudi Arabia, as the largest economy in the Middle East, will consider becoming part of an expanded BRICS, especially when all international environments see BRICS nations as the strongest economies in the world.

The BRICS group is seen as very important at least for the Middle East, especially for Saudi Arabia and Iran, as they are trying to diversify their economies and political relations in line with their long-term vision.

Even if the predictions regarding the BRICS countries as the fastest growing economies have not materialized so much lately, this alliance still is a diplomatic forum and provides financing for development aside from the Western environment and mainstream.

In 2014, with USD 50 billion as a base currency, the BRICS nations launched the New Development Bank (NDB) as an alternative to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In addition, they have created a financial liquidity mechanism called the Contingent Reserve Arrangement to support members struggling to make payments. These offers have not only proved attractive to the BRICS countries, but also to many other developing and emerging economies that have had painful experiences with the IMF's structural adjustment programs and austerity measures.

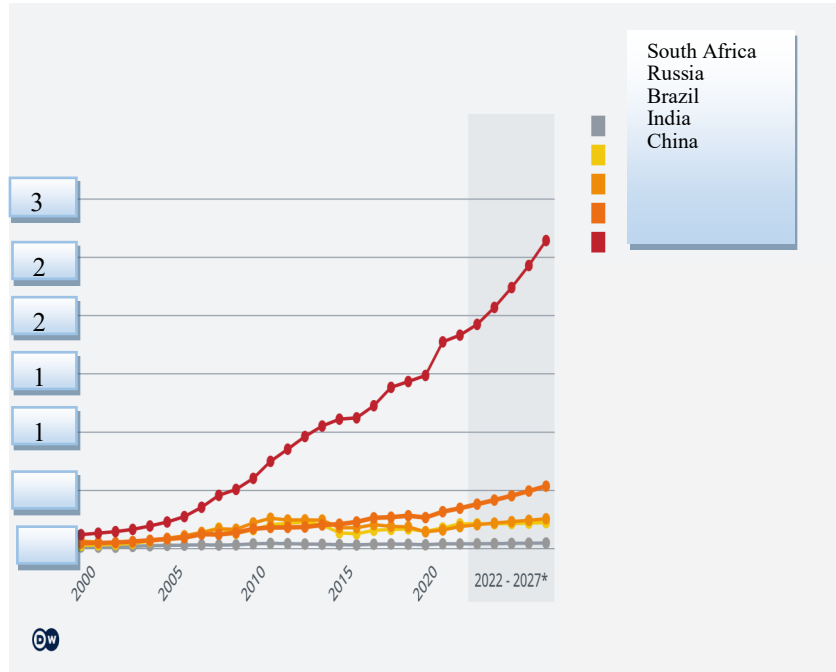
<sup>4</sup> Goldman Sachs is an American multinational investment bank and financial services company. Founded in 1869. Goldman Sachs is headquartered at 200 West Street in Lower Manhattan, with regional headquarters in London, Warsaw, Bangalore, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Dallas and Salt Lake City, and offices in other international financial centers. Goldman Sachs is the world's second largest investment bank by revenue and ranks 57th on the Fortune 500 list of the largest US corporations by total revenue.

<sup>5</sup> He is also a former chairman of Goldman Sachs Asset Management and a former Conservative government minister. Since January 2014, he has been Honorary Professor of Economics at the University of Manchester. He was appointed business secretary to the Treasury in the second Cameron ministry, a post he held until his resignation on September 23, 2016. For two years he led the UK's Independent Study on Antimicrobial Resistance, which ceased operations in May 2016. Since 2008, he has written monthly columns for the international media organization Project Syndicate. He is the current Chair of the Board of Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs.

This is why many countries have shown an increasing interest and said they may be interested in joining the BRICS group, especially since the NBD is open to new members. A telling example is that in 2021, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Uruguay and Bangladesh bought shares. These were, however, much smaller than the respective USD 10 billion investments made by the bank's founding members.

The South African Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor,<sup>6</sup> stated that worldwide interest in the BRICS group is "huge". In early March 2023, she made it known to the media that she had 12 letters on her desk from certain countries interested in joining this group, noting that "Saudi Arabia is one of them, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Algeria and Argentina, as well as Mexico and Nigeria are the others".

Economic growth in the BRICS countries shown by the evolution and forecast of their gross domestic product (GDP) in trillions of dollars is as follows:



Source: <https://www.dw.com/en/a-new-world-order-brics-nations-offer-alternative-to-west/a-65124269>

As we can see in the chart above, even if the latest economic developments in the BRICS member states do not confirm the initial myths and hopes on which the group was founded, namely that a real competing group must be created to change the world order, the latest developments seem to confirm that China started an extensive process of shape a new world order.

Of the five BRICS members, only China and India have seen sustained and extensive growth since then. As China's gross domestic product grew from 6 trillion USD in 2010 to nearly 18 trillion USD in 2021, and India's grew from 1.7 trillion USD to 3.1 trillion USD, the GDP of Brazil, South Africa and Russia stagnated.

Under such circumstances, we can easily see that since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, BRICS countries have distanced themselves even more from the West. For example, India, Brazil, South Africa or China do not take part in the decision-making process regarding the sanctions against Russia. This has become increasingly clear when Indian-Russian trade reached a historical level or when we look at Brazil's dependence of Russian fertilizers.

"Diplomatically, the war in Ukraine appears to have drawn a sharp line between Russia and the West", as political scientist Matthew Bishop of the University of Sheffield pointed out to the Economic Observatory late last year, but we can safely say that a red line has been established between BRICS and the countries that are not members of this group. As a result, some European and American decision-makers fear that BRICS

<sup>6</sup> Grace Naledi Mandisa Pandor is a South African politician and scholar a former minister for international relations and cooperation (2019).

could become less of an economic club where rising powers seek to influence global growth and development, and more of a political club defined by a strong competitive spirit, deeply marked by their authoritarian nationalism and probably by other strategic goals they have planned to adopt so they can change the world order.

The meeting between Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2023 proved to be a decisive moment for Brazil's foreign policy, with significant potential for a closer alliance with Beijing, and meant moving away from Brazil's traditional relations with the US and Europe, a fact that certainly contributes to the change of the world order. As for his first official visit to China following his election as president in January 2023, the Brazilian official is expected to try and convince Xi Jinping to join the so-called "peace club" with countries whose common goal is negotiating an end to the war in Ukraine.

Brazil and China appear to be largely in a similar position regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine, with both countries leaving the impression, and favouring mediation between the two warring states, thus attempting to implement a strategy that would end the conflict peacefully. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a publication in February 2023, precisely one year after the start of the conflict in Ukraine, outlining a change of approach to the conflict in Ukraine, which gives the Brazilian leader the perfect opportunity not only to persuade Xi Jinping to join its alternative forum, but also to increase Brazil's strategic presence on the world stage as an international actor of particular global importance. While the content of the publication was generally unbiased, appearing to criticize both the Russian invasion and US-backed sanctions as well as NATO's actions, China sought to make clear that "dialogue and negotiation are the only viable solutions to the Ukrainian crisis."

For his part, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva condemned Moscow, with Brazil recently voting to support a UN resolution that rejected the "brutal invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation" and called for the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops from the country. However, Lula has been vocal in criticising the actions of the Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelensky, saying in May 2022 that the authorities in Kiev were as responsible for the war as Putin. In addition, Brazil refused to participate in economic sanctions against Russia, without also providing military equipment to Ukraine. This impartiality gives the Brazilian president some credibility in mediating peace talks worldwide.

### **BRICS Pays More Attention than Ever to the Middle East**

Over the past decade, China's transnational interests and influence have expanded among developing countries, and we can say that the days when the Chinese foreign policy was guided by Deng Xiaoping's doctrine to "hide your power and bide your time" are over. Now, under Xi Jinping, China is taking a more direct role in the Middle East and pursuing a global agenda. Strategically, military spending is rising: the budget of the People's Liberation Army has more than doubled to 293.35 billion USD since Xi Jinping came to power, reasserting China's position as the world's second-largest military spender. Economically, the Belt and Road Initiative has seen an estimated one trillion USD invested in adjacent projects around the world.

Diplomatically, China has recently proven its ability to bring together opposing states, even brokering an agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran to reset political ties after seven years of tensions and conflict. Saudi Arabia and Iran's decision to restore diplomatic relations has taken many experts and analysts around the world by surprise, as some commentators say that the US could never have brokered such an agreement and the question remains: how important and real and on what was China's diplomatic role actually based and centred? As part of the agreement, the two countries decided to reopen their embassies within two months, as well as initiate security cooperation arrangements.

