

GEOSTRATEGIC PULSE

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Motto: "OPINIONS ARE FREE, BUT NOT MANDATORY" I. L. CARAGIALE

The Transatlantic Link - Current and Future Significance.

NATO's Role in European Defence

**The Future of NATO: Adaptability and the Capacity
to Turn Crises into Opportunities**

Transnistria: 'Freezing' as the Lesser Evil

A New Approach to Serbia and Kosovo

I. EDITORIAL

3 From the Editor

- **Constantin IACOBÎȚĂ**



II. EURO-ATLANTIC SECURITY

5 The Transatlantic Link – Current and Future Significance. *Part 8 - NATO's Role in European Defence*

- **Gheorghe SAVU**



11 The Future of NATO: Adaptability and the Capacity to Turn Crises into Opportunities

- **Andreea STOIAN KARADELI**



15 The Importance of the *Black Sea and Balkans Security Forum 2019* to Current Security Issues – Military Mobility

- **Gabriel RILLA**

III. BLACK SEA – MEDITERRANEAN SEA AREA

17 Transnistria: ‘Freezing’ as the Lesser Evil

- **Vladimir SOCOR**



24 A New Approach to Serbia and Kosovo

- **Ben HODGES**



27 The Eastern Mediterranean: Turkey Between Cyprus’ Energy Resources and the Russian S-400

- **Dumitru CHICAN**



IV. INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

30 The United States – Iran: Neither Peace Nor War

- **Reza SHAHRESTANI**

33 Remember: “The Six Day War”

- **Dumitru CHICAN**

35 A new US Strategy in Syria?

- **Dumitru CHICAN**

38 “From Peace to Prosperity” via Bahrain

- **Dumitru CHICAN**



40 Economic Summer: the World from One “G” to Another

- **Dinu COSTESCU**

42 Malaysia – Yet Another Crisis Looming?

- **Murray HUNTER**



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

EDITORIAL**From the Editor**

Constantin IACOBÎȚĂ



During the 12th – 14th of June 2019, the small city of Mamaia (Constanta, Romania) hosted an already traditional event – “Black Sea and Balkans Security Forum.”

The third edition of security debates took place in a regional context predetermined by Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea, followed by an aggressive Russian behaviour in the Black Sea (most recently, the Kerch incident in November 2018).

One of the defining lines of the forum, mentioned by most speakers and unanimously supported, was the importance of regional unity on the matter of security, from different perspectives – national, regional, European, and transatlantic/Allied.

It was obvious though, from an observer’s point of view, that getting there proved challenging. And one of the many reasons for that was Turkey’s decision to purchase and operate S400 systems produced by Russia.

Nevertheless, the larger context in which the 2019 edition of the forum hosted by Romania took place was completed by an event with a significant, positive influence on the security of the Euro-Atlantic area in general, and of the Black Sea region in particular. It was the 70th anniversary of NATO, solemnized by the Foreign Affairs Ministerial which took place during the 3rd and 4th of April 2019, in Washington DC.

The event produced two relevant results:

- The Statement on the occasion of NATO's 70th Anniversary Issued by the NATO Foreign Ministers, that reaffirmed “the enduring transatlantic bond between Europe and



North America...and our bedrock commitment enshrined in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty that an attack against one Ally shall be considered an attack against us all". Moreover, the current security situation was described as "unpredictable and challenging, including a more aggressive Russia and a persistent threat of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, ... instability beyond our borders contributing to irregular migration, ... cyber and hybrid threats".

- The NATO Foreign Ministers agreed on a package meant to increase Allied presence and intensify activities in the Black Sea. As Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated, the package included "more surveillance exercises and other issues which we strongly believe are relevant for the Black Sea region. And, of course, also then working with our partners Georgia and Ukraine".

While mentioning two of the major components of the current Allied presence and activities in the region – the multinational task force in Romania and the air police forces, the Secretary General underlined that, the agreed package "shows that NATO has increased its presence in the Black Sea region with more naval presence".

The package agreed upon by the Ministerial in Washington DC emphasized, as did the Forum in Mamaia despite some diverging opinions, the Allied awareness of the way Russia sees the Black Sea region. Specifically, Russia sees the region as a geostrategic priority, and its objective is to dominate it and keep NATO under control.

It also underscored the Allied unity and the USA key role in achieving this unity. Finally, yet importantly, it institutes an example for the Black Sea region, and offers Romania an opportunity to develop its regional and Allied profile.



Meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers - 3-4 April 2019 - Washington, United States <https://www.nato.int>

EURO-ATLANTIC SECURITY



The Transatlantic Link - Current and Future Significance

Part 2, NATO's Role in European Defence

**Associate Prof. CEng PhD
Gheorghe SAVU²**

The transatlantic link takes various shapes and covers a large variety of domains. The most important of all is the defence of the Euro-Atlantic community. The concept of transatlantic link becomes meaningful with the signing of the North-Atlantic Treaty³ (Washington 4th of April 1949) and its inclusion in Article 5: *“The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.”*

Although the text of the Treaty doesn't refer to the transatlantic link directly, it is obvious that *“their efforts for collective defence in Europe and North America”* could only be accomplished within the context of the transatlantic relationship. From this point of view, it is worth mentioning the fact that the USA provides more than 70% of NATO's budget. In 2018 the USA spent 35.8 billion dollars for European defence and has now over 65,000 troops deployed on this

continent. Taking into account the large amounts of military equipment and technique stationed on European territory, one can certainly say that, due to the North America's involvement, the transatlantic link plays a decisive role in deterring and defending against any military aggression on allied European states.

