



# GEOSTRATEGIC PULSE

Bilingual-monthly publication of political analysis

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

From geopolitics of poverty to the poverty of geopolitics

What does Russia want?

Armenia: not another color revolution

Conflicts, challenges, instability: the gloomy horizon of the Middle East

Surprise in the Conflicts Between the Great Powers

**Recommended Reading:**

**Turkey: the insane and  
the melancholy**





# Special contributions (in alphabetical order)



## **Adrian CONSTANTINESCU**

*PhD in international economy and Master in public international law*

Scientific researcher and head of department within the World Economy Institute, permanent deputy representative and chief negotiator of Romania to GATT/OMC, various other positions in diplomacy up to that of Ambassador in the Kingdom of Sweden and the Republic of Macedonia.



## **Andrei KORTUNOV**

*Director General of the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC)*

Graduated from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) and postgraduate studies at the Institute for US and Canadian Studies, USSR Academy of

Sciences. Holds a Ph.D. degree in History.

Was Deputy Director of the Institute for US and Canadian Studies. Founder and first president of the Moscow Public Science Foundation.

Taught Russian foreign policy at the University Of Miami (USA), and at the Lewis & Clark College in Portland (University of California).

Author of over 120 publications dedicated to the analysis of Soviet/Russian-American relations, global security, and the foreign and domestic policy of the USSR and Russia.



## **Anton COSTESCU**

*Orientalist and specialist on economic international relations*

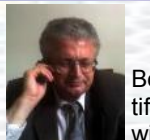
Former Minister Counsellor (economic affairs) covering for more than 30 years the Middle East and North Africa. An experienced connoisseur of the Arab world.



## **Dieter FARWICK**

*Senior Vice-President World Security Network Foundation*

Brigadier General (ret), former advisor to Manfred Wörner, former Force Commander and Chief of Operations at NATO HQ and Director of German Federal Armed Forces Intelligence Office. He is a member of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), London. He is author of six books on geopolitics and security, and of numerous other articles and assessments.



## **Emilian M. DOBRESCU**

*Professor*

Born in 1954, he is since 25 years the Scientific Secretary of the Romanian Academy with the Department of Economy, Legislation and Sociology. He is specialized in European integration, general management, social economy and sociology of management.



## **Iulian FOTA**

Former Advisor on National Security of the Romanian President. Formerly deputy of the Romanian Secretary of State on defense policy with the Ministry of Defense, head of defense office with Romania's mission at NATO and WEU at NATO's Headquarters in Brussels. In 2005 he was appointed Director of Romania's National Defense College. He has a SNSPA's doctor's degree in political sciences and graduated NATO's Defense College in Rome and the National College of Defense in Romania. He is a member of the European Center's Council for Political analysis (CEPA) and of other numerous international foundations and institutions.



## **Adrian SEVERIN**

Born in March, 1954, he had a remarkable political ascent after 1989. He was minister of Foreign Affairs in 1996-1997, deputy in the Romanian Parliament in 1990 and later between 1992-2007. As of the 1st of January, 2007, he was elected member of the European Parliament. He was UN's special rapporteur for human rights in Belarus and PACE member between 1993-2007.

A talented politician who probably did not find the best juncture in order to advance further on a national and European level.



## **Anis. H. BAJREKTAREVIĆ**

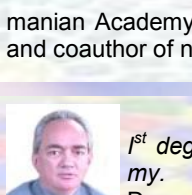
*Prof. (FH) Dr. Anis Bajrektarevic, Acting Deputy Director of Studies EXPORT EU-ASEAN-NAFTA Professor and Chairperson International Law and Global Political Studies University of Applied Sciences IMC-Krems AUSTRIA*

Former MFA official and career diplomat (early '90) of BH, is a member of IFIMES International Institute, author of dozen presentations, speeches, seminars, research colloquiums as well a numerous public events (round tables, study trips, etc).



## **Dan DUNGACIU**

*PhD, Director - Institute of Political Science and International Relations of the Romanian Academy* Master in Political Sciences, PhD in Sociology, with numerous training courses abroad at prestigious institutions in Great Britain, USA, Austria, Greece, Italy. Researcher at the Institute of Political Science and International Relations of the Romanian Academy. Former counselor of Moldavian President. Author and coauthor of numerous articles, studies and books.



## **Dorian VLĂDEANU**

*1<sup>st</sup> degree senior researcher within the Romanian Academy. Associate university professor.*

Degree in economics and automation and computers, Doctor of Economics, author of over 100 works in macroeconomics. He developed the first strategy on public services at a national level. Author, co-author and coordinator of the first generation of legislation made by the Romanian Government for public services (2002-2004).



## **Hrant KOSTANYAN**

Dr. Hrant Kostanyan is a Researcher at CEPS 'Europe in the World' unit, a Senior Key Expert at the College of Europe Natolin and an Adjunct Professor at Vesalius College. His research focuses on EU institutions and decision-making, primarily on the European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the EU's relations with Eastern Neighbours and Russia



## **Liliana POPESCU**

Liliana Popescu is Associate Professor at the National School of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA) Bucharest – presently Vice-Rector. She was adviser to the minister and Director of the Policy Planning Unit within the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1998 – 1999). Liliana Popescu holds a Ph.D. from the University of Manchester, Department of Government (1996).

Publications. Books: *The Construction of the European Union*. Bucharest: Ed.C.H.Beck, 2009. *Gender Politics*. Bucharest: Ed. Maiko, 2004. *Individual Freedom and Political Manipulation*. Bucharest: Politeia-SNSPA, 2003. Founder and Editor-in-Chief of the *Romanian Journal of Society and Politics* (since 2001).



## Special contributions (in alphabetical order)



### Maksym BUGRIY

Visiting Fellow at Jamestown Foundation in Washington D.C. He has a wide experience as a researcher and analyst with the most important think-tanks in Ukraine, the National Institute for Strategic Studies included.



### Mihaiu MĂRGĂRIT

*Political-military analyst, Project Director at EURISC Foundation- The European Institute for Risk, Security and Communication Management*

Refined political-military analyst, author of several studies and articles published in the specialized and civilian media concerning the military, the strategic research, the national security strategy, the secret services and democracy, NATO Integration, etc.



### Murray HUNTER

*Associate Professor at University Malaysia Perlis*

Entrepreneur, consultant, professor and researcher involved in the Asia - Pacific business for the last 30 years. He is an editorial member to nine international academic journals and member of the advisory council of "Diplomatic Insight", "4<sup>th</sup> Media" as well as of "Addelton Academic Publishers" in New York.



### Sergiu MEDAR

Presidential Advisor for National Security at the Romanian Presidency (2006-2008), university professor, author of numerous studies and articles on issues of national security, of the book "Defense Diplomacy" and coordinator of "Military Intelligence within the Current Security Context" volume - 2006. He is now dealing with aspects of "Corporate Security Management"



### Marian RIZEA

Counter-intelligence officer on economics (Reserve Colonel), is Professor, Ph.D, Eng., at the Ecological University of Bucharest and Fellow Professor at the Oil and Gas University of Ploiesti, member of DIS-CRIFST of the Romanian Academy, expert in the security of classified intelligence, critical energy infrastructure and environment protection, risk analyses and geopolitical studies. He is the author/co-author of 17 books and more than 250 articles published in the national and international specialized magazines.



### Mihnea CONSTANTINESCU

A fost Șef al Cabinetului Primului Ministru și Consilier de Stat în cinci guverne, Șef de Cabinet și Consilier al ministrului român de externe, Purtător de cuvânt al Guvernului României și Sub-Secretar de Stat pentru Informații Publice. Doctor în inginerie nucleară, bursă în management la Universitatea Tennessee și trei tipuri de cursuri la Kennedy School of Government de la Universitatea Harvard. Membru fondator al Institutului Aspen - România și al Asociației "Casa NATO". A îndeplinit diferite misiuni internaționale la Bagdad, OSCE și în Georgia.



### Paul SÂNDULESCU

A businessman and investor in speculative financial instruments. Master in international trade, having an extensive experience in import-export activities, trade, tourism and financial speculation. Passionate for investment and geo-strategic analysis.



### Simion COSTEA

*PhD, Senior Lecturer - Deputy Dean of "Petru Maior" State University in Târgu Mureș*

Doctor in History, "Jean Monnet Professor" of European Integration acknowledged by the EU, awarded with the Romanian Academy Prize for his work as historian of European Integration. Chief Editor of "L'Europe unie" magazine (Paris), author and coauthor of numerous books, studies and articles.



### Vasile DÂNCU

Born on November 25th, 1961 he is a Romanian politician, sociologist by profession. Professor at the Sociology Faculty of the University of Bucharest and at the Faculty of Sociology and the Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences of Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca. Founder of SINTEZA - a magazine of culture and strategic thinking. He is the chairman and owner of the Romanian Institute for Assessment and Strategy (IRES). Author of 10 books and numerous articles.



### Vasile PUȘCĂȘ

*PhD Professor at Babeș Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca*

He teaches contemporary history, international relations and negotiations. He worked as a diplomat in New York and Washington D.C., and then was a member of the Government and chief negotiator for the Romanian membership to the European Union, Chief of the European Affairs Department in the Romanian Government, member of the parliament. He is a consultant for several Romanian and foreign companies, and the author of numerous books. He is a board member in many international expert organizations, he teaches at prestigious institutions of superior education abroad.



### Yuriy RADKOVETS

Vice President of Borysfen Intel Center for Doctoral Studies, Doctor of Military Sciences, associate professor, general-lieutenant (ret.).

### Vladimir SOCOR

*Senior fellow at The Jamestown Foundation and Eurasia Daily Monitor*



Political analyst on East-European affairs, especially of the former Soviet republics and the CIS, specialized in political issues, ethnic conflicts and energy resources. Senior fellow at the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies in Washington, author of numerous articles and works published in Wall Street Journal, and other prestigious publications. He is frequently a guest lecturer at Harvard University - National Security program at Kennedy School of Government and a member of the Euro-Atlantic Security Study Group.



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

## EDITORIAL

### Armenia - quo vadis?

*Corneliu PIVARIU*



The developments in the former tiny Soviet Republic in the Caucasus were less covered by the international media in spite of major geopolitical events that have been taking place lately. Unjustly, we think since the economic, political and military situation in Armenia may have a great importance on the further developments not only in the Caucasus but also in the Middle East, on the Russian Federation's relations with Europe, the USA and Turkey.

The former president Serzh Sargsyan, whose mandate expired on April 9th, 2018 tried a move similar to that of president Vladimir Putin by transferring, during his presidential mandate, numerous prerogatives to the prime minister and then, benefitting from the parliamentary majority of the governing party (the Republican Party) to be elected prime minister and that happened on April 17th, with a majority of 77 votes. The opposition described his move as taking over the power and ample protest demonstrations were triggered in Yerevan. As a result of these protests, Serz Sargsyan resigned on April 23rd. Presently, Sargsyan is the leader of the governing Republican Party and member of the parliament. Major protests against Sargsyan's regime took place also in 2011 and in July 2016 the latter ones aimed, according to protesters' declarations, at freeing the political detainees and his resignation for his corrupt regime comes to an end.

The opposition leader, Nikol Pashinyan, aged 42, a former journalist who spent many years in opposition, succeeded in obtaining, on May 8th, his election as prime minister by the parliament after a first vote was inauspicious for him a few days before. As the parliament's structure is known, with a majority of the Republican Party of the former president Serzh Sargsyan, it is expected that the reforms the new prime minister intends to implement will be further met with a strong opposition and the political life in Armenia will not have a smooth evolution from now on.

This crisis proved that Russia still has important control leverage in Armenia: the oligarchic, corrupt system, economic and military dependence, the threat of the conflict with Azerbaijan (in Nagorno-Karabakh). In fact, president Vladimir Putin opted for being an important arms supplier for the rich Azerbaijan (\$5 bil. starting with 2010) and delayed the military equipment to Yerevan, causing thus an unequal power balance between the two countries and refused to join the arms embargo for the conflict zones as recommended by OSCE. This situation allowed Azerbaijan, for the first time since the onset of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, in the 1990s, to retrieve in April 2016 8,000ha of land- according to Armenian sources (20,000 ha according to the Azeris). In fact, ever since the protests in Yerevan begun, Azerbaijan started to deploy an important number of troops and strengthened its military presence on the contact line while the president Aliyev declared immediately after Pashinyan's appointment as prime-minister that he is readying important military actions and that the newly located soil-soil missiles in Nakhchivan may hit any of the enemy's targets. He is aware that a new potential military triumph, no matter how small, will contribute to consolidating his power even if he won the presidential elections in April 2018 with around 86% of the votes.

The new Armenian prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan, aware as well of the importance of the relations with Moscow, already paid a visit to president Vladimir Putin in Sochi where he thanked for Moscow's neutral position during the demonstrations in Yerevan. He underlined as well the importance of the military cooperation with Russia (the latter safeguards the inviolability of the border with Turkey and has a base with 3,000 troops in Gyumri and an airforce squadron of MIG-29s). As far as the future of the relations between Armenia and Russia is concerned, the new prime minister Pashinyan declared, ever since his appointment, that there is no question of discontinuing the relations with Moscow; in Sochi he was more cautious and stressed that the movement he leads did not set its geopolitical objectives yet. The economic and military dependence on Moscow will make the new leadership in Yerevan maintain important cooperation relations with Russia.

Armenia's future developments will depend on a multitude of factors and the external ones are particularly important in the framework of the regional and global geopolitical evolutions. A new conflict with Azerbaijan is very likely in a near or medium term.

22<sup>27</sup>  
MAI 2018

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'GL. M.R. STEFANIK' ARMED FORCES ACADEMY, SLOVAKIA

22<sup>ND</sup> - 23<sup>RD</sup> MAY 2018

'HENRI COANDA' AIR FORCE ACADEMY, 160 MIHAI VITEAZU ST., BRASOV

**TUESDAY, 22<sup>ND</sup> MAY 2018**

**10.00**

OFFICIAL OPENING

PLENARY SESSION:

ANTONIA COLIBĂȘANU, PhD, analyst,  
Geopolitical Futures, Austin, Texas, SUA

ANIS H. BAJREKTAREVIC, PhD,  
professor, Institute for  
Modern Political History Analyses, Viena

**18.00**

OFFICIAL DINNER

**WEDNESDAY, 23<sup>RD</sup> MAY 2018**

**8.00**

PARALLEL PANELS:

- A) SECURITY, STRATEGY,  
GEOPOLITICS & CYBERDEFENCE
- B) ENGINEERING SCIENCES
- C) APPLIED MATHEMATICS,  
COMPUTER SCIENCES
- D) MANAGEMENT &  
SOCIO-HUMANITIES

E) WORKSHOPS

**18.00**

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## The Current Geostrategic World-wide Outlook



# From geopolitics of poverty to the poverty of geopolitics

**Prof.dr. Dorian VLĂDEANU**

**MOTTO:**

***Jesus Christ: Thou have the  
poors always with thee...***

### 1. Eternal questions and customs

What is poverty? Why is the poverty one of the permanent evils accompanying our civilisation in all times? Is the poverty the result of idleness, is it the result of some deficient social mechanisms, is it the result of certain mentalities? Is it an objective condition, or a constructed, necessary condition? Is the war of the few ones against the many or the war of the many against the few? Is poverty the same everywhere or, on different meridians, the poor ones are rich in other parts of the world (and vice versa)?

**Robert McNamara** considered that "absolute poverty is an extreme state of human existence when the individual, struggling for survival, is subject to unimaginable deprivations and humiliations outreaching the fantasy of the privileged world".

Let us keep in mind from this definition, given by a character who, during his existence, never experienced poverty, a first characteristic of this scourge: struggle for survival due to deprivations. A second characteristic is represented by "unimaginable humiliation".

**David Shipler**, in his book "The working poor-invisible in America", records an event which tragism and lack of logic outclass the frames of Kafka's novels: "In front of the government headquarters of HUD (Housing and Urban Development), Wasingthon-DC, the lifeless body of a homeless woman, surrounded by police, fire-fighter cars, ambulances etc. was picked for being carried to the morgue. The New York Times reporter present there records the declaration of a HUD lady employee looking at the scene: "What irony! As long as he lives, the human does not receive a shred of the assistance granted to a

dead man". Lack of solutions, absolute deadlock and institutional perplexity represents another characteristic accompanying poverty.

In 1934, **Bertold Brecht** said with bitter irony: "Poor man looks at the rich man saying morose-ly: If I were rich, you would be me".

The richest three persons in the world have a greater wealth than the GDP of the poorest 50 countries in the world. It is obvious that the poverty of the 50 countries has not, as a direct cause, the affluence of the three persons, as it is also true that such statistics do not impress anyone. On the contrary, they are tyresome. Let us not forget that a third of the USA's population lives on the poverty threshold or even under it. In Western Europe things are not at all better (tens of millions of poor people and a small part of them only are recent immigrants).

The latest researches show that 20% of women in Germany are directed affected by the poverty risk (and not all of them are former East Germans).

No statistic is valid for Eastern Europe, as poverty has beaten experience, practice, theory and imagination. As it cannot be either depicted, nor known, it is obviously not acknowledged.

Too few a field of activity are so abundant in experts as poverty. Therefore, neither the theorists, nor the theories are lacking; on the contrary, there are plenty of them...

The first modern theory emerged in the XIXth century England and had as its main vector-carrier **Herbert Spencer** who considered that **poverty is the result of individual moral vices**. "The destitutes are lazy, criminal people, drunken, trumps, committed to a self-destructive way of life". Therefore, the guilty ones for poverty are the poor themselves. Let us remember the "objective" and "non-party" character of Mr Herbert Spencer's position, a character opposed to any idea or suspicion of affiliation to any class

struggle theory. What are we doing when we find out that not all the poor are drunken, criminals or lazy, etc.?

"Poverty is a cultural feature" says **Oscar Lewis** at the middle of last century (around 1959-1960), based on researches carried out in urban circles of Puerto Rico and Mexico. In other words, poverty creates a culture with values, norms, ways of thinking that are shaping the individual's behavior.

The poverty's features are identified as being the orientation towards being in the moment (the impossibility of delaying consumption and therefore of savings), resignation and self-imposed acceptance, fatalism, non-involvement in the social life and organisation, etc.

There are other interesting theories, too, that have all a common point: none of their advocates and promoters was ever part even for one day of the world they are theorizing.

Summarizing, we can note that the experts define poverty from two perspectives: that of satisfying the material needs (from the consumption perspective) and from the perspective of the social performance (job, education, culture, political or apolitical activism).

Let us try to give a definition to this sad concept within which range nobody wants to be even for one day.

Therefore, poverty in its broadest sense, is defined as a condition of permanent shortage of strictly needed resources for securing a decent living – which content is defined (by the same experts) by lack of food (in a proportion of 32%), shortage of money (28%) and lack of a permanent shelter (30%).

In our quest to give a quantifiable representation of the specter of sufferings generated by poverty, we will say that poverty may be, therefore, partially comprised in a "tridimensional" description: a) lack of a secure dwelling (the household does not possess the dwelling); b) the total incomes and expenditures are below a certain benchmark (a benchmark specific to certain areas, counties, countries); c) shortage of inventory, usually reduced to at most two durable

goods in urban areas, and a durable good in the rural areas, respectively.

Although absolute poverty seems to have decreased during the last two-three decades (especially due to China's economic detente), poverty still expanded and is further expanding so that out of the more than 2.5 billion poor (documented by international institutions sources), around 900m of them are in the "rich" countries (40-50m in the USA only), more than 250m in the countries that just entered the Western democracy matrix after 1990 (the countries of the former communist bloc and the newly independent countries following the collapse of the former USSR), while the difference is "evenly" distributed among Africa, Asia and South America.

Out of 100 inhabitants, 20 are living with less than \$1/day and 40 with less than \$5/day.

The International Labour Organisation established, sometime in the 1970s (1977), a list with fundamental needs which shortage defines the poverty: shortage of fresh meat or fish, less than 6 pairs of socks (sic!), lack of a car, etc.! After more than 40 years, we find out that what defined poverty then is defining today to a great extent and on many meridians the middle class!

In Germany, for instance, the poverty threshold is given by the minimum income of €1,000/month. There are in Germany as well more than 20m pensioners with a median pension of €1,100/month; are the pensioners of the richest European state and of the third world economic power closer to the middle class or to the poverty area? They are, however, 20m...

Whether you are living in Germany with €1,000/month or in Romania with \$4/day or in Africa, Asia and Latin America with \$1.5/day you are already close to the biting of the poverty bulldog and you cannot evade this biting either easily or for sure.

## 2. The world's affluence: poverty!

Poverty in Germany, Romania, USA, France and Russia have a certain specificity and a type of



causes while the one in Nigeria, Bolivia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, etc. have quite another specificity and causes.

If, for the first set of examples, there is still a trace of dignity and hope for the millions of poor, for the second set of examples the hope and trace of dignity disappeared since centuries and there are no indices it will reappear in the next centuries for the millions of poor.

When we began writing these lines, we did not imagine for one second they will have the power to change even for a thousandth of a day the desperate condition of a dirt poor African or of a Romanian complaining he can no longer send his child to school or of an American veteran sleeping under who knows what bridge after risking his life in Vietnam or Iraq for the country's glory or for the good of people nobody sees their faces.

No, I did not imagine something like that yet I am still part of the people (not too many) believing, with the last remaining traces of conscience, pretending not to be corrupted by any desire of grandeur or wealth, who knows and feels he is obliged to do what he does: to write and to remember a handful of people who surely have the conscience availability and more power not to do something today, yesterday or tomorrow, but not forget this threat an entire planet is living under since millennia.

And since no one wants to thoroughly solve the poverty issue and its terrible consequences, let us theorize a little more. First, let us specify that poverty, as expression of inequalities, would be a problem, inequality of incomes another problem and the inequality of wealths quite another.

**Bill Gates** said it is not your fault you have been born poor. Your fault is when you die poor, too... Well said but I would not agree with him due to reasons that will become clearer. For the time being, I substitute in a way the issue of poverty with the wealth dilemma: is poverty due to inequality of incomes or to inequality of wealth (as a matter of fact, most of the rich don't really have incomes – it is the only thing they have in common with the poor ones).

The great majority of theorists believe it is not

the inequality of incomes that represents the social problem, but one of the poverty's causes. The great majority but not all! Townsend (Great Britain) for instance, considers that if the richest 20% would cede 15% of their incomes to the poorest 20%, then the latter incomes would double (the utopian solution suggested by the great sociologist is indeed beyond any contemporary imagination).

And yet, if for the poorly developed countries it is the direct result of underdevelopment, for the developed countries the poverty problem is an embarrassing and extremely dangerous one. This fact, we believe, determined **Lyndon Johnson** to launch the first national program of "war against poverty".

And, as he had to wage another war at the same time, it happened that in the end he lost both of them, so that, in 1994, the USA had a larger number of poor people than in 1964 and, after the 2008 global financial crisis, their number exceeded the 1994 figure.

An American commentator with a sense of (gallows) humor subtly remarked that if the two wars were lost, it would have been better if they have not been..."started"! Pragmatism learns us that what cannot be won should not be started!...

The first systematic researches on poverty and also the first notable results were achieved in Great Britain and are rightfully attributed to **Seebohm Rowntree**, in 1899; the research programs were later resumed within the framework of the same methodological coordinates in 1936 and, after that, in 1950.

The practical application of the most thorough, responsible and long-term researches on poverty during the last 100 years had a multitude of positive results and effects among which one may summarize some figures and words: if around 33% of the population lived in poverty in 1899, in 1936 this percentage diminished to 18% and in 1950 to only 1.5%. It was the biggest campaign against poverty and the biggest victory in fighting this social scourge. And the last one!...

However, where can one find in an synthetic

expression the source of poverty?...

**John Perkins** (in his "Confessions of an Economic Hit Man" – an extensive presentation of corruption) explains in plain English (really?...) why and how small loans are granted to underdeveloped countries, loans which, from small ones become, through the specter of interests and conditionalities, very big and impossible to be repaid by several generations of the living people of the country that had the unlucky inspiration of appealing to foreign loans. When debts cannot be repaid any more, the old as the hills and colonialism horse-trading starts: would you give us your oil or shall we take it? What about the copper reserves? We don't think you need the iron ore either! ... As far as the lithium ones, surely we need it more than you do!

Well, to assist you from time to time with some survival loans, you would better lease us on advantageous terms your natural gas and around 50,000 ha of your forest territory! I beg your pardon?!... To replant them? No, it is out of the question! Deforestation, yes! If you like, you replant it and we support you with other loans. We support nature and future generation! ...

The activist **Wesley P. P. Hall** underlined that "everything starts from the way of explaining how the global banking system operates and how it is connected to war and terrorism". It sounds like conspiracy theory? Maybe, nothing more real! ... Are there some examples? Some?

**Ukraine** is the first example of a rich country and a poor state. Before 1990 it was considered richer than Poland or Russia and today only the Republic of Moldova is poorer. If in 1992 its GDP was \$113bil, in 2013 it was of \$97bil only.

However, in 2007 it was (and still is) among the 10 first countries in the world as far as the steel output is concerned and the third world exporter of steel. With an agricultural potential bigger than that of any European country (from east to west and from north to south), Ukraine is struggling between an endemic poverty and state's disappearance. Neither the EU is too eager to a too quick enlargement on the Brussels-Kiev direction, but rather to bilateral collaborations on axes of the sort of Paris-Moscow or

Berlin-Moscow...!

**Syria**, erstwhile a fairy-tale, quiet country, to make an example of it within a vortex of religious terrorism which fed the world terrorism in neighbouring countries woke up all of a sudden thrown in a world with thousands of dead, tens of thousands of wounded, millions of uprooted and a population migration even greater than Romania's (unaffected by war but by too much of peace...!). The reasons of the terrible war pertain to a complex of factors yet unprioritised, unstructured and not announced in a clear and beyond any reasonable doubt such as: demographic explosion, lack of water, prolonged drought, the simultaneous presence on its territory of three gas pipelines, religious or political and social disputes, climate change, etc.

It is true that between 2006-2010, more than 60% of Syria's territory suffered the most severe drought of the last half millennium as it is also true that during 2007-2008, around 95-97% of the vegetation was practically burned so that 85% of the livestock disappeared, 75% of the farmers went bankrupt and more than 2 million people were severely affected by drought.

In 1950, Syria's population was 5mil inhabitants while in 2010 raised to 25mil on the same area, yet with much diminished natural resources.

Syria was thus confronted with the migration of the population from rural to urban areas (more than 1.5mil), on the one hand, and with the immigration from Iraq (3.5-4mil people), on the other. From around 9 million people in 2002, the urban population reached, by 2010, around 14 million, a number that generated economic, social, political and religious pressures we think no government could have solved them quickly and more properly, irrespective of its provenance and of how great its competence might have been.

Geostrategically, Syria has obviously a series of characteristics that cannot be overlooked by the great "players" and "actors" in the area. First, it has more than 200km seashore at the Mediterranean Sea. Then, there are three gas pipelines that intersect Syria:



a) **The Arab gas pipeline** (not entirely functional) which construction was backed by the West and which track was (and still is): Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, Europe (the gas pipeline would have reduced Europe's energy dependence on Russia, but also on...Germany's!);

b) **The Friendship pipeline** (sic!) or **Islamic** which track is: Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Europe;

c) **Qatar – Turkey pipeline** with two ramifications: Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia, Kuweir, Iraq, respectively.

If we ask the question: who does Europe's energy independence hurt? The answer is simple: Russia. Is it really Russia behind the conflict in Syria? The answer is not any longer simple and it seems it is not cautious either, under the assumption someone would know (and there are enough of them). The research should be carried on further...

Two questions still arise: will the gas ever reach Europe and, if yes, on which track? The one Russia wants, the one the USA wants or the one Germany wants? Is it anyone yet "able" to want?!...

For the time being no, as there is no integrated Europe and so much less united! At this chapter and at many others...

After seven years of war, there is not more left from Syria's economy that what was left from the economies of the former socialist countries after almost three decades of restructuring under peaceful circumstances (to say nothing of the case of emigration where parallels and similarities are really strange – strange, yet not inexplicable).

For instance, **the Banias refinery** (built by Industrialexport-Import, Romania, in 1975) is in ruins (as it is the great majority of Eastern Europe's refineries).

In 2010, Syria's GDP amounted to \$60bil and today is about \$40bil! In 1997, its oil output was 600,000 bpd and in 2014 60,000 bpd only. Syria's oil exports amounted in 2010 to \$4.7bil and in 2014 to \$0.14bil only.

It is said that the slump in oil prices (that dramatically affected Russia's economy) could not have been halted except by destabilizing the Middle East. And, again, the question arises: was it Russia behind the disaster in Syria? If we analyse the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan we immediately reach the conclusion that the hypothesis does not stand (obviously under the circumstances of a rigorous and objective if anything else analysis). In support of this hypothesis it is the fact that, at least from the point of view of the big players on the hydrocarbon market, the slump in oil prices was due to two main reasons: the exponential development of the sands oil in and by the USA, and Saudi Arabia's maintaining a low price for strangling the financing of Islamic State's supporters. And not of those only...

The discovery in the Persian Gulf of the biggest gas deposit further complicates the already existing problems.

And if we add the fact that, through Syria, Russia has free access to the Tartous port and naval base (its only access point in the Mediterranean) and that Assad refused the implementation of the Saudi gas project and chose instead the Iranian one, then the questions and theories concerning poverty begin to gain a taste of money and blood and not of ink, library and university.

The drought that was mentioned above affected at the same time Russia and the USA, Turkey, Jordan and Israel, etc., yet no one heard or saw any conflict breaking out all of a sudden due to water shortage and drought. It is obvious that drought, climate change, the war in Iraq, water shortage, etc. were contributory but not determining factors of the "civil" conflict in Syria. Perhaps the sufferings of millions of people extended in time relentlessly for years on do not count in front of the interests of a mob of decerebrated, sick of greed and of the fear of losing absolute control of something that is not the result of their efforts and work and do not belong to them either? Would it be for the first time? What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again – the Ecclesiastes says.

**Afghanistan** is another country of the same geographical area where, at least on the media screens, it is poverty that impresses! People's and places' as well! A sequence of barren and greyish mountains defended by the planet's poorest and most terrible fighters almost bare-handed, if one takes into account the fighting technique of those who attacked them yesterday and today defends them and also of those who yesterday defended them and today attack them!

The two sides wanted to bless Afghanistan with what they had best: one with socialism, the other with democracy.

One of them was engaging in the class struggle, the other in fighting terrorism. None of them wanted to fight the only enemy no one has yet overcome: poverty. On the contrary, they came to help it... Not to die quickly, but to live forever!

Political analysts (some of them even independent ones) did not let themselves be cheated by the full of fury anti-terrorist campaign launched by Bush after 9/11 especially that the malicious tongues – a few too many – say that some days before only, someone of the White House met... Bin Laden! - of course the conspiracy theory...

Yet a statement by the Pentagon (overlooked by the... independent media), of November, 2002 (think that's good!) mentioned, among others, that several American-Afghan expeditions (the one who said that an etalon democracy cannot collaborate with an exemplary religious dictatorship was wrong!) underpinned that the most recent prospections identified huge mineral reserves in the subsoil of Asia's poorest and most ravaged country.