Pursuing these initiatives, it is highly likely that China will also want a seat at the negotiating table between Russia and Ukraine, increasing the likelihood that Lula's "peace club" proposal will be welcomed by Xi if Beijing can be the main international actor leading these negotiations.

The intensification of China's ties with the Arab world, and the recent visit of President Xi Jinping to Saudi Arabia, as a great power and member of BRICS, should be seen as a step taken in the context of the US' declining strategic presence in the region, and since the Saudi Arabia-US relations lately seem to be marked by and disagreements. "It is indeed a fact that the Saudi-US relationship is not at its best, but the US remains Saudi Arabia and the Middle East's the largest security partner, while China is the largest economic partner". This was pointed out by the political analyst Al-Ansari during an interview in Riyadh.

China's trade in the region has grown significantly since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and is growing steadily, rising from 180 billion USD in 2019 to 259 billion USD in 2021. On the other hand, the Middle East's trade with the U.S. decreased from 120 billion USD in 2019 to 82 billion USD in 2021. China continues to work to strengthen its economic ties, surpassing regional divisions. This helps strengthen its position as the

largest trading partner for regional powers such as Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, adding that Saudi Arabia is increasingly committed to putting its own national interests above all others. “Nowadays situations around the world are different, and the Saudis are adjusting their global vision accordingly”, as Al-Ansari noted. We must not forget the fact that: “Twenty years ago, China was the largest trading partner for 12 nations around the world. Today, it is the largest trading partner for more than 120 nations in the world, which is 60% of all nations”, as Al-Ansari said. China’s growing global engagement and, by implication, in the Middle East only confirms that the plans, strategies and policies of all countries in the region are based, now more than ever, on the development of a rapidly emerging perception that it is very important thforat Saudi Arabia and the entire Arab region to have strong relations with the Chinese nation.

It has become very clear that the international and regional situation are currently significantly marked and will continue to undergo deep, complex and large-scale changes in the future as well, which makes the strategic and global importance of the China-Saudi Arabia relations and implicitly those between BRICS and the Middle East more prominent. As both sides committed to intensifying their communication and coordination at the UN and on various other multilateral platforms, the Saudi Crown Prince spoke highly of China with regard to supporting Saudi Arabia in becoming a dialogue partner of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and promised to increase consultations with China at the G20 and in BRICS.

### We Can Conclude that...

In the current evolving regional and global context, it is not clear whether Beijing’s “no conflict” policy can distance China from the diplomatic pressure of defining the final geopolitical alignments.

As a result, the Middle East is getting ready to become an arena for a multipolar competition, but this competition may not be vertical, nor develop rapidly or generate major effects. Therefore, the great powers must respond to the realities on the ground by listening and carefully monitoring the developments and the attitude of the forces in the region and adapt to the regional concerns constantly changing all around the world.

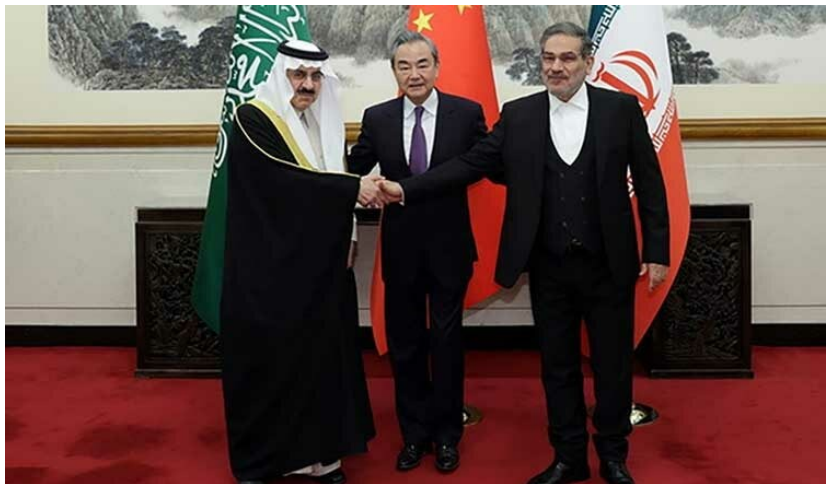
Beijing may want to reshape a bloc of allied nations in its image, according to its strategy and goals, but it will still face the challenge of setting clear objectives and finding the human, material and financial capital to achieve them. The tantalizing headlines that Saudi Arabia and Iran are seeking to join BRICS must be taken into consideration. The prospect of these two rivals joining the same multilateral organization aimed at promoting the economic prosperity of all member nations seems fictional.

Nevertheless, we must not overlook that this may occur and starts making sense if we look at this situation from China’s point of view. While China at one point was aggressively courting and trying to woo Saudi Arabia with the aim of weakening its deep relationship with the West, it is now very interesting that China is placing this country in line with its other partners, even Iran. Stopping and terminating the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran so that both countries align with China would amount to a historical evolutionary process at the regional and global level.

However, these two states remain in anticipation of each other in terms of foreign policy, the BRICS block wanting to be, in theory, an ideal ship to carry out geopolitical transformations in any part of the world, and wanting, especially through the impetus generated by China, to become the main leader in an increasingly dynamic Middle East, which now appears to be seeking more independence from the US.

We can say that BRICS is yet to objectively assess and complete its mandate, and may quickly become an “empty ship” for the foreign policy objectives of its most influential members.

Can BRICS Member States facilitate a viable alternative to introducing another currency to compete with the US dollar? Developments in all areas around the world and the current ongoing global financial crisis, but also the confrontational foreign policy between various states and groups of states to change the world order, could explain why BRICS countries have intensified their efforts to launch an alternative currency to the



Source: <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501253757/china-brokered-iran-saudi-deal-threatens-to-push-us-out-of-the-gulf-and-washington-should-take-note/>

US dollar, the possible consequences and implications of such a move being very difficult to quantify for all the economies in the world, but especially for the African ones.

It is too soon to predict whether the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran will develop and endure. Nowadays, it has become very clear that the economic and trade ties that often give rise to, and favour political engagements, facilitate a close cooperation in other areas as well, including defence, and must eventually lead to the development of cooperation in the field of information and security, but such an evolution is very difficult to assess and forecast when it comes to the Middle East.

### III. MIDDLE EAST- CHINA



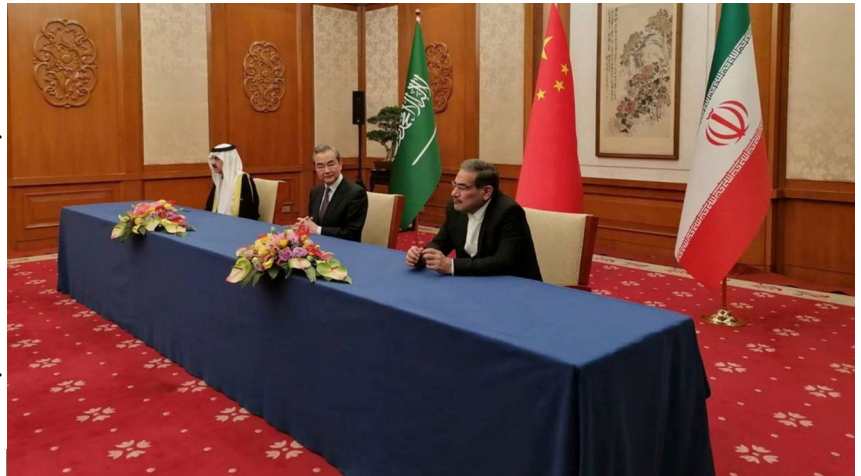
## China's Role in the Middle East

*Hei Sing Tso (China)*

China's recent role as a mediator to foster the detente between Iran and Saudi Arabia surprised not only the West. The whole world is now keeping its eyes on the role China will play in the Middle East. The region has been both an engine and an arsenal. Oil and guns are in the daily lives of people in the Middle East. Will China's involvement change the geopolitical landscape of the region? This is certainly a very serious question for academics and practitioners of international relations. This article tries to analyse China's strategic direction towards the Middle East from a geostrategic perspective.

### Geo-economics

China is a socialist country in a political sense. Planning and long-term strategies are features specific to socialist nations. After the chaos and ruin during Mao's period, Deng Xiaopeng created a Reform-Openness Strategy incorporating capitalist markets. After more than 30 years of Reform, China has now reached a saturated internal economy. The Chinese Communist Party's ultimate goal is to raise the living standard of the entire population to a higher degree. This is the main reason behind Xi Jinping's *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI). This is the "2.0" version of Deng's Reform-Openness Strategy. Economic integration with Eurasia is the main grand strategic goal of contemporary China. The Middle East is certainly a part of Eurasia. Interesting is the role of the Middle East in the context of the BRI in China's strategy.