Initially, the transatlantic link became part of the military experts' vocabulary out of the need to underline the role the two-way relationship between North-America and Europe plays in the collective defence of the North-Atlantic area. In time, even if the phrase remained the same, its meaning and content became more and more important to Euro-Atlantic security given the evolution of the international security, the political and military situation on both sides of the North Atlantic and, not least, the nature of relationships between NATO and the EU on one hand, and USA and European NATO/EU member states on the other hand. The geographical area of the transatlantic link, though, has gone through major changes. If the North-Atlantic Treaty collective defence concept has initially applied to NATO member states from Europe and North America, without referring to a distinct geographical area, it now sees its missions from a Euro-Atlantic perspective and the phrase *Euro-Atlantic security and defence* is used more and more often in the Alliance's official documents.

Thus, Article 3 of **NATO Strategic Concept for**

1. As mentioned in the previous article - *The Transatlantic Link - Current and Future Significance Part 1 - Challenges and Opportunities* (Geostrategic Pulse, no. 274/May-June 2019), the author continues his view on the transatlantic link focusing on NATO's role in European defence.

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3. North-Atlantic Treaty, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm.

the Defence and Security of Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization⁴, adopted at the NATO Summit in Lisbon (19th – 20th of November 2010) clearly defines the concepts of *transatlantic link* and *Euro-Atlantic area* as follows: *“The political and military bonds between Europe and North America have been forged in NATO since the Alliance was founded in 1949; the transatlantic link remains as strong, and as important to the preservation of Euro-Atlantic peace and security, as ever. The security of NATO members on both sides of the Atlantic is indivisible. We will continue to defend it together, on the basis of solidarity, shared purpose and fair burden-sharing.”* Moreover, the Strategic Concept introduces the phrases *Euro-Atlantic area* and *Euro-Atlantic partners*, thus defining NATO’s missions and values for a decade – 2010-2020, as the role the partner states play becomes more and more significant (Picture no. 1)

threats to the Euro-Atlantic area over the past two decades, the member states and NATO itself are more aware of the growing importance of the transatlantic link. The subject has become a subject on the agenda of every foreign and defence ministers meeting and NATO Summits as well, where declarations on the transatlantic link have very often been adopted. The declarations of the last two NATO Summits are very relevant in that respect:

- **The Warsaw Declaration on Transatlantic Security**⁶, issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council (Warsaw, 8-9 July 2016) states the following (Article 1): *„United by our enduring transatlantic bond, and our commitment to democracy, individual liberty, human rights and the rule of law, NATO will continue to strive for peace, security and stability in the whole of the Euro-Atlantic area, in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter.”.*

Given the more and more diverse risks and



Picture no. 1, NATO and its partner states⁵

4. NATO Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_publications/20120214_strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf

5. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_81136.htm

6. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133168.htm

- **The Brussels Declaration on Transatlantic Security and Solidarity**⁷ adopted at the NATO Summit in Brussels (18th of July 2018) gives the transatlantic link a security and solidarity perspective. Whereas before this Summit the transatlantic link was approached from the point of view of Euro-Atlantic security, as a continuation of the decision taken in the Wales Summit (4th – 5th of September 2014) to give 2% of GDP to defence, at the insistence of the USA and Great Britain, the transatlantic solidarity has been added to the concept. Thus, Article 71 of the Declaration stipulates the following: „NATO recognises the importance of a stronger and more capable European defence. The development of coherent, complementary and interoperable defence capabilities, avoiding unnecessary duplication, is key in our joint efforts to make the Euro-Atlantic area safer. Such efforts, including recent developments, will lead to a stronger NATO, help enhance our common security, contribute to transatlantic burden sharing, help deliver needed capabilities, and support an overall increase in defence spending.”

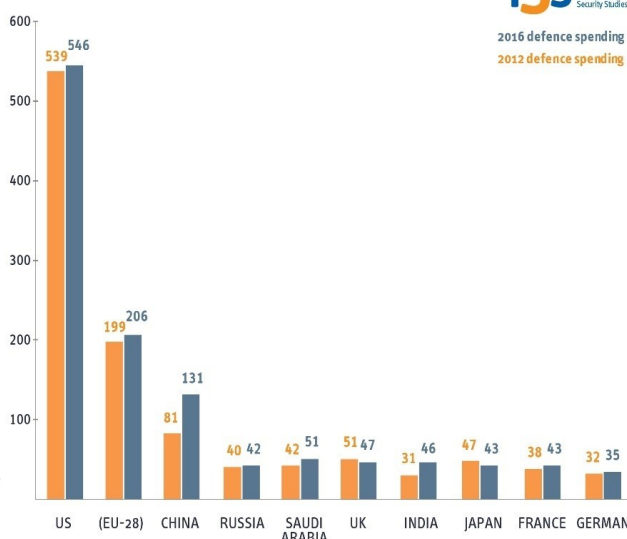
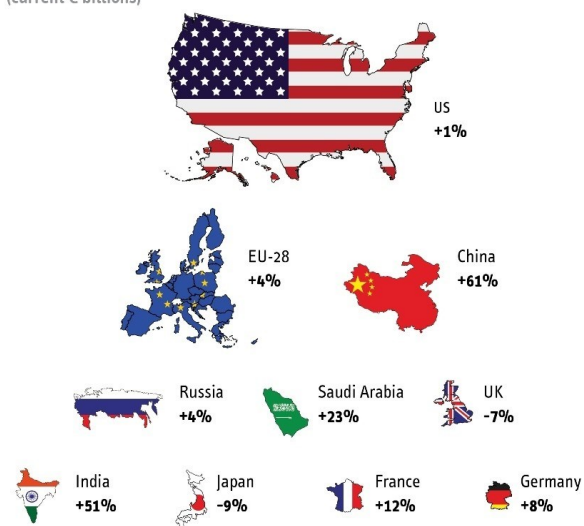
By reading the Strategic Concept and the two Declarations, one can draw the conclusion that **the transatlantic link maintains its relevance from the perspective of both European de-**