Let us take note that many years ago (1985), the Afghan Department of Geology recklessly published a report stating that the country's subsoil had huge reserves of iron, chrome, gold, silver, uranium, natural gas (around 150bil cu.m.), magnesium, sulphur, lapis lazuli, coal (more than 500 mil t), lithium.

The Russians knew already of the natural gas since 1957 and searched for the rest on the spot in the 1980s. Yet something did not suit them well (probably the American Stinger missile)

and, in 1989, with the treasury dried up and the tail at its place, they made a U-turn. Thereafter, the right wing ones came and do not want to leave any more!

This is obviously due to reasons pertaining to democracy, terrorism to which, specialized sources, add the abovementioned reserves estimated between \$1,000 to \$3,000bil!

In a more explicit wording, Afghanistan has the biggest reserves of iron, copper, uranium and lithium in the world so that, even if it was inhabited by the most well-behaved Christian orders' monks they would have been accused of terrorism and considered enemies of democracy!

On June 13th, 2010, The New York Post announced an event of profound geostrategical and geopolitical implications with global reach: the U.S. Geological Survey (the supreme forum in the American geology and mining), closely and discretely guided by the CIA, made a detailed mapping of all Afghanistan's deposits which were estimated, on a first call, to \$1,000bil.

So it was that the geopolitical chess players in Moscow started to draw up immediately new "opening theories", while in Washington eyes of the financial establishment left their sockets, in Tehran the anxiety reached its peak and the strategist in Beijing were summoned for an emergency meeting.

Meanwhile, 99% of the Afghan population and no tribe leader had the slightest clue of the unimaginable wealth which will fix them for good on the poverty cross.

Both the Afghan government and Hamid Karzai were among the last to be informed (it seems this the general rule for the strategic allies). Yet, the sheer determination of a people who has been never either defeated or conquered in all his multi-millenia history it is not of good omen for those who already invited themselves to the rich table of Afghanistan's resources. In the mean time, the brave anti-corruption fighters (known on other lands) set already the tariff: \$30mil for "convincing" a minister.

And since the ridicule has no common decency, the corruption referral was submitted by some



American officials who just learned that the copper exploitation licence was granted to certain Chinese companies! Perhaps if the licences had another destination, even with bigger costs and a more extended lobby, no accusation would have been

lodged! When he learned about the huge reserves (and for what he fights in fact), the commander of the American forces in Afghanistan, gen. **David H. Petraeus**, cried out: "Oh, my God, there is an absolutely huge potential here. This country sits practically on treasures". Later (after two years), **Wahidullah Shahrani**, the Afghan mines minister, declared that his country's mineral deposits are not only of \$1,000bil but 3 times bigger: \$3,000bil !!!

The inflation rate in Afghanistan is 13.8%, the unemployment rate 35% and the poverty index 48.8%; if we take into consideration Iraq's recent experience, we may say that Afghanistan is still fine! ...

**Nigeria** is by far Africa's richest country and one of its poorest states. It is Africa's biggest oil producer and exporter. Its daily oil production: 2.4–2.5 mil bpd and a 21.5bil cu.m gas/year output.

Mention should be made that it has no refinery on the country's territory so that, for every \$1,000 oil export it loses at least as much by importing oil products, fuels etc.

In the north of the country, 70% of the population lives on less than \$1 a day.

It is, indeed, due to government corruption and to the terrorist organization Boko Haram! ... No big oil corporation has exploitation blocks in this part of the world! ... With a few exceptions: **Shell, British Petroleum, Chevron, Lukoil, ENI, Royal Dutch, Exxon Mobil**.

Global Witness, a British NGO, and Finance Uncovered (an investigation journalists' network active in over 60 countries) published a research in which ENI and SHELL were accused of high level corruption in Nigeria (as a matter of fact, the head of anti-corruption authority in Nigeria, Ibrahim Magu, was the target of an assassination

Country	Ranking according to oil output	Ranking according to GDP/capita
<b>Nigeria</b>	11	174 (2600 \$/capita)
<b>Angola</b>	17	137 (5900 \$/capita)
<b>Sudan</b>	31	170 (3000 \$/capita)

attempt and escaped "miraculously" as the media said).

With a population of over 186 million inhabitants and a two-figure natality, Nigeria is the country with the youngest median age population (under 35 years) yet with the biggest unemployment rate among the youth.

If we make just a small inventory of the African exporting countries and corroborate the position held in the poverty ranking with the position held on the hydrocarbon market, it would be practically impossible not to make a correlation related to common sense, not compulsorily competence related or whatsoever political leaning:

Although they have together more than 20% of Africa's population and one of the biggest exploited and exploitable riches on the planet, it seems that poverty which is inexorable and on indefinite term is linked to the wealth of these countries (as it is the case of other countries, too).

**Iraq** is another rich country with a poor state.

Yet, nobody wrote more thoroughly and documented on Iraq than **Naomi Klein** in her celebrated book "The Shock Doctrine". Nonetheless, nothing changed. Nowhere and, probably, never!

An idea that in fact went through the entire world's history may be detached from the above lines: in all times and on all meridians, the poorest people are in the richest countries. Is poverty really the biggest world's wealth?

### 3. Conclusions (!?)

It is difficult to arrive at a conclusion on one of mankind's crucial problem that had no solutions for centuries and millennia on end and we do

not believe solutions will be found too soon, and that does not mean we have to minimize the geostrategical potential of the most insidious, perfidious and “guiltless” weapon: it is not manufactured by someone, everybody holds it, and has a deadly capacity of self-multiplication and, under certain circumstances, carefully studied, it “shoots”! It is right, it has no precise shooting! Not even once those who armed it and “shoot” found themselves under its “fire” (Robespierre is a handy example, maybe the most known, and not the only one)...

We do not feel drawn to a certain ideology or to a certain great power (or superpower), allied, more or less recently, more or less strategical. Truth has a few friends and so is the case with those living in its proximity!

We did not intend to analyze and/or develop a theory or another, but to get closer to what we believe to be the poverty's fundamental cause and its perpetuation in all eras and historical times, irrespective of the dominant political doctrine, irrespective of the relevant religious beliefs.

We consider that the poverty's fundamental causes are greed and lack of morals. And not laziness, inebriation or the inclination towards a conflictual and parasitical style sometimes crammed with criminal accents.

**H. Spencer's** theories prove to be in fact a collection of exceptions with a reduced scope, yet with a great ideological load.

A recent and ample research carried out by the Berkeley University (California, USA) documents the existence of some powerful inverse correlation between wealth and the social behavior considered to be human and natural in the sense that **emphaty, common sense and availability to assist a fellow human is inversely proportional with the wealth** an individual or another possesses. The result of research confirms, if such were needed, Aristotle's and Plato's teachings: greed represents the fundamentals of non-ethical behavior. So what! A pragmatic would answer.

Questions such as arise: who is poorer, a peas-

ant of Sichuan province who has no money yet he has no liabilities, or a medicine graduate with liabilities of millions and very lavish proceeds? Although we do not agree with the idea, we quote the conclusions of the Credit Suisse Report which states that liabilities would not affect inequities... Therefore, between the two, the poorer is the Chinese peasant (the comparison is at least flawed).

By raising the level of generalization, we could ask ourselves as well, for instance, which country is richer: Afghanistan with its \$3,000bil mineral reserves or Japan which is practically void of such resources? Or maybe The Netherlands, Belgium, or Luxembourg...?

Neither of these examples are very well picked. Yet the question turns into: which countries are richer, the ones which own resources or the ones exploiting them? Two types of answers may result: a) if the processing country is the same with the one possessing them, the answer is simple; b) if the country exploiting them is not the country owning them, then certainly poverty stays with the “owner”.

Such situations, of global reach, are not covered by Herbert Spencer's analysis on poverty as it is certain that neither laziness nor inebriation can be accepted as causes of poverty on more than half of the planet's territory.

OXFAM's reports notice that: “If during 1990-2010, the growth has been in favor of poors, 700 million people, women in their majority, would not be living today in poverty. Instead, during this period, the incomes of poorest people, i.e. 10% of humans, increased by almost \$3/per month (!) while the incomes of the most wealthy 1% increased 182 times!

And OXFAM, too, (which reports are founded on GLOBAL WEALTH DATA BOOK – 2015) emphasizes with a mute surprise that the wealth of the first 52 richest people in the world equals the wealth of the poorest 3.6 billion of planet's inhabitants. The same way the sands of Africa's deserts furnish minerals to the immense Amazon basin (although nobody would have believed before now something like that), in the same way the two categories of people might



be interlinked, namely the unimaginable wealth of some versus the immensity of the mass and poverty of the others.

In other words, the interlink exists even if it is not visible. It is obvious that this hypothesis cannot be, and it is not valid unless we suppose that all 3.6 billion are, according to H.Spencer's theory, thieves, doped, drunken, criminals etc; in such a case it is obvious that mankind got yet another problem as big as the planet!

However, poverty has not spread to Asia's steppes and deserts only but also alongside the highways and among the skyscrapers on both shores of the Atlantic. In Greece and Spain, one in three children lives in poverty and in the USA 30% of the minors are in the poverty area and affected by great shortcomings.

The economist **Thomas Piketty** showed, without doubts, that the countries considered rich are either not safe from the poverty's expanding sands and desert. And so it was that during the last 30 years, the increase of the 50% poorest Americans' incomes was 0% while the incomes of the 1% richest ones increased by 300%. Here come the global financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF that warn that the inequity and the internal inequities (within the states) are much bigger than three decades ago!

We learn from the researches of these institutions (and from other sources) that, for instance, in 1970, in Great Britain only 10% of the profit returned to the shareholders (the difference was invested), and in 2010 it was 70% while 180 countries recorded revenues smaller than the revenues of the first 10 big corporations.

The institutional investors (such as the pensions funds) held, 30 years ago, 30% of the capital; today, they hold 3% only! Within the corporations, the salary differentials are colossal. At this chapter, the example of the director of an IT company in India whose salary is 400 times bigger than the median wage at the company's level is widely known. In 1980, the cocoa producers received 18% of the value of a chocolate; in 2010, 6% only!

By means of the most "sophisticated" lobbying

systems, the big corporations evade more and more the social and fiscal obligations and, for instance, APPLE pays in taxes only 0.005% of the profits it acquires in the European countries (2014 – 2016).

These policies, (combined with many other subterfuges and exemptions turned into laws "as ordered") incur losses of over \$300bil/year to the countries with low development levels.

OXFAM writes down that 43-45% of the wealth of the billionaires FORBES recorded in 2016 is linked and resulted directly from such practices to which corruption on a large scale is to be added.

**Michael Tanner** of **Cato Institute** wrote: poverty cannot be eradicated by making it comfortable; none of the poors with an income of less than \$3/day will not spend for all his children as much as a rich spends on one of his favourite dogs.

We agree partially with **W.Churchill's** saying: "You do not make the poors richer making the rich poorer". Yet his saying was appropriate for an epoch in which the globalist greed did not cover either the entire planet nor the mind of the entire mankind.

One could not overlook **J.F.Kennedy's** warning either: "If a free society cannot solve the situation of the ever growing number of poors, it cannot save the few ones who are rich". Kennedy discerned the terrible power of a situation with a detonating power more devastating than that of a terrible weapon..

**Otto Scharmer**, co-founder of **Presencing Institute for Excellence in Education** (awarded by MIT) stressed in his turn what it is obvious since centuries yet, I don't know why, nobody sees: the survival capacity of a state depends on the way it is treating its poors: **Rescuing communities takes precedence over rescuing corporations** the same way that rescuing nature and life itself takes precedence over rescuing a civilization which symptoms of moral and spiritual decadence never reached such a... "high" ... level!

Let us remember the so-called **state fragility indicator** measuring the fragility of a state

construction, of a country, based on a series of 6 points: migration, refugees, demographic pressure, economic imbalances, social imbalances (the poor), the disputes between the different types of minorities and the majority.

None of today's world states on a scale from 0 to 100 has the state fragility indicator under 70 (0 is the minimum and 100 the maximum of this indicator).

And the poverty weapon is everywhere taken into account and is the more ubiquitous and perfidious as it does not reside in the soldiers' bandolier but in the luxurious offices of certain decision makers without face and without conscience.

We conclude this journey, a sad one and maybe futile, into the world of the weapon at our fingertip, the poor's and poverty's, with a quoting from one of the few men who stepped on the earth's surface, **Mahatma Gandhi**: the most terrible form of violence is poverty. To which, may we be absolved, we add: and the most abject form of lack of conscience.

Not any poor is lazy, doped, drunken, criminal as not any functional two-legged is a human! ...

### No WWII: The Odd Logic of the New Fake Cold War and the Curious Reality of Feather Pillow Proxy Wars



**Dr. Matthew CROSTON**

There has been an awful lot of noise and blowing wind of late across all forms of social media about an impending WWII between the United

States and Russia, most of which involves further involvement and an intensified escalation within Syria. With the US airstrikes (alongside its allied partners, the UK and France) on Friday night (American time), that crescendo is no doubt going to hit an all-time high of anticipa-



tion. To that I offer one small contrary warning: don't hold your breath for the mushroom clouds just yet. There is still too much evidence of designed respectful interaction between the United States and Russia to even begin to suspect a major physical confrontation directly between the two will take place. And this includes last night's airstrikes.

While there is no doubt that current relations between America and Russia are not exactly glowing and positive, there are also numerous examples of restraint to show that both sides do not wish to pursue a war with each other. In some cases, the very evidence that has put people all over the world in a frothy orgasm of Cold War bloodlust is actually the evidence people should be noting for why war is unlikely. Consider the following incidents/initiatives that have taken place over the past few years and consider how often any one of them could have resulted in war and other serious military repercussions between adversaries:

- Russia supporting with its own military presence the Crimean secession referendum;
- American retaliatory sanctions for said support, resulting in the Russian ruble losing literally half of its value, significantly damaging the earning and consuming power of regular Russians;

- Russian retaliatory initiatives for those sanctions, most notably the alleged hacking of the 2016 American Presidential election;

- The Magnitskii Act (followed up with still more sanctions just last week), which is basically a form of punishment by hubris: America black-listing influential friends of Putin (oligarchs) from having access to enter America;

- The closing of diplomatic offices in both Russia and America, with further escalation to a tit-for-tat diplomat rejection plan where both countries keep kicking each other's diplomats out of their respective countries.

- One country accuses the other of overlooking chemical gas attacks against the Syrian people;

- One country accuses the other of fabricating chemical gas attacks against the Syrian people;

- Rumors of a 'pee tape' morally compromising the President of the United States while on an earlier visit to Russia;

- Rumors of secretly going after to freeze and/or steal billions of dollars President Putin supposedly has stashed all over the globe;

- And, of course, the biggest one of all: both sides intervening in another country's internal civil war but on opposite sides of the conflict.

This is a fairly impressive list of disagreement, discord, conflict, and outright aggression. There have been wars breaking out all over the globe for far fewer incidents and over far less intense accusations and maneuvers. This is why so many today are obsessing over the so-called New Cold War. In fact, the opposite is reality: we should not be welcoming the New Cold War. We should be welcoming the New FAKE Cold War. All of the reasons given above should have been reason enough for kinetic confrontation between the two countries. And yet no direct military conflict has arisen. The United States has now done 'surprise' airstrikes in

Syria not once but twice. And, "miraculously," no significant, if at all, formal uniformed Russian military presence has been killed in either of those airstrikes. When the White House goes before the press conference microphones to thank its allies for their cooperation and assistance, the unrecognized reality is that one of those allies is de facto Russia: the two sides have clearly collaborated at least in terms of communication before the airstrikes to ensure that only the proper Syrian military targets are hit and the formal Russian military presence has time to evacuate the direct area. This, of course, is bad news for any and all Syrians: basically, what both countries have been saying throughout the entire civil war is that it is just fine to spill Syrian blood as long as American and Russian blood is not spilled with it. This is the feather pillow of proxy wars. At least when it comes to Americans and Russians. Again, no comment on how much it has been a sledgehammer for both Syrian sides within Syria.

The problem with the analysis ongoing about Russian-American relations is that it is ultimately guilty of that egregious academic sin: a lack of falsifiability. We teach our young doctoral students that whenever any serious investigation is begun, they must ensure that their project has the chance of actually being wrong. This principle of falsifiability is built into our projects and our brains so as to ensure we do not bias or project our desired results into our findings. Given the complex, ambiguous, and competing alterna-





tives nature of global security and war, it is easy to see why this is so important: it is mind-bogglingly easy to 'get the results you want' if you are determined to see an issue in one particular way. Finding the data and interpreting the evidence is rather simple. The problem is that the analyst must strive to not ignore competing evidence and alternative explanations that muddy the waters for the desired outcome. This is what has been happening for nearly three years (at least) when it comes to how we analyze Russian-American relations. The very data that so many media outlets and presumed Russian experts in the West use as 'proof' for an undeniable New Cold War is just as easily positioned to show how two countries have chosen to NOT go to war with one another and NOT confront one another physically when they easily could have and many other countries in the same position would have. Instead of proven bad news, it is just as easily argued as proof of good news.

Interpretation. This is the essence of our business in global affairs, international security, and intelligence. Right now, we are violating some of our core research principles in order to maintain a single desired analytical outcome. Perhaps most disturbingly, the desired outcome in this case is the more dangerous one, the more violent one, and the more irresponsible one. Perhaps it is odd to say, but at the moment it seems the people we all have to thank for avoiding the precipice of real war are not our intellectuals and scholars, but the leaders of the two countries that everyone keeps trying to say are hell-bent on destroying each other. Welcome to the odd logic of the New Fake Cold War the curious reality of feather pillow proxy wars.

#### **Dr. Matthew CROSTON**

Dr. Matthew Crosston is Executive Vice Chairman of ModernDiplomacy.eu. He is Senior Doctoral Faculty in the School of Security and Global Studies at the American Military University and was just named the future Co-Editor of the seminal International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence. His work is catalogued at: <https://brown.academia.edu/ProfMatthewCrosston/Analytics>.

## **The EU is at risk of death from myopia**



**Giles MERRITT is Founder and Chairman of Friends of Europe**

If the European Union were to die, some might expect its death certificate to cite inertia. But myopia looks more likely. Short-sightedness risks becoming the European project's terminal sickness.

"I don't want to belong to a generation of sleepwalkers," said France's President Emmanuel Macron in Strasbourg last week. Underlying his speech to the European Parliament was the message that the solutions to yesterday's problems are no longer suited to those of tomorrow. It's a theme that other policymakers and political leaders across Europe should be repeating over and over again.

The long-term difficulties that confront Europe are daunting, and if public opinion can be made aware of them, the grip on voters of populist parties would be substantially weakened. But first, a simple truth.

The weakening over the past decade of the drive for greater European integration has nothing to do with poor political leadership, and everything to do with economic conditions. The EU's national leaders are habitually blamed, but the reality is that austerity policies following the 2008 financial crisis and low-growth, no-growth across Europe have locked politicians and their voters into a risk-averse mood.

It is important that we Europeans should grasp this point, because long-term trends point to continuing slow growth unless radical new policies are implemented. The goal must be to kick-start European economies back to the higher growth rates that led to the single market, the euro and the EU's 'Big Bang' enlargement.

Failure to do that puts the whole European pro-

ject at risk of decline and gradual dismemberment. "Not with a bang but a whimper," as the poet T.S. Eliot wrote of the way the world ends.

What, then, are these trends that myopic Europe urgently needs to focus on? The most obvious is demographic decline, but hard on its heels are technological vulnerability, waning living standards and rising social tensions. All are well-known but widely ignored.

Politicians intent on getting elected are reluctant to cast themselves as doom-laden Jeremiahs, or Cassandras. Journalists respond to the public appetite for news but not education. That's doubtless why the grave implications of Europe's ageing receive so little attention. The fact that in only a decade from now something like 40% of the EU population will be over-65s is seen as a healthcare and pensions problem.

Yet that's only the tip of the iceberg. Far more alarming is the shrinkage of the European workforce. Some might welcome that as good news for younger job-seekers, but that's wrong. The EU-28 workforce of 240m people will number only 207m by mid-century if immigration stays at present levels, but could fall disastrously to only 169m if it is slowed or even stopped. Taking 33m taxpayers and consumers out of the European economy over three decades would be extremely damaging, while over 60m people would be catastrophic.

Europe needs to start right now on planning ways to counter its demographic decline. Average incomes are already only two-thirds those of Americans, and on course to drop to three-fifths. Giving a fillip to the European economy is essential if a spiralling political and economic collapse is to be avoided.

That boost would come from a bold and determined investment strategy across Europe aimed at education, health and housing. If eurozone governance reforms were discussed in the light of borrowing to build a more resilient Europe, then the reservations of northern European governments could be allayed. The modest 'Juncker Plan' for €315 billion to be spent on infrastructure should be seen as a mere pilot.

The key point is that more hospitals, schools and houses are needed to accommodate both Europe's ageing population and also the new blood that immigration can bring. The Keynesian pump-priming effects will re-energise sluggish economies and thus ensure that the EU project recovers its ambitious forward momentum.

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## TURKEY – NATO : MOVING TO A SPLIT?

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**Dinu COSTESCU**

Is the cessation of the relations between Turkey and NATO just a matter of time? Such a question would have been difficult to imagine a few years ago or, more exactly, throughout the period since Turkey's accession to NATO in 1952, a period during which the Bosphorus and Dardanelles country fulfilled faithfully the mission it was assigned with by the western political and military alliance – of stronghold of the eastern NATO's flank and impassable wall against former Soviet Union's expansionism and of the communist ideology towards Europe and, generally, towards areas within the West's spheres of interests seized in the acerbical competition imposed by the geopolitics of the Cold War after the end of the last planetary conflagration.

Today, on the background of the developments the world is witnessing, the Middle East region included, there are many analysts and commentators endorsing the idea that NATO itself is confronted with a crisis due to at least three elements: first, it is about the rise at an accelerated pace on the global chessboard of the Russian Federation's visibility and assertiveness, a fact seriously threatening the return to the climate that characterized the global bipolar order after WWII; second, it is about the relative regression the United States registers within the global system of foreign relations and affairs, a fact that determined the leader of the White House to re-

quest America's allies to sustain the financial effort for their protection claimed from the United States, a protection that was never conceived in terms reminding the logic of commercial transactions; and last, it is about what could be labelled as the joint failure of the United States and of the European Union – the two main NATO's supporting pillars - of handling the relationship with Recep Teyyip Erdogan's Turkey, a fact that generated tensions going up to the leader in Ankara's threatening with Turkey's withdrawal, sooner or later, from the Atlantic Alliance's membership. One cannot ignore the evidence that, from America's oldest and most faithful ally, Recep Teyyip Erdogan turns into one of the inflexible opponents of the Euro-Atlantism to which he opposes blatantly his neo-Ottoman doctrine and ambitions aimed at a geopolitical and forces reconfiguration of the Middle East where Turkey may prove herself as ideal paradigm and as an omnipotent and omniscient for all the region's problems. The offensive code-named "Euphrates Shield" aimed at halting the expansion of the Syrian Kurds minority west of Euphrates River was followed by the Operation "Olive Branch" which resulted in the occupation of the Afrin Kurdish enclave north-west of Syria and Ergogan's declarations of continuing the military campaign on the Kurdish town of Manbij – where important American fighting troops are located - and, finally, to reach the Syrian Kurdistan's north-eastern extremity to the border with Iraq, namely to practically set up a security buffer zone alongside the entire border with Syria were as many reasons that embittered Turkey's overall relations with the United States, taking into account that the Trump Administration granted a strong military, logistic and moral support to the fighting Syrian Kurdish ethnic minority whom the government in Ankara considers terrorists and an existential threat to Turkey's national security interests.

The dissensions concerning the different approach of the Kurdish issue are not the only reason for the tense relations between Ankara and the United States, indeed. Donald Trump's famous decision of acknowledging Jerusalem as the State of Israel's "eternal" capital and to relo-

cate the American embassy compound from Tel-Aviv to the "holy town" offered Recep Teyyip Erdogan the opportunity to pose as defender of the "Islam's third holy place" and making himself a continuer of the Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II, known, among others, for his fierce opposition to Balfour Declaration and, implicitly, for setting up in Palestine a "national Jewish home" as Lord Balfour promised on behalf of His British Majesty. In December, 2017, in front of a meeting of his "comrades" of the Islamist Party Justice and Development, the Turkish president addressed his counterpart over the Ocean the following words: "Mister Trump, we will not abandon Jerusalem which is, for the Muslims, a red line".

On the other hand, the United States has an as critical as possible vision on the accelerated coming closer between Ankara and Vladimir Putin's Russia, particularly by the purchase of the Russian air defense systems S-400, a unusual move for an important NATO member.

The functioning of NATO's mechanism is based on complete trust and interlinking among member states and armies codified in Article V of the constitutive Chart which provides for that any attack against a member state will be considered as an aggression against all member states.

It is easily to notice that during the last years, most Recep Teyyip Erdogan's strategic options turned into failures, starting with his Syrian policy and the clandestine support granted to certain jihadist groups opposed to Bashar Al-Assad to the obsession with the Kurdish terrorism which, in its turn, contributed fundamentally to a debasement of Turkey's relations with the United States and, by ricochet, with the North Atlantic Alliance. The difficulty president Erdogan has in drawing up and implementing a winning strategy is not alien, in its turn, to another failure registered by the Turkish leader when he hoped of being able to exploit to his own interest the tremendous changes generated in the regional vicinity by the so-called "Arab spring" in order to create the image and position of a hero and of a regional leader who may decisively influence regional developments and



project the Islamic Turkey on the forefront of the chessboard of global strategy. The revenge unleashed against the Turkish society after the 2016 summer failed coup attempt did not bypass the national army and, sources at NATO Headquarters in Brussels stated that the Turkish military echelons integrated into NATO structures were "purged" to a 60 – 80% proportion, they were marginalized or operative and command military cadres massively applied for refugee status abroad. Washington's constant refusal to positively reply to the insistent requests of extraditing imam Fethullah Gullen, who resides in America and is accused by president Recep Teyyip Erdogan of initiating and instigating the July 2016 putch opened a threatening breach in the solidity of the relations between Turkey and the United States and, implicitly, between Turkey and the Atlantic Alliance structures. A breach widened once more by the dissensions between Erdogan's hostility towards the Syrian Kurdish minority, on the one hand, and the support Donald Trump's Administration grants to the same Kurdish minority in their joint campaign against the jihadists of Islamic State.

The fact that the European Union suspended sine die the negotiations for Turkey's accession in a context whereby the relations between the European and euro-atlantic community and a Turkey more and more involved in partnership relations and strategic cooperation with the Russian Federation should be added to all the above. Therefore, it is easily understandable that the "Golden Age" of flirting between Turkey, on the one hand, and NATO and the western community, on the other, came to a de facto end with all the consequences that may in perspective erode further the solidity and the well functioning of these relations.

According to its founding documents, NATO has neither mandate, nor tasks of taking positions or initiate interferences in issues pertaining to the internal situation of its member states. Yet the strategic roughness existing between Turkey and NATO accompanied by Erdogan regime's autocratic orientation on the rise makes it difficult the continuation of relations like in those

"good old times". During the January visit Regep Teyyip Erdogan paid to Paris, president Emmanuel Macron told his guest that the "Turkey's dream of joining the European Union was unrealistic".

Will the same conclusion be reached in what concern the continuity of the relations between Turkey and the North Atlantic Alliance?

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## To revive dying democracies, focus on ordinary folk, not politicians

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***Shada ISLAM is Director of Europe & Geopolitics at Friends of Europe***

The fall-out from the US-led military strikes in Syria will keep us busy for days. Ending the seven-year old war and bringing peace to Syria must certainly be high on the global agenda. It also makes it even more vital to urgently tackle the task of reviving dying democracies.

Populists, illiberals, authoritarians, military dictators and once-democratic-leaders-gone-bad litter the landscape, making the world a more dangerous place. The world's erstwhile most-powerful nation is being run by a man obsessed with Twitter. Other leaders similarly swear and swagger. Policy by sound bites is becoming the norm.

But what's a person supposed to do? Democracy is about politics. And politics is about politicians. And politicians belong to political parties. So democracy is about political parties and who gets elected, gets the most votes, gets to sit in the parliament, pass laws, look important.

Well, democracy is also about people. It's about all of us living together, sharing the planet and taking responsibility for it. It's about active citizenship, rights and obligations, give and take.

Democracy is also about people. It's about all of us living together, sharing the planet and taking responsibility for it

As the world becomes more tribal and polarised and the political debate more shallow, it's no surprise that more and more people are getting fed up with politicians, their quarrels and infighting, their tendency to put party above nation. Their neglect of citizens' interest. Their corruption, moral and/or pecuniary. Their dominance, their negligence and their egos.

And while everyone's attention tends to centre on those who follow and vote for the hate-mongers and bigots, there is also another, more heartening global story. It's about "ordinary" people taking matters into their own hands to work for the common public good. They are doing so through individual initiatives, local action, national movements and global campaigns.

Look carefully: while politicians argue and squabble, it's the ordinary folk who are shaping and reshaping the world. Whether it's trying to stop massacres or shelter refugees, cracking down on crime and guns, cleaning up parks and street corners, demanding safe food or fighting for equal opportunities, it's the story of people, joining forces, putting aside their differences to tackle shared challenges.

Young Americans are taking to the streets to urge an end to gun violence, anti-Brexiters are actively working to stop Brexit, Hungarians are protesting the policies and actions of Viktor Orbán and many Israelis are calling for peace with Palestinians. Their actions are getting bigger, stronger and more ambitious.

These moves very rarely make the headlines and if they do, they are quickly replaced by more virulent and toxic voices, those who see the world as an unending competition. The nasties make the headlines and actively troll their adversaries on social media. Hate and prejudice gets global attention. But the reality of today's world is not just about those who insult and offend. It is also about constructive connectivity, of people putting aside their differences and grievances to join hands in the hope of making positive change.

Look carefully: while politicians argue and squabble, it's the ordinary folk who are shaping and reshaping the world

Like *En Marche* in France, some movements do have leaders. But mostly these movements are amorphous, messy, volatile and leaderless. Some are short-lived, others live on.

Certainly spontaneous grassroots movements cannot replace well-organised political parties. They are vitally needed, however, to build and maintain open and inclusive societies, to keep politicians on their toes, to name and shame, keep politics more or less clean and drive constructive change. Sometimes their voices are drowned out by harsher clamour. Sometimes – like the #MeToo movement – they can transform old behaviours.

Like authentic and independent journalism, people-led political and social campaigns are vitally important for the survival of democracy. Little surprise then, as in Hungary, Poland, Turkey and Russia, media crackdowns and demonisation of civil society organisations are the unpleasant hallmark of autocrats and illiberals.

As it navigates increasingly treacherous waters, the EU can no longer rely on political parties to push for freedom and democracy, whether at home or abroad. As illustrated by the European People's Party's (EPP) leniency towards Orbán, the US Republican Party's failure to rein in Trump, the party political debates over Brexit or indeed the failure to find a negotiated solution for Catalonia, politicians can no longer be relied on to think first of the public or national interest.