Source: <https://thediplomat.com/2023/03/why-china-is-looking-for-a-bigger-role-in-the-middle-east/>

China is the second largest trading partner of the Arab world, while Arab countries are China's main oil providers. In 2015, China has replaced the United States as the largest importer of oil and at least half of its oil comes from the Middle East. In 2030, China will need to consume 800 billion tons of oil; 75% of it must be imported. However, China has another oil provider – Russia. After the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, China seized the opportunity and started buying much cheaper oil from the *polar bear*. In March 2023, nearly 43 million barrels of Russian crude oil were set for China. However, China will not lean on Russia entirely for its energy supply. First of all, China does not want to leave the impression that it is supporting Russia economically. Secondly, putting all eggs in one basket is too risky. Before the outbreak of the Ukrainian conflict, Russia showed no keen interest in joining the BRI. From China's strategic perspective, having Saudi Arabia as a competitor can offset Russia's negative influence.

Oil is also essential for the development of the countries along the BRI. The China Marine Petroleum Corporation has traded LNG (liquefied natural gas) with about 20 countries along the BRI and invested more than 25 billion RMB in 10 petroleum projects. Resource sharing is a feature of the BRI. China's strategic concern is not to make large profits from petroleum trade but to provide sufficient energy for constructing infra-



structures along the BRI. Another long-term goal regarding China's strategy in the Middle East is to establish a new International Economic Order. China intends to have a say in setting the rules in the international economy, including in establishing institutions, norms, values, mechanisms, etc. Petrocurrency is one of the key components of this economic strategy. During the latest China-Arab summit, President Xi Jinping told Arab leaders that China would work to buy oil and gas in yuan, a move that would support Beijing's goal in making its currency international and weaken the hold the U.S. dollar has on world trade. As of late, Saudi Arabia for example, has been considering selling its oil in other currencies. This will pave the way for China to input its own standards and rules on the global economy. Hence, oil supply, BRI and a new economic order are the three main geo-economic objectives for China's strategy in the Middle East.

### **Political Risk**

As I said before, *guns* and *oil* are part of the everyday life in the Middle East. This region is full of significant political hazards. First of all, there are ordinary political risks. Oil investments and trade are challenging and intensive, and they take long when it comes to cycles and returns. Any disruptions within governments, regime changes, can certainly jeopardize Chinese foreign assets, contracts and investments. In 2005, a Chinese oil enterprise signed a 25-year oil exploration contract with Libya. In 2011, the political situation in Libya deteriorated. The project was terminated and China suffered a loss of about 20 billion USD. In 2005 and 2010, the same Chinese enterprise acquired shares for two oil companies in Syria. However, the political turmoil in the country made the Chinese investor completely withdraw from the Syrian market. China has been investing in Sudan ever since 1995; its investments in oil exploration mount up to up to 20 billion USD; the dissensions in Sudan, in 2011, caused a great loss. Since, the crisis in Yemen has been ongoing for eight years, it made the Chinese suspend all oil projects there.

### **Security Risk**

The second most important dimension is the security issue. First of all, the Sunni-Shia "scuffle" has always been there but was manageable. On the other hand, the effects of the Syrian crisis spread, creating conflicts across the whole region: in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, etc.

Another security risk is terrorism. The increasing turmoil in the countries in the Middle East made radicalism spread and flourish very easily. The Islamic State (ISIS) still controls many areas, posing serious threats to the stability of the Middle East. In 2014 the ISIS leader at the time targeted China, as a place for the spread of jihad.

There is also the issue of structural security. National borders in the Middle East were arbitrarily defined by Britain and France a long time ago. However, these cannot accommodate the diverse distribution of different religious and ethnic groups. Once regimes are weakened politically, separatism would certainly take over and come in waves. Conflicts in Syria, and Iraq and the rise of ISIS are such examples. In 2011, many of the Chinese development projects in the Middle East diminished significantly, due to political and social unrest, and the largest were related to the energy sector.

The final risk to be approached here, is external. China's assertive position in the Middle East will clash with the interests of other foreign powers. After the 1991 Gulf War, Gulf countries basically subcontracted their defence and security to the United States. A US air force base is situated in Oman, while the central command is in Qatar and the fifth fleet is in Benin. In 2010, Europe has set up a free trade zone with the Mediterranean countries, competing for oil market shares in the Middle East. In 2009, France set up a military base in the UAE, while in 2014, Britain set one up in Benin. Besides the West, Russia has supported Syria with military and energy resources, so that it could exert and preserve its influence in the region.

Out of all these foreign powers, the United States will remain China's main rival. The USA want a steady supply of oil from the Middle East using USD as the single petrocurrency. Moreover, the United States will not tolerate China's increasing influence in the region, particularly, if some nations defy Washington and get closer to China. Simply put, in the eyes of the American leadership, China has become a strong competitor in the Middle East.

### **China's Approach**

Taking into account all of the above, I believe that China's main role in the Middle East is to mitigate geopolitical risks, in order to minimize their impacts on the geo-economy of the Belt and Road Initiative. First of all, China will try to consolidate the integrity and stability of the regime. State failure should be prevented. We should be aware that China upholds the principle of non-interference with the internal affairs of other nations. Hence, Beijing will not impose its systems and values on other nations. Economic and social well-being

is ideal for good governance. China is willing to share its experience with other countries, with regard to its economic and social policies. Through mutual exchange and learning, other nations may be influenced by China's soft power. Policy communication and civil exchange are two main features of the strategy that ensures the functioning of the BRI. This is a tacit public diplomacy. The result is not instant but it may pay on the long run.

To counter security risks, different approaches should be taken. As far as the Sunni-Shia issue is concerned, China is already actively engaged with Iran and Saudi Arabia so that the relations between the two Islamic branches head towards normalisation. This is a good start. China will continue to assist Tehran and Riyadh in the mediation process between other Sunni and Shia nations and groups so that they eventually reach a peaceful settlement. I believe China will use its BRI tools as economic incentives to bring all interested parties to the negotiating table. In opposition to the courses of action that the USA chose to take – the use of sanctions – the Chinese chose economic diplomacy. As far as radicalism and terrorism are concerned, the issue is more complicated. The most effective method to be employed in this case is intelligence collection. China may widen intelligence sharing with other Middle East countries on these matters. Although China officially denies spying overseas, deploying undercover agents to work on BRI projects may become a possibility. SIGINT and HUMINT are equally important.

How can China tackle the structural political risk in the Middle East? Let's have a look at the history of the silk road for further insights. In the past, Central Asia and the Middle East were controlled by a few empires. This makes the geopolitical landscape relatively stable and manageable. At present, the region encompasses many countries. If China wants to have geopolitical stability in the region, it must definitely develop strategic partnerships with the big powers including Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, Algeria, Syria, and Iraq. If these great states can form a stable polygon with China as a coordinator, the whole region will become less unstable. It is very likely that China is behind the recent diplomatic activities of these nations.

When it comes to external risks, I venture to say China's only rival is the United States. It will use a different approach in this competition in the Middle East. Firstly, China will not resort to military means. It will not even set up military bases or even supply military aid to any party in the region. Secondly, unlike the United States, China will not impose its own values, institutions or ideology on other countries. Thirdly, China will not form antagonising alliances with countries in the region so that they disrupt the power balance between them. It will develop relations with all nations for mutual benefit. China does not seek a sphere of influence, neither, does it want to divide the Middle East so that great powers can share the pieces. China will not confront the United States on any local issue in the Middle East. The real purpose is to integrate the Middle East in a new international order.

### **Stratagem as an Art**

Recently, academic discussions have endeavoured to take on China's strategic culture. I completely agree with the fact that the West will not be able to understand Chinese politics and policy, without having some knowledge of traditional Chinese wisdom and mindset. When people talk about Chinese strategy, they will cite Sun Tzu's Art of War for reference. However, there is an ancient Chinese school of diplomacy known as the School of Vertical and Horizontal Alliances that is rarely studied by foreign scholars. As I am an expert on Classic Chinese Stratagem, I here apply the wisdom of this school to give a brief conclusion on China's role in the Middle East.

The founder of the School of VHA was Guiguizi, who was a mysterious thinker, living during the period of the Warring States (475-221 BC). He has passed down orally a set of strategies known as the 72 strategies of change. Strategy no. 22, for example, is literally translated as "flying and grabbing to defeat the enemy". Flying and grabbing means creating the proper environment where a power can counter an enemy power. Essentially, what it means is the use of different methods and approaches to form a new kind of power pole. This new state of affairs will turn into an invisible cage containing the enemy. If the enemy moves right, we attack the left, making the enemy subject to our manipulation and control. In the present case, China intends to create a new power pole around oil, the BRI and a new international economic order. The ultimate goal is to counter the United States!