fence and security of the Euro-Atlantic area. Moreover, after 2014, the transatlantic link has been assigned a new dimension as a consequence of the measures taken by NATO and the EU in the fields of Euro-Atlantic defence and security. These measures are meant to strengthen the European member states defence capabilities, which will lead to greater defence responsibilities undertaken by the European allies. And they will contribute to a fairer distribution, between North America and Europe, of the budgetary efforts required by the Euro-Atlantic security and to a rise in the potential of European defence capabilities.

During the last three NATO Summits the USA permanently pressured its European allies to accomplish, by 2024, the two major objectives decided at the 2014 Summit: 1) 2% of GDP allocated to defence and 2) 20% of the defence budget is to be spent for defence equipment acquisition. This position of both Washington and London is definitely justified if we only take into account the fact that in 2017 the US defence expenditures amounted to 602.78 billion dollars, out of which 30.7 billion were allocated explicitly for direct expenses on USA’s military contribution to European defence. For comparison, the

Who are the largest defence spenders around the globe? (2012 vs 2016 levels)

(current € billions)



ISS European Institute for Security Studies
2016 defence spending
2012 defence spending

Data source: IISS Military Balance 2013/2017

© EU Institute for Security Studies

Picture no. 2, USA and EU Military Expenses

7. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156620.htm

defence expenses of the European allied member states amounted to 239.08 billion dollars while the defence expenses of the EU member states amounted to approximately 220 billion dollars (Picture no. 2). These figures represent the most relevant proof of the fact that European defence and security depend significantly on the consistency of the transatlantic link.

Following the terrorist attacks on the USA in 2001 and as a consequence of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine starting with 2014, NATO must face the serious deterioration of the security situation in its proximity and is facing now a series of risks and threats it has to deal with. Practically NATO is facing now security risks that are more dangerous and more difficult to fight against than during the Cold War. As a consequence of the Russian military aggression in the proximity of NATO's Eastern flank and of the hybrid, cyber, and terrorist threats against its member states and partners, the need to defend Europe is more pressing than ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is unanimously agreed that only NATO is capable of doing this, starting with investing in defence and undertaking decisions to thwart threats and defend Europe. This was the main subject on the agenda of the latest NATO Summits, starting with 2014, the Alliance taking the necessary steps to discourage any potential attacks against its European pillar and, if it comes to it, to defend its European Allies. Practically NATO is now capable, including through its cooperation with the EU, of deterring and defeating any threat to European security, conventional or unconventional. NATO member states are aware of the fact that Europe is currently up against an uncertain and unstable security environment that demands extra defence investments, development of proper military capabilities, contribution to NATO missions and operations, and consolidation of the partnerships with the EU and third parties.

The NATO Readiness Action Plan adopted at the Wales Summit (New Port September 2014) ensures the Alliance's capability to respond to any threat that endangers the security of NATO's territory, population, air and sea, especially its European side. Although the Plan covers the en-

tire Euro-Atlantic area, most measures taken until today are dedicated to European defence against Eastern and Southern threats, thus emphasizing NATO's crucial role in defending Europe. The measures that have been taken, including at the latest NATO Summit in 2018, enable the Alliance to benefit from the necessary capabilities to be in the right place at the right time, with a view to undertake deterrence and defence missions all over its territory. The Allied main focus is to defend the Eastern and Southern flanks, that have a direct impact on European security, and to fight against hybrid and cyber threats that affect all NATO member states.

Today, NATO's **enhanced forward presence** on the territory of its Eastern flank members is an important element of the European deterrence and defence and is based on four Multinational Battlegroups deployed in the Baltic States and Poland. They comprise almost of 4,500 troops from several Allied states and have the necessary equipment and logistics to undertake deterrence and defence missions together with the Armed Forces of the host nations (Picture no. 3). In addition to these, there are the Multinational Division Headquarters in Elblag (Poland) and Bucharest (Romania). Already fully operational, they have the role to plan, command and control the NATO forces at division level that would be deployed on the Eastern allied flank in crisis situations.

NATO Readiness Initiative adopted at the Brussels NATO Summit (11th -12th of July 2018) will ensure that the Alliance has well trained and equipped national forces. The level of readiness of these forces will allow them to engage in collective defence missions anywhere on the Allied territory, within 30 days. According to this Initiative, in addition to the rapid response forces already engaged through NATO's Readiness Action Plan, NATO member states will provide 30 naval combat vessels, 30 air squadrons, and 30 mechanised battalions along with the necessary warfare support. Their missions will be deterrence and defence anywhere on the Allied territory, including high-intensity war fighting and rapid intervention in crises. The measures to modernize the command structure and enhance



Picture no. 3, NATO Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltic States and Poland⁸

mobility are in various stages of implementation and their purpose is to ensure the rapid deployment of troops and equipment on NATO's European territory whether it is for training purposes, deterrence or in support of its members Armed Forces, in crisis situations.