The EU can no longer rely on political parties to push for freedom and democracy

If the EU is serious about the renewal of democracy both in Europe and globally, it must engage more forcefully with non-state actors, including local and regional authorities, business leaders, labour unions and students, women's groups and representatives of ethnic and religious minorities.

These discussions can no longer be a mere ritual, an after-thought or an obligation. Financial and moral support for pro-democracy groups, both at home and abroad, should be redoubled. Whether at home or outside, European Commissioners and members of the European Parlia-

ment must step outside their rarefied bubbles and engage, engage, engage with the demos.

Speeches and brief appearances at conferences and conventions are no longer enough. With elections to the European Parliament around the corner, it's more and more urgent to change the EU's rules of public engagement. It's time to get personal and make emotional connections.

Yes, people are being seduced by populists across the world. But many more are working courageously to stop the global slide into despair. They deserve our support and attention.

*First published by Friends of Europe, [www.friendsofeurope.org](http://www.friendsofeurope.org), and reprinted with the kind acceptance of the author .*

## Statement of the Political Science Association of Armenia:

*It's time for sober thinking*



The Political Science Association of Armenia expresses its deep concern regarding the events currently underway in Armenia.

The April 20 attack on the Minister of Defense service car, while he was carrying out his official duties, is clear evidence that current situation threatens Statehood of Armenia which is de facto under the war conditions, and may create favorable conditions for the several external harmful interferences. Especially dangerous are calls to commit high treason for financial benefits.

The Political Science Association of Armenia, as an organization uniting the professional resource in political science, worries about polarization and deepening confrontation within the society.

The national interest should be of priority over any political interests. Political Science Association of Armenia calls for starting negotiations without preconditions and offers its professional support.

***On behalf of the Political Science Association of Armenia Board, Honorary President of Association, Doctor of Political Science, Professor, LTG Hayk Kotanjian.***

## Armenia: Not Another Color Revolution



*Nora T. KALINSKIY*

**Unlike the revolution in Ukraine, in Armenia even the interim government will lean toward Russia.**

It took less than two weeks of protests for Armenian Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan, the former two-term president who had previously said he would not take the premiership, to step down from the position. The leader of the protests last week called it a "velvet revolution," a reference to the pro-democracy color revolutions of the early 2000s that swept the former Soviet Union and the Balkans. But this was no color revolution. The color revolutions pulled states out of Russia's orbit. Armenia, however, has nowhere else to go.

### Limits of the West

In the color revolutions of the past, the West offered indirect support to the protesters through vehicles like nongovernmental organizations. Yet there is no overt evidence that the



United States or any European countries directly funded or otherwise materially supported the Armenian protests. In fact, no Western government even made statements criticizing Sargsyan or his government. A few Western-funded NGOs went so far as to sign a petition in support of the protests, but this hardly suggests that a dramatic political transformation is imminent.

But just because the protests were unlikely to have been directed from abroad does not mean foreign powers can't take advantage of them. If Armenian unrest continues – with Western help, perhaps – neighboring Azerbaijan could be tempted to try to take advantage. Both countries are in a vulnerable spot in the South Caucasus near Russia's border, and instability there would force Moscow to divert resources from places the West is focused on, like Syria, to restore control. For now, with the way things are trending, the West is content to watch the situation unfold. Armenia is a key Russian ally in a crucial buffer zone, so Russia is already on the defensive.

But although the West could make things worse, it cannot hope to flip Armenia into the Western camp. The opposition in Armenia has traditionally criticized Sargsyan for his close ties with Russia, yet there is no strong anti-Russian current in Armenian politics. The Way Out alliance, or Yelk, the one liberal party in the parliament that opposes integration with the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union, holds only nine seats out of 105. For now, there will be an interim government, and the protesters are calling for a new election. But even if protest votes weaken the ruling Republican Party, the new government will follow the foreign policy lines of the previous one when it comes to Russia. Unlike the 2013-14 Euromaidan revolution in Ukraine, where a majority of the country was pro-West, in Armenia even the interim government will lean toward Russia. Instability, not regime change, is the West's goal for now.

### Russian Guarantees

This is because Armenia's economic and defense imperatives dictate a close alignment with

Russia. Armenia is landlocked, and its borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey are closed. It has about a 27-mile (44-kilometer) border to the south with Iran, and a much larger border with Georgia to the north. In 2016, 31 percent of its imports came from Russia via Georgia, including energy resources, food supplies and transport vehicles. The fortunes of numerous Armenian oligarchs depend on trade with Russia, and, as is common in post-Soviet states, they wield considerable political power. If Armenia is to avoid a severe recession and import shortages of energy, food and other essentials, good trade relations with Russia are a must.

Russia also shields Armenia from security threats posed by Azerbaijan and Turkey. Armenia is locked in a frozen conflict with Azerbaijan over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh and a number of Azerbaijani provinces that Armenia occupied during the war over the region in the early 1990s. The border between the two countries is always tense, with daily cease-fire violations. Russia keeps the conflict from boiling over by making sure that no side gets enough of an advantage over the other that warfare would become an option. It does this by positioning itself as the primary weapons supplier of both sides. If war between Armenia and Azerbaijan broke out, Turkey may intervene on the side of Azerbaijan. Such a conflict would threaten to spill over into Russia's Muslim regions in the North Caucasus. War in the Caucasus is the last thing Russia wants, especially as it's considering how best to respond to U.S.-led airstrikes against Assad regime targets in Syria.

Azerbaijan does not have a decisive military advantage over Armenia, but if unrest in Armenia leads to political chaos in the upper echelons of the government, Azerbaijan might seek to take advantage and reconquer some of the territory it lost in the 1988-94 war. The political situation in Armenia isn't yet so dire, so for now Azerbaijan is biding its time. But members of parliament in Azerbaijan have endorsed the protests in Armenia in hopes that Sargsyan's removal will be followed by the demise of a clan of Armenian politicians who hail from Nagorno-Karabakh, Sargsyan being one of them. Azerbai-

jan's statements of support for the protests are an indication that the country seeks to exploit the protests for its own ends.

The Turkish threat to Armenia is less straightforward. Turkey, like Russia, is bogged down in Syria. But even though Turkey is not in a position to project military power in Armenia, the South Caucasus is as important for Turkey as it is for Russia. Moreover, Turkey's ambition and power are growing, which is worrying for Armenia. Just last month, Armenia scrapped a peace agreement it signed with Turkey in 2009, accusing Turkey of making no efforts to ratify it. Animosity between the two countries goes back over a century, and besides, Russia is easier for Armenia to work with – it's farther away and less demanding. A Russian military base in Gyumri, Armenia, acts as a security guarantee against the Turkish expansionism that Armenians fear. It's also a guarantee that Russia will not forsake Armenia.

Until Armenia's economic and defense constraints change, it will continue to need to align with Russia. But even though the protests may not be a color revolution, that does not preclude them from having serious consequences. The U.S. and EU, Azerbaijan, Russia and Turkey each has its own interests in Armenia's fate. A fragile political environment forces Russia to ensure that its position in Armenia remains strong and creates possibilities for challengers to try to weaken Russia or even to increase their own standing in the Caucasus. Because Armenia is in the middle of these forces, the resilience of the protests constitutes a serious threat to the South Caucasus' fragile political balance. The likeliest scenario is still that they fizzle out, but the fault lines they have laid bare are not going anywhere. There is a lot of tinder here waiting for a match.

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## THE LERNEAN HYDRA



**Tassos SYMEONIDES**  
(RIEAS Academic Advisor)

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Greece emerged from a seven-year period of military rule in July 1974 only to step straight into a prolonged political cycle of division, debilitating partisan politics, and unprecedented corruption.

The period after 1974 became the “fourth round” of the conflict between the communist Left and the “accursed” Right<sup>1</sup>. In this fourth round, the Left finally succeeded in conquering politics. The so-called “conservatives,” lacking ideological conviction and frightened out of their wits lest they appeared “non-progressive” after seven years of military dictatorship, tried to prevail by emulating the Left's grass roots agitation only to fail dismally.

This post-junta cycle ended in 2010 with Greece's bankruptcy upending a revolving door “democracy” and putting the country at the mercy of her creditors. Back-to-back EU “bailouts,” hinging on German-inspired brutal austerity, scuttled the economy, destroyed the middle class, and demolished the two main political parties, the “conservative” New Democracy and the “socialist” PASOK.

Post-2010 Greece is often described as “Weimar Greece” for good reason, her domestic situation in steep and steady decline since the

1. The previous three rounds consisted of (a) the rise of communist resistance against the Nazi Occupation (b) the attack of the communist ELAS partisans against the nationalist resistance groups, 1943-44 and a communist attempt to take over the country when the Germans left, which was defeated during the Battle of Athens, December 1944-January 1945 and (c) the communist insurgency aiming to overthrow the postwar Greek government, 1946-49, which led to a catastrophic conflict and bled an already exhausted country white.

crisis began. The main effects of this collapse are easily observable with the naked eye:

- The invasion of the creditors has shaken already weak and corrupt state institutions rendering them practically dysfunctional;

- austerity has destroyed the private economy and impoverished millions;

- the cascade of draconian EU/IMF directives, mutilating incomes and promising ever harsher budget measures to come<sup>2</sup>, has stirred deep rejection of European “institutions” and has convinced the majority of the people that “there’s no light at the end of the tunnel;”

- the Greek government “... is using highly dubious methods to create the illusion of a budget surplus - and it is ordinary Greeks who are paying the price.”<sup>3</sup>

- and the economic collapse, contrary to predictions, not only did it not affect the established corruption networks, known among Greeks as “the intertwined interests,” but offered them fertile ground to continue to grow and undermine an already brittle Greek “democracy.”

On top of all that, the human disaster of 500,000 young educated Greeks packing up and leaving to seek better fortunes elsewhere now threatens the country’s very existence—demographically, politically, and economically. With the majority of her active segment of the population almost gone, Greece is morphing into a country of the elderly and the retired. Combined with a veritable invasion by largely Moslem undocumented aliens from neighboring Turkey, the loss of so many young Greeks is turning into a national catastrophe.

On top of all, “Weimar Greece” is dangerously slipping toward **authoritarian leftism**<sup>4</sup>. A protest vote in January 2015 allowed SYRIZA, a radical anarchist groupuscule once lingering on the far

fringes of parliamentary party politics, to form a government in coalition with a most unusual bedfellow, the far right-nationalist ANEL, a splinter of the mainstream New Democracy conservatives.

The SYRIZA-ANEL (or SYRANEL) coalition, after a brief period of attempting to challenge the Brussels mandarins on the murderous bailout terms, was pounded into political pulp by Mrs. Merkel and the creditors and rushed to apply austerity measures that left even hard-core totalitarian neoliberals in awe.

Not unexpectedly SYRIZA’s naked collaborationism with the creditors is now pushing SYRANEL ever so close to a humiliating electoral defeat. In response, PM Alexis Tsipras has launched a not-so-veiled effort to manipulate and undermine what is left of democratic institutions so that ***SYRIZA and the radical Left may dominate the political landscape as “kingmakers” even after they certainly meet disaster in the next general election***<sup>5</sup>.

SYRIZA-sponsored creeping “de-democratization” is a fundamental threat to Greece’s already crippled domestic stability. SYRIZA cultivates an “enemy-at-the-gates” mentality by pretending to be the long-suffering democratic maiden under attack from all corners by subversives belonging to previous regimes, both “conservative” and “socialist.” To add spunk to the recipe, SYRIZA deploys “point men” to vilify, abuse, and attack its opponents with unfounded accusations of corruption and nonstop drilling of the public ear on how SYRIZA’s “overthrow,” by all these lurking enemies of the people, would surely cause the end of Greece as we know it<sup>6</sup>.

Under pressure, SYRANEL has chosen ***deliberate abstention from enforcing the law in the face of daily anarchist gang violence*** to stir

2. Both the EU “bailout” wizards and the IMF have mercilessly targeted pensions. Since the onset of the crisis, the average pension has been reduced by 70% and more cuts are on the way with the ultimate target of pushing all pensions down to a mere pittance and thus leaving hundreds of thousands of old people in abject and life-threatening poverty in the name of “streamlining budgetary policies.”

3. Themistoklis Sofos, “Kafka in Greece: a struggle against tax bureaucracy” at <http://bit.ly/2FCCqaa>

4. The original Weimar republic came close to extinction because of communist subversion but was ironically “saved” by its eventual destroyer, Adolf Hitler, who also saw the communists annihilated in the most brutal manner.

5. Polls routinely discover the main opposition New Democracy ahead of SYRIZA by 19-25 percentage points.

6. Ironically, this disaster has already occurred thanks to the EU “bailouts” and the auctioning of the country at fire sale prices.



fear and insecurity. SYRIZA “strategists” hope that spreading trouble would allow their wobbling party to somehow win the mantle of the only “credible” actor capable of restoring order—which they themselves have deliberately undermined. It is obvious SYRIZA has chosen to play this dangerous game to the very end. Athens experiences daily violent anarchist attacks with no one ever arrested and charged. While SYRANEL pays lip service to “law and order” and the “reorganization” of law enforcement, its ministers openly direct the police not to touch the gangs, who use their own police-no-go ghetto section in the middle of Athens to raid, pillage, and burn unmolested.

Even if SYRIZA is somehow pushed out of government, the current situation won’t change much. None of the current parliamentary parties has enough electoral support to form a strong one-party government—and SYRIZA, to reinforce the prospect of ungovernability, passed an election law introducing simple proportional representation, a system which, in a country with Greece’s political history, almost ***guarantees perpetual instability through weak coalition governments***<sup>7</sup>.

The critical question of how to protect “Weimer Greece’s” domestic security thus becomes all the more urgent. Any SYRANEL successor will face a dismal domestic security situation, not to mention severe threats of war from neighboring Turkey sliding toward Islamist dictatorship. ***If there is a future government determined to break with a long tradition of empty rhetoric on security, and discard the fear of what the Left might do or say to protect “popular freedoms,” the following should be reform objectives for immediate action:***

***FIRST:*** Dismantle the Greek Police (HELAS) and reinstate the French system of policing, comprising a city police and a paramilitary armed gendarmerie, which existed until 1984

when the PASOK socialists discarded it<sup>8</sup>. The new system must prioritize (a) a special investigation bureau against illegal immigration and human trafficking gangs promoting the breach of Greek borders (b) an intelligence unit targeting “activists” arriving in Greece to stir ethnic minority trouble, promote secessionist movements, and buttress the “rights” of undocumented aliens, and (c) a special gendarmerie border patrol detachment, in close cooperation with the Armed Forces, which will succeed the existing civil service-based Border Protection Services (est. 1998).

***SECOND:*** Antiterrorism must obtain its own dedicated judicial arm, in cooperation with the Antiterrorist Branch, tasked to pursue the criminal prosecution of terrorists in special closed courts. Equal priority must be given to introducing a completely new antiterrorist law, which would introduce a special emergency penal procedure divorced from the civil Criminal Code.

***THIRD:*** The bureaucratic and cumbersome National Intelligence Service (EYP) must be radically reorganized by utilizing experience of allied countries whose intelligence services have already adjusted to the post 9/11 environment. Emphasis must be placed on new technologies, specialist recruitment, and an esprit de corps dismissing petty partisan internal political quarrels.

***FOURTH:*** A National Strategic Action Plan (NSAP) should be created ***to articulate in detail*** the objectives of national security, the methods to pursue them, and the directions of intelligence collection and analysis. NSAP should also establish rules of expanding EYP’s interface with government ministries and mass and social media.

***FIFTH:*** Personnel development should be the task of a university-level national intelligence academy divorced from the current ossified

7. Greece’s fractured political party system won’t be recovering any time soon as creditor “monitoring” and what looks like perpetual demands for more “reforms” stand to continue well into the distant future. Currently, SYRIZA and the creditors are busy peddling the fake story of “successful recovery” to push the devastated Greek economy back onto the markets. It is almost certain Greece will be thus subjected to added severe walloping from which she won’t be able to recover without added cash “stability cushions” and European credit lines. The latter though are most unlikely given the urge of Greece’s northern EU “partners” to get rid of the Greek troubles.

8. PASOK’s was an act of revenge upon the Royal (later Hellenic) Gendarmerie for its role in suppressing domestic communism and fighting against the communist insurgents during their attempt to overthrow the government, 1946-49.

model of the various armed forces service colleges. An interservice **National Graduate Academy of Intelligence & National Security** should acquire tenured professorial staff and provide intensive coursework according to curricula applied in similar institutions in allied countries. Students of the academy should be eligible for further training abroad and for opportunities to attend specialized education programs as visiting observer scholars in allied countries.

Postwar Greece confused for the most part intelligence gathering and analysis and domestic policing. In the post-junta period "reform" moved the system to the other extreme via "democratization" that paralyzed both intelligence and police via the notorious monster of Greek government bureaucracy, subversive public sector syndicalism, and partisan manipulation.

***If SYRIZA's successors succumb to the same temptations, Greece will undoubtedly suffer crippling disasters. What remains to be seen, therefore, is whether Greek politicians will succeed in fending off the Lernean Hydra of what Greeks are fond of calling "Greece's particularity" of social manner and political behavior. Just like Hercules found the way to slay the Hydra, Greek politicians must try the same. If they fail, there's little hope of stopping "Greece's particularity" from bringing down the house for good.***

## Unified Korea - A stepchild of Asia



**Joseph H. CHUNG**

One of the unexpected events that happened during the Pyong Chang Olympics was the remarkable diplomatic manoeuvre of the three stars: Moon Jae-in, Kim Jong-un and Donald Trump.

Moon Jae-in convinced Kim Jong-un to send a large delegation to Pyomg Chang and show to the world that North Korea was not a country

ruled by an irrational man;

Kim Jong-un told the world that he wanted peace;

Trump made it clear that he was not Obama, who according to Trump did nothing to solve the North Korean nuclear crisis.

Moreover, the "three stars: have made it possible to have two historical summits: the inter-Korea summit and the U.S.-North Korea summit.

That is great, but what can we expect from these summits? One thing is sure; each of the stars seems to have different hopes and expectations. Whatever their hopes and expectations may be, these summit must bring peace in the Korean peninsula after seventy years of unnecessary uncertainty, fragile security, fear and tension.

### The PyongChang Meetings

The PyongChang Olympics may have written a new page in the modern history of world diplomacy. The world was expecting the worst scenario of Trump's war against Kim Jong-un and the very success of the Olympics was in doubt. But, the war did not show its ugly teeth, not yet anyway; the youth of the world competed, fraternized, shared the victory and showed sincere friendship in defeat. Yes, the PyongChang was a success as a sport festivity.

But there was something else. We were all impressed with the silent, elegant and dignified diplomacy of Kim Yo-Jong, sister of Kim Jong-un; we were all touched by the honest effort of the North-South combined women hockey team who worked hard together in harmony despite seventy years of ideological separation. The world class performance of the North Korean musical group made us wonder how a country under the constant threats from outside and in-human sanctions for so long could produce such a team.

Moreover, the PyongChang has provided a diplomatic arena where three stars performed well. Moon Jae-in took an initiative, in consultation with Trump, to invite a huge delegation of North Korea to PyongChang and succeeded in creating

a peace mood. In return, Kim Jung-un has invited in early March special envoy of Moon Jae-in to Pyongyang where Moon Jae-in was invited to a summit with Kim at the end of April.

The same envoy went to Washington and reported to Trump of Kim Jong-un's wish to meet with Trump, who accepted Kim's invitation. Trump suggested the end of May as the date of the summit. This drama of diplomacy is so unexpected and so dramatic that the world- frankly speaking- felt a little dizzy.

Another surprising event was the reaction of Xi Jinping and Abe. Both welcomed the double summits and claimed their piece of peace pie evoking their role in international sanctions against Kim Jong-un.

It goes without saying that we all wish for successful summits. But we are not sure how these summits will come out. Nonetheless, we may allow ourselves to have an idea about the motivations of the summit stars. If we know the motivations of the stars, we may be able to have an idea about the summit outcomes.

What are the reasons for Kim Jung-un for transforming himself from being a man of reckless worrier to a man of peace? What does Trump hope to gain? What has motivated Moon Jae-in to go between Donald Trump and Kim Jung-un?

#### Why the summits?

Professor Anis H. Bajrektarevic famously claimed that a 'birth of unified Korea is an end of the US supremacy in Pacific'. Is the eventual reunification indeed a geopolitical changer? Is it really so?

Let us begin with Kim Jong-un. His decision to seek for peace with the U.S. and its allies may be explained in terms of internal factor as well as external determinants. Internal factors would include the following. First, after the launch of ICBM Hwasung-15 in November last year, reaching as far as 15,000 km, the Juche regime seems to believe that it can now deter nuclear attacks of the U.S.; this was made clear in Kim Jung-un's New Year Speech.

Second, the successful conclusion of the nuclear

programs has made Kim Jung-un's leadership more solid and more consolidated, thus ensuring internal social cohesion and political stability.

Third, the development of private market, the multiplication of mobiles phones allowing the North Koreans the access to outside world's reality may have made them more open-minded and perhaps desire for more economic development and peace. It is very likely that Kim Jong-un is well aware of this reality and that it can endanger the survival of the Juche regime. But young leader seems to think that his leadership is strong enough to ensure the regime's survival.

On the other hand, there are also several external determinants of Kim Jong-un's desire for peace. First, the intensification of nuclear threats and endless sanctions have surely been an important factor of Kim's decision. So far, North Korea has been successfully minimizing the damaging effect of sanctions mainly through underground network of trade and the emergence of private market and, partially, China's aid.

Now, the situation is different. Since Trump took over the power in Washington, the nuclear threats have become more alarming, while the sanctions have become much more damaging, especially since China joined the international sanctions on North Korea. In such situation, North Korea might have concluded that the peace with the U.S. and its allies was perhaps the only way to save its regime.

Another external factor is the regime change in South Korea. For ten years (2008-2017), South Korea was governed by conservative presidents, Lee Myung-bak (2008-2013) and Park Geun-hye (2013-2017). By the way, both are now in prison for bribery, corruption and abuse of power.

One of the chief characteristics of the conservative governments is its anti-North Korea culture. This is partly explained by the past colonial history. The conservative government of South Korea was formed in 1948 principally by Koreans who served, as high ranking civil servants, under Japanese colonial government; they collaborated for torturing and murdering patriots who fought against Japan.



On the other hand, the North Korean government was established by Kim Il-sung and the patriots. Thus, right from the beginning of the era of post-World War II, there has been deep and intense feeling of anger and hostility between the conservative government in the South and North Korean leaders.

This has produced two unfortunate results. First, the conservative governments which have ruled South Korea for sixty years out of seventy years since 1948 have produced a situation where the inter-Korean relation was dominated by mutual hostility, suspicion, mistrust and, above all, tension. Second, the conservative governments have used the inter-Korean tension as a tool of electoral campaign.

Prior to elections, the conservative governments often created an environment of fear by fabricating inter-Korean armed clashes or false rumours in such a way that the votes could go to the conservatives, who pretended themselves as the best guarantee of "security"; South Koreans are very sensitive about the security. This unfortunate phenomenon is called the "Book-Poong-Northern Wind".

Now, in 2017, the liberal government of Moon Jae-in took over the power. Let us remember that Moon was one of the chief architects of the "Sunshine Policy" for ten years from 1998 to 2008. The return of the liberal government under the leadership of Moon could have changed Kim Jong-un's perception of inter-Korea relations.

The young leader of Juche knows that he can trust Moon Jae-in and this might have contributed to his decision to have the inter-Korea summit and even the Washington-Pyongyang summit. It seems that Kim Jong-un relies on Moon Jae-in's mediation role for the success of the Trump-Kim summit.

Now, let us move to Donald Trump. There may be also internal and external factors which might have led Trump to think of meeting with Kim Jong-un. Internally, the "Russia" gate, the sex scandal and his low popularity might have induced Trump to use the U.S.-North Korea summit as means of turning public concerns away

from his internal problems. Besides, Trump promised, during his election campaign, to do something with North Korea, something which previous presidents, especially, Obama did not do. The summit with the young leader of the Juche regime may be the realization of his electoral promise.

The external factor motivating Trump to talk to Kim Jong-un is perhaps his perception of the China containment policy. China is getting stronger every day; Russia is developing new arms including powerful and fast under-water drones. Moreover, both Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin can now rule for long time to come, perhaps for life time.

This could have made Trump to re-examine Washington's relation with Pyongyang; he might have decided to solve the North Korean issues once for all so that he could allocate more resource to the strategy of China containment.

As for Moon Jae-in, several good reasons might have led him to take the diplomatic initiatives. First, Moon remembers well that Korea became Japanese colony because of the division of Korean leaders into Pro-Japanese, pro-Chinese or pro-Russia factions. Korea was and is surrounded by military giants trying to use the Korean peninsula for the promotion of their own interests.

For Moon, the reunification or at least the North-South mutual cooperation and united efforts to cope with outside intervention are very important. This point has been often made by Professor Michel Chossudovsky, who has even suggested a North-South peace treaty.

Second, one of the reasons for low FDI in South Korea has been the North-South tension. Hence, Moon hopes, through the summits, to reduce the North-South tension and increase foreign investments in South Korea. Third, the South Korean economy has attained a level of maturity and exhausted its potential growth; Seoul needs new economic frontier to develop further its economy; North Korea is the new economic frontier.

#### What Can We Expect from the Summits?

Thus, all the three nations have good reasons to engage in dialogues. The interesting question

is: "What could be the results of the summits?" "What can the three countries expect from these summits, if they are successful?"

The North-South Summit will be held on April 27th. The main agenda to be dealt with in this summit will be the preparation for the Trump-Kim Summit which may take place at the end of May or early June.

What Trump asks seems to be complete and immediate denuclearization meaning immediate and complete destruction of nuclear arms and missiles. On the other hand, Kim appears to be ready to denuclearize gradually. Kim's position is as determined as Trump's position is. Therefore, if they meet at the summit without prior negotiated compromise, the summit could end up with total failure and the nuclear crisis may become even more risky and even more dangerous.

In this situation, somebody should play the role of go-between and facilitate the Trump-Kim negotiation. Moon Jae-in, President of South Korea is the only person who can play effectively such role owing to his remarkably sincere diplomacy shown during the PyongChang Olympics.. Moon is the only person who has the trust of both Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un.

It appears that there have been sustained discussions between Pompeo, former director of CIA (and now Secretary of State) and Suh Hoon, director of South Korean CIA (National Intelligence Service) and between Chung Eui-yong, Korea's National Security Council chief and John Bolton nominated as Trump's National Security Advisor. It is not known what will be the outcome of these contacts and meetings. However, one thing sure is this; if there are no compromises, there is no use having the Trump-Kim summit.

Even if Trump and Kim come to some agreement on denuclearization, the content and speed of denuclearization depends on the rewards Kim will ask and Trump will be ready to provide them. It seems that North Korea would ask the following: the removal of nuclear assets from the Korean peninsula, end of US nuclear threats, removal of sanctions against North Korea, signing

of a peace treaty and normal bilateral diplomatic relations. Trump's intention of meeting this demand is not known.

However, it is quite possible that Trump might accept some of these demands for two reasons.

First, North Korea will not ask the withdrawal of the US troops from South Korea; this means that Washington can continue its strategy of China containment.

Second, it is more than possible that Washington would try to make North Korea friendly to the U.S. through normal diplomatic relations and trade and economic development cooperation. If this happens, North Korea will no longer be effective buffer zone for China.

In other words, the process of North Korea's denuclearization is liable to become an important variable in the dynamics of the Sino-American Thucydides trap. Thus, the denuclearization on the Korean peninsula does not mean the end of the danger of war in the region as long as the U.S. persists on its ambition to dominate China instead of cooperating for global prosperity and security.

\*

**Professor Joseph H. Chung has been teaching economics in Canada and Korea and serving, as advisor and consultant, various governments and public agencies including Korea's Economic Bureau of Planning and the Presidential Council for Unification of Korea. Now he is co-director of the East Asia Observatory (OAE) of Quebec University-Montreal Campus (UQAM). His research projects are focused on Korean affairs.**

*An early version of the text A 'Permanent Peace Regime' on the Korean Peninsula at Last? appeared in the Global Research.*





# What does Russia want?

**Dr. Simion COSTEA<sup>1</sup>**

**"What does Russia want?"**

was the title of an interesting conference organised by the European think-tank

Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) on **28 March 2018 in Brussels**, to discuss Russia's strategic goals and Europe's responses to them<sup>2</sup>.

Speakers:

- Kadri Liik, Senior Policy Fellow, ECFR London;
- Nicu Popescu, Senior Analyst, EUISS, Paris;
- Dmitry Suslov, Programme Director, Valdai Discussion Club<sup>3</sup>;
- Nathalie Tocci, Director, IAI Rome;
- Chaired by Fredrik Wesslau, Director, Wider Europe Programme, ECFR.

**Fredrik Wesslau started** by saying that Russia is a "challenge" to the West, which has become conventional wisdom. Russia seems to be creating obstacles to the West in all policy fields and in many geographical areas – including, in recent years, the domestic affairs of the European countries and the US. The poisoning of Sergei Skripal and his daughter may be the most recent manifestation of the problem. But what is missing is clarity about the nature of the challenge. **What does Russia want - and why? What are**

**the means it uses? How well does it link its tactics to strategy and coordinate its activities? Finally, what are the right ways for Europe to respond?**

As we enter Putin's fourth term - perhaps his last - ECFR has prepared a EU-Russia Power Audit which argues that **Russia's challenge to Europe is global in its reach and normative in its nature**. Russia wants to undo many of the basic aspects of the post-Cold War European order. **Europe's response, however, should focus less on Russia and more on Europe itself – it should address the drawbacks and deficiencies in the Western model, and thereby re-confirm the continuing viability of Europe as one of the key norm-setters in the world.**

**Main ideas from the Russian expert:**

- The Russian expert Dmitry Suslov indicated that there will be continuity in new Putin's mandate, yes, but some tactical adaptation. **We can expect an escalation of Russia's prolonged confrontation with the West;**
- **Russia wants a multipolar world order with China and India, replacing the Western normative order;**
- USA decided to win again, and to promote a containment policy in front of China and Russia. US policy is more "bellicose", in confrontation with Russia and China. According to the Russian expert, USA does not accept that Russia goes

1. Conferențiar univ. dr. – Universitatea "Petru Maior" din Târgu-Mures. Avertisment: Opiniile exprimate în acest articol aparțin lui Simion Costea și nu reflectă pozițiile niciunei instituții cu care acesta lucrează sau colaborează.