One of Guiguizi' other strategies is literally translated as "winning without combat". The basic concept of this tactic is the use of invisible weapons to surround the enemy using cultural, psychological, economic, diplomatic and other unspoken and covert tools. This will dry the enemy of energy and win the conflict without combat. Hence, as I have said above, China will not use military power to intervene in the Middle East. What the country actually does, is launch a non-combat strategy aiming to defeat its enemies, not end them!

### III. MIDDLE EAST - SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN



## Turning a New Page: The Saudi Arabia-Iran Alliance for Regional Stability

*PhD. Mohamad Al-Mokdad (Lebanon)*

Throughout history, the Middle East has long been plagued by tensions and conflicts, with Saudi Arabia and Iran frequently at odds, due to their variations in politics, religion, aspects that had effects on the region. However, in a lovely turn of events, a modern alliance between Saudi Arabia and Iran has emerged, marking a historical shift in the geopolitical panorama of the Middle East.

The roots of the Saudi Arabia-Iran contention can be traced back to the historical and religious variations between the Sunni-majority in Saudi Arabia and Shiite-majority in Iran. The two nations have often found themselves on opposing sides of conflicts in their vicinity, which incorporates in Yemen, Syria, and Lebanon, fuelling tensions and proxy wars. However, modern-day geopolitical tendencies have brought about a changing dynamic amongst those community powers.

One of the key drivers of this new alliance is converting the worldwide political landscape. In the past years, there was a power shift within the Middle East, with the United States showing less interest in the area after it sorted its priorities. This has created a void that Saudi Arabia and Iran are trying to fill. International and regional actors are trying to manage economic situations that are very demanding. They see that the only answer is walking alongside each other, deal with common issues and pursuing their interests.

Another problem that has contributed to the contemporary alliance is the regime change that took over the power in both countries – Saudi Arabia and Iran. Saudi Arabia has a younger and dynamic leader in the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who has been pushing for social and financial reforms within the USA. Iran, on the other hand, has a modern day president in Ebrahim Raisi, who has promised to prioritize America and see it as a financial tool and gradually replace domestic contributors with global ones. The changes in these control instruments mean more possibilities for dialogue and cooperation.

Religion, which has been a divisive component within the Saudi-Iran opposition, has played an additional part in the new alliance. Everywhere in the world there are Muslim countries that commit to defending and promoting Islam. They have got it into their “minds” that the differences between the branches of Islam ought to not be a barrier to cooperation and that they should be able to work together and solve their problems an essential matter to all the Muslims in the world. This means preventing and countering terrorism, promoting local stability, and addressing the wishes of Muslim minorities in other countries.

Economic issues have been a source of stress within the alliance. Both Saudi Arabia and Iran are managing worrisome economic issues, together with low oil charges, excessive unemployment for the younger population, and the need to diversify their economies. They realized that if they work together, they will be able to merge their resources and knowledge to master those annoying situations more effectively. As an example, they have been discussing the opportunity of intensifying their oil and gas resource exploitations, that would bring financial benefits to international locations and to the vicinity in its entirety.

Furthermore, the ever-changing dynamics of global politics has motivated the latest alliance even more. Both Saudi Arabia and Iran have been pressured by the West including the United States, which has im-

posed sanctions on them for various reasons. They have discovered that if they carry on together, they will “beef up” their bargaining power and protect their interests in the face of outside pressure. This has caused a strategic shift, wherein Saudi Arabia and Iran are finding common grounds and aligning their positions with regard to regional and global issues.

The modern day alliance between Saudi Arabia and Iran has already began out to bear fruit in various fields. One of the greatest advantages is the negotiating process for the tensions in Yemen, a long-term notorious conflict, where Saudi Arabia and Iran were in opposition. The two nations have engaged in talks and expressed a willingness to find a political solution for the catastrophe that could pave the way for a peaceful outcome in Yemen.

Another area of cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Iran is for the benefit of the region’s balance. Countries outside the region have expressed their wish to promote stability in the Middle East and have been making diplomatic efforts to manage conflicts and disputes within the region. Now, the two countries must prove they are willing to work towards de-escalating tensions and finding nonviolent answers to local crises, including those in Syria and Lebanon. The international community has welcomed these actions and see them as an incredible step in decreasing tensions and promoting balance within the region.

Economically, the brand new alliance between Saudi Arabia and Iran has the capacity to bring extensive benefits to each country. As I previously mentioned, they have taken into account financial and energy cooperation (progress with oil and gas), that can generate new possibilities for the economic development and diversification for both countries. They have also discussed cooperating in areas in need of change and funding (such as tourism), that may further strengthen their economies and facilitate joint financial cooperation within the region.

Additionally, the brand new alliance between Saudi Arabia and Iran has implications for the wider Middle East and for international politics. It has the capability to affect the energy balance inside the area and reshape the alliances and dynamics between the countries in the region and their international partners. It can additionally have implications on ongoing conflicts, which include the Syrian civil war and the Yemeni struggle, as the two countries – Saudi Arabia and Iran – must work together to come up with peaceful solutions and bring stability in those countries.

Besides, apart from the things I mentioned above, it is important to word that the new alliance between Saudi Arabia and Iran faces challenges and skepticism from various sides. There are issues worth taking into account – a long the history of distrust and animosity between the two countries, and whether or not this new alliance is sustainable on long term.

There are also regional and international actors who may not be supportive of this new alliance, as it could probably affect their interests and have an effect on in the area. Moreover, there are ongoing geopolitical and religious tensions within the Middle East that could pose endanger the Saudi -Iranian alliance. The area is complicated, there are multiple and competitive stakeholders and a history that might not be easy to ignore. The success of this alliance would rely upon the willingness of both nations to definitely cooperate, take advantage of the opportunities at hand and face the challenges which could rise up.

In conclusion, the new alliance between Saudi Arabia and Iran marks a historic shift in the geopolitical panorama of the Middle East. It is driven by the ever-changing international politics, by the management changes in each country, by challenging economic situations, and by their commitment to protecting and promoting Islam. The alliance has the capability to deliver high quality changes, reduce tensions, promote local stability, and foster economic cooperation. However, it additionally faces demanding situations and uncertainties. Because the situation evolves, it will likely be essential for both countries to show real dedication, analyze, and cooperate to preserve this new alliance and obtain the desired results. The world is watching closely as this new chapter in the Saudi Arabia-Iran saga unfolds, with hopes for a greater nonviolent and stable Middle East.

The brand new alliance between Saudi Arabia and Iran has drawn significant interest from the global community, with numerous opinions and reactions. A few countries and stakeholders have expressed their willingness to contribute to the development, seeing it as a fine step towards balance and cooperation. They see that this alliance could have a transformative impact on the Middle East, and has the potential to solve conflicts and address longstanding troubles through dialogue and diplomacy. One of the key advantages of the Saudi Arabia-Iran alliance is its ability to decrease tensions in the region. The two countries have a history of animosity and contention, which has fueled conflicts and instability in the Middle East. However, with this new alliance, they may wish to set aside their differences and work closer to find nonviolent solutions. This will have a ripple effect on the entire region, contributing to a strong and secure Middle East. Moreover, the economic capacity of this alliance cannot be overlooked. Both Saudi Arabia and Iran are essential gamers in-

side the international power market, with extensive oil and gas reserves. By taking part in joint financial initiatives, while improving the process of exploiting those oil and gas resources, through exchanges and funding, they may discover new opportunities and benefits. This may also contribute to the development of different industries, new jobs and the improvement of the general financial situation of the countries' vicinity.

This brand new alliance between Saudi Arabia and Iran also has the potential to change the dynamics of other conflicts in the Middle East. For instance, in Syria, where both actors have supported the opposing sides involved in the civil conflict. However, with their newfound cooperation, they could undoubtedly work together and find a political solution that could bring an end to the battle. Similarly, in Yemen, where they have been aiding different factions, their alliance could contribute to identifying a peaceful resolution to the ongoing conflict, which has already brought on significant suffering to the Yemeni population.

Furthermore, the Saudi Arabia-Iran alliance could have effects on global politics. The Middle East has been an unstable region for a long time, with numerous countries and international actors vying for influence. The alliance between Saudi Arabia and Iran could potentially shift the power balance in the region, leading to new alliances and strategies between different nations. This may have implications for the broader geopolitical landscape, which includes relationships with other major powers such as the USA, Russia, and China.