One must underline the fact that NATO's new deterrence and defence posture ask all the member states to invest more in the fields of conventional forces, enhanced forward presence on the Eastern flank, joint air and maritime forces, defence intelligence, cyber-defence, countering hybrid threats, and in the preparation of its territory and population for defence. It is obvious that in many of these fields NATO and the EU must cooperate, as they agreed on over the past years. Already, after 2014, NATO and the EU have been cooperating to increase their military mobility in Europe, to coordinate their defence needs, to adapt their legislation on defence equipment and personnel border-crossing, and to inventory and modernize transportation infrastructure that can be used for deployment of troops. The EU is more open than ever to cooperating with

NATO, being fully aware that European defence can only be ensured by NATO. To support this statement, it is enough to know that, should a collective defence scenario be applied, NATO's enhanced forward presence is supported by its Rapid Reaction Force of approximately 40,000 troops.

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As shown in this article, NATO continues to demonstrate its capacity to ensure European peace and stability. Above anything else, the Alliance has been keeping European peace for 70 years. Confronted with a dynamic and complex international security environment, including in its proximity, starting with 2014 the Alliance has embarked upon a complex adaptation and transformation process, in order stay effective in the 21st Century too. Nowadays, NATO successfully accomplishes its three main tasks – collective defence, crisis management, and security through cooperation, thus ensuring deterrence and defence against potential adversaries, including by promoting stability and strengthen-

8. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_04/20190423_190423-MAP-eFP-flat-en.pdf

ing the resilience of its members from East and South. Thus, NATO continues to be the guarantor of peace and stability in Europe and, in cooperation with the EU, the most important source of stability in an international security environment characterised by unpredictability, as well as multiple and diverse challenges and threats from state and non-state actors, including terrorist, hybrid, and cyber attacks.

Facing conventional and asymmetrical threats that can seriously endanger European security, NATO has consolidated its European deterrence and defence capabilities including by deploying forces on its Eastern flank, by ensuring enhanced Allied presence in the Extended Black Sea Region, and by paying more attention to the Southern flank. It is worth mentioning the fact that NATO's European members are aware of the current threats to European security and have decided to increase their defence budgets in order to develop military capabilities that are necessary for both national and collective defence missions and participation in NATO led missions and operations. Taking into consideration the NATO-EU cooperation on development of military capabilities, we can speak about a joint effort of the two organizations to ensure European defence and security including by strengthening the transatlantic link.

The importance of the transatlantic link for European defence and security keeps on growing, as NATO and EU member states join forces and cooperate both bilaterally and multilaterally for deterrence and defence against any external threats they come up against. The transatlantic link is expected to be again an important issue on the agenda of the NATO Summit (London, December 2019), which will mark 70 years since the founding of the Alliance. According to Jens Stoltenberg, the NATO Secretary General, the Summit agenda will include, among other *"the security challenges NATO has to face at present and in the future and the measures it has to take to adapt continuously, in order to guarantee the freedom of almost one billion citizens"* of the member states.

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The Future of NATO: Adaptability and the Capacity to Turn Crises into Opportunities

Andreea STOIAN KARADELI¹

Humanity has been shaped through the hardest times when the moments of extreme crisis forced people to react rapidly, to change and, as a direct result, to evolve. This pattern has been proved not only by the past experiences of the individuals or the society, but also by the evolution of most of its institutionalized structures. This paper argues that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is now facing a great opportunity in a time of complex crises developing around the globe, both inside the organization among its members and outside of it. Among all the threats to the security of its allies, the refugees' problem provides a complex challenge for the organization to prove that it is able to adapt its role and strategy to a new context, not only by using its military power, but also by engaging its political side.

Over sixty years ago, in 1956, the foreign ministers of Canada, Italy and Norway prepared the 'Report of the Committee of Three on Non-Military Cooperation in NATO', arguing that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization should develop its political role as much as the military one². In other words, the report was a call for the Alli-

ance to reassess the commitment of all the allies for a common purpose, independent of any individual interest. The event that triggered the 'Three Wise Men's' report was a crisis: on October 29, 1956, France and Britain—without consulting NATO as a whole or the United States in particular—joined forces with Israel to invade Egypt to secure the Suez Canal as an open trading and commercial route³. As the 'Three Wise Men's' report pointed out, "some states may be able to enjoy a degree of political and economic independence when things are going well. No state, however powerful, can guarantee its security and its welfare by national action alone."⁴ It was a crisis that pushed towards a realist assessment of NATO's purpose and strategy for the first time since the alliance was established in 1949, after World War II. At the beginning, the main aim of the Alliance was to serve as an insurance against global devastation and to oppose both militant nationalism and national militarism⁵. Up to present, the role of NATO had been debated on many occasions, the present context providing the opportunity for the organization to prove its ability to adapt and transform.

Depending on the perspective that one decides to assume, the present international context, very complex and deep-rooted in the past, might

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2. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (1956), Report of the Committee of Three on Non Military Cooperation in NATO, 3 noiembrie 2008 http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17481.htm.

3. Daniel Keohane (2016), NATO, the EU, and the Curse of Suez, Strategic Europe (blog), Carnegie Europe, 14 octombrie, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/64859>.

4. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (1956), Report of the Committee of Three on NonMilitary Cooperation in NATO, 3 noiembrie 2008.

5. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (1949), The North Atlantic Treaty, 21 martie 2016, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm.

represent an opportunity for NATO leaders to reconsider the organization's role on the international scene and both its military and, more than ever before, its political potential. As people continue to flee conflicts and look for new places to settle; as host countries struggle to accommodate a massive influx of refugees, and new conflicts erupt over strained resources, NATO's role has evolved from ensuring state security to assuring the security of people. Towards this end, the important role that the Alliance plays in preventing statelessness and building stability in crisis-prone areas makes a strong NATO all the more necessary and pertinent today.

Today's crisis is formed out of a variety of intertwined internal and external factors such as terrorism (both religiously inspired and right-wing extremism), cyber attacks, energy insecurity, new asymmetrical threats, lack of common perception of threats among the allies, the rise of populist and anti-American movements across Europe, Russia's aggression in Ukraine and Syria, and its involvement with Turkey, disinformation campaigns aimed at weakening the West, the uncertainty of the position taken by the United States following the 2016 presidential election, and the increasing number of refugees following conflicts around the globe. NATO faces a multitude of challenges along its Eastern and Southern flanks. As a result, the context pushes towards an urgent need for long-term mechanisms to protect the Euro-Atlantic community's way of life, shared values, and security, by military and, most of all, political means.

Although it is treated as a new problem and as a threat to the western society, the refugee crisis is not a situation that was created over night, but it is rather a result of the failures suffered by the international community and international organizations in providing peace and stability in power vacuum places such as the Middle East and North Africa. The lack of an efficient strategy in crisis zones like Syria were the starting point

for a chain reaction that resulted in an increasing number of refugees in Western countries that has eventually paved the way for extremist far-right parties and politicians to increase their popularity. Terrorism is indeed on the rise as a result of the refugee crisis, but it is not necessarily the religious inspired one. It is instead the right-wing extremism that grows and infiltrates among our western communities, winning hearts and minds as well as the call for jihad does. Europe's traditional centrist coalition lost its majority in the European Union's parliamentary elections in May 2019, with far-right populist parties and liberal, pro-European Union parties both gaining ground⁶. If NATO wants to assume a stronger role in the current refugee crisis – which is not necessarily a will, but a must –, the organization needs to go back to the roots and reposition the first piece of the domino, while taking up the other pieces.

The world today is facing an unprecedented migration crisis with 68.5 million forcibly displaced people worldwide. This number also includes 25.4 million refugees⁷ and, as a starting point, NATO has operations in many of the countries from which people are fleeing conflict, civil war, and unrest. NATO's presence is crucial to restoring stability to these regions and strengthening governance. For instance, NATO is an active member of the Global Coalition to Defeat the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. As a strategy to restore the beginning of the Domino chain, NATO's focus on rebuilding broken states and stabilizing conflict areas through peacekeeping and capacity-building missions in places like Syria and Iraq⁸, can be a long-term efficient approach to reducing the influx of refugees.

Moreover, 'adaptability' should be a key word to define NATO's strategy for the refugee crisis. Whether it is ISIS in Syria, al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan or drug cartels in Latin America, NATO's ability to adapt to the emerging contexts, different geographies, societies and cul-

6. Anderson (2019), „4 Takeaways from the European Parliament Election Results”, National Public Radio, <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/27/727293356/4-takeaways-from-the-european-parliament-election-results>.

7. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2018), „Global Trends”, <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

8. Milkoreit (2007), „Taking the Civil Dimension of Security Seriously - NATO as the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Organization, NATO Review,

https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2007/Military_civilian_divide/postconflict_reconstruction_organization/EN/index.htm.

tures might be the key for an efficient long-term strategy. In this case, an international allied effort needs to be implemented, not only through military means, but mostly through political ones. The whole world witnessed how delayed operations like the ones in Kosovo or in Syria result in humanitarian disasters that have long-term global effects.

In the past, NATO has proved its adaptability to the nature of crisis on several occasions and for instance, the organization helped the African Union (AU) expand its peacekeeping and humanitarian mission in Sudan by coordinating the airlift of more than 30,000 AU troops into the region between June 2005 and December 2007. NATO has also responded to crisis that came from natural disasters, such as the 7.6-magnitude earthquake that struck Pakistan in 2005, killing more than 80,000 people and leaving four million homeless. NATO brought in tons of food and relief supplies and airlifted medical units and engineers into the region. These two examples stand as proof that the Alliance has the potential to go beyond its well-known military dimension and to provide help in various situations. However, this potential needs to be developed and tailored according to the context.

Although unfortunate, the current refugee crisis is also an opportunity for NATO to prove its adaptation and modernisation capabilities, both at external and internal levels: while it can enhance further cooperation between NATO and its partners, it can also push towards the organization's process of integrating strategic and operational planning for an unidirectional, multi-domain approach to the defence of Europe – an important pillar of NATO. Among the twenty-nine allies, twenty-two are members of the European Union. This means that NATO and EU share one set of forces and, at the same time, one set of economic and diplomatic instruments. The refugee crisis in the EU is, therefore, an important subject for NATO and proves once more the necessity of inter-organisational coherence to-

wards a common comprehensive strategy. So far, the EU and NATO have gradually developed a common path to tackle the refugee crisis, but there is still a long journey ahead. On 7 March 2016, NATO and Frontex (the EU agency responsible for external border control) agreed on a set of joint efforts to address the refugee and migration crisis⁹. The cooperation represents the starting point of a 'common understanding' on the modalities of the cooperation, which in practical terms basically means ensuring consistency and complementarities of the Frontex operation and NATO's support activities.