2. [http://www.ecfr.eu/events/event/what\\_does\\_russia\\_want](http://www.ecfr.eu/events/event/what_does_russia_want)

3. Clubul de Discuție Valdai este un **think-tank cu sediul la Moscova** înființat în 2004. Poartă numele Lacului Valdai aflat în apropierea Veliky Novgorod, unde a avut loc prima reuniune a Clubului. Think-tank-ul Valdai este **strâns legat președintele rus Vladimir Putin** care s-a întâlnit cu participanții la reuniunile anuale ale Clubului Valdai încă din momentul fondării acestuia. Printre mulți alți oficiali de la Kremlin care participă la reuniuni se află Dmitri Medvedev, prim ministru; Serghei Ivanov, Șeful Staffului Biroului Executiv Prezidențial; Serghei Lavrov, ministrul Afacerilor Externe; Serghei Shoigu, ministrul Apărării și alții. Daniel W. Drezner, profesor de politici internaționale la Școala Fletcher de Drept și Diplomatie la Universitatea Tufts descrie Valdaiul drept "echivalentul rusesc de cel mai înalt rang al Davosului" și consideră că cel mai valoros element pentru cei care asistă este capacitatea de a determina linia oficială a guvernului rus. Marcel H. Van Herpen identifică în Valdai efortul soft power (puterii subtile) al Kremlinului în slujba scopurilor de politică externe ruse în care conducerea rusă folosește conferința în încercarea de a (1) câștiga bunăvoință din partea unor intelectuali occidentali, (2) crearea unor oportunități de relaționare între elitele occidentale și ruse, și (3) "crearea unui teren de testare pentru inițiativele de politică externă ale Kremlinului." Profesori și academicieni din universitățile și think-tank-urile majore ale lumii participă la evenimentele Valdai.





outside USA dominated world order, which generates confrontation;

- Russia will develop asymmetric means for deterrence of USA;

- Individual EUMS will engage with Russia;

- USA and Russia will develop more nuanced policies in Ukraine;

- The Russian expert Dmitry Suslov stated that Russia can't profit from Skripal affair. It serves UK, USA and Ukraine. This is a provocation of these 3 powers to reunify the West against Russia, according to Dmitry Suslov. However, Nicu Popescu expressed a different opinion: Skripal case might not be rational for Russia as a whole, but it could be rational for some Russian intelligence officers. Skripal affair shows a surprising unity in the West not like in Litvinenko case. Even Italy, France and Hungary reacted<sup>4</sup>.

- The Russian expert stated that escalation of the East-West conflict will continue; there will be a pre-war situation, but not war;

- Dmitry Suslov acknowledged the economic constraints of Russian foreign policy. Putin does not want arms race because of that; Russia has enough deterrence. According to Suslov, Putin is popular; he does not need escalation of conflict with the West to be popular;

- **Putin needs to end the conflict on Russian terms;**

- The Russian expert indicated that Russia exploits real divisions in the West to pursue its

own goals. Russia did not invent such divisions, there are existing divisions;

- The Russian expert explained that Russia is involved in **a strategic revolt with no rules and no limits**, hoping nothing bad will happen to Russia, **but the risks exist for everybody**;

- **Dmitry Suslov indicated that many in Moscow feel that: "We are in a pre-war situation";**

- Turkey is a tactical partner for Russia, as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel. Russia has a mixed relationship with Turkey, which is not a strategic ally, according to Dmitry Suslov;

- China is a partner and a challenge for Russia; a partner in changing the international order, in confronting US. Russia wants greater Eurasia including China, but China does not want its power diluted, according to Suslov.

#### **Main ideas of the EU experts:**

- Kadri Liik explained that the EU-Russia conflict has roots **in different normative concepts about the international order and internal order. Russia's model is nation-centred, and promotes spheres of influence, not universal liberal order. Russia rejects interference in its internal order**;

- The EU has no Russia strategy because the EU is not united enough. EU needs to unite and build a long-term strategy vis-à-vis Russia together with a short term strategy;



4. Nicu Popescu

5. Kadri Liik

6. Nathalie Tocci

• **Russia wanted to be part of Western system in the 1990, but it changed its mind.** After Russia's annexation of Crimea many experts said that Russia needed external success to bust Putin's internal popularity;

• About EU's "national interest": EU can't give up on its vales entrenched in its DNA;

• Russia says Eurasia is a new game, EU is obsolete. But Eurasia is not strong enough economically<sup>5</sup>;

• EU consensus is strong on sanctions on Crimea, Donbas and Skripal case. However, the EU's selective engagement with Russia is not sufficient<sup>6</sup>. **Competition between Russia and West is about internal rules, spheres of influence, and about global order, according to Nathalie Tocci**;

• International liberal order can exist if we have strong democracies attractive for others (for Ukraine among others). What is the EU's goal? To influence Russia, as Russia have vulnerabilities. How to best protect ourselves?

• **EU has to recuperate its liberal attractiveness – soft power.** We can't impose norms, also in reconstructing Syria. What Europe wants is changing. What we should want is to figure who we are, and then to manage the confrontation<sup>7</sup>;

• Nicu Popescu agreed that we and Russia think very different on geopolitics, economy, and internal rules. We think Russia will not have money to pay for Donbass crisis and that the war in Syria is expensive. **The Russian actions are not economically rational but geopolitically rational**;

• Growing interdependence did not bring Russia in the Western system and Western norms. The Russians pretend that they only react to America's aggressive policy, but this is not true; Russia was more assertive, aggressive and furious during the Obama's mandates than

during Bush's mandate. But Russia is not happy even if the West's last military intervention to overthrow a regime was 9 years ago in Libya. Decreasing levels of Western interventionism, did not lead to better relations with Russia. Quite the contrary. **Russia is assertive, not reactive**;

• Europeans would be happy to reduce defensive spending and have good relations with Russia;

• **Russia was more and more aggressive, not purely defensive. Russia's defensive is not static, but active in Ukraine.** Cyber is not new in the new Cold War<sup>8</sup>;

• Gazprom sold record quantity of gas last year, which is a liberal order activity, not cold war record. Nicu Popescu explained that **Russia wants a political cold war, but not economic cold war**;

• On the surface the Syrian campaign was well-managed diplomatically, Russia managed to dealing well with the many actors involved, project power, sell weapons and maintain working relations with all regional powers. Big contrast to Ukraine. Russia grossly mishandled Ukraine;

• Not clear how sustainable is this Russian policy in 10 or 20 years. But in **short term Russia is likely to escalate the conflict**<sup>9</sup>.



7. Nathalie Tocci

8. Nicu Popescu

9. Nicu Popescu





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## CONSIDERATION

### Consequences of unilaterally denouncing of the nuclear deal with Iran by the USA

**Corneliu PIVARIU**

As he declared previously during the electoral campaign and at the beginning of his office, president Donald Trump announced and signed on May, 8th 2018, the United States's unilateral withdrawal from what is known to the public at large as the nuclear agreement with Iran (The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action - JCPOA - signed in the 5+1 format with Iran by the USA, Great Britain, France, China, Russia and Germany after long negotiations, in July 2015). For those who did not remember, Germany's inclusion into this agreement was the result of the fact it supplied Iran, decades ago, dual technology that benefited the development of the Iranian nuclear file.

Immediately after president Donald Trump's official statement, the Iranian Foreign Affairs minister, Javad Zarif, begun a rapid diplomatic tour to China, Russia and the European Union. An advisor of the supreme leader Ali Kamenei state that Iran will neither renegotiate the agreement, nor its missiles program. Moreover, certain Iranian statements expressed the no-confidence in the European position of further supporting the implementation of the Agreement. Some other statements mentioned that Iran will, under unfavourable circumstances of the discussions with the European officials, will publicize the economic facilities and financial incentives granted to certain top European personalities and even to the American Secretary of State John Kerry, during the negotiations for agreeing JCPOA, and that would explain why the proposals that did not suit Iran were eliminated from the final text.

For the time being, the EU (and also France, Germany and Great Britain, separately) and Russia support maintaining the agreement denounced by president Donald Trump. We notice the rather sharp statements of the Commissioner for Foreign and Security Policy Federica Mogherine (which, in our opinion, exceed the real - and modest - possibilities of the UE's foreign policy under current European legislation), as well as Donald Tusk's statements criticizing the American decision and endorsed keeping the agreement into force. Some other voices have been heard as well considering the USA, after its withdrawal from the agreement, (as that was a real surprise) as not being any longer an European trusted ally something that is, again in our opinion, a great strategic and geopolitical mistake. We restate the opinion that, particularly under the circumstances of today's geopolitical developments, the alliance between Europe and the USA or between the USA and Europe should be a constant able to prevent a new world conflict with incalculable consequences for the mankind.

As far as the USA is concerned and in accordance with the decisions president Trump took, economic sanctions were imposed on certain Iranian entities including the Revolutionary Guard Corps (Pasdaran), Central Bank of Iran and other officials. Moreover, the sanctions to be adopted will affect on the European firms (and American firms) that have already economic contracts amounting to hundreds and thousands of dollar with Iran. It is obvious that the sanctions against Iran, especially when they will be adopted by the European countries, will have important effects on the Iranian economy.

As it was natural, the USA's position was approved by Israel and also by Saudi Arabia that stated that if Iran gets nuclear weapons, it will do the same. We remind here some information according to which Saudi Arabia has already concluded a secret protocol with Pakistan since several decades (stipulating that in case of a nuclear threat against Saudi Arabia, Islamabad will put at Riyadh's disposal some nuclear strikes as response).

Russia seems to benefit as a result of this situation first by the crude oil price increase and then due to the possibilities of concluding new contracts with Tehtan in case the European companies withdraw.

An important consequence of the Agreement's denunciation, under the circumstances of worsening the situation, is a large-scale regional military conflict breaking out that may end in redesigning the map of the Middle East, drastically reducing the Iranian influence in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. The Israeli military action against *"almost the entire Iranian infrastructure in Syria"*, as a response to the 20 Iranian missiles launched against Israel should be added, as it was the most powerful Israeli military actions of the last 40 years (Operation "House of Cards"). It seems that the operation was coordinated by Israel with the USA and Russia. A new evidence of how complicated the developments in the Middle East are and could be.

The USA considered certainly the possibility of a military conflict with Iran breaking out. The question to be asked is what resulted from this analysis and what will Washington's decision be.

## The Main Factors of the Middle East Situation

# CONFLICTS, CHALLENGES, INSTABILITY: THE GLOOMY HORIZON OF THE MIDDLE EAST

## MIDDLE EAST: MAIN CHALLENGES AND RISKS IN 2018

Valdai Discussion Club



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### Dinu COSTESCU

Whether a useful and sustainable lesson can be taught from the developments the Middle East went through during the last 7-8 years, it can be synthesized by the alarming assertion that the demarches and initiatives meant to bring and enforce security and stability in this sensitive part of the global geopolitics proved to be in their great majority but a mere chimerical constructs and, ipso facto, having no perspective of materializing.

The Middle East remains, this year too, a soil overflowed by the dense amalgam of certain social, political, ideological, security and deeply rooted conflicted forces which, through their vigor and resilience prevent the emergence of a new generation of currents and forces able to make a change and a social, identitarian, ethical and behavioral reform.

And the issue existing in all this landscape does not lie especially in the multitude of these forces – institutionalized or not – yet placed in an eminently conflicted interlinking but in the more damaging situation of being polarized around certain extra-regional forces which, seizing the terms of the regional equations, become themselves autochthonal, regional and that makes that the traditional regional issues internationalized and manifest more and more sharply as international factors of a global conflicted situation.

On the other hand, the Western powers and governments threatened by the "Eastern" conflicted defiances proved to be either lacking the will or unable to use their diplomatic, economic and security instruments for cleansing the general corpus of the Middle East and preferring, most of the times, either the ostrich's policy or exhibiting exaggerated concerns for their own values, civilization and life style which should not be stained by the contact with the others' wars, problems or "conflicts".

And if during the period of "revolution until victory" and of the cold war of the last century, the rivalries could be kept at bay either through deterrence technique or through authoritarian policies, today the conflicts grinding the Middle East's geopolitical and identitarian coherence



are more than ever generators of chaos, disorder and destructive competition.

The risk, challenges, incertitudes, military, sectarian, ethnical and of other nature confrontation became thus defining labels of a status the Middle East particularizes itself at the beginning of the third millennium.

\*

The Middle East is not just a region where a multitude of conflicts are simultaneously manifested, but also a chessgame on which the threat of new conflicts is an as actual reality as it is difficult to predict.

The existing criss-crossings, overlappings or convergencies among the conflicted statuses, the causalities, their nature, the belligerents' identity, strategies and interests leave too little room for the taxonomic rigors and reduce, at the same time, the accuracy and the predictability degree of the scenarios and analytical prognoses.

Nevertheless, a panoramic and concentrated look particularly on the eastern *Mashreq*, with its three great subdivisions of its political geography – the Levant and its Mesopotamian extension, south Eurasia and the Arabic Peninsula with the Persian Gulf proximity – ascertains an obvious finding. It is about *Maghreb*, or the Arab north of the African continent, with its Libyan and Egyptian exceptions, is less or not at all affected by active wars, and is concerned rather than otherwise with resuming the domestic normality upset by the "Arab spring" phenomenon, while the rest of the Middle East remains an active hotbed of ongoing or foreseeable conflicts whereby all sorts of tensions and belligerents

are to be found: guerrilla war on the anti-terrorism jihadist front in Syria and Iraq, civil war accompanied by an ample process of state and social dissolution in Syria, Libya, Yemen, the so-called "war by proxies" or franchise war with state and non-state actors involved as it is the case in Syria, Yemen, Libya and in other conflicts where great regional players are involved (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Iran, Turkey, Israel) or global ones – the United States of America, The Russian Federation, Great Britain, France, Canada etc.

\*

The present lines are not intended to draw up a descriptive inventory of the conflicted situations of the Middle East but try to identify, even in a summarized way, the possible risk factors that the regional developments in the foreseeable future provide by activating the on-going conflicts or certain latent conflicted situations.

It is well known that if the tensions and crises of the Middle East region perpetuate in the absence of a political solution, that is due mainly to the confrontation of strategic interests among the great powers involved in the quasi-generalized crisis of the region and here we mention particularly the United States under Donald Trump Administration, the Russian Federation since its military intervention in Syria at the end of September, 2015, and after Vladimir Putin's winning the fourth mandate and taking office at the Kremlin.

Not the least, the political and military movements Turkey, Iran and Israel have in mind or could bring these countries at the forefront are of interest.

**1. The United States.** After the surprise statement president Donald Trump made with reference to the future "eternal" statute of Jerusalem, with all the consequences of this decision on the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations process, the White House leader hardened his virulent tone concerning Iran and the nuclear agreement and, at the beginning of April to declare equally unexpected that the United States will proceed

"very soon" to military withdrawal (around 2,000 soldiers) from Syria.

What consequences of conflicted nature may these decisions have?

- In **Syria**, the Russian Federation announced a series of new initiatives for resuming the peace negotiations in a framework intended to be a connexion among the Geneva, Astana and Sochi processes, an imprecise initiative with uncertain chances of success that will inevitably mean new discussions, procrastinations and, in the last analysis, extensions of the Syrian calvary;

- In **Lebanon**, where the contorted process of the parliamentary elections led to a significant advance of Hezbollah party and this Lebanese pro-Iranian formation announced bringing back to the country the human, military and logistical potential deployed on the Syrian front alongside Bashar Al-Assad's loyalist army. In the current context, any escalation of tensions in southern Lebanon at the Jewish state's northern border has the perspective of degenerating into a new war with Israel whose minister of Defense, Avigdor Lieberman, has stated that a possible new war with Hezbollah would mean a war on a sole front encompassing Lebanon, Syria and Iran.

When, on the Syrian front and, in perspective, on the Iraqi front, **Turkey** declares more vocally its intention of continuing and expand the military intervention until neutralizing any security threat from the **Kurdish separatist** ethnics irrespective of the evolution of the initiatives for achieving a political settlement of the internal conflicts in the two neighbouring states Syria and Iraq. There are enough reasons to believe that the Kurdish independentism, far from being exhausted, will find new resources for militarily backing its autonomy claims with direct negative consequences in what concern the crises and violent confrontations especially in Syria and Iraq.

- Although it is less predictable that the **Israeli-Palestinian** disputes degenerate in ample protests as a result of the meaninglessness of the so-called "deal of the century" promised by president Donald Trump for reaching a consensus concerning the settlement of the Palestinian file,



the said file will retain its conflicted potential that could be ignited by Palestinian formations' and particularly Hamas' provocation of incidents to be followed by the usual responses of the Israeli army contributing thus to perpetuating a tense climate in the area and generally at the level of the Middle East.

Finally, far from calming down, the great sectarian conflict separating the Muslim world be-



tween Shias and Sunnis will evolve on an ascending trajectory whereby the main role belongs to the Saudi Wahhabite kingdom and to the Iranian theocratic regime and fed by the conflicted radicalization of the American and Israeli approaches towards the Islamic Republic of Iran, on the one hand, and by the ever visible shaping of a Saudi Arabia - the United States - Israel axis oriented against the regime in Tehran, on the other hand.

In his prolonged political and economic visit to the United States, the **Saudi Arabia's** Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman declared even that "if the economic and diplomatic pressures will not succeed in imposing a change of substance of Iran's vicinity and regional policy, it is very likely that within 10-15 years a large-scale war break-out between the two neighbouring powers." The Saudi monarchy's massive and feverish arming campaign of hundreds of billions of dollar from the American defense industries may be a sign that the Saudis adopted the well-known old dictum "si vis pacem, para bellum"

The Middle East continues to be, even more acutely, a realm of the most unexpected conflicts and surprises. Surprises which are not, unfortunately, in the positive sense of the word.

## THE SYRIAN FILE:

### A RELENTLESS REPETITION FOR THE COLD WAR

***Maher NABOULSI, Syria***

A strange malaise seems to have descended on the rational capacities of the so-called "international community" where there is no international legality and international law that was considered not long ago as the diplomacy's bible and pillow book. Self-proclaimed "riot cop of the world" or, according to possibilities and the limits of its vanity of a region, be it geographical or sectarian, it is turning more and more hysterically into violators of the justice, chaos and anarchy producers on behalf of "democracy" it violently condemns everything it calls the others' interferences yet forgetting at the same time the primal fact they are invaders and sow wind who are not afraid any longer of the tempest resulted.

A foreign affairs minister of the western European continent assigned with a peacekeeping mission was harshly requesting that all who have "no business in Syria" leave that country. Who are they? The United States, Great Britain, France, the Islamist militias of more than 100 countries of the world either on behalf of the same bullet-riddled democracy or of the world Muslim neo-caliphate? No, you did not guess. The ones who have "no business in Syria" are, according to the respective official, the Russian Federation, Iran and Hezbollah. (Nothing about Turkey which is a NATO member!)

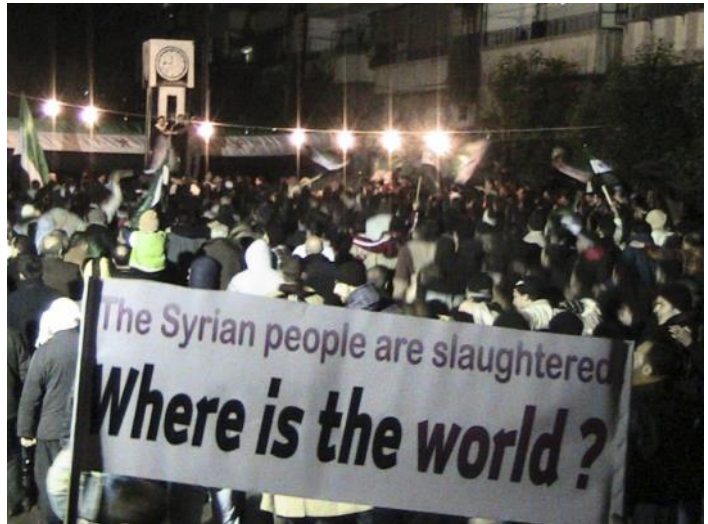
The Syrian domestic conflict, which entered its 8<sup>th</sup> year of "Arab spring", turned into a hub for the international relations that continuously rehearse for the transition to the great and true cold war of the new world order. At the same time, the Syrian fronts reminds of the hellish merry-go-round offered during WWII by the civil war in Spain as well as of Spain during 1936-1939, as in Syria two big coalitions are confronting now in a life and death contest: a western-euroatlantic and a regional sectarian one, reuniting the United States, Great Britain, France, Sau-

di Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, Israel and, a second, "Oriental" one, made up of Syria, the Russian Federation, Iran and part of the more than 400 militias whose positions are changing subject to the changes of the front and the sponsors' financial generosity.

The very nature and the strategic vision of the two camps determine the fundamental differences between them. Because, while the Oriental coalition uses its own military and its own logistic capabilities, the Western camp wages a franchise war, by proxies which represents, most of the times, multinational or indigenous militias having a national-sectarian nature. In this case, the traditional invasion, with the invader's own armies is replaced by franchises set up on the material or political mercenary principle acting for creating or worsening the domestic problems of the targetted state, overthrowing the existing governing regime and, finally, the targetted state's passing under the control of foreign forces that destabilized it.

The assertion made at that time by high officials and decision-makers of the American administrations who placed the invasion of Iraq, in 2003 and, then, the intervention in Syria after 2011, in the more general context of the strategy of reshaping the Middle East and turning it into "the new" or the "great" Middle East by implementing the triumphalistic and destructive theory of the "constructive chaos" is not new as it was tested also on other meridians of the planet after the collapse of the former Soviet colossus and the temporary end of the Cold War.

And, the sequels of this martial approach of the world order has never been late to prove that



the recourse to the power of the military arsenals is not an epic staged on the Hollywood set-ups but a trauma of proportion whereby even the Americans may lose their life. We see that in the failure of the Iraqi adventure, the dine die perpetuation of the war in Afghanistan or in the arrogant recantings which stake is Syria's existence and the Syrian people's and society's future.

The chessboard of the war in the Levant is today a great testing ground whereby all the great foreign belligerents – be them euroatlantic, eurasian or regional are testing their hundreds of new supersophisticated weapons which first and foremost victims are the Syrian civilians, their families, elders and children. It is, at the same time, a platform on which backstage hectic preliminary rehearses for the future new very cold war are taking place, a war which risks turning into a very hot if not an glowing one.

Yet the Syrian war is, from the double perspective of war and peace a great turning point, too. In spite of huge human, material, financial and logistic resources deployed on the battlegrounds and in its airspace, resorting to services of the jihadist mercenaries coming from all the corners of the earth did nor achieve more than a regular army could have achieved. Yet this fact raises a question on which the analysts, researchers and the decision-makers should probably contemplate more attentive: will the fighting franchises become the advance-guard of tomorrow's cold war?





The Syrians and Syria, as an agressed country, are fully entitled to defend their identity and existence, mainly, or expecially in the framework of the negotiations where their fate and the right of configuring their future, secure from aggressions and interferences into issues concerning them exclusively.

The wars which are waged in Syria by foreign wills hostile to each other are as many components of a war threatening to become universal. And, if the so-called "international community" is really interested in good faith in solving the Syrian drama, its interest should be manifest through international law codified in the UN Chart only. What barrier stands in front of such an approach, as such a barrier is there? The answer, even if it is easy to utter since 8 years is avoided with modesty and deliberately by the very international community. Why? For any approach of solving the conflicts based on the international law principles implies a compulsory prerequisite, namely clearly defining the concepts of "aggressor" and "victim". A task that no one seems ready to assume.

The great powers' grounding in the quagmire of the Syrian war has as a rhetoric argument their concern of keeping under control a tense status which may possibly boil trough components such as the migrants' issue that might break up

an already unstable and fragile equilibrium. Fact is that the divergencies, conflicts of interest and the vanity pressures opposing the great players on the chessboard of the Syrian war are so obvious and remanent that any scenario of ending the war state in a foreseeable future become superfluous.

The Syrian political opposition took arms in hands hoping to reach reform and democracy. As it did not succeed in acting like serious partner not sabotaged by narrow interests, it has lost the financial, moral and militaty support of the Western camp and is based today on meanness financing from some fundamentalis private circles of the Gulf Arab states and succeeds in surviving through a damaging way of placing itself in the train of jihadist entities.

The internal war in Syria may be considered as a marginal component of the complex cold war which is more noisily and more transparently waged among the great global and regional players. The conflict is, at the same time, a mirror reflecting the great stakes of the present geopolitics which are hidden with difficulty behind the argument of the fight against the jihadist-terrorist phenomenon, showing how embittered the relations animating the geopolitics of our days are.





## SYRIA: BETWEEN THE BALANCE OF INTERESTS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR THE ZONES OF INFLUENCE

**Ambassador prof. Dumitru  
CHICAN**

### **1. Limited and controlled escalation**

The bloody military campaign that, by the middle of the last spring, torched the eastern part of Ghouta oasis around the Syrian capital Damascus marked, for the first time during the last 30 years, a direct fighting engagement between the Israeli air forces and the Syrian Army's anti-aircraft defenses that ended in downing an Israeli Army's interception and attack aircraft. Accompanied by threats and warnings launched by both sides, the tension generated by the incident which engaged this time the Syrian and Jewish states, was very short-lived, one day only, yet it introduced in principle the open perspective of a potential much wider conflict between Syria, allied with the Russian Federation and Iran, on the one hand, and Israel backed by the United States. And that leads naturally to an important question concerning both future evolutions of the Syrian domestic conflict and their impact at the level of the regional tensions ruled by the sharp descent towards freezing of the existing conflictual climate globally: how will Syria accommodate itself and evolve in a context characterized by deep and inflexible ascending tensions between the two main players – the United States and the Russian Federation – that are not any longer powers with global vocation only but they became also the main regional players on the Syrian and on the Middle East gameboard? And what role will Syria have – if any – in managing this conflict that turned the Syrian file into a kind of black hole around which almost all active or latent regional and extra-regional conflicts evolve rapidly?

There were assessments of certain analysts claiming that the downing by Tsahal of the Iranian drone (UAV) at the Golan border strip was a pre-meditated act of the Israeli side in order to

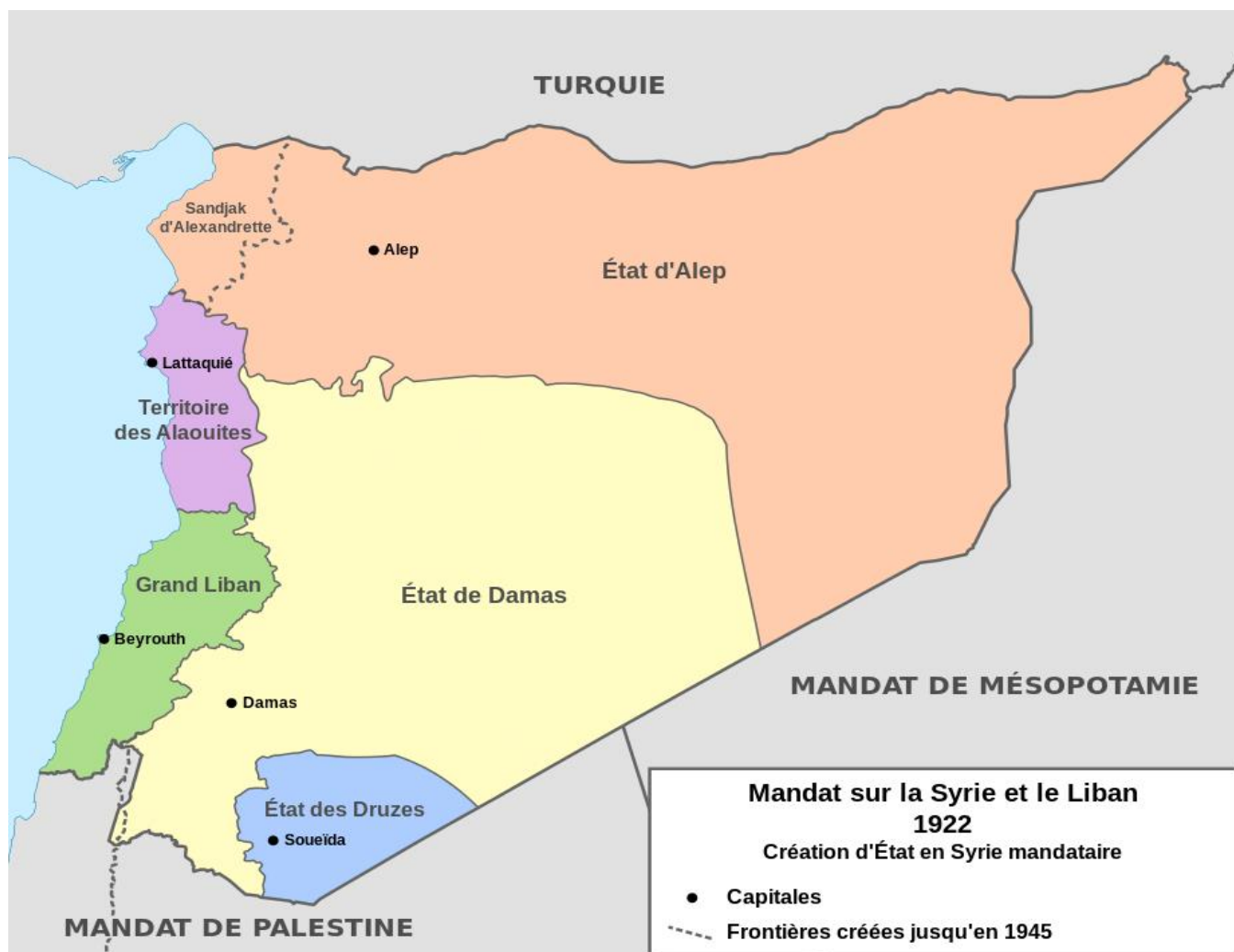
draw Iran towards a confrontation confirming the active involvement of the theocratic regime in de-stabilizing Israel's vicinity and offering an argument in favor of an Israeli-American-Western offensive against the "existential threat" the Islamic Republic's sectarian and militarist expansionism represents for Israel, for the regional context and for the international stability.

### **2. Balancing the interests**

Moscow's tendency of "reconfiguring the alliances" takes place when the Russian Federation experienced an important political failure of its program of taking over the initiative and seize, through the Sochi Dialogue Conference, the political negotiations process between the Syrian belligerents involved in the civil war. Yet that did not mean a de facto regression of Russia's position and role on the Syrian front gameboard. On the contrary, in this stage of the conflict whereby everybody is fighting everybody, both the Russian Federation and the other powers directly involved in the war's developments – the United States, Iran, Turkey – seem more than ever during the last seven years of war animated by the interest that, maintaining a balance on a "razor's edge" among the belligerents' own interests, secure for themselves an as consistent as possible geographic and strategic advantage for perpetuating the control over the post-conflict Syria. From concepts such as "Serviceable Syria" and "Deep Syria", to tactical and territorial interventions such as "de-escalation zones", today's successors of Mark Sykes and François Picot seem intent on repeating the cartographical experiment done by the French Mandate authorities which, in 1922, arbitrarily partitioned Great Syria in no less than five artificial "states" – in an as unhappy as a typical colonial experiment.

Within this context, Israel carried out intense





*Syria under the French Mandate – 1922*

political and diplomatic approaches mainly with the Kremlin and the White House in order to prevent an entrenchment of the Iranian presence in the southern part of the Syrian territory in the vicinity of the Golan Heights demarcation line and succeeded, at the same time, to hinder the Iranian project of creating a "Shia corridor" on the Iraq-Syria-Lebanon alignment meant to secure Iran both a direct connection with the political and military formation Hezbollah and an advanced bridge-head in the immediate proximity of the Jewish state. It is envisaged that this idea of a Shia corridor will be one of the profound conflicted issues in the framework of the future formulas of ending the domestic Syrian conflict.