However, regardless of the two countries' combined capabilities, the brand new alliance between Saudi Arabia and Iran faces additional challenges and uncertainties. Some of these are the deeply-rooted mistrust and the animosity between the two countries. They have had longstanding differences, problems emerging because of nearby influence, religious ideology, and they have been exploited by opposing proxies involved in conflicts all over the Middle East. Rebuilding trust and finding a common ground may not be easy, and it will require proper dedication and sustained efforts from each side. Additionally, there are nearby and worldwide actors who might not be supportive of the Saudi Arabia-Iran alliance. A few countries in the area, in particular the ones that have sided with Saudi Arabia or Iran's opponents, may view this alliance as an opportunity to get involved and try to undermine it. There also are concerns regarding disruptive factors that might try to derail the progress of this alliance through acts of violence or sabotage. Furthermore, the complicated geopolitical and religious dynamics in the Middle East could endanger the sustainability of this alliance. The region is characterized by way more than one conflict, historical rivalries, and a competitive past. Identifying a common ground and overcoming differences in this complex environment may also prove to be challenging. There are also concerns about the possibility of a hostile response, coming from extremist corporations or religious tensions that could disrupt the course of this alliance.

In conclusion, the new alliance between Saudi Arabia and Iran has the capability to bring about significant changes in the Middle East, with implications for the stability of its vicinity. It could also bring financial cooperation, and have a significant impact on global politics. Whilst it may help decrease tensions, have financial advantages, find solutions to conflicts, it will also face challenges and uncertainties.

## IV. INDO-PACIFIC



### **The Balance of Power in the Indo-Pacific Before and After the War in Ukraine**

*Aditya Thorat (India)*

On the 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022, when Russian President Vladimir Putin declared a “special military operation” on his sovereign neighbour Ukraine, the world witnessed a few of century-defining weeks. It is too soon for us to come to any conclusion about the conflict in Ukraine, but this war has undoubtedly awakened Europe from a slumber. The military and diplomatic moves this war started were last seen in the peak years of the Cold War. However, the conflict cannot be compared to any other historical war.

Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Scandinavia, and the Balkans are the regions most impacted by this war, but they are not the only ones. A missing piece of the puzzle that often gets ignored is the Indo-Pacific region. If we do not take into account the impact the Indo-Pacific has on this war, all analyses with regard to it can surely be seen as incomplete.

#### **Why the Indo-Pacific?**

The Indo-Pacific is a relatively new term, or rather a new concept altogether. That is why, it is challenging to evaluate this region. In the context of the Eurasian Geostrategy, for example, this region might seem irrelevant. It is natural to think of the irrelevancy of the Indo-Pacific, as the importance this region has is not because of its present capabilities but of its potential ones, the ones it might develop in the coming future.

The term was first referred to, formally, in 2007 by Japan’s Former Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe during his address to the Indian Parliament. Shinzo Abe said “The Pacific and the Indian Oceans are now bringing about a dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and of prosperity. A *broader Asia* that broke away geographical boundaries is now beginning to take on a distinct form. Our two countries have the ability – and the responsibility – to ensure that it broadens yet further and to nurture and enrich these seas to become seas of clearest transparency.”

In 2007, Shinzo Abe also took the initiative for forming the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between Japan, the USA, India, and Australia. This was an alliance formed to secure the sea lanes in the Indo-Pacific.

In 2013, Australia’s Defence White Paper used the term Indo-Pacific. The term was now officially documented and articulated by experts.

The period between 2007 and 2013 was momentous in determining the current power balance in the world. On one side of the Pacific were Japan, India, and China.

Japan was recovering from its economic crisis in the 1990s. An important part of Japan’s economic and foreign policy was to secure trade in rising Asia markets. The safety and security of sea passages connecting the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean became a priority for Japan.

India was reaping the benefits of the economic liberalization it introduced in the 1990s. With the Civil Nuclear Deal with the USA, India also gained legitimacy as a nuclear power. It was also developing naval and

missile capabilities in the Indian Ocean to assert itself as a regional superpower.

China, meanwhile, had become the world's second-largest economy by surpassing Japan in 2010. Not just economically, but in every aspect, China was being touted as the "World Number 2". It was cementing its hegemonic ambitions not just in Asia but around the world. The two biggest shocks that China gave to the G-7 countries were: The Belt and Road Initiative and the South China Sea Dispute. Both these issues were a challenge to the traditional supply chains that the G-7 economies depended upon.

On the other side of the Pacific was the USA.

Between 2007 and 2013, the US economic policy and foreign policy saw significant changes. The financial crisis in 2008 changed the outlook of US investors toward international investments. Rather than just being dependent on Europe, American investors wanted to diversify their investments. The rising Asian markets were hence a pleasing destination for them. Specifically, South Asian and South-East Asian economies saw a lot of limelight. The most important part of this new moment was to secure the sea routes connecting the American continent with the Asian continent. This is why, US interests in the South China Sea, the Strait of Malacca, and the Indian Ocean expanded.

For the first time, China and the US were in a direct conflict of interests over a geographic region. The US foreign policy saw an interesting transition after the "War on Terror" came to an end after the end of Osama Bin Laden. The US Army slowly started to reduce its overseas involvement, especially in the Middle East.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944, the Allied forces landed on the beaches of Normandy. Since then the US military had boots on the ground in every major conflict that took place around the world. The Korean War, the Suez Crisis, the Bay of Pigs Invasion, the Berlin Crisis, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, and finally The War on Terror were the important overseas conflicts that saw US military involvement. However, this era was coming to end. It was under these circumstances that the Indo-Pacific and the Quad Alliance evolved. It was as if all dots had been connected at the right time for this alliance to form.

Now let us examine what happened after 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022, which has taken the Indo-Pacific in disarray.

### **The Indo in the Indo-Pacific**

The Indo-Pacific was not always the term the West used to refer to rising Asian economies. The original term used to be Asia-Pacific. This term came into being after 1978, when China globalized its economy and became a manufacturing hub for Western nations. During this time US-China diplomatic and trade relations were healthy and growing. Meanwhile, US-India diplomatic and trade relations were stagnant and sometimes even got tense.

After the 2000s, the US started realizing it depended on China and East Asia while at the same time, it started realizing the potential India and South Asia had. The shift from Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific happened for this particular reason. The naval advantage that India has in this region is significant enough to not ignore India in any alliance that takes shape. India has access to some of the most important maritime choke points. India has strategic access to the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Bab-Al-Mandeb, and the Strait of Malacca. This is why many countries are interested in partnering with India. Indian policymakers are well aware of this advantage and want to take advantage of it as much as they can. India is a part of the famous BRICS alliance (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). The alliance received more public attention after Russia invaded Ukraine. This invasion was already anticipated but the preparedness of the Russian economy for Western sanctions was not. The way the Russian economy started protecting itself from international pressure after the invasion of Crimea in 2014 is real and worth looking into. Russia has become a case study for the BRICS nations, which desire to have economies independent of the Western bloc. Instead of learning lessons, BRICS countries are getting inspired by Russia.

There has been a lot of talk about de-dollarization in recent times. This started when the Russian Rouble was backed by gold and protected it from international monetary fluctuations. India too on several occasions has expressed its intent to become independent of the Western financial system. This move is not welcomed by the USA. It is not just the BRICS alliance that India is close with, but it is also close with Russia as a country. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, India has become Russia's trusted trade partner. The trade between the two countries hit a record \$39.8 billion in the period 2022-2023. The trade ties between the two countries are said to grow even further, as the Russian Deputy Prime Minister, Denis Manturov went to India at the end of April and talked about trade barriers. These moves did not agree with the USA – India was accused of "funding the war" because of its trade ties with Russia.

The relations between USA and India sometimes take unpleasant turns. After a two-year break, the USA have recently appointed a new ambassador to India. The US ambassador to India, Mr. Eric Garcetti, has

talked about dealing human rights issues during his tenure. This statement was not well received as it questioned the legitimacy of India's current ruling party. Another long-standing issue that affects the relations between the two countries is that of nuclear submarines. For the safety and security of the Indian Ocean, India has always wanted sophisticated nuclear submarine technology which is capable of delivering ballistic missiles and cruise missiles. However, the USA has always refused to cooperate on this issue and share any technology with India. This makes India question the USA's intentions, and the Quad Alliance.

Both the Quad Alliance and BRICS are yet to reach their full potential. Their future depends on the side India chooses as a priority. For, the past two years India has enjoyed the benefits of being multipolar but that will not always be the case. India cannot be on this tightrope walk and must soon take a side. The side India takes is going to determine a lot of what happens in the Indo-Pacific and also in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The next few years are going to be essential in determining the power balance in Eurasia.