In other words, the context of the refugee crisis opened a new area of cooperation for the two sides. If NATO and the EU could build on initial cooperation on migration issues to successfully map and coordinate their efforts, and those of their members and partners, NATO would be able to focus on the areas where it can add the most value: collective defence (which it provides directly in the form of, for example, a robust maritime presence in the Mediterranean) and defence capacity building (which it provides in cooperation with regional partners). Defence Capacity Building is already an important field for NATO, through various counter-terrorism trainings and operations in Tunisia or by preparing Jordan's security forces and institutions¹⁰. These activities involve both local ownership and responsibility and international collaboration and coordination between partners in the region and between those partners and the EU. Creating a stable and peaceful environment instead of the power vacuums in the conflict areas is the only lasting solution for the refugee crisis and, in this case, NATO plays a key role due to its double potential: military and political. Initiatives such as the one on Defence Capacity Building build on NATO's extensive track record and expertise in advising, assisting, training and mentoring countries that require defence and related security capacity building support. NATO's unique defence expertise is used in or-

9. EEAS Press Team (2016), Joint Statement by High Representative Federica Mogherini and Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos on the Modalities of the Cooperation Between Frontex and NATO in the Aegean Sea, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/2838_en.

10. NATO (2018), Defence and Related Security Capacity Building Initiative, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132756.htm

der to provide and coordinate practical specialised support. Good progress continues on the DCB packages for Georgia, Iraq, Jordan and the Republic of Moldova.

So far, NATO has undertaken some formal and informal institutional adaptations aimed specifically at addressing Europe's southern neighbourhood as a centre for the refugee crisis and also a melting point of terrorist roots. At the same time, the organization is undergoing broader adaptation aimed to keep up with the global challenges. In the case of the refugee crisis, NATO has tried to tackle both the roots of the problem and the situation at the European borders where it proved to be an important asset in stopping illegal immigration. However, without a long-term comprehensive strategy that involves adaptation to the context and cooperation with the other actors involved, these efforts remain rather disparate and insufficient. Bearing in mind that the refugee crisis is just one threat among a complex set of threats, achieving coherence between approaches to state actors and non-state actors should be central to the process of refining and integrating NATO's regionally-focused operational plans into a clear, 360-degree vision for the defence of Europe.

In order to create a long-lasting strategy for the present international context and for the refugee crisis, NATO leaders might want to consider the following elements:

- Firstly, in order to face the current threats, NATO needs to reinforce the alliance's political dimension and to use it at its full potential. This means using the North Atlantic Council, which brings together alliance ambassadors on a weekly basis, as a regular, candid forum to discuss political issues. The political dimension is essential in order to cope with various challenges to the West's political, security, and democratic systems—not only from Russia and the self-proclaimed Islamic State but also from the darker sides of globalization and technology, including cyber-attacks;

- Secondly, NATO needs to acknowledge the importance of resilience. Terrorist attacks, whether conventional or hybrid, damage citizens' confidence and trust in governments. NATO and gov-

ernments must be able to rebuild societies quickly in the event of major attacks that could disrupt essential infrastructure. Resilience is about defending the Western liberal order. NATO's role is crucial in this regard, provided it has the military capabilities to respond quickly to attacks.

- Thirdly, NATO should strengthen further more the political bonds with the EU, as a vital element for political side of the transatlantic relationship. Military and civilian tasks should not be considered separately, but intertwined. Lastly, NATO should go beyond its self-imposed boundaries and out of the 'bubble'. NATO officials should leave their Brussels headquarters and travel to town halls, schools, colleges, and enterprises to explain what the alliance is about and why it is needed.

Bearing in mind the evolving crisis worldwide and the development of further complex threats to the international security, the key towards ensuring the safety of our societies is adaptation. NATO has proved it has the capacity to continuously adapt in order to face challenges and the refugee crisis is one example. However, the organization has not yet proved its full potential and has been rather reticent in juggling with both military and political assets. In order to cope with the refugee crisis in the EU, an important pillar for NATO, the organization needs to fight both the causing factors and the consequences. While in the battle zone the military potential of the Alliance represents an advantage, back in Europe, this dimension can only serve to ensure border security. Complementary to these two aspects is the political dimension that comes hand in hand with EU's abilities in this domain. NATO's ongoing process of adaptation and modernisation provides ways to transform crisis into challenges and opportunities ranging from adjustments to NATO's command structure to the integration of emerging operational plans.

To sum up, there is only one way out of the complex crisis of today's world that can ensure NATO's success and survival – adaptability and the capability to notice the opportunity in the whole distorted picture.

The Importance of the Black Sea and Balkans Security Forum 2019 to Current Security Issues – Military Mobility

Col. Gabriel RILLA¹

On the 12th-14th of June 2019, the Romanian city of Constanta held an international event that was dedicated to the betterment of the evaluation and understanding of the security evolutions in the region of the Black Sea and the Balkans. The international conference the *Black Sea and the Balkans Security Forum 2019 (BSBSF 2019)* has been an ongoing event, since 2017 and has been jointly organised by the Romanian Advanced Study Centre, *New Strategy Centre*, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, NATO's Public Diplomacy Division, the Metropolitan Area Authorities of Constanta and the *Ovidius University* in Constanta. The event has brought together this year, over 500 participants, both from Romania and from abroad – government officials, scholars, experts from the defence industry, think-tanks and journalists.

The hosts proficiently managed to assemble relevant personalities to tackle the proposed debates, and managed to create the proper environment for dialogue and the exchange of opinions and ideas, as well as for generating new concepts on how to address security matters in the region and beyond, onto NATO's Eastern flank. The guests, highly experienced professionals – Romanian and foreign officials, NATO and EU, members belonging to institutions dealing with matters of national security and foreign affairs, scholars, defence industry representatives and journalists – talked about the current and emerging challenges in the region, that are important to Romanian, as well as Euro-Atlantic security.