The last period, marked by the presidential elections in Russia and Vladimir Putin's victory,

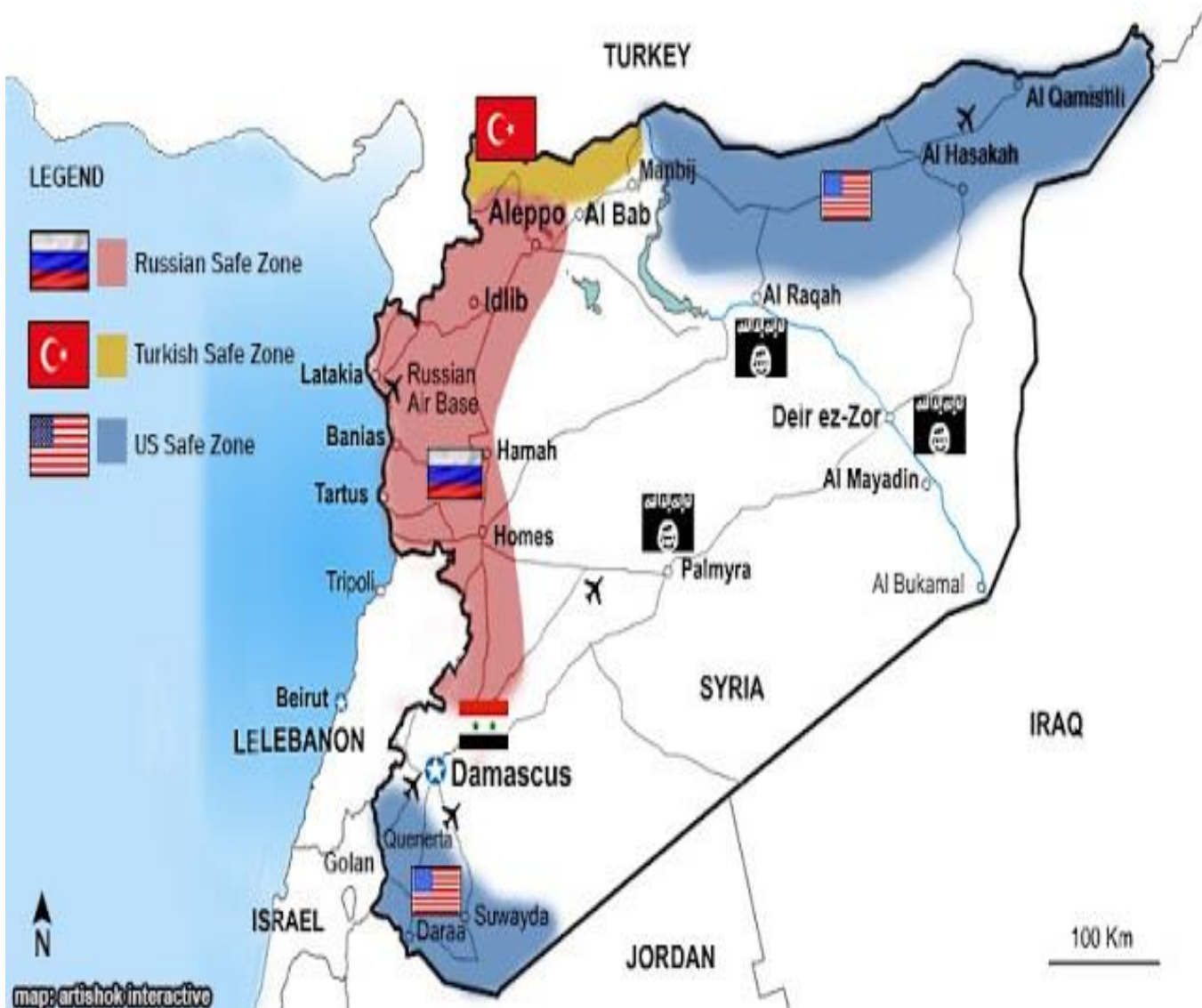
by the presidential elections in Egypt adjudicated for a new mandate by the president Abdel Fattah El-Sissi and the general elections in Lebanon and Iraq, Israel adopted a prudent and static position towards the developments of the Syrian front concerned, probably, of the desire of maintaining this fragile balance, on the one hand, and also of avoiding the damaging consequences of the possible new belicose acts could have on its relations with Saudi Arabia, relations which timidly yet steadily witness an encouraging evolution (Riyadh's most recent act of kindness was last March when it opened the Saudi air space to the commercial flights from Israel inaugurated by an Air India flight taking off from Ben Gurion airport heading for New Dehli and transiting the Saudi air space).

### 3. The struggle for the zones of influence

At a first glance on the map of today's Syria, one finds out that the country's geography is obviously different from the existing one at the outset of the Syrian revolts in 2011. And the fundamental difference is given by the fact that, as a whole, the geographical Syrian corpus is divided in a mosaic of enclaves and zones of influence controlled by foreign forces – regional and global – among which the presence of the United States, the Russian Federation and Turkey are by far on prominent places.

One finds out that, in general, these zones of influence are, on the one hand, separated either by natural borders, such as the Euphrates River

course, or artificial ones such as the Damascus-Idlib railway in the west and, on the other, the state forces controlling them together with their allies are opposed and competing and making thus possible the claim that the syntagm "territorial partition" is not any longer a mere linguistic exercise and makes less sustainable the idea that Syria will ever really return to the pre-war configuration. The zones of influence we identify now only as cartographic references are considered from the perspective of their future turning into mini-states. And this perspective concerns, in the most alarming manner, the fundamental issue of Syria's unity and national sovereignty of the Syrian people. All the more so as the perspective of a peace accord is practically non-existent.



*Zones of influence in Syria - US, Russia, Turkey*

Today, any rhetorics about "Serviceable Syria" (regime's one) and the "other Syria" (or the others' Syria) is superfluous when even "Serviceable Syria" is lacking unity and under a double occupation – Russian and Iranian ones – and coveted with arms in hand by the kaleidoscope of militias coming from all the corners of the earth. What is currently understood by "Serviceable Syria", namely the seashore region with Lattakia, Baniyas and Tartous ports, Homs district as well as the metropolitan capital and its rural area is, in fact, a control and influence zone dominated by a unlimited Russian presence under Vladimir Putin's orders only.

Damascus' agricultural area up to the border with Lebanon is an exclusive Iranian area where the much evoked Shia corridor on the Iran-Iraq-Damascus-Beirut alignment is not any longer a possibility, but an utility reality intensely used by the Iranian military columns and by the convoys of the militias sent by Tehran and which are themselves under the exclusive command of the Iranian officers and of Tehran's politicians.

East of Euphrates, where the main country's natural, agricultural, hydrographical, oil and gas resources, phosphate and uranium deposits lie, the situation is similar. This is a United States' exclusive controlled area where no one enters unless the Americans nod.

The north-eastern districts are guarded by Recep Teyyip Erdogans's "Euphrates Shield" and "Olive Branch" and is a perimeter occupied under the pretext of fighting the Islamist jihadism and the "Kurdish terrorism" which seems of not satisfying the Turkish leader's ambitions of geographical expansionism as he announced his intention of extending the Turkish presence over Syria's entire northern area up to the Iraqi frontier.

The situation of the Syrian front remains further fluctuant, unpredictable and unstable for all the powers that divided among themselves Syria's geography and that not only due to causes punctually related to the events on the fighting front but due to the disensions, disagreements and suspicions existing among the great players on the gameboard of the Syrian domestic con-

flict but, first of all, between the Russian Federation and the United States – the two poles deciding the rhythm, the intensity and the duration of the war.

Contrary to what was publicly declared by the officials in Washington, the beginning of the end of the campaign against the jihadist group Islamic State brought about also a deep strategic change of the American side's approach in what the Syrian crisis is concerned in the sense that instead of implementing its previous promises and of proceeding with ending the military operations on the Syrian front, the American administration decided to maintain its armed presence in Syria indefinitely and made its withdrawal conditional on first solving the war in Syria, a decision which, by all appearances, was received by the other players as a defiance. As a consequence, the reaction is already known: all the players decided, in coordination or not, to proceed identically by making their own armed presence and drawing delimitating frontiers lines between their own feudal type fiefs where the only decision maker and owner is the prince, the sultan or the czar.

As far as the fate of the disinherited Syrians is concerned,...it is to be discussed later if, between two hunting expeditions with better loot, the "lords" find the time for petty things.

**Note:** After the former chief of the American diplomacy, Rex Tillerson, endorsed publicly in January the need of a permanent presence of the more than 2,000 soldiers the US has in north-east Syria, at the end of March, in a speech Donald Trump delivered in front of a working class reunion in Ohio and which was considered by the American media as populist, announced sententiously that he will withdraw "very soon" the American troops from Syria without adding other details and deplored the 7 trillion America spent during its wars in the Middle East. "We will let the others take care of Syria and will get back home where we belong", Donald Trump added pathetically. The commentators, accustomed with the capricious sinus rhythm of the presidential American discourse, overlooked lightly the statement of the leader in the White

House which they considered rather an effect of the appointment of the bellicose ambassador John Bolton as National Security Advisor – himself as flaming and changing temperament as Donald Trump's. It remains to be seen what the time courtroom will decide.

## 90 YEARS OF "MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD"

*Ambassador prof. Dumitru CHICAN*

The modern chronicle of the collective Islamic memory is marking, the spring of this year, the anniversary of 90 years since in the Egyptian town of Ismailia, the school teacher cum theologian Hassan Al-Banna announced the creation of the "Movement of the Muslim Brothers" (*Harakat Al-Ikhwān Al-Muslimīn*) as a first institutional structure of the political Islam and which, in June 1928, through the 50 points of the founding document drawn up by Hassan Al-Banna, put forward two fundamental objectives – one with a strong nationalistic character, aimed at liberating the Islamic nation from the yoke of the British colonialism and the second one of Islamic nature, laid down as a reaction to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's abolishing the Ottoman Muslim caliphate after WWI. On the spur of that "catastrophe" descended upon the Islamic nation and supported theoretically by the conceptions of certain previous and contemporary radical ideologues such as Ibn Taimiya, of Turk origin, the Saudi Mohammed Abdel Wahhab, the Pakistani Abu Ala Al -Mawdudi or the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, the movement materialized an ideological and doctrinary platform much more distant from the national issues and exclusively poached by a radical and ultraconservative Islam. Its catchword proclaims that Islam "must rule" and that "Islam is the solution" for all individual's, society's and state's problems and its action program is an eminently Islamic one – "Allah is our target, the Prophet is our model, Qur'an is our Constitution, the holy war is our path, martyrdom upon God's way is our desire".

As it benefitted of financial support from certain regimes – Arab and non-Arab with an Islamic stance – the Movement was to rapidly expand its geographic presence with branches and activities in large part of the Arab states, in Europe, Africa, the two Americas and the Indian sub-continent and, at the same time, it created its own military branch and secret services while moving progressively to subversive and terrorist activities both in Egypt (the assassination of prime minister Mahmoud Al-Naqrashi, failed assassination attempts of the Egyptian presidents Gamal Abdel Nasser and Hosni Mubarak) and in Syria – assassinations and incitements to rebellion against the Baathist regime and in other Arab states. As of the 1980s, the stated Movement's objective was focused domestically on absolute Islamization of the state and of the society by generally applying the Muslim canonical law – *sharia* – and externally reconstructing the global Islamic caliphate.

In the framework of the "Arab spring" that resulted in overthrowing the Egyptian regime led by Hosni Mubarak, the Islamist movement, through the political formation the Justice and Development Party participated to the first parliamentary elections in 2011 and got the majority of the votes and, a year later, in 2012, its candidate Mohammed El-Morsi participated to the presidential elections and won with a tiny difference. The new administration initiated an intense program of social and institutional Islamization which was to bring about strong discontent and divisions within the corpus of the Egyptian society that degenerated into broad street manifestation with numerous human losses and all that led to the intervention, in 2013, of the military institution into the political arena. The Islamist president Mohammed El-Morsi and the movement's leadership were arrested and the movement itself was outlawed and declared terrorist organization.

Thus, after almost a century of struggles for seizing the state power, for implementing the Qur'anic criteria of administering the state and society and militantism for the revival of the planetary Muslim caliphate, the "Muslim Brotherhood Movement" missed miserably the first



exercise of power and moved, for the umpteenth time, to the obscure underground of illegality and clandestine activities, without a clear perspective of coming out of this labyrinth.

Both through their programs, doctrine and actions and through the powerful influence over the jihadist groupings and organizations they created or inspired, the Muslim Brotherhood Movement had an overwhelming contribution, particularly during the last years, to the overlapping or even to a total semantic fusion between Islam, on the one hand, and the concept of "Islamism" or "political Islam" on the other hand, namely between Islam, as sphere of spirituality, and its exploitation for mercantile, ideological, politicking and populist purposes. 90 years are separating the contemporaneity from the moment Hassan Al-Banna was launching his movement and program which, not a few Islamologues and analysts, Muslims included, from the Islam area or outside it did not hesitate to label as totalitarian and fascist in their nature. For, like totalitarian and dictatorial ideologies of the last century, what is identified by the Islamism concept proves to be a construct that aspires to establish its own absolute dictatorship over everything i.e. the components of the man's historical and social living – from the individual himself to the community of individuals, to the institutions ruling their way of functioning up to assuming the ontological and anthropological responsibility. This is what the founder imam Hassan Al-Banna was writing: "We, the Muslim Brothers, consider that Islam's precepts and universal teachings are integrating everything that refers to the man situated in this world and in the world beyond. Islam is not limited to cultural and spiritual aspects yet means, at the same time, cult (worship), belief, homeland and citizenship, religion and state, spirituality and actions, Book (Qur'an) and sword. The all too noble Qur'an refers to all that which it regards as inextricably linked to Islam" (Hassan Al-Banna: *Muzakkirāt Al – Da'wa wa al – Dā'iya*, „Memorii despre predică și predicator", Cairo, 7505, quoted in our book „Jihad sau drumul spre Djanna", Corint Publishing House, Bucharest, 2011, p.231). Taken as such, Islamism is rather a radi-

cal political ideology that does not hesitate to resort to intimidation, terror, persecution for destroying the individuality, suppressing the freedom of thought and turning the society into an amorphous submissive and easily manuevrable mass.

Manichean in its essence, Islamism, like any seizing ideology, proposes an extremely simplistic and schematic vision of the world whereby one finds inevitably "the other" whose elimination represents a sine qua non for the very legitimization of the Islamist and Islamizing militantism.

The Muslim Brotherhood's temporary governance emphasized Islamism's mixed false democratic and false liberal character that succeeded, through the practices of forced Islamization of the state, to deeply divide the society by a fault line making 50% of Egyptians invested with the embarrassing role of "Islamic vice police" oppose the other 50% of Egyptians who do not agree with the Muslim Brotherhood's policies, principles and programs and are looked at as embodying the "other" deviant, apostate and traitor of the "true belief" and, by that, a prototype of the enemy who must be marginalised, chased away, if not physically eliminated from the biological and community life. From this standpoint, the thought of the Egyptian doctrinarian and theoretician Sayyid Qotb, synthesized by the sentence "Islam must rule!" Arguing, Qotb believed it is "urgently needed that Islam rule and command in order to achieve itself, to build the perfect and just society we need yet which will not become reality as long as Islam will not hold the power over everything pertaining to the terrestrial and social life...The world needs a positive belief. Christianity's role is over precisely for not offering mankind anything constructive and positive, said the Egyptian ideologue resorting to the very Qur'anic text for clarifying the fundamental difference between the true believers and the deviant ones: "The infidels are those who do not accept that the individual and the world should be ruled by the law revealed by the word of Allah" (Sayyid Qotb: *Ma'rakat Al-Islam wa al-Ra'smāliya*, "The Struggle Between Islam And Capitalism", Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e Islamici, Roma, nr.

61/1981, pp.234-235)

In a first visit paid to the religious University of Al-Azhar in Cairo, immediately after being elected as Egypt's president in 2013, Abdel Fattah El-Sissi was speaking of the duty the clerical classes have first of all to save Islam from suicide by renouncing to the literal reading of the Muslim medieval scriptures and to the attempts of forcefully aggregating a medieval tinkering within the patterns of the contemporary modernity.

Thus, the head of the Egyptian state warned, outlawing a radical Islamist organization will not automatically mean the disappearance of the extremist thinking and the radicalization of Islam will bring it on a difficult to justify position of hostility of the Muslim religion towards the rest of the contemporary world. And of the latter towards the Islamic world!

## THE RUSSIAN- IRANIAN RELATIONS: A GEOPOLITICAL APPROACH

**Reza SHAHRESTANI**

### 1. A flashback

The collapse of the former Soviet Union followed by the desintegration of the European system of governance based ideologically on dialectic-materialism and the temporary cessation of the Cold War marked, among others, the onset of an ample, multidirectional process of rethinking and reconfiguring the Russian Federation's new foreign policy as heir of the Russian ideology of a great power promoted by all Russia's leaders from the imperial tzarist regimes to Boris Eltsin and Vladimir Putin. And this stance was particularly noticed in the environmental geographical space of Central Asia and Caucasus, of the Black Sea and the Baltic Basin, while the shaping, by the Russian Federation, of the independent states split from the former Soviet Union was, in its turn, one of the first class achievements of Russia's new foreign policy within the regional geostrategical context after the events of the end of the last century.

The evolution of the interlinking between the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran is circumscribed to the same context as the bilateral relations between the two states are determined by a complex of factors generated and enforced as a priority by the political geography of the regional vicinity which, in the succession of the historical stages, was not characterized by a cooperative interaction, yet mostly by its conflicted and competitive nature.

If Ruhollah Khomeyni's Islamic Revolution brought to an end the Western influence over the Iranian political geography, that did not bring, at the same time, notable changes as far as the lack of trust, suspicions and coldness manifested by the new theocratic religious authorities in Tehran were concerned and a beginning of a thaw that was noticed only at the end of the "Soviet era", more exactly after the eight years of the Iranian-Iraqi war of 1980 -1988, and the first concrete change in approaching the bilateral relations was Iran's "discovery" of the post-Soviet Russia as an important supplier of military equipment. The regional and global conflicted files, on which the chessboard the regimes of the "democratic Russia" and of the Muslim revolutionary Iran were to discover unexplored reserves for promoting their relations as a concealment of supporting the geostrategical and geopolitical interests of each of the two "allied" players, were to be added as a coming together and contiguous elements. The ground-breaking stage of this cooperation between the opposites was initiated, on the background of the Iran-Iraq conflict, by the former Syrian president Hafez Al-Assad, the irreducible enemy of Saddam Hussein's Iraqi Baathism and by Ayatollah Khomeyni who brought on the Middle East's political and conflicted context the "Rejectionist and Steadfastness Front" against the "Zionist enemy". Yet other files generated by the regional developments and, among them, on a prominent place today is the Syrian civil war which, since some years, is the fundamental driver of the Russian-Iranian relation and the element on which Syria's future and of its people's depend, was to be added to the binder of the "steadfastness".

One may notice today that in the Central Asia area, the level of the Russian-Iranian competition that characterized the bilateral relations during the last decade of the last century decreased remarkably while the same bilateral relations witnessed a unprecedented dynamism in the field of trade exchanges and economic cooperation, whereby the big Russian companies are active on the Iranian market such as Gazprom and other Russian companies specialized in the steel industry, car manufacturing, nuclear programs and arms industry are just some of them.

It would be erroneous to believe that such front comradeship in the Syrian war was enough to characterize with a joyful optimism the future of the relations between Moscow and Tehran. The future path of these relations is not unhindered and has obstacles difficult to remove. And one of these barriers is that the regime in Tehran has not enough trust in the manner the Russians are elaborating politics and this suspicion is supported by a long series of historical precedents, whereby Russia proved ready to abandon in the last moment its friends and allies if required by its exclusive interests.

Second, it is about the fact that the balancing policy the Russian Federation is promoting in the Middle East does not always necessarily correspond with Iran's interests, a country aspiring to impose itself as a big regional power when Moscow acts precisely for preventing the emergence in the area of other competing powers wishing to impose their influence in a political geography that Russia wants to monopolize for itself.

Third, one can talk about that those very interests which, during the last years, proved to be converging were, through its planned finalities, based on diverging reasons and causes and that may prove from the future perspective a threatening factor for a real coming closer of the two states. So, both the Russian Federation and Iran came to Syria for supporting Bashar Al-Assad's regime, yet the motives and finalities for which they proceeded so are not converging if they are not even diametrically opposed.

On the other side, there are not at all negligible

elements which, in one form or another, may support and encourage the coming together and the resilience of the bilateral relations between Russia and Iran.

**1. The economic factor** has a weight which importance derives not from the volume of trade exchanges, amounting yearly to around \$2 billion, but from the the strategic fields mixed up with the economic sphere which concentrates a great part of the flow of trade exchanges and economic cooperation, such as:

a) **The transportation sector** where, together with Azerbaijan, the two countries are involved in achieving the huge project of "North-South Corridor", made up of maritime lines, railway and terrestrial lines that are to connect the Indian sub-continent, the Persian Gulf area and the Caspian Sea basin via Iran, with an extension to Sankt Petersburg and further towards Northern Europe. The corridor is to secure an annual cargo flow estimated to around 10m ton. Moreover, the duration of all activities on this sector is envisaged to be reduced from 40 days, as it lasts when transiting the Suez canal now, to 14 days on the North-South itinerary.

b) **In the energy field**, Iran and the Russian Federation have huge reserves of oil and natural gas which existence, corroborated with the interventions of the last years of the western competitors on the energy markets, determined Moscow and Tehran to strengthen their cooperation particularly in what concern leveling the prices. Yet this cooperation between the two partners does not exclude their competition which proves to be a bitter one and above the bilateral cooperation relations.

**2. The regional and international factor** should be considered to the extent to which the Russian Federation's and Iran's specific interests are not limited to the geography of the Middle East, but they are oriented towards outside areas, possibly more important, such as Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea, areas which influence directs the national security interests, especially in Russia's case, that is interested in creating a safety belt in its geographic proximity which assumes a close cooperation



with Iran, having common borders with the three mentioned areas.

It can be said that, as they are now, the relations between Iran and the Russian Federation have a geostrategic character without being, at the functional level, a strategic alliance. What unites the two states in the Middle East, Central Asia and the Caucasus is much bigger than what separates them. And the common denominator of these relations is to be found both in conjunctural interests and in what Moscow and Tehran understand by the Western's defiance or challenge. And the latter factor represents, for both partners, a source of mistrust and suspicion towards the possibility that, under certain circumstances, one of the two sides comes closer to the West at the expense of the interests of its partner. A fear manifested, to a greater extent, in Tehran. It is true that president Putin assured the spiritual guide Ali Khamenei definitely: "We will never betray you!". Yet how credible are the promises made at the highest level of the political pyramid?

## **2. The Russian Federation – Iran binomial in the context of the Middle East**

The collapse of the Soviet Union marked the passage of the world order from the bipolarity of power to the sole pole represented by the United States of America whose role was rapidly strengthened following the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. From that moment on, the fight against the terrorist phenomenon became, at least in terms of the American strategy, an absolute priority, after the fall of the Soviet Union and of the communist system which put America in front of a uncomfortable void of enemies. The process proclaimed by Zbigniew Brzezinski – of looking after new enemies after the disappearance of communism, was inaugurated by the Afghanistan and Iraq wars.

The role of universal player America was entrusted with by George W. Bush (2001 – 2009), came to an end once Barack Obama (2008 – 2016) came to the White House and sent to the history's archive the principle set up by Dwight Eisenhower, that made America for four decades

the sole influential power over the fate and developments in the Middle East. Barack Obama's vision granted priority to domestic policies to the detriment of international networking and facilitated, as a result, the emergence and the ascent of new regional and international forces competing among them and with the United States of America.

It is not surprising that in this context, the Russian Federation resorted to the entire panoply of strategic weapons – oil and natural gas, Christian-Orthodox religious feelings, arms trade etc. – in order to rebuild its status of great power on the global chessboard and for expanding its presence and influence in its close vicinity where the Middle East and Central Asia have a prominent place. The military "victory" in Georgia, then opening and feeding the front in Ukraine, annexing the Crimea Peninsula and the military intervention in Syria, for saving Bashar Al-Assad's regime from falling, were as many success factors that supported and encouraged Vladimir Putin's political program.

The Kremlin's leader clinging on geopolitical enlargement of the Russian sphere of influence, represented the determining reason of the insistence he pursued the identification and finding allies, preferably in the economic field rather than in the political field: engaging in the competition for oil and natural gas pipelines for the perspective of securing the domination over the European conventional energy market as the initiatives of convening new contracts in the field of exploring and exploiting the oil in the Iraqi Kurdistan, in Syria and Iran, are just a few example to that purpose.

After its massive involvement in the developments of the Syrian civil war, at the end of September 2015, Moscow probed the possibilities of expanding towards the states of the Persian Gulf with whom, on the background of the political discourse of solving the Syrian conflict, it concluded contracts amounting to billions of dollars in fields such as nuclear activity, military production and future technologies.

Iran represents, in this area, a unavoidable regional power which, among the regional states,

is the country having the oldest relations with the Western world since the time of Shah Abbas I (1571-1629), relations which continued until the Islamic Revolution and the overthrow of the last Persian monarch, Mohamed Reza Pahlavi Aryahmer

After president Donald Trump took office, the American-Iranian relations were under the existential threat, so that the "alliance" relations between Russia and Iran appears as an example of front comradeship when the war in Syria is concerned. A war that, according to the latest interpretations, seems to be coming to an end.

The international sanctions imposed on Iran and the policy promoted by Barack Obama resulted in further galvanizing and strengthening the relations between the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran, the field of nuclear programs included, whereby the two sides carried out contracts amounting to billions of dollars. At the same time, Russia used for itself the Iranian or pro-Iranian militias for imposing a status-quo on the Syrian military chessboard. The war conditions, corroborated with the pressures exerted by the United States and the European Union's countries had as a consequence an expansion of the cooperation space of the Russian-Iranian pair with close neighbouring states, whereby Azerbaijan is among the first countries, a cooperation consecrated by the November Summit in Tehran reuniting the heads of state of the Russian Federation, Iran and Azerbaijan.

Vladimir Putin's reelection in the highest position for a fourth presidential mandate emphasized his rigorous interest of diminishing to the maximum the impact of the international economic sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation, while Iran, confronted with the American and Israeli ever aggressive and hostile campaign needs badly, in its turn, Russia's political support in counteracting the offensive waged by America and Israel, while Azerbaijan expects the same Russian backing in what concern the dispute over the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave.

It may be said that the Russian-Iranian interlinking is not as eminently strategic as it is one of coordinating the interests that may fluctuate,

subject to the succession of the context conflicts. The Russian Federation voted, for instance, in favor of applying international anti-Iranian sanctions due to the fact that, in exchange, promise was made by the West that Russia will benefit, for 25 years, of accessing Ukraine's military ports and that Ukraine will not be accepted as a new member of the North Atlantic Alliance.

Russia needs Iran for closing "with honours" the campaign in Syria and for implementing its strategy of superpower at the regional level of the Middle East. On the other side, Iran needs the Russian Federation in the conflict conjecture in which Iran has to act solely on several fronts. And, the interlinking between Moscow and Tehran, beyond the strategic interests, linked mostly to the evolution of the Syrian civil war and the economic advantages and benefits, seems today to be not an instrument of direct influence and orientation of the Middle East's geostrategy, but a means of a unveiled blackmailing for imposing their own points of view in the bitter competition to which all the regional and global players and belligerents participate for configuring the new Middle East and of the new global order which arises within the tense climate of the new cold war of the contemporary world.

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## ISRAEL AND IRAN, A WAR POSTPONED...

### FOR THE TIME BEING

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**Reza SHAHRESTANI**

At least in light of the public declarations of late of the political and military Israeli officials, it may be understood that Israel is more and more concerned and worried by Iran's regional policy that the authorities in Tehran are not any longer trying hard to disguise under the smoke screen of rhetorics: the Islamic Republic is increasingly decided to secure a presence on a indefinite term in Syria to use it as a platform for continuing the theocratic regime's and its Islamic revolution regional expansion of power and influence.

On February 10th, the level of conflicted strain

and fever between the Jewish state, on the one hand, and the Syrian and Iranian regimes, on the other, witnessed an increase up to a threatening height that could have escalated into a direct military confrontation yet the latest calculations had barred the developments towards a hot denouement. The facts unfolded rapidly: a UAV coming from Syria penetrated the Israeli air space where it was intercepted and downed by Tsahal forces. In retaliation, Israel raided and bombarded the place from where the UAV took off. The Syrian anti-aerial defenses fought back and downed an Israeli F-16 jet – the first incident of this kind Israel witnessed in 30 years. The episode was closed by a vast Israeli aerial operation in the Syrian territory against more than 10 locations and bases controlled and managed by the Iranians, the military airport Tayfur near Homs included, that is used by the Iranian fighting units. It was a *casus belli* and a dangerous precedent in itself that emphasized the inflamed climate characterizing the Israeli-Iranian networking at the beginning of this year.

The Iranian war machine was deployed in Syria for contributing to rescuing Bashar Al-Assad's regime from falling over the cliff, a regime engaged on a double front of eradicating its own political and military opposition and the radical Islamist jihadism represented especially by Islamic State and by the indigenous Islamist formations led by Al-Qaida and the militias self-titled the "Islamic Army" (*Al-Jaysh Al-Islamiy*). Islamic State was practically eliminated as a weighty element in the Syrian war equation while the other opposition formations do not represent any longer a credible threat to the Damascus regime yet that does not mean Iran has the slightest intention of ending its military presence in Syria. On the contrary, this presence and the possible threats it entails have the tendency of expanding territorially towards the Syrian southern areas towards the borders with Jordan and towards the demarcation line in the Golan Heights and that exacerbates, for the Israeli decision-makers and officials, the possible threats aimed at the national security of the Jewish state and represents a hotbed of tensions which, at a certain moment, might create the

conditions for a direct military confrontation.

At least another two elements are to be added to this concern that are circumscribed to the already experimented Iranian tactics namely waging the possible regional conflicts outside its national territory and by means of proxies and franchises the Islamic Republic created during the past in Lebanon, Iraq and Syria among which the most virulent proved to be the political and military formation Hezbollah in Lebanon.

In this context, first it is about that according to data obtained by the Israeli and Western services, Iran developed and continues to strengthen a dynamic military infrastructure in Syria aimed at manufacturing war equipment, missiles included, and a great part of the output is intended for Hezbollah's offensive military arsenal.

Second, it is about the fact that after the 6<sup>th</sup> of May parliamentary elections in Lebanon, Hezbollah consolidated its position on the domestic political chessboard and that will directly influence the stance the new government in Beirut will adopt towards possible escalations of the regional developments between the "Party of Allah" and the Jewish state in the sense of an active defensive in any conflict that may occur in accordance with the message conveyed from the presidential Palace of Baabda by the Lebanese president Michel Aoun himself upon taking office namely Hezbollah is part and parcel of the national Lebanese army. The fact that, in the perspective of the Syrian war reaching and end, Hezbollah will bring home the more than 10,000 fighters deployed now in the southern region of the Syrian front, will significantly increase the fighting potential of this formation and, consequently, the degree of threat represented for the security of the State of Israel is no less important.