## V. HYBRID WARFARE IN THE DIGITAL ERA



### The Psychology of War in the Digital Age The Impact of the Media and the Social Networks on How We See Conflicts

*PhD. Leliana Pârvulescu*

In the digital age, wars and conflicts are played out not only on battlefields, but also on mobile phones, computers and television screens. Mass media and social media have brought war closer to people than ever before, changing the way it is perceived and experienced. What we experience while watching the war in Ukraine emphasizes this. In this article, I will analyse the psychological impact of consuming war-related information through the media and the social networks, while comparing it to the situation in past wars, when such technologies did not exist.

Constant exposure to war related images and information can have negative effects on individuals' mental health, such as stress, anxiety and post-traumatic symptoms. Intensive exposure to war news can lead to informational fatigue and a distorted perception of reality, heightening feelings of insecurity and fear. People can become numb to the violence of war and human suffering, especially when it is presented repeatedly in the media and social media. This can lead to less empathy and concern for the victims of war. Desensitization can also contribute to a separation between those who are directly affected by the war and those who watch it from afar, making it more difficult to promote a humanitarian response and peace.

Besides, mass media and social networks can amplify political and ideological messages, contributing to the polarization of the public opinion and, in some cases, to the radicalization of individuals. This can fuel conflict and lead to bellicose rhetoric in society. In addition, disinformation and media manipulation can contribute to a bad perception of the war and the escalating tensions. On the other hand, exposure to information about war through media and social media can increase awareness on global issues and encourage people to engage in civic and humanitarian action. Access to real-time information can help expose abuses and war crimes, increasing pressure on governments and international organizations to take action, protect human rights and promote peace. It



Source: <https://www.stimson.org/2022/social-media-misinformation-and-the-prevention-of-political-instability-and-mass-atrocities/>

is obvious where countries stand and how they are involvement when it comes to establishing peace in Ukraine, through constant negotiations with Moscow.

As a result, mass media and social media have a complex impact on how we perceive and experience war today. In addition to negative effects such as stress, anxiety, and loss of sensitivity, these channels can help increase awareness and civic engagement in war-related issues. It is essential that we are aware of these effects and adapt our informational and emotional behaviour accordingly in order to maintain our sanity and promote a peaceful and responsible society.

Unlike the wars of the past, when information about wars was limited and transmitted in a more controlled manner, which reduced direct exposure to traumatic events, nowadays this exposure can greatly change behaviours and mind-sets. During past wars, information was often controlled and filtered by governments and media outlets. This meant that the population was exposed to less details and explicit images representing violence and human suffering. While this can be seen as an advantage in terms of protecting individuals' mental health, it can also hide abuses and war crimes. Today, the effect of the "connectivity paradox" shows that despite easy access to information, people may be less informed and less able to understand the reality of war in its global context. Although modern technology and social media allow us to be constantly connected to events around the world, this does not necessarily mean that we are better informed. This connectivity paradox can be explained by the fact that while we have access to a vast amount of information, we are often subjected to a surfeit of news and content that prevents us from filtering and understanding relevant and meaningful information. In this sense, people may be less informed and less able to understand the reality of war in its global context compared to previous eras. In the past, wars were often portrayed in the media in a way that promoted national unity and solidarity, with an emphasis on heroism and sacrifice. With today's social media, messages are more diverse and complex, and the sense of national solidarity and morale can be eroded, especially in wars that are perceived as unjust or unjustified. In certain cases, people may compare contemporary wars with past ones, considering them "nobler" or "justified" due to ideological or national causes. This nostalgia can be fuelled by romanticized representations of past wars in history and culture and can obscure the brutal and complex reality of armed conflict. Comparing current wars with past wars shows how much our perceptions of war have changed in the age of mass media and social media. This entails a number of challenges and dilemmas for the individuals' mental health. Thus, we can talk about negative psychological consequences for those who watch the war live. Studies have shown that post-traumatic stress symptoms can affect not only those directly involved in the war, but also those watching the events from a distance. Strong emotional responses and the polarization of public opinion can occur, fuelled by rapid and emotional reactions on social media. If we talk about vicarious trauma, we refer to experiencing traumatic symptoms as a result of exposure to other people's traumas, even if these events are not experienced directly. Those who follow war through media and social media can experience stress, anxiety and post-traumatic symptoms as they are repeatedly exposed to images and stories of violence and human suffering. This can have a negative impact on individuals' mental health and daily functioning.

Furthermore, exposure to information about war and violence through the media and social media can elicit intense emotional responses such as anger, sadness, and fear. These emotions can be amplified by interaction with other users on social media and can fuel the polarization of public opinion, creating divisions and tensions in society. This can make it more difficult to find consensus and peaceful solutions to international conflicts.

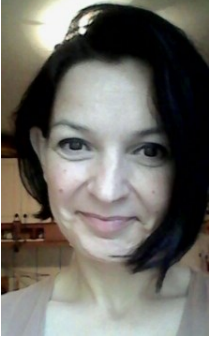
Public resources and policies should be directed towards preventing and treating mental health problems related to the exposure to the violence of war, through the responsible and critical promotion of information about war and violence. This involves developing skills to evaluate and interpret sources of information, as well as promoting a balanced and fact-based public discourse. In a world where wars and conflicts are often publicized and monitored in real time, it is essential to promote peace values, dialogue and international cooperation. This involves developing and supporting policies and initiatives that encourage diplomatic and nonviolent solutions to international disputes and tensions. Governments, civil organizations and citizens must work together to combat disinformation and media manipulation in the context of war and conflict. This infers promoting transparency, accountability and ethics in journalism and communication, as well as developing strategies for fact-checking and debunking fake news. Information campaigns and educational programs can help raise public awareness with regard to disinformation, as well as improve the ability to detect and report false or misleading content. This can include training in schools, workshops and seminars, as well as using technology to identify and remove fake content. Combating disinformation and media manipulation in the context of wars and conflicts requires an international and coordinated approach. International organizations, such as the United Nations and the European Union, can play a key role in promoting common standards and

rules for media and social media, as well as supporting cooperation between states and non-state actors to counter disinformation and protect security information.

### **Bibliography**

1. Altheide, D. L. (2006). *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
2. Furedi, F. (2007). *The Politics of Fear: Beyond Left and Right*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
3. Gross, K. (2010). Framing Powerful Emotions: Fear and Enthusiasm in the 2004 Presidential Campaign. In R. Y. Shapiro & L. R. Jacobs (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media* (pp. 273-286). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
4. Holsti, O. R. (2004). *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
5. Moeller, S. D. (1999). *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death*. London: Routledge.
6. Pew Research Center. (2018). *The Information Needs of Citizens: Where Libraries Fit In*. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/07/18/the-information-needs-of-citizens-where-libraries-fit-in/>
7. Silverstone, R. (2007). *Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
8. Strozier, C. B., & Flynn, M. (Eds.). (2013). *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
9. Walter, B. (2004). The Living Dead: The Construction of People and Place in the Reporting of Genocide. In A. Kuper (Ed.), *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century* (pp. 155-179). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

## V. HYBRID WARFARE IN THE DIGITAL ERA



### IQ Regression Propaganda & The Hybrid War

Anamaria POPESCU

IQ regression is a term that refers to the phenomenon of a decrease in average IQ over time, which has been observed in some countries. While the causes of IQ regression are not fully understood, it has been linked to a variety of factors, including environmental pollution, changes in nutrition, and genetic factors. In the context of political subversion, IQ regression could be used as a tool to weaken a country's population and make them more vulnerable to manipulation and control.

What is more, those seeking to subvert a country's political system could use IQ decrease to account for authoritarian policies or actions. By claiming that the population is too intellectually deficient to make informed decisions, they could justify taking more control over the political system and limiting individual freedom. *It is crucial to address the underlying causes of IQ regression, such as environmental pollution and poor nutrition, in order to prevent it from being used as a tool for political subversion.*

IQ regression can have long-term impacts on a population's intellectual abilities and potential, which can affect their ability to learn, perform well academically, and contribute to society. This can have negative economic and social consequences, as individuals with lower cognitive abilities may have fewer opportunities to succeed and contribute to their communities.

This issue appears everywhere in different formats and can be viewed from different perspectives. When statistics show a decrease in global average IQ, perhaps it's less about the way our conscious mind processes, and more about...the subconscious.

When presented with the idea that IQ dropped significantly over the last years, people may have a wide range of beliefs, thoughts, and feelings depending on their environment, education and experience. Their opinions may differ based on their direct understanding of what IQ represents.