BSBSF 2019 included on its agenda a series of topics referring to military and hybrid threats, informational warfare, cyber warfare and the influence of climate change or religion on the risks and threats in the region. The debates cov-

ered and considered the impact the military influence in the Black Sea area has over the whole region, as well as the importance of certain initiatives such as *Bucharest 9* and the *Three Seas Initiative* in managing not only military, but also other security challenges and threats. The various themes and the professionals and experts present at the event practically make *BSBSF 2019* a forum that provides an efficient way to generate new ideas to strengthen regional security, and connect them to NATO's actions.

The Chief of Defence Staff, General Nicolae Ciuca, delivered a speech about "Military Mobility: Key Area of NATO-EU Cooperation". Starting from the idea that the current European security environment really needs a fast response, NATO must be able to quickly provide the necessary forces, at the right place and time, so that it can properly manage potential threats. A key feature to ensure NATO's deterrence and defence capabilities is its ability to quickly deploy its response forces.

The Chief of Defence made a short list of the national efforts in the field of military mobility that are meant to ensure the quick and unrestricted deployment of the allied forces and their strategic partners on our national territory, in order to support military operations, should the situation occurs. His expose underlined a series of actions regarding military mobility that Romania focuses on at the moment.

He reminded us of our national duties in so far as: the initiatives regarding the permanent and structured European cooperation, the issue concerning "dual-use" infrastructure development and the harmonisation of law and specific procedures. As such, Romania joined the European Union Common Security and Defence Policy and became involved in the military mobility projects that it developed. In this context, the European Council adopted a list of projects proposed

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by the European Defence Agency and the main actions that have been and are to be taken include: managing diplomatic border crossing (military equipment and personnel) agreements, expanding the transportation infrastructure, simplifying custom procedures and harmonizing legal frameworks.

Underlining the fact that one of the main actions, regarding military mobility, that are to be taken in 2019, refers to the development of the transportation infrastructure and its affiliated projects, the Chief of Defence also mentioned the need to analyse and prioritise the projects regarding the development of the transportation infrastructure on a national level, as well as cooperate with the Ministry of Transportation in order to identify the most effective projects related to the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) corridors that cross Romania.

TEN-T's infrastructure is generally seen as a priority to the development of the Romanian transportation infrastructure, so there already are projects concerning this, included in the National Transportation Master Plan. There still are short and long term projects to be identified, that are financially sustainable and that truly support NATO and EU's Quick Response Forces and mostly the Very High Readiness Joint Task Forces.

As far as military mobility is concerned, the Chief of Defence insisted on the fact that NATO and the EU agreed on combining their objectives and actions. The EU has emerged as the leader in the field using political, legal and financial instruments to obtain concrete results, both on a short, as well as on a medium term. Romania, both as a NATO and an EU member follows the instructions of the two and complies with their requests, at least as far as military mobility is concerned.

At the same time, the Chief of Defence emphasized the fact that developing military mobility projects on a national scale implies a wider approach and cooperation between institutions that go beyond the resources, capabilities and abilities of the Romanian Ministry of Defence. That is why it works with the Ministry of Transportation, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, in order to harmonize legal frameworks and implement common projects.

The involved institutions should analyse and prioritize the development projects of the transportation infrastructure on the national level, in cooperation with the Ministry of Transportation. Considering the high complexity of these projects, the cooperation between ministries ensures an efficient participation to the meetings organised by the European Defence Agency and NATO.

The Chief of Defence came to the conclusion that the development, during a time of peace, of an effective infrastructure that ensures the liberty of movement may be seen as deterrence on NATO's Eastern flank. Therefore, Romania is engaged in facilitating military mobility projects on its territory, according to EU regulations, but also according to NATO's specific requirements, as well as and those of its strategic partners.



BLACK SEA – MEDITERRANEAN SEA AREA

Transnistria: 'Freezing' as the Lesser Evil



Vladimir SOCOR

Part One

Ambassadors from Russia, Ukraine, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the United States, and the European Union, collectively the mediators and observers to the Transnistria conflict-settlement negotiations, held talks in Chisinau and Tiraspol on July 12. This group seeks to promote the resumption of active negotiations after last month's regime change in Moldova. The negotiations' professed goals are a) "small steps" to upgrade Transnistria's distinctive prerogatives, leading toward b) a "special status for Transnistria within Moldova" (Osce.org, July 12).

Moving through "small steps" toward a "special status" is inherently dangerous to Moldova, and is a matter of concern to neighboring Ukraine. Apart from the primordial Russian inspiration of the whole process (which should have invalidated this process from the outset), any acceleration of these negotiations could break apart Moldova's coalition of Western-oriented and Russia-friendly parties that took office one

month ago. Even Moldovan President Igor Dodon, for all his links to Moscow, has said that Transnistria is a divisive issue that should be handled cautiously and even be left in abeyance for the time being, lest it bring the ruling coalition in Chisinau down (IPN, June 28).

Given that Russia designed this process at origin, with some Western chancelleries (from varying considerations) tagging along, and given the risk it now poses to Moldova's internal stability, a "freeze" on this process would be the lesser evil, compared with continuing these negotiations in their present form (see Part Two).