This territorial "complementarity" of threats did not pass unobserved by the Israeli political and military circles and the Defense minister Avigdor Lieberman declared that "we, the Israelis, are decided to prevent our enemies from provoking any prejudice to the Israeli citizens' security..." Avigdor Lieberman declared also



that “when the next military campaign will start, no matter where it takes place, in the north or in the south, it will be a two-front operation – in Lebanon and in Syria. The time of the one front war is over, this is our approach and our army is readying... In my opinion, the enemies should seriously consider any step they may take against Israel for not force us to prove the capabilities of the Israeli army” minister Lieberman warned and expressed also the opinion that, on the other hand, Lebanon’s armed forms lost their independence and became an integral part of Hezbollah from where it receives orders”.

Generally, the situation at the Israel’s frontiers with Syria and Lebanon is tense enough to determine some Arab-speaking journalists and commentators to advance the possibility that a military clash may break-out in the coming period after Tel-Aviv would have evaluated the situation and obtained a clearer and sustainable image as far as the positions and orientations of the new Lebanese government will take office after the general elections of the beginning of this month are concerned.

Beyond the martial rhetoric characterizing since a long time Avigdor Lieberman’s discourse as well as the extremely long TV speeches of the “one - man show” sort of the Hezbollah leader, sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, the objective question concerning the real extent to which Israel – even animated by president Donald Trump’s encouragements and diatribes - is ready and above all prepared to engage alone in a “two-front war” where it has to fight against a triple enemy – Iran, Hezbollah and the Lebanese army, to say nothing of the possibility that on the Syrian front and particularly at the border of the Golan Heights and, why not, even from Gaza other belligerents be them asymmetrical are activated persists.

There are, indeed, enough arguments pleading



in favor of analysts believing a war is inevitable. Yet at the same time arguments in favor of the idea that war is not impending at least in a foreseeable future are not lacking.

Now, when the developments on the Syrian front herald a soon-to-be cease- fire and when the tensions between Russia and the Western community resemble rather a cat and mouse game and, in Syria and, in general, in the troubled context of the Middle East, there is a political and military status quo on all possible fronts of a future war which no one of the influential belligerents is ready yet to violate it as long as there is no a more favorable and beneficial alternative for any of them. Iran evolves within the confines charted by the status quo, confines it violates sometimes, conscious it will receive the Israeli retaliation and ready to accept it as long as that does not represent an irreversible casus belli but rather a “war incident” without dramatic consequences on the development of the front on the whole.

For confrontation to become reality, the Trump Administration’s belicose anti-Iranian euphoria is not enough especially as the United States has no regional domestic franchises able to wage, on their own, a de facto war by proxies. Alone, Israel cannot be such a franchise to wage the war on behalf of its ally on the other side of the Atlantic. Moreover, the Jewish state is being attracted by the idea of determining the Administration in Washington takes over the initiative with an Israeli “collateral” support. It is difficult to believe that Donald Trump hates to such an extent the Persian mullahs accepts that America be for Israel what Hezbollah is for Iran.

The conflicted state follows an ascending trajectory. And, given that the already mentioned status quo cannot last endlessly, war remains a prospect that should be considered. An existing war which, for the time being, remains just a postponed denouement.

## BETWEEN "SAUDIA FIRST" AND "ARABIA INFELIX"

*Ambassador prof. Dumitru CHICAN*

### 1. Preliminaries

We witness since some months an euphoric process of metamorphosis of the defining effigies of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a process which, adorned by some "historical decisions" such as liberalizing woman's right to sit in the driver's seat of a personal car or to attend matches or other cultural, sports and educational events on stadiums, designated to transform the Wahhabite kingdom by 2030 in what the media already call through a uncensored mimicry "Saudia first". The official designation of the kingdom – *Al-Mamlaka Al-Arabiya Al-Saudiya* – the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – is already chased away from the colloquial speech in order to be replaced by the omnipresent and omnipotent MBS which, in its extended variant, identifies Mohamed Bin Salman, Crown Prince and ante-factum king of his country.

In parallel yet carefully kept on the background of the media spotlight, the brutal war triggered three years ago by Saudi Arabia from the initiative and will of prince MBS in Yemen continues, a war code-named Decisive Storm and having as declared target liquidating the rebellion launched by the Houthi separatists proved to be circumscribed to the more ample and complex conflict carried out through proxies between the two regional powers, namely the Sunni Wahhabism of the monarchy in Riyadh and the Iranian Twelver Shia which stake was given by the ambitions of regional expansion and influence geographically, economically, sectarian, ideological and militarily. Already stuck in the Yemeni quagmire, the former Arabia Felix was turned into, and lacking a long-term vision concerning the ways of coming out of this wrongly conceived conflict, Saudi Arabia as well as the theocratic Iran seem not wanting to realize that

Yemen's fall into chaos could have, on a medium and long run, boomerang effects not only on the regional strategic climate but also on the internal stability and the fundamentals the two religious regimes of "Arabia first" and the Iran dreaming of Shiite arches and crescents are built on.

### 2. A small war with heavy consequences

Fallen ever since 2014 into the flames of a civilian and at the same time regional conflict, Yemen is described in the Western approaches as being the "forgotten land" sometimes or "the front of a forgotten war" some other times, both attributes underlying the extent of the apathy, impotence or lack of political will this abstract syntagm called the "international community" led by the great powers of the international order shows towards the tragedy of a people victimized by the vainglory and the ambitions of the main regional players involved. The humanitarian crisis generated by the others' war translates into the gravest cholera epidemic ever registered – more than a million cases according to the International Red Cross – to whom more than 10,000 civilian losses following the war operations or of chronic malnutrition should be added and which threatens today more than 70% of the Yemeni's total demography.

The Saudi-led coalition which is based on the ground on local militias among which some of salafist ideology origin are not lacking and on the secessionist formations of the southern part of the country is, one may say, in a competition state with all the other belligerent sides as far as the sovereign ignorance of the international conventions and the protection of civil population, of the historical or cultural heritage or Yemen's national infrastructure and preventing, at the same time, in a programatic way, the activities of the humanitarian missions or severely blocking the ports and airports allowing connections with the outside world.

The official discourse of the regime in Riyadh pretends that the war's objective is to "restore legality", namely of president's Mansour Hadi who is, more recently, subjected to house arrest

due to insufficient involvement in the campaign against the Houthi rebellion.

Also this war by proxies is, unfortunately, both a context whereby the state or non-state belligerents are perpetrating, behind the total embargo of information, atrocities that can easily fall within war crimes or crimes against humanity categories. However, under various circumstantial justifications, such as fighting the Iranian "terrorism and expansionism" (a country which in its turn sponsors the rebellion), great powers self-proclaimed apostles of democracy and peace led by the United States, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and France continue to grant Saudi Arabia and to an equal extent the United Arab Emirates substantial and diversified military assistance from sophisticated weapons to military advisors, satellite information and aerial photos of the front etc.- an assistance which, far from being a solidarity gesture, is supported by fabulous contracts with the defense industries of the respective states as the yearly value of the war effort is estimated to amount to \$15bil. Yet the supplies of military material and equipment for Saudi Arabia only and for supporting Operation Restoring Hope in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula are not coming just from the three mentioned countries since the military supply network is wider and more diversified as the bellow data for 2016

provided by the European Commission for the Control of Arms Exports of the European Union countries show.

#### **A. Saudi Arabia**

**Total imports from the European Union: \$3,08 bil. out of which:**

- France - 28 %
- Great Britain - 22 %
- Germany - 19 %
- Italy - 15 %
- Bulgaria - 7 %
- Spain - 6 %
- Other countries - 3 %. (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, The Netherlands, Poland, Sweden)

#### **B. The United Arab Emirates**

**Total imports from the European Union : \$2,3 bil. out of which:**

- Sweden - 54 %
- France - 15 %
- Great Britain - 7 %
- Italy - 3 %
- Other countries- 13 %. (Austria, Belgium,





Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Luxemburg, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain.

### 3. The Yemeni war and the traps of jihadism

From the moment the Houthi rebels supported by Iran were able to launch long-range missiles reaching targets all over the Saudi territory, the authorities in Riyadh adopted an errating position between a triumphalist propaganda in accordance to which "all is well on the southern front" and a flawed and wrongly planned public communication trying to convince the public opinion and the mass media that... Saudi Arabia is a victim! And when the Saudi diplomats at the UN were speaking of a couple of hundreds of dead as a result of Houthi bombardments, the image and the prestige of the "prescient" future monarch, prince MBS, were the first to be affected and, even if not declared, ordinary person understands that, in spite of the official propaganda, "not all is well on the southern front".

The institutional collapse of the Yemeni state leaves open the way to an increased and more intense Salafist jihadist militancy. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates marginalized the Islamist political formation "Islah" (Reform), an ideological offshoot of the "Muslim Brotherhood", and brought to an end the moderating and peacemaker role this party had during the "Arab spring" and unleashed the jihadist extremist groups. The chaos triggered domestically allowed Al-Qaida in April 2015 to take over Mukalla – the fifth biggest Yemeni port – at a time Islamic State had proclaimed the "neo-caliphate" in Syria and Iraq. Whether the American drones did not succeed in taking Yemen out of the sphere of interests of the jihadist movement, a prolongation of the Yemeni war at a time Islamic State lost its geographic component in the Levant and Mesopotamia may make of this country an attractive place for jihadists' turning in on it and transforming it in a hotbed irradiating regionally and extra-regionally the jihadist ideology and violence.

More than being looked at as a negligible periphery, Yemen should be considered a generating place of a not-at-all quiet future whereby a

festivist syntagm such as „Saudia first” might remain a mere figure of speech.

## THE STRUGGLE FOR SYRIA: FOREIGN MILITARI BASES

*Maher NABOULSI, Siria*

The civil war in Syria meant not only unthinkable destructions, human losses and sufferings accompanied by an advanced crumbling of the social texture, economy and state institutions but also by an acerbical contest among the regional and extra-regional players directly involved in the Syrian domestic conflict for establishing head-bridges on the territory of this country, locations that turned into bases, centers and barracks which number amounts to 30 and which is on the rise. Except for the bases and locations held by the Damascus regime's allies (the Russian Federation, Iran, the Lebanese Hezbollah's militias), the remaining existing foreign bases are considered illegal by the Syrian government since they were set up without the agreement of the Syrian state.

This article, drawn up based on the information supplied by the military commandments of the armies involved in the Syrian conflict, by the regional and international mass-media and Geostrategic Pulse own sources, intends to offer a comprehensive image of the foreign presence on the Syrian territory yet not pretending to be exhaustive or unaffected by the inherent loopholes of a documentation which is not immune to inaccuracies and approximations.

### 1. The United States of America

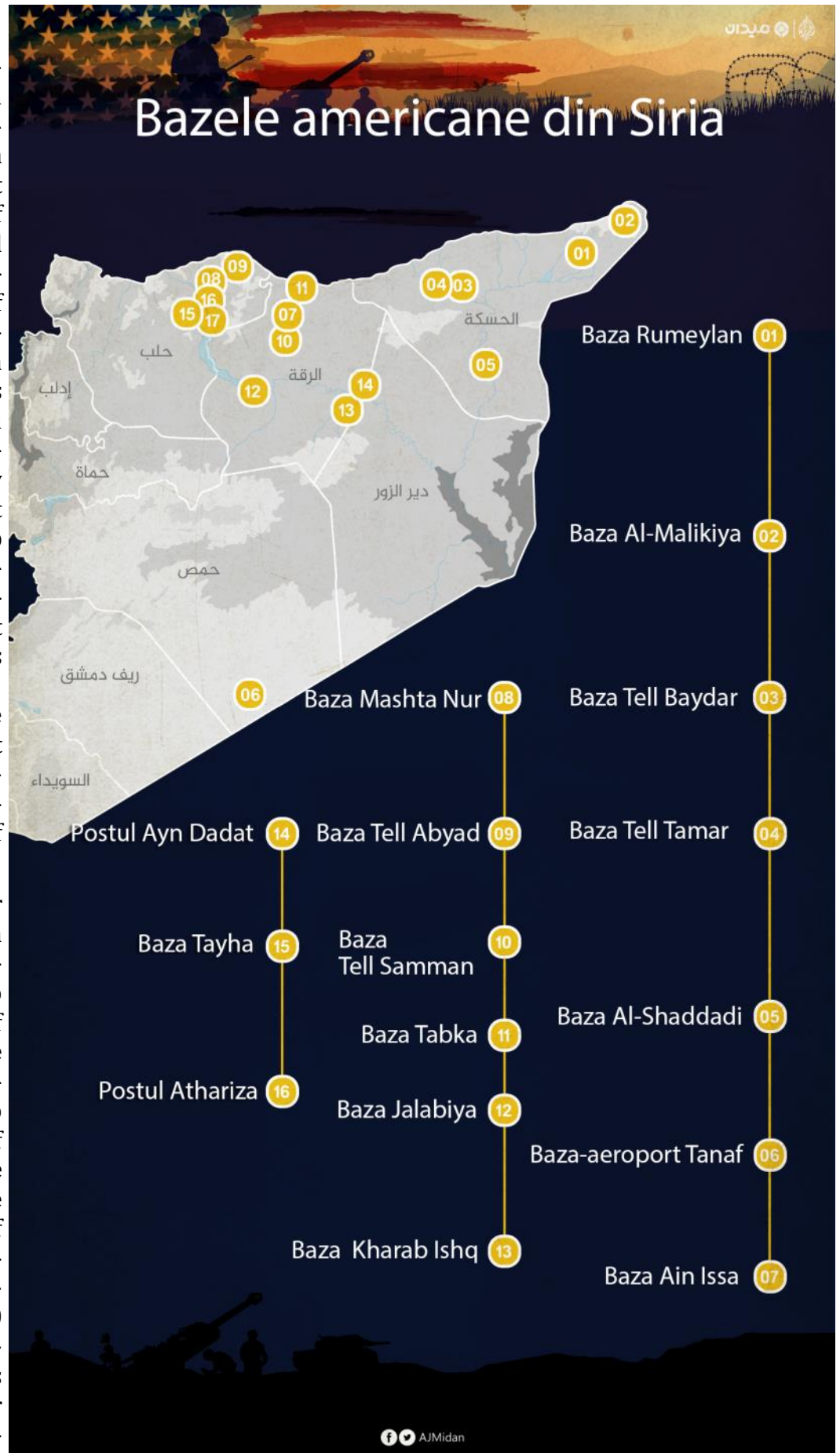
Ever since the Syrian crisis broke out in the spring of 2011, the former president Barack Obama promoted consistently a hesitating policy as far as the United States' intention or wish of military commitment on the Syrian front were concerned and this period of imprecision and hesitations came to an end once the Russian Federation' direct military intervention on the Syrian front and in its dramatic developments in



September, 2015.

The first step towards the American direct armed involvement in Syria was deploying a first echelon made up of 50 soldiers of special forces with the non-combat mission of advising the detachments of the Syrian opposition. That was the first American presence in the Syrian war's geography after its break out and after setting up and activating, in August 2014, the multi-state anti-terrorist coalition that was fundamentally brought about by the jihadist terrorist group self-titled Islamic State's occupying the Iraqi city of Mosul.

The initial number of the American "advisors" was to increase gradually to 500 at the end of 2016 and the "advisors" themselves returned to their real status of fighters of the elite forces engaged in the wider campaign of uprooting the Islamist terrorist phenomenon. Another 1,000 soldiers were deployed in Kuwait as reserves, a number that was kept un-



changed until June 6th, 2017 when the Syrian town of Raqqa, the fief of the "Islamic caliphate", was declared free from the jihadist-Islamist occupation.

The new American president Donald Trump's taking office at the White House, marked the beginning of certain substantial changes to the United States' strategy of waging the anti-terrorist Islamist war and, in this framework, of really positioning towards the developments of the domestic Syrian war. On December 27th, 2016, Donald Trump requested the Pentagon to draw up an enhanced offensive fighting plan against Islamic State in Syria as well as to set up some security zones on the Syrian territory of which the new president has been speaking during his campaign for the presidential elections. Now, the number of the American soldiers having missions in Syria is estimated at 2,000 and the figure is, according to some Arab sources, higher than that officially announced and fluctuating in accordance with Donald Trump Administration's decisions of reconfiguring the American troops on the Syrian front, either by withdrawing them or by increasing their number. As of 2015, the United States paid a priority attention for setting up in Syria permanent or temporary bases and their number at the end of April reached 16, that means that numerically America ranks first among the other foreign players competitors – Russia, Iran and Turkey – for securing a stable military presence in the geography of the Syrian war. What highlights the location of the American bases is the fact that they are situated in the north and north-east of the Syrian Kurdistan along Syria's state borders with Turkey and Iraq. Here they are in a brief presentation:

1. **Rumeilan Base**, in Qamishli district (governorate), on Syria's north-eastern extremity. It has an airport able to operate heavy cargo planes, including military and logistic supplies for the fighting units of the Kurdish ethnics. The area represents the country's main oil and natural gas perimeter;

2. **Al-Malikiya Base**, in the Qamishli north-eastern governorate. It has an airport operating

heavy cargo planes;

3. **Tell Baydar Base**, in the Hassake north-eastern governorate. It accommodates around 800 special American troops;

4. **Tell Tamar Base**, in Hassake governorate, close to Turkey's border. It accommodates troops of the multinational anti-terrorist coalition and instructors for the Arab-Kurdish alliance;

5. **Al-Shaddadi Base**, south of Hassake governorate on the outskirts of the important Jabis-sa oilfield. It accommodates around 150 American military of the elite units;

6. **Tanf airport Base**, in the south, at the border with Jordan. It accommodates American, British and German soldiers;

7. **Ayn Issa Base**, in Rakka's southern suburb. It accommodates 200 support soldiers of the Kurdish forces and 75 French military;

8. **Mashta Nur Base**, south of Kobane town, accommodates military of the American and French elite units;

9. **Tell Al-Abyad Base**, north of Rakka governorate. A training and instruction base for the Kurdish fighters with facilities of operating heavy cargo planes;

10. **Tell Saman Base**, north of Rakka town. A military communications center;

11. **Tabka Airbase**. North of Tabka town, close to Al-Assad storage dam on the Euphrates River;

12. **Jalabiya Base**, on the administrative border between Rakka and Aleppo governorates. It has airstrips for fighter jets and ammunition depots;

13. **Haarb Ishq Base**, on the administrative border between Rakka and Aleppo governorates. It operates cargo planes and parachuting planes;

14. **Ain Dadad Station**, close to Manbij town airport. It is an observation and surveillance post of the Free Syrian Army ( supported by Turkey) movements;

15. **Tayha Base**, on the south-eastern outskirts of Manbij town. It accommodates 400 American military;

16. **The fixed Post in Athariza**, on the outskirts of Manbij town. It is a separation buffer zone between the Kurdish militia's positions and the Syrian Free Army's ones.

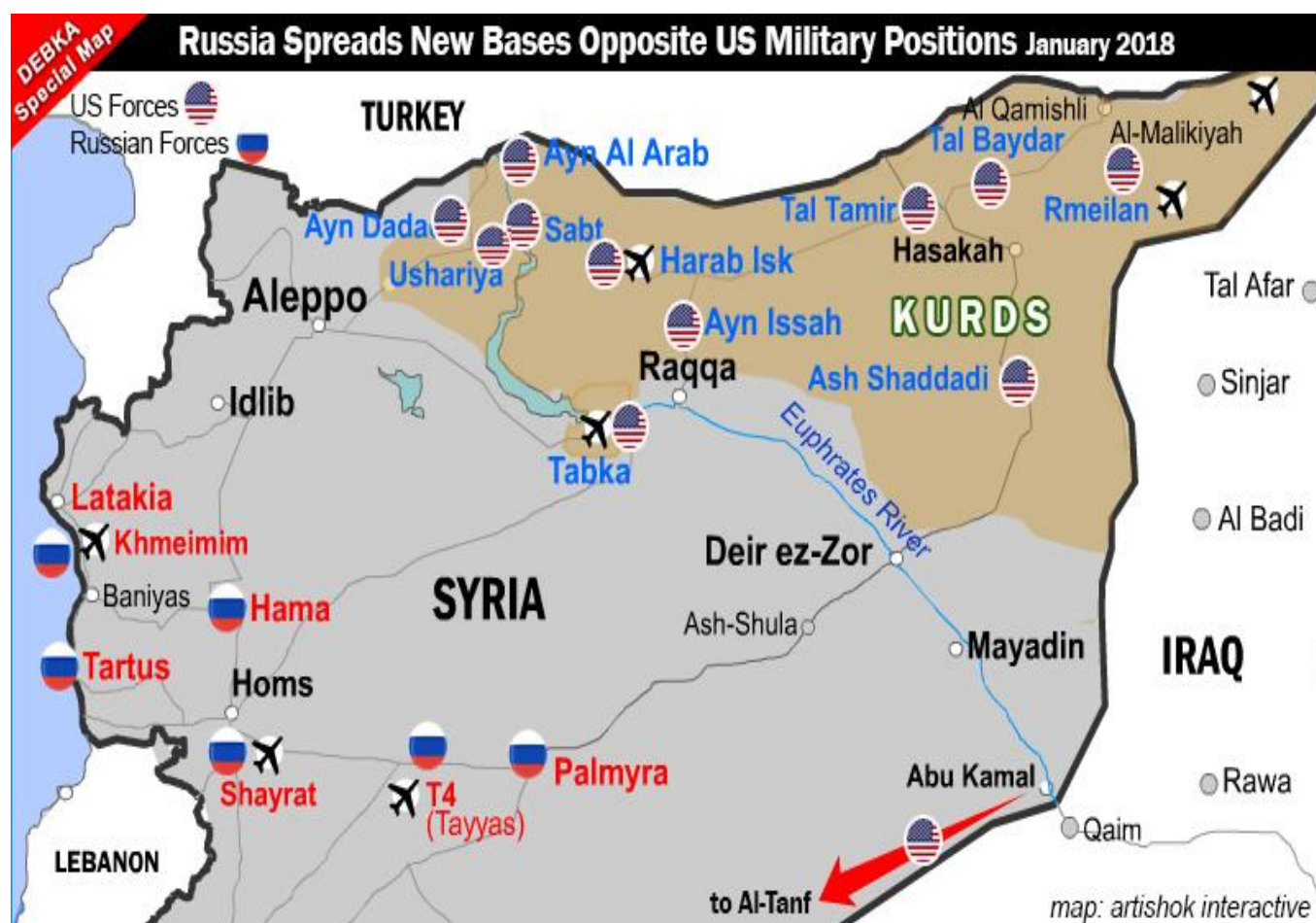
## 2. The Russian Federation

The most recent reference to the Russian Federation's military human presence in Syria is given, according to official sources in Moscow, by the total number of the Russians participating to the military mission in Syria who cast their votes there during the recent presidential elections. In accordance with the said source, the number of Russians making up presently the Russian expeditionary mission in Syria is 2,954.

The great part of the Russian military troops in Syria is concentrated at the Hmeimim airbase in the north-western Syrian territory, who were

deployed there in disguise as military "consultants" and "advisors" for training and advising the national Syrian troops who were accredited with a decisive contribution to Bashar Al-Assad's achievements after September 30th, 2015 when the Russian army intervened directly on the chessboard of the Syrian domestic conflict.

Military police troops, most of whom are recruited from the former Soviet Caucasus Republics of Islamic denomination, are to be added to these "advisors". The military police troops are deployed either into the zones the Syrian government recovered from the Muslim-jihadist and Islamist factions or into the so-called "de-escalation" zones of the military conflicts established through negotiations and agreements reached in Astana, Kazakhstan. According to a Vladimir Putin's public declaration, between the beginning of the Russian intervention in Syria on September 30th, 2015 and the end of December 2017, a number of 48,000 Russian soldiers were involved in the Russian intervention in Syria.



The Russian Federation has the air base in Hmeimim air which, based on a November 2015 government agreement, Syria put it totally and on an indefinite term at the Russian Federation's disposal and the latter proceeded with modernising this location and endowing it with S-400 soil-air missiles systems as well as with mobile launching pads of Panther and Thor-M1 missiles.

In Lattakia and Tartous ports, (used even since the Soviet period as repairments and supply port), the Russian side carried out significant modernizations for berthing huge men of war as well as anti-missiles systems S-300.

Beyond these main aerial and naval bases, the Russian Federation benefits, in a preferential regime, of facilities in 6 other Syrian military locations, namely:

- The Military Marine Faculty in Jableh, in Lattakia zone;
- Hama military airport;
- Mezzeh Airport, at the western outskirts of Damascus;
- Shayrat military airport;
- Palmyra military airport, in Homs governorate;
- Jandaris military airport in the Afrin enclave, north-west of the country.

Negotiations for buying land are presently taking place for building another 4 Russian military bases in Hama district.

There are no official or certain information concerning the fleet of the Russian military aviation acting in Syria and the observers argue imprecisely that there are dozens of aircrafts. It is certain that this air force includes, at least, Suhoi 24 bombers, Tupolev 160, Mig of several generations and different missiles with ranges up to 4,500km. The Russian Ministry of Defense declared that the Russian army and the Russian defense industry tested and used around 200 new and sophisticated types of arms during that time. The most advanced categories of military ships and submarines were used several times

during the 7 years of Syrian war.

### 3. Iran

Iran's military presence on the Syrian civil war front has the particularity that, besides the "official" troops represented by the Revolutionary Islamic Guard, there are and operate in Syria under Iranian command and military, logistic and financial assistance formations of fighters recruited according to the affiliation to Shia Muslim sect, irrespective of nationality and organization, with a few exceptions, as mercenaries in more than 50 units (detachments) among which the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Zeynabite Pakistani and Afghan militias (*Al-Zeynabiyun*) and the Fatimids (*Al-Fatymiyun*) stand out, and the total number of the Iranian or pro-Iranian human potential in Syria is estimated to more than 70,000 fighters. In different places of the territory and subject to the front developments, there are other formations acting at the Tehran's regime orders:

- The Militias of the Syrian Defense Forces made up of Syrians of Shia sect constituted in 2012 acting especially in Aleppo, Tartous, Lattakia, Homs, and Damascus governorates as well as in Soueida, in the south;

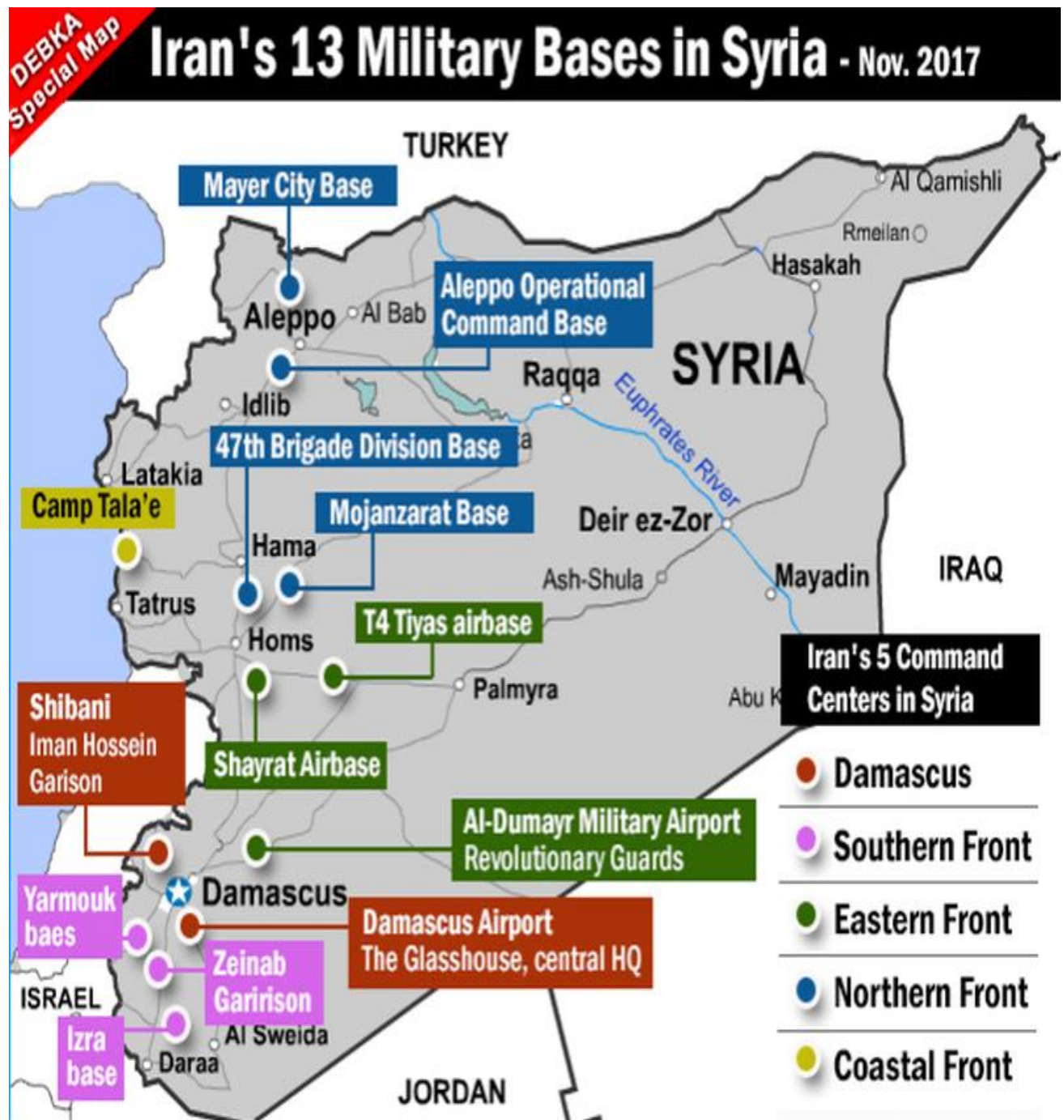
- The "*Al-Nujaba*" movement (the Nobles) made up of around 9,000 Shiite fighters of Iraqi nationality;

- "Abdul Fadl Al-Abbas" movement made up of around 4,500 Iraqi Shia. Most of them are located in Aleppo governorate;

- "Imam Al-Baker" brigade made up of Syrians of Palmyra and Aleppo areas. Its human potential is estimated to around 1,000 – 1,500 people.

The Central Command of the Iranians troops, known as the "Glasshouse" is situated close to Damascus International Airport (18 km from the capital) is considered the biggest and the most important place of the Iranian army in Syria. Besides, Iran had, at the beginning of May, 2018, around 13 times more command centers, bases, technical stations, production and maintenance





units with military profile of which the most important are:

– **Al -Shibani Barracks** or "Imam Hussein Barracks" north-west of Damascus in the tourist Zabadani town on the old Damascus-Beirut road. A former central headquarters of the Revolutionary Guards, it accommodates presently around 6,000 people of "Fajr Shiraz" Brigade (Shiraz Sunrise), of the "Fatimid Brigade" and of Hezbollah militias. It is considered the advanced defense line against the attacks of the Syrian oppo-

sition or from the close vicinity of Hermon Mountains, north of the Golan Heights.