Some people may be concerned about the implications of a decrease in the IQ of the general population, seeing it as a potential threat to human progress and innovation. Meanwhile, some worry that a decline in *their own* IQ could weaken their problem-solving abilities, or even lead to their failure to teach their offspring essential skills, such as the ability to learn and adapt to new situations. One may even consider a reduction in overall intelligence something that could lower quality of life.

Others may be sceptical of the significance of IQ as an indicator of intelligence or question the accura-



Source: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_156338.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_156338.htm)

cy and reliability of the statistics themselves. They may argue that IQ tests are culturally biased or may lack the capability of measuring the full range of human intelligence, or that the EQ, IQ and SQ parameters may vary based on context and perspective.

Still, some may view the drop in IQ as a sign of broader and deeper-rooted societal or environmental issues, such as increased exposure to environmental toxins or decreased access to education and resources.

To sum up, reactions to a lowering global average IQ vary widely depending on individual beliefs, values, and perspectives.

Propaganda is a form of communication that is designed to influence people's beliefs, opinions, and behaviours in a particular direction. While there is no one-size-fits-all answer to why propaganda might promote a decrease in average IQ, there are some potential reasons why this might occur:

**1. Control:** Propaganda is commonly used as a tool of control, with those in power seeking to limit the intelligence and critical thinking skills of the general population in order to maintain said power and influence.

**2. Divide and conquer:** The use of propaganda to create divisions within groups of people, making them more susceptible to manipulation and control. By promoting the IQ drop, propaganda could instil a sense of superiority into those who believe themselves to be more intelligent, leading to further separation and social conflict.

**3. Misinformation:** Propaganda may be employed as a means of spreading false or misleading information, leading people to make poor decisions or engage in harmful behaviours. By promoting a decrease in IQ, propaganda could create a sense of hopelessness and apathy among the general population, thereby making them less likely to seek out accurate information or take action to improve their situation.

*The hybrid war* is a form of warfare that combines conventional military tactics with non-military tactics, such as propaganda, cyberwarfare, and political subversion. In addition to propaganda that encourages a decrease in average IQ, there are several other hybrid war tools that could be used to achieve similar purposes:

**1. Disinformation campaigns:** spreading false or misleading information to manipulate public opinion or create confusion and mistrust. Disinformation campaigns may be used to undermine trust in the Government or other institutions, sow division among different groups, or create chaos.

**2. Cyber-attacks:** using computer systems and networks to disrupt or disable critical infrastructure, steal sensitive information, or spread propaganda and disinformation. Cyberattacks can be used to create confusion, interfere with communication, and undermine trust in institutions.

**3. Political subversion:** the act of covertly influencing political processes or institutions to achieve specific goals. Political subversion may involve supporting extremist groups or parties, infiltrating governments or other institutions, or engaging in surreptitious operations to sway public opinion.

**4. Economic pressure:** utilizing economic tools such as sanctions or trade restrictions to influence the behaviour of other countries or organizations. Economic pressure can be used to create economic instability or to force countries to adopt certain policies.

The hybrid warfare is a complex and constantly evolving phenomenon, and there are many different tools that can be used to achieve specific goals. The key is to remain mindful of potential threats, and to develop effective strategies for countering them.

*Here are some hybrids of IQ regression and the aforementioned tactics:*

**Combining disinformation campaigns with IQ Regression Propaganda** could have a powerful and potentially devastating effect on public opinion and decision-making.

If people believe that they are less intelligent or less capable of making informed decisions, they may be more likely to accept information at face value, making them more vulnerable to manipulation.

Furthermore, if people believe that intelligence is something that is unchanging and cannot be improved, they may be less likely to seek out accurate information or engage in critical thinking and analysis. This could create a feedback loop where disinformation campaigns are able to spread more easily, leading to further confusion and mistrust.

Therefore, combining disinformation campaigns with an intensive promotion of a drop in IQ could be a highly effective and dangerous strategy for those seeking to manipulate public opinion and achieve specific goals.

**A cyber-attack could be combined with IQ regression propaganda** in several ways. For example:

*Spreading malware that causes cognitive impairment:* Malware is malicious software that is designed to damage or disrupt computer systems. Cyber attackers could develop malware that causes cognitive impairment, such as memory loss or confusion. If this malware were to infect a large number of computers, it could have a widespread impact on cognitive abilities.

*Using phishing emails to spread propaganda or check one's IQ:* Phishing emails are fake emails that are designed to look like legitimate emails from trusted sources. They often contain links to fake websites or malware that can infect computers. Cyber attackers use phishing emails to determine people to share private data over private (mental) health issues or grant access for different purposes. By targeting specific demographics, such as people who are already experiencing cognitive decline or those who are vulnerable to disinformation, phishing campaigns could be highly effective.

*Disrupting educational systems:* Educational systems are increasingly reliant on technology, and cyber attackers could disrupt these systems in numerous ways. For example, they could launch distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks that overload educational websites, preventing students from accessing educational materials. They could also target online learning platforms with malware that causes cognitive impairment, promotes false information or even solutions to cover one's poor IQ (as for example, using AI tools to solve tasks).

By combining cyber-attacks with IQ decrease propaganda could be a powerful tool for those seeking to manipulate public opinion and achieve specific goals.

**IQ decreases might be used to generate economic pressure**, though the mechanisms through which this could occur are not very clear. One way that IQ drop could lead to economic pressure is through a decrease in workforce productivity. Lower IQ scores have been linked to lower educational attainment and lower job performance, which could lead to a regression in overall workforce productivity. This could cause economic pressure if it leads to less economic output, reduced competitiveness, and higher levels of unemployment.

**If IQ regression is linked to factors such as environmental pollution or poor nutrition**, it could have broader economic impacts. For example, if said factors lead to increased healthcare costs or decreased labour force participation, this could create economic pressure.

Lastly, if an authoritarian government uses IQ decrease as a justification for limiting individual freedoms or engaging in policies that harm economic growth, that could also result in economic pressure.

Besides environmental pollution and malnutrition, **here are 12 other potential causes of IQ regression:**

**Lack of sleep:** Chronic sleep deprivation has been linked to decreased cognitive abilities, including lower IQ scores.

**Stress:** Prolonged exposure to high levels of stress hormones can have a negative impact on the brain, including reduced cognitive function.

**Head injuries:** Traumatic brain injuries, such as concussions, can lead to long-term cognitive deficits, including a decrease in IQ scores.

**Substance abuse:** Substance abuse, particularly of alcohol and drugs such as opioids, can have a negative impact on cognitive abilities especially in younger individuals.

**Chronic illness:** Chronic illnesses, such as autoimmune disorders or chronic infections, can lead to inflammation in the brain and decreased cognitive function.

**Social isolation:** Lack of social interaction and isolation can have a negative impact on cognitive abilities and social skills, including lowering IQ scores.

**Environmental toxins:** Exposure to environmental toxins, such as lead or mercury, can have a negative impact on brain development.

**Genetics:** Certain genetic disorders, such as Down syndrome or Fragile X syndrome, are associated with intellectual disability.

**Aging:** As individuals age, their cognitive abilities may decline.

**Lack of education:** Limited access to education or poor quality education can limit cognitive abilities.

**Lack of stimulation:** Lack of mental stimulation, such as limited exposure to new ideas or experiences, can result in reduced cognitive function.

**Trauma:** Traumatic experiences, such as physical or emotional abuse, can have a negative impact on cognitive abilities and cause a decrease in one's IQ score.

Countering IQ regression propaganda requires a multifaceted approach that addresses both the root causes of IQ drop and the ways in which propaganda is spread and consumed. **Here are some potential strategies:**

**Education and awareness:** Educating the public about the impact of IQ regression and how it can be caused by the presented factors, would increase awareness of the issue and help individuals take steps to address it.

- **Critical thinking and media literacy:** Encouraging the development of critical thinking skills and media literacy can help individuals better discern between accurate and misleading information, reducing the impact of propaganda on IQ.
- **Fact-checking and verification:** Fact-checking information and verifying sources can help to counteract the spread of false information and propaganda, reducing its impact.
- **Scientific research and evidence-based policies:** Conducting scientific research on the causes of IQ drop and developing evidence-based policies to address these causes can help prevent IQ regression from occurring in the first place.
- **Community outreach and support:** Providing support and resources to communities affected by IQ decrease, can help mitigate the negative impact on cognitive abilities and prevent further regression.
- **Mental health and well-being:** Promoting mental health and well-being can help individuals better cope with stress and trauma, minimizing the impact of these factors on cognitive abilities and IQ.
- **Political and social action:** Addressing the root causes of IQ regression, may require political and social action, such as lobbying for any of the causes. Although, they might also be misused.

*The benefits of IQ decrease propaganda would depend on the specific context and the motives of those behind it.* However, in general, those who may benefit from IQ decrease propaganda could include individuals or groups with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo or those who seek to gain power or control by spreading misinformation.

*The most vulnerable categories of targets could include those who are already marginalized or disadvantaged,* such as low-income communities, communities of colour, or those living in areas that promote one or more of the regression causes. These groups may be more susceptible to the negative effects of IQ decrease propaganda.

*The collateral damage of IQ regression propaganda could include a decrease in public trust in science and evidence-based research,* as well as a decrease in awareness of the root causes of IQ regression. This could lead to a lack of action to address the underlying issues and an exacerbation of IQ regression in vulnerable communities.

*IQ regression propaganda can backfire in several ways.* For example, it could lead to increased public awareness of the issue and renewed focus on addressing the root causes of IQ regression. It could also cause backlash against those spreading the propaganda, resulting in a loss of credibility and trust.

Additionally, it could give rise to increased support for policies and initiatives aimed at improving environmental and social conditions that contribute to IQ regression, ultimately working against the aims of those behind the propaganda.

On the real battlefield, IQ Regression Propaganda could potentially have an impact on soldiers' cognitive abilities, which would alter their performance and decision-making. In conditions where soldiers are exposed to known factors that can contribute to IQ regression, propaganda that seeks to exacerbate these factors could further affect their cognitive function. Soldiers who are exposed to IQ regression propaganda may be more susceptible to misinformation and may make decisions that are not in their best interest or the best interest of their unit or mission. This could eventually influence the outcome of a battle or military campaign. However, the impact of IQ regression propaganda on the battlefield would depend on several factors, including the specific context, the resilience of the soldiers, and the ability of military leaders to counteract propaganda and provide support to soldiers who may be affected by one or more factors that contribute to IQ drop.

The impact of IQ regression propaganda on the real battlefield is presumably complex and would depend on a range of factors that are difficult to predict. Nevertheless, it is important for military leaders to be aware of the potential impact of propaganda on soldiers' cognitive abilities and to take action to combat misinformation and support soldiers' mental and physical health.

It is not ethical to twist IQ regression propaganda for one's own purposes, as this would involve spreading misinformation that could harm individuals and communities. But this happens, and it's hard to control in an interconnected world.

On the other hand, promoting awareness of the issue and advocating for policies and initiatives aimed at improving conditions that contribute to IQ regression has the possibility to backfire: it can put vulnerable groups into the spotlight of malevolent entities.

It is important to promote critical thinking and media literacy skills, as these can help individuals recognize and counteract misinformation and propaganda. By promoting accurate information, multiple perspec-

tives and encouraging individuals to think critically about the information they consume, we can help prevent the spread of harmful propaganda and promote a more informed and engaged society.

Some might argue that a high IQ society is hard to control, but a weak IQ society can become a disaster when faced with hybrid warfare. It is essential that the leadership chooses carefully in favour of a single strategy and applies it consistently throughout society. A high IQ society can withstand hybrid warfare, though it's not easy to rule, nor predictable. Undoubtedly, this is the reason why most political systems prefer command, control and coordination as a means of increasing predictability.



## **Biographies of the authors**



### **Prof. PhD. Ionut COJOCARU**

*He has a PhD in history. He has published numerous studies and volumes on the history of Turkey and the Balkans. He is a university lecturer at the “Politehnica University in Bucharest, but also an associate member at the Historical and Archaeological Sciences Section of the Romanian Academy of Sciences”. Among the published books we mention: Colonizatori în Colonie (2022), Balcanii vol. I (2020), Prin noi înșine! O istorie a partidului național liberal (2019), Ion I. C. Brătianu, Ioan Scurtu (2017), Turcia de la Atatürk la Erdoğan (2016), România și Turcia actori importanți în sistemul de relații interbelice (1918-1940) (2014), România-Turcia 1923-1938. Documente vol I (2011).*



### **Mihai CISTELICAN (journalist)**

*Graduated the Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj, Mihai Cistelicăan publishes in 2021 the volume Publicists by Ion Brad, with a foreword by Ilie Rad, originally a doctoral thesis; he is also co-editor of three volumes. He made his debut in the media at the daily newspaper Cluj Day, but he also wrote for The Monitor of Cluj, Tribune, Old hearth or Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai Ephemerides. Since 2018 he collaborates with www.stiripesurse.ro, being passionate about political or cultural topics.*



### **Andreea-Cristina STANCA**

*She has a diploma in international relations and European studies at the National School of Political and Administrative Studies, Bucharest with her thesis “The Specificity of the Israeli Army: Particularities and Influence in Politics”. She attended a Master’s Program in Diplomacy and Negotiations at the National School of Political and Administrative Studies. Took part in the YOUTHPASS The Youth Creative Academy project, in Cabris, France, which aimed to identify and apply creative methods of learning and expression that contribute to the development of young people’s skills in times when digitization and globalization are becoming more and more present. She participated in the Summer School and modular courses conducted by the “Theodor Herzl” Centre for Israeli Studies.*



### **Eva J. Koulouriotis (Greece)**

*She is a Greek political analyst specialised in the Middle East. She is political analyst specialising in Middle East and columnist in international and Greek media. She holds a BA in Economics from Deree College – The American College of Greece, an MSc in Public Policy and Management from the University of London CeFiMS, SOAS and an MBA in Global Management from the University of Phoenix – Arizona.*

[www.evakoulourioti.com](http://www.evakoulourioti.com).



### **Hei Sing Tso (China)**



*He is an experienced analyst of global geopolitics, especially those related to China, Eurasia and the Asia Pacific, giving frequent interviews to the media, as well as think-tanks, officials and legislators. Bachelor of Laws with Honours, City University, Hong Kong. He holds a Postgraduate Certificate in International Law, University of Edinburgh, Scotland, MA in Religious Studies, University of Chester, United Kingdom. He is the head of the Society for the Advanced Study of International Relations (a Hong Kong-based think tank for current international policy analysis, publishing a bimonthly e-report in Chinese).*

*He is also the President of the Guiguizi Stratagem Learning (a training firm for traditional Chinese stratagem learning) and the Director of Connecstrategy Consulting, a consulting firm promoting government and business ties with China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao.*



### **PhD. Mohammad Al Mokdad (Liban)**



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



### **Aditya Thorat (India)**



*He is passionate about global business, and wants to get involved in areas where he can come up with interdisciplinary solutions to solve contemporary global problems. He is a student of Foreign Policy and Economics. He wants to work in areas that will give him real-world experience in international relations. He has a solid foundation in research and writing skills. In 2023 he starts his studies at Elliott School, one of the world's leading international business schools located in the heart of Washington, D.C. and George Washington University, an independent academic institution established by the US Congress in 1821. He is dedicated to promoting human welfare. He attended 20 conferences and used his writing skills to draft speeches, statements, draft resolutions and press releases.*



### **PhD. Leliana PÂRVULESCU**

*She is the President of Zivac Group and the Centre for Research and Prevention of Bioterrorism in Romania. She has a PhD in genetic engineering and a PhD in intelligence and national security. She is an expert in behavioural analysis. She is a clinical psychologist and a psychologist specialized in applied psychology in the field of national security and a profiler, a forensic psychologist, sociologist, and a trainer certified by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour. Being concerned with understanding humans and human behaviour, she underwent a rigorous scientific training, allowing her to approach human behaviour from a genetic, psychological, behavioural point of view. The results can be seen in the numerous research studies, books, and articles she published.*



### **Anamaria POPESCU**



*She graduated from the University of Economics, Management and Finance from BFI Vienna and has a certificate from the Institute for Competitive Intelligence in Germany. She has extensive experience in the field of Psychology Intelligence Analysis, strategies, architecture, coordination and analysis in the field of HUMINT operations, information warfare, analytical traps, mind programming and the balance of creativity, hybrid tools for system modification - propaganda, deception and sabotage - measures and countermeasures.*



### **PhD.Eng. Stelian TEODORESCU**



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

# GEOSTRATEGIC

## PULSE

*Editors: Pompilia VLĂDESCU and Stelian TEODORESCU*

**ISSN: 1843-701X**

Founded in 2007 | Bucharest

### Partners



**STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL  
PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE**



Starting from December 2010, GEOSTRATEGIC PULSE is registered in the international catalogue INDEX COPERNICUS JOURNAL MASTERS LIST. This bulletin cannot be multiplied and reproduced without consent. It is allowed to use some materials or quotations with the preservation of accuracy and the original title, as well as with the express mention of the source. The opinions and ideas expressed in the content of the articles represent the point of view of the authors.