– **The triangle Deraa – Suweida – Quneitra** of Syria's south and south-west: it designates the military region of the Syrian-Jordanian border area and the Syrian side of the Golan Heights, with headquarters 60km south of Damascus on the road connecting the capital with the southern Deraa district. With more than 18,000 troops, the area has as main support pillars the military bases **Yarmuk** and **Izra**, south-east of

the border with Golan, north of the Deraa town where a Sam-1 missiles system is placed;

– **The area of the eastern border with Iraq** represents the "eastern front" of the war and, from the standpoint of the Iranian army, it encompasses the districts (governorates) Hassake, Deir Ezzor, Qamishli and Rakka. The headquarters of the "Command III" of the Revolutionary guards is in Dumeir locality, at around 50km off the Damascus-Baghdad road. The 11th Brigade and the 18th Brigade which operative perimeter covers the southern suburbs of Homs and the northern and eastern districts of the Syrian territory are deployed in Homs district and in the area of the **Shayrat strategic military airport**;

– **The T4 airbase**, at around 50km of Palmyra in the center of the Syrian desert. 1,000 soldiers of the Revolutionary Guards are stationed here. An armoured brigade ("Mojanzarat") is also stationed south of Hama;

– **The Northern Front** stretches from Homs to the northern border with Turkey and includes Aleppo and Idleb districts. Besides the Iranian regional headquarters located in the former Military Academy in Aleppo, the 47th and the 48th Armoured Divisions operate there;

– **The coastal military area**, pertaining to Aleppo headquarters includes the Mediterranean coast of Lattakia and Tartous districts.

The General Command of the Iranian and pro-Iranian troops deployed in Syria is represented by an integrated Command Council included into the Revolutionary Guards led by Brig. General Hossein Gaani, alternate of Gen. Qassem Soleymani, commander of "Al-Quds Force", seconded by Gen. Jaafari Asadi, who commands the troops of the Revolutionary Guards deployed in Syria only.

#### 4. Turkey

As of the summer of 2017, Turkey proceeded massively with deploying military forces and equipment in Syria's north under the pretense of fighting the Islamist terrorism represented by



"Islamic State" as well as against the secessionist expansionist tendencies of the Kurdish minority in which Ankara's regime saw an "existential threat" to Turkey's national security and integrity.

On January 20, 2018, the Turkish army, in alliance with the rebels of the Syrian Free Army, launched the Operation code-named the "Olive Branch" aimed at halting the Kurdish advance west of Euphrates River and towards the Turkish border. After two months, on March 18th, 2018, the Afrin town and enclave were occupied almost without fight by the Turkish army and president Recep Teyyip Erdogan announced the intention of continuing the campaign towards Manbij strategic town (where American troops are stationed) and towards east, up to the frontier between the Syrian and Iraqi Kurdistan.

Until now, Turkey set up three military bases, namely **Salat base** in Idlib governorate, close to Jarablous town, **Deir Samman base**, north-west of Aleppo and **Aqel base**, north-west of Aleppo governorate. A fourth base is going to be set up north-west of Aleppo governorate close to Afrin as supply and logistic support point for Turkish future armed actions on the Syrian territory.

Besides all these, the Turkish army set up several dozens of "control and surveillance points" in Syria's north and central part on the confines of the so-called de-escalation zones agreed upon in the framework of the negotiations process in Astana, Kazakhstan and, in accordance with certain communiqués of the military officials, Turkey intends to set up another 4 new bases.



### 5. Great Britain

Apart from the other western locations, Great Britain has its own base close to Tanf airport, in Syria's south-western triangle, close to the borders with Jordan and Iraq.

### 6. France

According to an information broadcasted on March, 30th, by Anadolu Press Agency, France would have 5 military clandestine locations north-east of the Syrian Kurdistan where around 100 military of special units of the French army are stationed with the mission that independently or in coordination with the American troops in the area to grant support and instruction to Kurdish fighters of the Democratic Forces (YPG). Anadolu Press Agency, which published a map, the five French locations are placed near the Kurdish localities Ayn El- Arab (Kobane), Mashta Nur, Sarrin, Harab Ishq, Abu Issa and within the perimeter of the Lafarge cement factories in Harab Ishq.

The information was not confirmed or denied by neutral sources.

### 7. Hezbollah militias



Hezbollah militias, fighting alongside the regime in Damascus, have on the Syrian territory, besides the logistic facilities secured by the Syrian government, four main bases in the mountainous area of Anti-Lebanon, approximately at the middle distance between Damascus and the Lebanese border:



– The base in the small town of Qusseir, around 20 km west of the capital, within the area of the touristic towns Bloudan and Zabadani;

– The base in Zabadani town;

– A base in Qalamun, north-west of Damascus in the mountainous area of the touristic localities Maalula and Seidnaya;

– A base in Hama governorate, south of Sarghaza, on the Orontes water course (*Nahr El-Assi*).







## Russia: The Winner of the latest Airstrikes against Syria ?

**Wang Li**

On April 21, one week after the U.S.-led airstrikes against Syria, Russian FM Lavrov said that Russia would sell S-300 anti-aircraft missiles to Syria unconditionally. Since Moscow denounced the recent US-led missile strikes as an “aggression” against Syria and violated international law, selling S-300 missiles to Syria seems to be logical.

As it is well-known, the powerful weapon of S-300 has a range of up to 125 miles and the capability to track down and strike multiple targets simultaneously with lethal efficiency. It would mean a quantum leap in Syria’s air defense capability and pose a strong challenge to any upcoming menace from airstrikes. Before U.S-led airstrikes against Syria last week, Moscow had refrained from providing Damascus with such advanced S-300. Yet, now Russia openly rejects Western demands to halt such sales.



As a matter of fact, Russia had made explicit warnings to shoot down U.S. missiles prior to the airstrikes and even to target the missile-launchers. These threats are part of a wider Russian strategy aimed at showing the entire world – and the Middle East in particular – that Moscow stands by the Assad regime no matter what



horrors it unleashes. Russia was supported widely by the world with an argument for the role of the United Nations and the field-trip investigation of the alleged chemical-weapons sites in Syria. Meanwhile, Russia was sure to demonstrate the extent and the efficiency of its deterrent capabilities, including S-300 missiles system, which is regarded as the key to any nuclear power.

Ironically, U.S.-led airstrike against Syria aimed to damage Assad’s chemical-weapons program and to deter the murderous regime in Damascus from unleashing alleged chemical weapons on its own people. Yet in reality, the strikes are more of an indication of “Russia’s success at causing Western powers to limit their actions and opt for extreme caution in their response to Assad’s regime”. Since Russia’s actions are guided by a cold, hard logic, by standing firm alongside its Syrian client, it sent a message globally that any Middle Eastern state which aligns with Russia will gain the essentially unconditional backing of a great power whose overall purpose is to rebuild its global power status and boost the value of Russia as a trusted great power.

### The West outfoxed ?

In diplomatic field, Russia also shows its posi-



"An exceptional fact that the Middle East is a cradle of all four monotheistic religions is thus turned into its own paradox. Fueled by severe socio-economic exclusions and exacerbated by exploitation of the Shia-Sunni and of Muslim-Jewish-Christian antagonism, political radicalization is surely one of the most convenient instruments of subtle control aimed at preserving local governing authorities predatory-alienated, unauthentic and weak, if not incapacitated.

tion. On the same day of U.S.-led airstrikes against Syria, a sovereign state and also a client state of Russia, President Putin denounced the attack as "the U.S. is deepening a humanitarian catastrophe." In both legal and moral terms, U.S.-led coalition's military action openly violated international law, norms and practices. As the fully-armed nuclear powers and the permanent members of UN Security Council, the U.S., Britain and France deliberately ignored the high authorities of the United Nations. Just one day ago, Secretary-General Guterres called for the creation of an independent panel that "could determine who used chemical weapons in Syria, as the absence of such a body increases the risks of a military escalation in a country already driven by confrontations and proxy wars." Yet, the three powers arrogantly rejected the appealing from international community.

Why the Trio acted so? Postulating his 'anthropo-geographic inversion' as a pattern in current international relations, professor Anis H. Bajrektarevic was predicative and accurate on the MENA dynamics: "... it is an absolute imperative for the external/peripheral powers to dominate such a pivotal geo-economic and geopolitical theater by simply keeping its center soft (e.g. by pre-empting, preventing or hindering the emancipation that might come through any indigenous socio-political modernization and economic diversification). This is the very same imperative that has remained a dominant rationale of inner European and Asian *machtpolitik* for centuries."

Professor concluded on instruments used, too:

### **"The Winner takes it all" – but, who is standing small ?**

In summary, Russia has appeared as a winner with dual identities: one is a defender of a small country worn by the 8-year civil war; other is a strong military power which has potentials to challenge the hegemony of the United States and its key allies. Although China did not openly align with Russia militarily, Beijing and Moscow once again insured their consensus on the Syria crisis. First, Russia alongside China and many other states denounced the military strikes on Syria by the US, UK and France as a violation of the basic principle of prohibition of use of force in international law and run contrary to the UN Charter. Second, the use of force against Syria on the ground of "punishing or retaliating against the use of chemical weapons" does not conform to international law. In this case, we shall not forget the precedent of the Iraqi issue. That historical lesson should be learned because it is very irresponsible to launch military strikes on a sovereign state on the ground of "presumption of guilt". Third, China and Russia are more convinced than ever before that they must deepen their strategic partnership of coordination in light of the latest U.S. national security report defined Beijing and Moscow as "global competitors". Because of this, Russia, working with China, Iran and many other states, is definitely able to challenge the United States and its key allies globally.





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## Economic Horizon

## Driving Tomorrow

### Self-Driving Cars and its (legal) future

**Dr. Andreas EUSTACCHIO\***

"The highly intriguing theory - supported by the extensive geological evidences including the bacteriological analysis of deep-laying hydrocarbons – about the abiotic nature of oil and its practically infinite recreation in the lower geological formations of earth was presented some 25 years ago. These fin-



dings were quickly dismissed, and the theory itself largely ignored and forgotten. The same happened with the highly elaborate plans of Nikola Tesla to exploit a natural geo-electrical phenomenon for the wireless transfers of high energy for free. Why? Infinity eliminates the premium of deeper psychologisation, as it does not necessitate any emotional attachment – something abundantly residing in nature cannot efficiently mobilize our present societies..."

Following the lines from the seminar work of prof. Anis H. Bajrektarevic on *Energy, Technology and Geopolitics*, let us present an interesting take on the E-cars, similar driverless technologies and its legal implications that will mark our near future.

\* \* \* \*

Self-driving cars react in a split second: quicker than even the most attentive driver. Self-driving cars don't get tired, they don't lose concentration or become aggressive; they're not bothered

by everyday problems and thoughts; they don't get hungry or develop headaches. Self-driving cars don't drink alcohol or drive under the influence of drugs. In short, human error, the number one cause of road traffic accidents, could be made a thing of the past in one fell swoop if manual driving were to be banned immediately. Is that right? It would be, if there hadn't recently been reports about two deaths, one during the test drive for a self-driving car (UBER) and one while a semi-autonomous vehicle was driving on a motorway and using its lane assist system (Tesla), both of which regrettably occurred in the USA in March 2018. In Tesla's case it seems that the semi-autonomous driving assistant was switched off at the moment of the accident.

Around the globe, people die every day due to careless driving, with around 90% of all accidents caused by human error and just a small percentage due to a technical fault related to the vehicle. Despite human error, we have not banned driving on these grounds. Two accidents with fatal consequences involving autonomous vehicles being test-driven have attracted the full glare of the media spotlight, and call into question the technical development of a rapidly progressing industry. Are self-driving cars now just hype, or a trend that cannot be contained, despite every additional human life that is lost as a result of mistakes made by self-driving technology?

\* **Dr. Andreas EUSTACCHIO** LL.M. (London LSE), the Vienna-based attorney-at-law; born in Zambia.

### The legal side

For many, the thought that fully autonomous vehicles (a self-driving car without a driver) might exist in the future is rather unsettling. The two recent deaths in the USA resulting from (semi-) autonomous cars have, rather, may cause fear for others. From a legal perspective, it makes no difference whatsoever for the injured party whether the accident was caused by a careless human or technology that was functioning inadequately. The reason for the line drawn between the two, despite this fact, is probably that every human error represents a separate accident, whereas the failure or malfunction of technology cannot be seen as a one-off: rather, understandably and probably correctly, it is viewed as a system error or series error caused by a certain technology available at a particular point in time.

From a legal angle, a technical defect generally also represents a design defect that affects the entire run of a particular vehicle range. Deaths caused by software malfunctions cause people to quickly lose trust in other vehicles equipped with the same faulty software. Conversely, if a drunk driver injures or kills another road user, it is not assumed that the majority of other drivers (or all of them) could potentially cause accidents due to the influence of alcohol.

### The desirability side

The fundamental question for all technological



developments is this: do people want self-driving cars?

When we talk of self-driving (or autonomous) vehicles, we mean machines guided by computers. On-board computers are common practice in aviation, without the pilot him- or herself flying the plane – and from a statistical point of view, airplanes are the safest mode of transport. Couldn't cars become just as safe? However, a comparison between planes and cars cannot be justified, due to the different user groups, the number of cars driven every day, and the constantly imminent risk of a collision with other road users, including pedestrians.

While driver assistance systems, such as lane assist, park assist or adaptive cruise control, can be found in many widespread models and are principally permitted and allowed in Europe, current legislation in Europe and also Austria only permits (semi-) autonomous vehicles to be used for test purposes. Additionally, in Austria these test drives can, inter alia, only take place



on motorways or with minibuses in an urban environment following specially marked routes (cf. the test drives with minibuses in the towns of Salzburg and Velden). Test drives have been carried out on Austria's roads in line with particular legal requirements for a little more than a year, and it has been necessary to have a person in the vehicle at all times. This person must be able to intervene immediately if an accident is on the horizon, to correct wrong steering by the computer or to get

the vehicle back under (human) control.

Indeed, under the legislation in the US states that do permit test drives, people still (currently) need to be inside the car (even before the two accidents mentioned above, California had announced a law that would have made it no longer necessary to have a person in the vehicle). As a result, three questions arise regarding the UBER accident which occurred during a test drive in the US state of Arizona, resulting in a fatal collision with a cyclist:

1. Could the person who was inside the vehicle to control it for safety reasons have activated the emergency brake and averted the collision with the cyclist who suddenly crossed the road?

2. Why did the sensors built into the car not recognize the cyclist in time?

3. Why did the vehicle not stick to the legal speed limit?

Currently, driving systems are being tested in Europe and the USA. In the USA, this can take place on national roads and, contrary to European legislation, also on urban streets. As long as we are still in the test phase we cannot talk of technically proven, let alone officially approved, driving systems. The technical development of self-driving cars, however, has already made it clear that legal responsibility is shifting away from the driver and towards vehicle manufacturers and software developers.

## Our Prospects

Whether, and when, self-driving cars could become an everyday phenomenon is greatly dependent on certain (future) questions:

- Are we right to expect absolute safety from self-driving cars?
- What decisions should self-driving cars make in the event that one life can only be saved at the cost of another?
- How should this dilemma be resolved?

If artificial intelligence (AI) and self-learning systems could also be included within the technology for self-driving cars, vehicles of this type might possibly become one day *“humanoid robots on four wheels”*, but they could not be compared to a human being with particular notions of value and morality. If every individual personally bears responsibility for their intuitive behavior in a specific accident situation, the limits of our legal system are laid bare if algorithms using huge quantities of data make decisions in advance for a subsequent accident situation: these decisions can no longer be wholly ascribed to a particular person or software developer if a self-driving car is involved. It will be our task as lawyers to offer legal support to legislators as they attempt to meet these challenges.





The Secret Services of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and Security Issues

## Considerations concerning surprise in the conflicts between the great powers

**Dr. Octavian DUMITRESCU**

Surprise is one of the themes that has permanently characterized military actions and armed conflicts, being a key concern of the leaders with security responsibilities and, equally, of the professionals and analysts in this field. Surprise is as old as war is human evolution. The evolution of the military in general and especially of the modern armed conflicts has induced a special attention on this concept, or rather on the complex of concepts referring to military actions, an attention coming from both the political and military decision makers and the military leaders of many countries, particularly of the major powers. Experts say that surprise, and in fact achieving it, can be considered a major risk factor in armed conflict due to what it can cause to the surprised party. At the same time, surprise is a factor of success for whoever realizes it at the detriment of the surprised one. The complexity of surprise and of the effects it produces, especially the effects of achieving it increase significantly during the confrontation between alliances or coalitions, which usually include the contemporary great powers, the great security players.

Surprise can be achieved at all the levels of the armed conflict - tactical, operational and strategic - and in all the areas of military activity, especially in the technical/technological, scientific and conceptual ones, in doctrines, strategies or tactics. In principle, it is not excluded from any field or component of the military domain. A recent report by the **Center for Strategic and International Studies** (CSIS) entitled *Coping with Surprise in Great Power Conflicts*, signed by Mark F. Cancian (February 2018), analyzes in sufficient detail and examples the issue of surprise in possible conflicts between the great powers, confined to the strategic level of the armed confrontation. The report outlines some of the com-

ponents of this complex concept, **analyzed from the point of view of the situation and security interests of the United States**, the history and experience of the US armed forces, with many examples from the past military history of the world. This article is mostly based on information contained in the report of the CSIS, but it also includes the author's opinions resulting from his experience as military expert.

The analysis is based on the view that *"the military have a set of expectations as to how conflicts will start, how will technologies work, how will they conduct battles and who will be involved"* so that, based on these expectations, the military leaders and the senior national security officials could implement the best tools in order to achieve success in a potential confrontation. In this process, there are many unknown factors and uncertainties that may lead to the surprise the opponent and its inability to avoid surprise. In brief, surprise occurs when the events are contrary to the expectations of the victim and it gives the opposing party an important advantage.

In the current global security environment, the vulnerabilities that may cause surprise in armed conflicts are caused by the emergence of new better prepared competitors, the dominance in information, the repeated and frequent changes and the technologies used in armed conflicts which may significantly change the military actions, the use of strategies, tactics and new processes of preparation and conduct of conflicts and last-minute changes in military diplomacy or of another type (ex. economic one) that change the situation or the composition of the opponent or of the opposing coalition.

After all, **surprise is achieved when the opponent's expectations are not realistic and the opposing party achieves an important ad-**

**vantage**, even if the surprised party is ultimately trying to counter the novelty that the opponent has put into the confrontation. It is important to emphasize that surprise is not usually absolute, it manifests itself partly, in certain areas and it is difficult to be avoided when the conditions are averse to the opponent. *There are several factors that contribute to the achievement of surprise*, such as the secrecy of the preparatory and preliminary measures of the armed actions; the limits of the information systems; the inherent difficulties in the predictability of the future; the peculiarities or the weaknesses of the human factor; the wit of the opponent; the reliability and consideration of warnings; the vulnerabilities of the forces in the destructive environment of the armed conflict.

The important key in **avoiding surprise** is **anticipation**, *in a credible and realistic manner, of the threats and dangers, their acknowledgement by important policy makers and the preparation for military actions by the institutions involved*. Of course each party involved in an armed conflict intends to achieve surprise as often as possible, but often it occurs as a result of certain uncertainties inherent in war, sometimes even due to the own forces, for example when the own weapons and equipment based on modern technologies are not as powerful as one of the belligerents expected or when the doctrines, strategies or tactics are not at the level required in the respective confrontation.

**The importance of surprise** in the possible confrontations between the great powers, especially at the strategic level, stems from the fact that it may have *significant* effects on the course of combat actions by the *advantage* created to the party that creates it, by the *psychological nature* of possible effects that may demoralize or sometimes even paralyze the opposing forces. At the same time, it is necessary to emphasize that achieving surprise does not always guarantee success, sometimes the victim may have sufficient resources (human, material, information or technology) so that it can remove the effects of surprise, recover and eventually win the confrontation. However, for the victim is significant that achieving surprise may be important in

terms of the human and material losses, the negative echo in the public opinion and in the own national institutions. Therefore, it is better to avoid surprise by the decisions of the political and military leaders concerning the plans of the friendly forces, the analysis of the situation in terms of national and international security, the analysis of the contemporary military phenomenon and of the armed conflicts in the world and of the trends of their development.

According to the author of the CSIS report mentioned above, surprise can occur in four forms, depending on the area to which it relates, as follows: **strategic** surprise, **technological** surprise, **doctrinal** surprise and **diplomatic** or **political** surprise. The CSIS study analysis is limited to the national strategic level of the concept, with direct reference to the United States of America, but, it does not exclude the operational and tactical levels of military actions, as it does not exclude other areas outside the military. As a result, the current article is structured in the same way.

**Strategic surprise** is most common in the analyses of experts and it worries the most the political and military leaders of states and national and international security institutions. The first step in addressing this concept must be the *analysis of the risks* that may arise from the possible opponent, whose results must stand at the foundation of the plans for war or of the possible war actions. Of course the opponent will go through the same process, but his conclusions may be opposite or contrary. What the own decision makers consider to be rational and justified, the representatives of the opponent may find as irrational or illogical, therefore this phase requires great care in the study of the data and information about the opponent and the just appreciation of its combat capabilities.

The risk analysis process must include the formulation of alternatives and the constraints that may exist in the possible confrontation, the links between the friendly and the enemy activities, the way in which they bring advantages or not, as well as the differences in culture and perception between the two possible opponents, ele-

ments that can influence the course of actions and the enemy's combat capabilities. Usually, the opponents use the surprise attack to achieve quick victory, without important losses and long-term sufferance, in other words, to minimize the possible cost of the predicted actions taken against the opponent and thus, to attract the appreciation of the people for the actions taken in battle. Moreover, many policy makers and military leaders often find that if they invest heavily in high-tech weapons and equipment, they automatically bring advantages in military operations and the advantage can be used to launch shock and surprise. History offers sufficient examples that lead to this conclusion – the blitzkrieg, the conflict in the Falklands, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait etc - and situations where the surprise achieved in the initial phase of the conflict did not ensure the final victory. If the initial shock caused by surprise is absorbed and, subsequently, its effects are counteracted by the victim, it is possible that the final outcome of the conflict be different.

An important part of the effects of shock caused by the use of surprise is reflected on the political or military decision-makers and in this case the most important issue is not related to warning information but to the inability of policymakers to believe what happened, although it is never possible that a full-scale attack to be completely hidden, especially with the current advanced technology of reconnaissance, surveillance and warning. There are usually *visible indications denoting preparations for an attack* of the enemy: visible movements of troops, extended mobilization measures, enhanced reconnaissance, intensified espionage, exacerbated public statements accusing the opponent and more. Even in the case of long-distance strikes with cruise and intercontinental missiles, or in the case of possible cyber or space attacks, the actions prior to the confrontation cannot be completely undetectable. Important visible actions are necessary for a successful surprise attack, such as repositioning specific platforms, the garrison staff retention, increasing the number of people providing permanence in work on monitoring and early warning or changing the oper-

ating mode of the public institutions.

Although in some cases there were sufficient indications of a strategic attack, high-level decision makers did not believe that the attack was imminent by the day and as a result, they failed to take appropriate action. The result was disastrous. Here are some examples: the German attack on the USSR (1941) in spite of the alliance agreements between the parties, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia (1968), the Arab attack on Israel (1973) and others. Although in these cases there was sufficient strategic information that demonstrated the imminence of strategic surprise, although analyses clearly showed what was going to happen, responsible state authorities at the highest level have not accepted the idea and failed to take appropriate measures in time, so that the achievement of strategic surprise came true. In other cases, despite the strategic information acquired and processed on time, they were not convincing or were insufficient and lacked tactical information. It is the case of the terrorist attacks in the US (September 2011) on the twin towers and the building of the Pentagon when the possibility of future attacks was known, but there was no clear information about the place and time of the attack and especially about the attackers' operating plans and no preventive action was taken, which led to a strategic surprise of great effect.

**Technological surprise** is another kind of surprise which refers to the differences between the performance of new tools in battle and the expectations people have from the modern capabilities which produces strategic effects. This form of surprise appears, on the one hand, when the opponent's ability has not been anticipated or has been underrated or wronged and, on the other hand, when friendly technologies are not performing as planners expected or as it has been demonstrated during the prior exercises. Nevertheless, it is very unlikely to achieve absolute and complete technological surprise because it is not possible to keep secret all the aspects related to the enemy's technologies or to an absolute technological revolution.

**Surprise determined by the enemy's technology** is achieved due to the insufficient assessment or knowledge of the opponent's level of armament and equipment technology, procedures and tactics used by the enemy in the expected confrontation. It could equally be an inappropriate response to the actions of the enemy forces on the battlefield, in which case, the effects of achieving surprise may be more easily absorbed and mitigated, making them temporary until the correction of errors and the deployment of appropriate actions to fight against the opponent. In *the conflicts between great powers*, technological surprise may be decisive for victory or it can create some tactical advantages of such magnitude so as to determine strategic effects. In case of a confrontation between a great power and a regional power, technological surprise can be decisive due to the potential overwhelming effects for the victim, which would not give it the possibility to react to the actions of the great powers and thus lose the confrontation.

Another aspect of technological surprise is related to *the complexity of deploying new technologies in the military*. In some cases, an opponent can use one system with advanced technology in all the military forces involved in the conflict, in which situation the effects of the technological surprise can have a strategic character and could significantly modify the outcome of the armed confrontation. Equally, there can be situations when a strategic player deploys multiple systems with innovative technologies in several branches or forces (air, navy, space and nuclear, for example), in which situation the effects can be decisive for the outcome of the armed confrontation. However, in the latter case, *major investments* are needed for the procurement of innovative technologies, the production of advanced equipment and its implementation within most of the forces involved.

The fact is that any of these types of technological surprise has important effects for only a short period of time, because since the new technology was used, the opponent begins to understand it and designs technologies to counteract it, bringing in time the reasonable or corre-

sponding countermeasures. There are several exceptions when a player can maintain for a longer period of time a surprise technological system – as it was the case of the “stealth” aircraft – simply because the opponent could not find the appropriate countermeasures, but in this case we cannot talk of a continuous technological surprise. For this reason, it is normal to make new investments even during the confrontation in order to introduce new models of technique or equipment in the equation of surprise, or, at least, to modernize the existing ones and enhance their combat capabilities.

Some analysts argue that technological surprise usually does not have major effects on the balance of forces; the effects are rather minor and on the short term, without significant weight to the outcome of the confrontation. They give more importance to the *intelligent combination of different ways of combat*, of the modern forces such as the special ones, cyber or space forces, as well to the bold implementation of the traditional and modern forms of confrontation, adapting them to the conditions of the battlefield.

**Surprise caused by the failure of friendly technology** is as important as surprise caused by the technology of the opponent and it occurs when friendly weapons and equipment do not operate at the expected performance of own specialists or in accordance with the results obtained at the experiments carried out before the confrontation. There are numerous such examples throughout history: in the Second World War, some American submarine torpedoes failed to function normally due to a magnetic detonator and they created confusion among the crew, even contradictions between them and the manufacturers; some American air-to-air missiles used in the Vietnam War had a real impact probability of 8 percent, as compared to 70 percent as was expected, given the complexity of the sensitive equipment and the deficiencies in the training of the pilots; lighter than air vehicles (the name is from the years 1920 to 1930), although have produced huge expectations and have been used in speculative Jules Verne-type fictions, did not prove to be sufficiently robust to



revolutionize the war and had a modest role in the Second World War. *The effects of surprise caused by the inefficiency of own weapons and equipment* are important, creating suspicion and disappointment among the troops and even serious resentment. The inefficiency or failure of the armament and equipment can create additional vulnerabilities to the friendly forces involved in the conflict.

As resulted from the CSIS report presented above, three aspects are considered to be **the current vulnerabilities of the technological surprise**: *the intensity and the high level of classification in the enemy's investment; the high performance of the technologies used by the enemy; the weak performance of the technology used by the friendly forces.* The first aspect seems to be well secured against the collection of information; the second area can be identified only during the confrontation, as it is the case of the third one, which sometimes remains unknown even after the confrontation, being hardly accepted officially or admitted by the decision makers. In the first case, the most significant domain is the cyberspace, where it is difficult to identify when and how a surprise attack will happen, and therefore, the effects are considerable and difficult to counteract. It is known that hackers can attack civilian and military communications, databases or institutions and corporations and we consider that they will soon attack military weapon systems and equipment, which are increasingly dependent on the cyber component. The possibility of attacks on systems based on lasers may create new vulnerabilities. Uncertainty and complexity in the domain of surprise in the cyber world denotes the difficulty of timely combating cyber attacks and the multitude of possible effects, particularly in the military domain.

When referring to the surprise caused by *the vulnerability of the high-tech systems*, it appears that the new combat capabilities are more advanced than the previous ones, but they are exposed to surprise attacks that could ultimately even make them inoperable. We illustrate with the space actions, which are exposed to cyber attacks with maximum effects, both in terms of

the proper functioning of the specific means and in terms of amending the data on which these means carry out attacks against the targets. The same situation can apply in the case of autonomous fighting vehicles and missile defense systems, hypersonic aircraft, submarines, communications of all types, high-precision ammunition and means using such ammunition for hitting enemy targets located far away. The vulnerability to surprise attacks of the combative capabilities has increased as they have become more advanced; using high technology and they increased their dependence on sophisticated cyber components.

*The vulnerabilities caused by the failure of friendly technologies* can lead to a large extent to the state of surprise, given the increasing dependence of the technology and military equipment to the advanced technologies. In this case, one of the components is coming from the increasing level of cyber technology, whose vulnerability we have discussed above. On the other hand, major failures are possible in terms of the new technologies insufficiently known or of the insufficient training of the personnel involved or the reduction of performance in the case of actions carried out in a different environment than the one where the new equipment has been tested. A change of location may reduce the performance or efficiency of weapons, ammunition or sophisticated communications. An example is the GPS system that stands at the basis of a lot of systems and military equipment; it works great at peace time, but in war conditions it may be vulnerable due to the system of interference which can affect the GPS satellites, even if these satellites do not become targets of the enemy, but only due to the changes of the conditions in which the system is operating to its full potential.

In conclusion, we emphasize the fact that in general technological surprise is a significant component of the concepts related to this objective, that its importance is growing as technologies used become more modern and more sophisticated.

**Doctrinal surprise** is the third form of sur-

prise referring to the **usage of the known capabilities in a manner unknown to the enemy**, which can produce new and significant effects. The way new and old weapons systems are combined may surprise the opponent. The strategies and tactics officially adopted in peacetime provide the basis for the use of weapons and equipment with modern technologies in order to obtain some destructive effects on the enemy forces, even if alone they are not sufficient. Strategies are detailed in tactics, procedures and concrete ways to fight, which bring a significant chance of success. Doctrinal surprise is mostly based on technological surprise, which provides the achievement conditions, but without the involvement of the human factor in the implementation of new concepts and procedures, based on new technologies, it is difficult to surprise the enemy.

*According to the CSIS report, there are **five ways of achieving doctrinal surprise**: the implementation of innovative combinations of the existing combat capabilities and technologies; the attack of the so-called "safe spaces"; the breaking of the taboos; the blurring of the separation line between peace and war; the failure of the own doctrine.* It is expected that, in the event of armed confrontation, these ways of achieving surprise cannot be separated, the military and political leaders ultimately deciding how to achieve the desired level of surprise, the manner in which enemy targets and objectives are hit so as to correspond to the intentions of the opposing party.

**a. The innovative combination of capabilities and technologies** consists in choosing the most appropriate methods and weapons to damage the opposing forces, communications and logistical elements and their use in a manner unexpected to the opponent at unexpected times during the armed confrontation. The unexpected smart combination can surprise the enemy and can produce significant results. An unexpected combination of forces and means involved in battle can greatly reduce the adversary's capacity to react and consequently it may create an important advantage and the achievement of the goal in battle, the seizure of some important objectives for the outcome of the confrontation and

at the end, the victory. There are numerous examples in military history and the reader can find them in the specialized literature.

**b. The attack of the "safe areas"** aims at achieving surprise by choosing objectives considered as intangible by the opponent, for whose safety the most severe measures have been taken. In this sense, the study mentioned here includes the assassination of the adversary leadership, information compromise and direct attacks on the adversary's homeland. Of course, the removal of important people from the equation of strategic leadership (but not only at this level) can induce a state of panic into the adversary's forces and population, especially if the annihilated person is a special public figure, a high-value target with a symbolic value for the opponent, whose loss can be assessed as leading to failure. Surprise in this situation may decrease the courage, devotion and dedication of the fighters, but it can also trigger a most severe and fierce fight to cancel the effects of surprise and restore the morale of the enemy forces. On the other hand, the compromise of the information is not an unusual problem given the evolution of the cyber means and techniques used to break electronic systems. At present, it has become common that both civilian and military electronic systems be broken by hackers, sometimes for mere satisfaction and to demonstrate the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of these systems, and at other times to come into the possession of important data and information about the security of the targeted countries and institutions of the adversary. The effects can be disastrous in some instances, especially if it is about the information on military institutions. The direct attack on enemy territory is the classic situation for the initial stage of the conflict and may have significant effects if the attacker calls the special forces and special weapons unknown by the opponent.

**c. Breaking the taboos** refers to the preparation and conduct of military or non military actions which would produce important effects and would lead to the surprise of the opponent. Suicide has become a rare military tactic, at first by the Japanese kamikaze and later, as some groups have left the rules of the state actors, this

has become more common in the confrontation with the forces of own countries or with the forces of other states or global security players to achieve their goals and capture the territories of other states and proclaim new countries, as was the case with the ISIS. Some of these forms have originally appeared unrelated to the armed conflict, such as the suicide attacks widely practiced by terrorist groups, others were "experienced" in the confrontations between the big global players. This second category includes the use of nuclear, chemical, biological and bacteriological weapons, the violation of traditional principles and rules that have been respected for long periods of time or often assumed by means of mutual deterrence, such as the treaty reducing conventional arms and the nuclear weapons. Some form of terrorist attack against the peaceful population is not excluded for the success of the military opponent's specific claims about territorial demands or the control of some important region. Not ruled out the use of some form of terrorist attack on the peaceful population for the success of specific claims military opponent on territorial concession or acquisition of control of important regions.

**d. *Blurring the line between peace and war*** is increasingly frequent at present when looking for ways to circumvent international laws and regulations in order to achieve goals. Thus, the players interested in resolving less plausible claims approach the victims without triggering the classic actions of using armed force and use both native dissatisfied or paid elements (people from the victim country) in subversive actions in order to form a critical group which can be called to achieve goals. This is how the so-called "gray areas" appeared, where individuals without uniform or military insignia are operating, being able to create confusion and agitation among citizens, claiming the complaints and, if necessary, carrying out armed actions against the local institutions. Such actions are sometimes called hybrid war. We exemplify with the annexation of Crimea to the Russian Federation, where direct military force was not used and the goal was achieved without military action and, equally plausible, the actions in the regions of

eastern Ukraine. In the armed conflicts in which the major powers are involved, the opposing powers can operate indirectly in order to counter the achievement of the goals and support in different ways the opposing players (with weapons, ammunition, logistics etc.) so that they face the great pressure of the great enemy power.

**e. *The failure of the own doctrine*** may lead to surprise due to the deficiencies in the analysis and experimentation of doctrines at peacetime or to their poor implementation. It is also possible that the experimentation in the conditions existing at peace time have not revealed certain weaknesses of the doctrine and that they emerge at war, in which case it is difficult to fix the shortcomings. The implementation of a new doctrine involves the provision of a complex of interactions and bodies, the quality of the human factor, along with the new technologies, all under the stress conditions existing during an armed confrontation. The uncertainty created by the insufficient good experimentation creates significant vulnerabilities and the effects of surprise are extremely difficult to remove. On the other hand, policy makers - military and civilian alike - are highly important in determining the correct duration and intensity of the armed confrontation in order to eliminate - from the very start - the deficiencies in the prolongation of the human efforts, in the provision of a long term multilateral logistics. The incorrect assessment of the duration and intensity of the conflict depends largely on the political and military factors at a strategic level and it can lead to the temporary or permanent loss of initiative, but also to significant human and material losses. An exaggerated optimism or the underestimation of the opponent's capabilities can be serious obstacles to reaching the state of surprise and, therefore, they can create conditions for defeat. A realistic estimation of these factors of the confrontation must simultaneously include the opponent's ability to meet its own actions, not to change the course of action in its favor or not to take initiative on the battlefield, which would be great surprise for own forces, respectively the achievement of strategic surprise of the own forces.



Political and/or diplomatic surprise is defined by the unexpected attitude of the allied or enemy countries with major effects on the balance of forces. This unexpected realignment can occur at anytime, be it at peacetime or at wartime, but it stands out most if it happens during the confrontation because it has immediate effects. The greatest significance of the political or diplomatic surprise occurs if it takes place during the conflict and this situation is the most common. The CSIS study mentioned above brings into focus some situations in the history of the modern alliances where the political and diplomatic surprise had major effects. The most interesting case of this kind was the way in which the Nazi Germany attacked the forces of the Soviet Union, though there was an agreement between them – the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact – which shocked the whole world and produced effects after 23 August 1939, when Germany invaded Poland and the Soviet Union occupied the Baltic states and parts of Poland and Romania. And yet, in these circumstances, in 1941, despite numerous warnings, Stalin refused to believe that Hitler would attack the Soviet forces, which led to a poor reaction of the Soviet forces and at the loss of much of the Soviet territory so that the German troops quickly and easily reached Moscow, where, with huge efforts and losses for the USSR, have finally been stopped and subsequently bounced to the east. The significant diplomatic surprise occurred when Romania left the alliance with Germany and turned weapons against it, which enormously impacted the developments in the military actions after 23 August 1944 and the final defeat of the Nazi Germany. Although the significance of this act of great courage for Romania has been diminished during the peace talks and after the military operations, the history of mankind will always give this surprising act during the Second World War its deserved place.

There are other cases of political and diplomatic surprise in the more recent history of the world. The CSIS study mentions the situation that occurred during the Cold War when France withdrew from the NATO headquarters (1966), or in the case of the former Warsaw Treaty,

when the involvement of the Poland or of the Czech Republic in the operations of the alliance was not certain. Situations of uncertainty also existed in the case of the most recent regional conflicts, when France refused to participate in the establishment of the international force attacking Iraq in 2003 and when Turkey refused at the very last moment to allow the access of the US forces. Although the military component of these confrontations is the most affected by the surprising change in the balance of forces, these rapid changes are usually not taken into account in advance by the military planners, though the analysis and calculations must be redone after they occur, so as to avoid the possible effects of surprise.

Political or diplomatic surprise is directly linked to the realism of the politicians and to their own interests. Some realistic experts shows that the internal state of a nation is determined by the interest in security and power and that idealism does not have an important role, while the internal structure of the state has a reduced relevance to the international world. They also argue that alliances are temporary “marriages of convenience”; that they always act in line with their own interests that do not subordinate to the interests of other states. Of course there are long-term alliances, such as NATO, whose members proved realistic and confident in the choice of being included in the alliance, on the one hand, but we mention the fundamental values, the seriousness and the depth of the long-term members of the alliance, the realism in the provisions of the Treaty, the combat power and capabilities of the alliance and of the allied partners, on the other hand.

Approaching the profound levels of political and diplomatic surprise, the authors of the CSIS study consider that if diplomatic surprise appears in the external relations of a nation, political surprise occurs in its internal relations. Sometimes, it appears that certain internal political fractures may underlie the beginning of a conflict through a diplomatic alignment that can be established by the political leaders. Surprise may thus occur, with serious effects for the victim society, due to the internal political fracture,

while the society is being exposed to internal and external risks. The party which is in opposition may trigger anti-war political movements, which will expose again society to major risks.

In the context of the conflicts between the great powers, there are known vulnerabilities that can occur for the countries involved in the alliances with the great powers. For example, the United States must have allies in all regions where it has interests to defend, but the large distances to the American territory requires it to displace significant amounts of weapons, ammunition and logistics near the regions of interest and for that purpose it has allies in these regions. In turn, these allied countries become vulnerable to US adversaries in these regions, being considered enemies of the US enemies.

**The complexity of surprise in armed conflicts between the great powers can be found in the aspects summarized above.** The theme cannot be fully presented; a complete analysis would be as complex and ample as the issue itself. Having many components, surprise in the confrontations between the great powers is one of the themes of modern conflicts, most often occurring and being solved in surprise. Many of the events of the recent decades that have changed the world map have had this fate. We mention here the example of the Soviet Union, the giant state stretching on two continents and up to the Arctic Ocean to the north, which marked the twentieth century and whose traces are still evident. Although there have been early signs of the phenomenon, **the disappearance of the USSR from the world map took place by surprise, quickly and without too many complications**, which proves that this state was created artificially by those who wanted endless power. The complications related to the existence of the USSR have been maintained and will proba-

bly remain for many years after its disappearance from history, but the complexity of the phenomena accompanying the surprise of this disappearance indicates the complexity of the existence of this state. The Soviet Union has not disappeared as a result of an armed confrontation between the great powers, but it happened because there were numerous internal and external conflict situations, both between the countries of the former Soviet empire and between the empire and the rest of the world. The struggle between the interests of the Soviet Union and the interests of other world powers has led - by different processes - to its surprising disappearance.

**In conclusion, we can say that surprise is a complex phenomenon that characterizes armed conflicts, especially between great powers, but it is not excluded to be found in any conflict, regional or global, strategic, operational or tactical, but also in doctrine, tactics and procedures used, as well as in the technological and political or diplomatic domains. We believe that surprise is not a phenomenon exclusively of the armed combat and can be found in any other field of human existence. Of course, the complexity, effects or ways of expression in every area are specific, depending on the peculiarities of the domain. Ultimately, surprise depends on the factors specific to the various domains and it has particular effects and consequences in each case.**





## The fight for the Artificial Intelligence, for geostrategic dominance

**Paul SÂNDULESCU**

*An unmanned systems future, really for almost every facet of our life, is inevitable. It is not going away, so we need to deal with it head-on.*

Brig. Gen. Frank Kelley, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Unmanned Systems

The Artificial Intelligence (AI), the upper level of the Information Technology (IT), and the next evolutionary step, is an active and increasingly important tool, and soon will be the leading spearhead of the change of the world order we are witnessing and taking part in. So it is no surprising that states are extremely interested and are investing heavily in this field, in a race for the most informational advance. That is until the moment of the Technological Singularity (which mankind seems not to care about, and of which it couldn't actually escape), when the human species shall be taken over.

The Artificial Intelligence applications in the Military aims at: replacing "frozen" software with systems that do not need to be refreshed periodically; using it in training systems (i.e. acting as unpredictable and adaptive adversaries); understanding photos and videos; facial recognition; augmented reality; Neuro-Linguistic Programming, to interact with humans using natural language; solving logistical problems; supporting war games; automating combat in the so-called manned-unmanned operations; speeding weapon development and optimization; identifying targets and non-combatants.

The difficulties of implementing the AI in the military field are due to the fact that the Military's current verification and validation process is meant for frozen software and is not suited to AIs that learn. It is extremely hard to trust a system that cannot be understood. For the AI, the data is critical, since learning AI depends criti-

cally on data. Because of this, tinted data, possibly from adversaries, might have fatal consequences.

If, 10 years ago, the US was by far the world leader in this domain, 3-5 years ago, the balance began to tilt toward China. The US is still seen as a global tech leader, but the gap fades with every passing day. Even before 2013, in China, more documents were published than in the US on deep learning technology through Artificial Neural Networks, software loosely modeled after the neuronal structure of the mammalian cerebral cortex, which allows Artificial Intelligence to move forward independently, because the software can learn and think by itself.

Country	2017	2012	Change
US	34%	41%	-7%
China	23%	10%	13%
UK	5%	5%	0%
Singapore	4%	2%	2%
Japan	4%	3%	1%
Australia	3%	6%	-3%
Canada	3%	3%	0%
India	2%	1%	1%
Hong Kong	2%	3%	-1%
Germany	2%	4%	-2%
France	2%	4%	-2%
Israel	2%	4%	-2%
Italy	2%	2%	0%
Other	10%	10%	0%

An idea of the current situation and the dynamics is given by looking at the share of researchers with papers presented at the Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AAAI) in 2017, by country.

China's goal, considered to be of key strategic importance for the next 10 years, and published in the form of a 28 page development roadmap released in July 2017, is clear: to become "the world's primary AI innovation center® by 6469. Beijing estimates its IT industry will grow to \$ 24 billion by 2020, and to \$ 63 billion by 2025.



Already in January, China announced that it plans to invest \$ 2.12 billion to build a park in the western Beijing for the development of the AI that will accommodate up to 400 enterprises and will bring an annual income of \$ 7.895 billion. And a Chinese province is committed to invest \$ 5 billion in the AI.

In the development roadmap I mentioned, the Chinese urged private, public and military firms to cooperate on national AI goals. Importantly, China attracts top AI professionals. Setting off major alarm bells was the 2017 departure of Microsoft global executive vice president Chinese Qi Lu to China's giant company Baidu. Besides his former position at the American company, Lu holds over 40 US patents in the AI field. Prior to Lu, another Chinese, Ya-Qin Zhang, left Microsoft in 2014, where he was corporate vice president and chairman of the Microsoft Asia-Pacific R&D, and he also joined Baidu where he is now president in charge of technology, emerging business, and global business operations.

At this time, the Chinese are using the Artificial Intelligence for online shopping (including the in-person facial recognition-based purchasing), cloud and quantum computing (Alibaba), medical diagnostics (Tencent), image and facial recognition (SenseTime), autonomous cars (Baidu), real-time language translation (iFlytek), swarm drone operations (entertainment and People's Liberation Army -PLA - surveillance), global ship tracking (PLA), satellite imagery fusion and analysis (PLA). As an example of the effectiveness the Chinese are using IA in tracking citizens, in the first week of the Lunar New Year travel rush, using facial recognition they arrested a half-dozen fugitives and more than two dozen others on charges of having fake identification.

The US focuses its AI efforts on the national defense issues, although the private companies are concerned only about their businesses. But whose AI systems will be used by the State and the Military, of course. It can be found at: Defense Department (sifting through drone footage), FBI (fingerprint database search), CIA (research in predictive analytics), Google/

Alphabet (autonomous cars, cloud computing, commercial use), Apple (voice and image recognition), Facebook (image recognition), Uber (autonomous cars), WallMart (commercial), Amazon (cloud computing, commercial), OpenAI (research and robotics), Microsoft (image and voice recognition), IBM (Watson and quantum computing), Nvidia (chipmaker, cloud computing, autonomous cars), Twilio (cloud software), Micron Technology (chipmaker), Intel (cloud computing, medical diagnostic imaging, fraud detection).

Fearing the Chinese offensive in the AI field, President Donald Trump blocked on March 12 the Singapore-based chipmaker Broadcom's proposed \$105 billion acquisition of the American wireless chip giant Qualcomm, justifying that the takeover *"threatens to impair the national security of the United States."* The taking over would allow Chinese tech giant Huawei to leap to the top of the global 5G industry.

In the battlefield, the Pentagon launched in April 2017 the Project Maven, whose integration began already in the fall in the war on ISIS. The idea is to automate the analysis of the of video feeds coming from large drones, and to fuse text, video, and virtually every potential source of data or information (*"social media posts, live-streaming diagnostic data off of jets, drones, and other aircraft, attainable whether data, pilot biophysical data from soldier-worn sensors, and more"*) together through AI, so as to identify the targets with great probability and timeliness. In the first week of use, the accuracy of the Maven system increased from 60% to 80%!

Russia is very incisive in using the AI to dominate the battlefield. *"The government has taken a very active role in trying to define how Artificial Intelligence, Unmanned Systems and High Tech Weapons are to be used,"* said Samuel Bendett, an analyst in Russian unmanned systems at the CNA Corp. think tank. *"The Ministry of Defense is taking the lead in that it's establishing centers; it's establishing all kinds of organizations within the MoD structure. It is now running Artificial Intelligence competitions to design and develop new technologies. It's encouraging military indus-*

*trial complex to step up and develop various artificial intelligence tools as well."*

For several years, Russia has steadily improved its ground combat robots. Last year, Kalashnikov Concern has announced it will produce "*a range of products based on neural networks*," including a "*fully automated combat mode*" that will identify and shoot at targets.

But, according to a document delivered by Moscow to the UN, it is "*inadmissible*" from its perspective to allow Artificial Intelligence to decide on the opening the fire without any human oversight. The intention of the Russians is commendable, but it remains to be seen whether they will still be able to maintain the option in the future.

Russia has already used AI for military purposes for data and imagery collection and analysis from the Black Sea to Syria; for object avoidance for unmanned aerial and ground combat systems; for swarm testing with various UAS.

In this evolution, the power growth of the large commercial corporations cannot be ignored. Their leverage is their financial force, which is colossal. To make an idea, if at the moment of landing on the Moon, the private companies played only the role of providers for the state institutions, at this moment they are picking up the baton, and are already overtaking the governments. On February 6th, SpaceX launched the world's most powerful rocket, Falcon Heavy. It can carry 150 metric tons on a low Earth orbit, while NASA's Saturn 5 (which transported people to the Moon) had a capacity of only 135 metric tons on a low Earth orbit. And the plans of the commercial companies are very big, surpassing those of the space agencies. They have Moon and Mars in their sights for starters.

It should not be forgotten at any moment that for the private companies, above all, only the financial prevail. Though, it couldn't be different in the today's globalization. But their lack of interest for the national issues has strong influences on the geostrategic balance.

For the time being, the forefront of the AI development is taken by the rapidly expanding commercial market for both air and

ground autonomous systems. This makes banning an autonomous technology for military use no longer an option, given the technologies available in the commercial sector will be far superior.

We are already witnessing a real race in the commercial sphere of autonomous systems development, strongly encouraged by the states, as we have seen above, in order to be used in the military field. Military autonomous systems development has been slow and incremental at best. It pales in comparison with the advances made in the commercial autonomous systems. There is a large disparity in commercial versus military R&D spending, and this has an effect on the types and quality of the autonomous systems that the Military incorporate into their systems.

Because the companies have by far more money and offer much higher salaries than the Militaries, highly skilled roboticists and related engineers, so important for defense and aerospace, migrate towards the commercial automotive or information and communication sectors. Most of the AI's progress has been due over the past five years to major US companies such as Google, Microsoft, Amazon, and Facebook. But, as I said, because they are interested only in the money, not the geostrategic considerations, they are already transferring much of the critical segments of R & D to other locations in other states, such as Toronto, London, Paris, Berlin Dresden, Tübingen (Germany) Aachen and Beijing.

The geostrategic interests of the states, the companies rush for profit-making, the comprehensible people's competition for having the best electronic devices and software, are impelling the Artificial Intelligence, without people taking into account the consequences even if they are very well documented. Does the human species have the seeds of self-destruction seeded deeply into its DNA? It seems so.



## Military Technology and Equipments, New Weapon Devices

### Type 055 Multirole Missile Destroyer (China) (NATO Renhai)



The Type 055 is a new class of multirole missile destroyer (DDG) for the PLA Navy. The U.S. DoD has referred to the vessel as 'Renhai' class and classified it as a missile cruiser (CG) rather than destroyer. With an estimated displacement of 10,000 t, the Type 055 is the largest surface combatant ever introduced by the PLA Navy. At least four hulls are built in Dalian and Shanghai, with the first-of-class launched at the Jiangnan Shipyard on 28 June 2017, and it enters service in 2018.

The Type 055 is equipped with a 128-cell (some sources suggested 112-cell) VLS, with two VLS grids are installed on the bow deck in front of the bridge and amidships forward of the helicopter hangar respectively. The VLS is capable of firing a range of missiles from its universal rectangle-shaped missile cells, using either a 'hot' or 'cold' launch method. Missiles that can be carried by the destroyer include the HHQ-9 long-range SAM, HHQ-16 medium-range SAM, HHQ-10 short-range SAM, YJ-18 anti-ship cruise missile (ASCM), and possibly the DF-10 land-attack cruise missile (LACM).

The Type 055 will be able to fire the **YJ-18** ASCM from its VLS. The YJ-18 has been developed from the Russian 3M-54E Club-S, an export variant of the 3M-54 Kalibr (SS-N-27 'Sizzler') anti-ship cruise missile (ASCM) used by the Rus-

sian Navy. Detailed information on the missile is not available but the 3M-54E missile can deliver a 200 kg warhead to a maximum range of 220 km (or 300 km on the 3M-54E1) at a speed of Mach 2.9 in the terminal stage of an engagement. The missile is powered by a turbojet engine and employs an inertial guidance plus terminal active radar-homing.

The main gun on the bow deck is an indigenous **H/PJ-45A** single-barrel 130 mm/70-calibre naval gun developed by Zhengzhou Institute of Machinery and Electronics (713 Institute) and built by the Second Inner Mongolia Machinery Plant (447 Factory).

The H/PJ-45A is modeled after (but not a direct copy of) the Russian AK-130 automatic naval gun, and can be operated in fully automatic mode from the radar control system, from the shipborne optical sighting system, or laid manually. The gun can fire 86.2 kg projectiles at a maximum rate of 40 rounds/min to a maximum range of 30 km.

The Type 055 is equipped with a new active phased array radar (APAR) system, consisting of four larger flat arrays working in the S/C-band, and four smaller arrays working in the X-band. The dual-band radar system incorporates a variety of functionalities including air/sea surveillance, target acquisition, and fire-control previously performed by different radar systems, avoiding electromagnetic interferences and allowing an integrated intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance (ISTAR) capability. The radar system is also believed to be capable of detecting ballistic missile targets and guiding missile interceptors, providing the Type 055 destroyer with the ballistic missile defense (BMD) capability.

The destroyer's propulsion is said to be in the form of COGOG, consisting of four indigenous gas turbines each rated at 40,230 hp (30 MW).

**Presented by Cornel VAIDA**



## The thermonuclear intercontinental ballistic missile RS-28 Sarmat (NATO Satan2)



The RS-28 Sarmat (NATO code Satan 2) is a Russian liquid-fueled, MIRV-equipped, super-heavy thermonuclear armed intercontinental ballistic missile. It is intended to replace the old R-36M missile (SS-18 *Satan*) and Russia has been developing it since 2009.

During Vladimir Putin's annual speech on Thursday, the Russian president played videos that unveiled brand-new nuclear weapons with startling capabilities.

Putin announced an "unstoppable" nuclear-powered "global cruise missile" that has "practically unlimited" range, then showed an animation of the device bobbing and weaving around the globe. He also played a computer animation of a high-speed, nuke-armed submarine drone blowing up ships and coastal targets.

Satan 2, which Putin claimed is already deployed in some missile silos, is slated to reach full service in 50 silos around 2020, and according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Satan 2 "is reported by Russian media as being able to carry 10 large warheads, 16

smaller ones, a combination of warheads and countermeasures, or up to 24 YU-74 hypersonic boost-glide vehicles."

That means one Satan 2 ICBM could pack as much as eight megatons of TNT-equivalent explosive power. That's more than 400 times as strong as either bomb the US dropped on Japan in 1945 — both of which, combined, led to roughly 150,000 casualties.

The technology used to deliver multiple warheads to different targets is called a "multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle," or MIRV. Such devices deploy their warheads after reaching speeds that can exceed 15,000 miles per hour. Depending on where the warhead is deployed in space and how it maneuvers, each one can strike targets hundreds of miles apart.

Judging by the official image, released in 2016, the RS-28 has many design features of the R-36M and might be actually an evolution of the R-36M, rather than a completely new design. The new missile uses upgraded electronics, guidance systems, countermeasures, and reportedly has more warhead options.

Most likely that the RS-28 Sarmat will use the same silos as the R-36M. These missile silos are located in dispersed locations across Russia. The silo launcher and command point are hardened against a nuclear explosion.

The new RS-28 Sarmat is a very capable ballistic missile because of its high speed and extremely high throw weight. In terms of weight and dimensions it is similar to the R-39M.

The RS-28 will have a range of at least 11 000 km. It is likely that with reduced payload this missile has even longer range. There was a version of the R-36M missile with a range of 16 000 km. The RS-28 Sarmat is able to employ multiple trajectories over the North Pole or South Pole, in order to reach targets in the United States.

Due to upgraded guidance systems this missile is much more accurate than the R-36M. It is estimated to have a 10 m CEP.

**Presented by Cornel VAIDA**

## Leading Articles, Studies and New Analyses

**Turkey: The Insane and the Melancholy****Author: Ece TEMELKURAN****Publisher: Corint Books, 2017**

Ece Temelkuran (born on 22 July in Izmir) is one of the most famous woman journalists and authors in Turkey, as well as a political editorialist. She was a columnist for Milliyet (200-2009) and Haberturk (2009-2012), TV anchor at Haberturk (2010-2011), but she was fired because she had criticized the Turkish government in several articles. Her opinions were also mirrored in the international media by publications such as The Guardian and Le Monde Diplomatique. Her volumes Deep Mountain: Across the Turkish-Armenian Divide (2010) and The Time of Mute Swans (2017) were also published in English. In 2008 she got the Aysenur Zarakolu Award for Freedom of Expression and Thought on behalf of the Human Rights Association.

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) reinvented a new logo: "This is a new Turkey, an advanced democracy" which has replaced Ataturk's "This is Turkey" all over the place. Opposing the party is just as dangerous as being against the concept of "great Turkey".

When AKP came to power, both Europe and the USA applauded them and said that "democracy has finally reached Turkey", as the party was seen as the perfect marriage between moderate Islam and democracy and therefore a model that could have worked in the Arab world.

Quite shortly afterwards, everyone noticed AKP were not at all what they

had been expected to be, as the army was gradually cut off from the political life of the country, the law was broken in quite a few political big cases where politicians and journalists were sentenced and charged they belonged to illegal organizations preparing coups.

AKP political and social movement "started" cancelling some of the old Turkish politics. The Kurdish initiative, the intellectual initiative, the Alawi initiative, the Romanian initiative have all become government targets. Some agreed to collaborate (the Alawites), and alternative solutions were found for the Romanian supporters and some of the Kurds. The ones who did not wish to settle were then called terrorists.

Very few understood the country was being pushed more and more into conservatorism, and certain laws against terrorism led towards a more obedient society. When the Constitution was modified, the AKP got full control over implementing the laws by eliminating some of the

prerogatives that belonged to other political and juridical mechanisms.

The book was written before 15 July 2016, when the coup happened in Turkey against the authoritarian Recep Erdogan Administration, so widely criticized for violations of civil rights and liberties. The military coup failed, but some 265 people died and about 50,000 people got suspended from their positions or got arrested, therefore there is still a great deal of concern regarding the stability of the Turkish constitutional system.

**Presented by Cornel VAIDA**



**STASILAND –****Stories from Behind the Berlin Wall****Author: Anna FUNDER****Publisher: Litera, București, 2017**

Anna Funder was born in Melbourne in 1966. She worked as a lawyer specialized on international law and he was also a radio and television producer. In 1966-1977 she was on her first scholarship and worked as a resident writer for the Australia Centre in Postdam (she then returned in 2000). Stasiland is Anna Funder's first work and it was published in 23 countries. The book was nominated for numerous literary awards in Australia and in the United Kingdom, including Age Book of the Year Award, Queensland Premier's Literary Awards, Guardian First Book Award, Index Freedom of Expression Awards and W.H. Heinemann Award. In June 2004, BBC Four awarded her the Samuel Johnson Prize. Anna Funder also wrote a novel – All That I Am. She lives in Sydney with her husband and her children.

The book is a collection of witness statements from people who agreed to talk about those times when they survived communism or they escaped to the West or they were caught or used as bates to capture some Western German citizens.

The Stasi (Staatssicherheit – State Security) was supporting the dictatorship in the Democratic republic of Germany (DRG) and they controlled every aspect of people's lives. The interviews in the book focused on people who were persecuted by this security agency because they had tried to escape to West Berlin or others tried to fight from within, as well as on several former Stasi members.

On pages 20-21 of the book the author writes that "Stasi was a domestic army used by the government to keep everything under control. Their business was to always know everything about everyone, using any means possible. (...) It was a metastatic bureaucracy that spread all over the East German society: in the open or not, there

was someone feeding info to the Stasi on their colleagues and friends in every school, in every factory, every building and every bar. (...) During their forty years of existence, the so-called "Firm" generated the same quantity of archives in the whole history of Germany, ever since the Middle Ages. Lined up together, the files Stasi opened on their own citizens would make a 180 kilometre-long line."

The facts described in there are terrifying: children separated from their parents, people vanished in the undergrounds of the Stasi, former employees who are doing great after 1990, etc.

A masterpiece. – Sunday Times

Lyrical, bitter, funny and sad, her writing allows several witnesses to get rid of the burden of the past for the second time. – The Observer

A fascinating book... I cannot think of a better introduction to the brutal reality of the repression in East Germany.– The Sunday Telegraph.

*Presented by Cornel VAIDA*



# STASILAND

POVEȘTI DIN SPATELE  
ZIDULUI BERLINULUI

ANNA FUNDER

CĂȘTIGĂTOARE A PREMIULUI SAMUEL JOHNSON PENTRU NONFICTIUNE  
CARTE APĂRUTĂ ÎN 23 DE ȚĂRI

KRONIKA





**Corneliu PIVARIU** - Director and Editor-in-Chief of the *Geostrategic Pulse*  
*President-General Director of INGEPO Consulting*

Author of books on strategic intelligence, terrorism and the situation in Iraq, of other studies and articles on the strategic information and the current geopolitical developments. Training on regional security at Harvard University-Kennedy School of Government. Member of the International Institute for Strategic Studies—London.



**Dumitru CHICAN**

*Ambassador, University Professor,  
Director for the Middle East at the Geostrategic Pulse*

An entire active career in the Romanian diplomacy, with permanent missions in numerous Arab countries. Other special missions abroad, such as Envoy of the Romanian Chief of State. One of the Romanian best experts in the Arabic language, the Arab culture and world. Author of several works and translations in and from Arabic, published in Romania and abroad. One of his latest books appeared in the UAE and was declared the best editorial issue at the International Book Fair in Sharjah and the best book



**Dr. Octavian DUMITRESCU**

*Director for the Black Sea Wider Area at the Geostrategic Pulse.*



**Cornel VAIDA** - Director INGEPO Consulting

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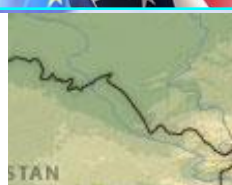


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