The "small steps" and "special status" are old goals on paper, but they are being pursued seriously as operational goals since 2016, inherited from Germany's then-minister of foreign affairs



Source: EPA

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Frank-Walter Steinmeier and the US's Barack Obama administration. Both were then in their final year in office, groping for some sort of legacy; and they viewed the "Transnistria conflict" as susceptible of resolution by agreement with Russia, potentially an example for a "special status" by agreement with Russia in Ukraine's Donbas. This necessitates mischaracterizing the "Transnistria conflict" as internal to Moldova, rather than a Russia-Moldova inter-state conflict; and Russia as "mediator," instead of aggressor. The flaws in these assumptions remain unexamined and continue to inspire the negotiations, to Moldova's direct detriment and potentially Ukraine's as well.

The "Transnistria conflict" is a unique case in which Russian and Western (European and US) diplomats have acted in consensus, without exhibiting any differences in their approach, in contrast to the other "frozen conflicts." Germany is not one of the "mediators and observers" on this conflict, but has gained an influential role since 2018 by taking charge of the OSCE's Chisinau Mission, which administers the negotiating process, overshadowing the US and EU, which merely hold observer status. Italy held the OSCE's rotating chairmanship in 2018 and appointed the outspoken Russia-friendly politician Franco Frattini as the organization's special representative on Moldova. The OSCE's Slovakian chairmanship in 2019 unnecessarily (and departing from standard practice) has reappointed Frattini to this post. Moldova's former governments, most recently that controlled by Vladimir Plahotniuc, passively accepted the "small steps" and the political objective of a "special status" for Transnistria.

While Russian and some Western diplomats seem interested in mechanical "progress" toward those goals (see above), serious reservations are heard from both sides of Moldova's bicephalous authorities who took office one month ago. The ACUM ("NOW") block disagrees with the negotiations' goals in their substance, while President Dodon has grown cautious and would play for time rather than be rushed into political negotiations.

Moldova's new prime minister, Maia Sandu

(from ACUM), surprised the ambassadors' group by challenging some fundamentals of these negotiations head on: the political objective, the direction of the "small steps," and the impunity tacitly granted to Transnistria's organized crime (Moldpres, July 12).

"We owe some answers to our citizens," Sandu told the ambassadors. "What is the goal of these negotiations? On the one hand, it is to settle this conflict politically, based on Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity. On the other hand, Tiraspol pursues the goal of independence. Where, then, is the end station of this process, given these mutually exclusive objectives? And which one of these objectives is being served by the policy of small steps? Throughout these years Chisinau has manifested openness toward Tiraspol. The latter has been accepted as a side to the negotiating process. Transnistrian residents enjoy freedom of movement in Moldova and beyond, benefit from various projects, and Transnistria itself is part of Moldova's free-trade-zone with the EU. And yet, we are no closer to a political settlement... The negotiating process must help combat Transnistria's corruption and smuggling; this [anti-crime effort] must become a priority. As long as Transnistria remains a major source of illegal enrichment for certain people, there cannot be any real progress toward a political solution" (Moldpres, July 13).

The OSCE Mission's chief, German diplomat Claus Neukirch, responding on the ambassadors' group's behalf, did not address those points. He simply reaffirmed that the goal is indeed to advance by small steps toward a special status for Transnistria (Moldpres, July 12). This repartee reflects: a) the OSCE's *de facto* seniority over the mere "observers," the US and the EU, in this negotiating process, b) Russia's insurmountable influence in the OSCE, and c) the German government's considering a possible accommodation with Russia in Moldova, after Berlin's failed attempts (2014–2017) to promote the Russian-drafted special status for Ukraine's Donbas.

The ambassadors' group met as well with President Dodon and Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration Vasili Shova, in Chisinau. Even Dodon expressed serious, if implicit reservations about

the prompt resumption of negotiations that the OSCE, Moscow and Tiraspol seem keen to launch now. Instead, Dodon suggested delaying any political negotiations into next year and adopting a different set of three priorities instead: “democratization of Transnistria, free movement of people and goods throughout Moldova’s territory, and reestablishment of a single economic space in the whole of Moldova” (Moldpres, July 12). Without repudiating the small steps, this new set of priorities reflects Dodon’s reluctance to accelerate the political negotiations (see above). What Dodon has explicitly cast aside is his old, pet “federalization” project (see Part Two).

Part Two

Moldova’s regime change in June 2019 has overtaken some of the key assumptions of Western diplomacy in the Transnistria conflict-settlement negotiations.

One Western assumption relates to the settlement’s content. It holds that the settlement (“special status”) must be negotiated and enacted with a Russian-installed, Moscow-loyal leadership in Tiraspol. This would conserve Transnistria’s existing geopolitical role and socio-political system, as Tiraspol itself describes it: a strategic outpost of Russia, and a showcase of political-cultural assimilation of non-Russians into the Russian World. At no point did Western diplomacy contemplate requiring political change in Transnistria as a prerequisite to any settlement. Instead, by dint of inertia, the “small steps” have been moving forward toward the goal of a special status. Russia could not alone have advanced its interests as it has through these negotiations. Western indiffer-

ence or, since 2016, Western consent allowed this evolution, enabling Moscow to pose as a team player in the 5+2 format. The direction of this movement is a piecemeal sovereignization of Transnistria and corresponding de-sovereignization of Moldova in that territory (see EDM, [September 20, 26, 2018](#)).

Moldova’s new prime minister, Maia Sandu, however, has called for linking the negotiations with internal change in Transnistria. Combating Transnistria’s corruption and smuggling must become a priority, failing which there cannot be any real “small steps” toward a political solution, Sandu told a large visiting group of ambassadors involved in these negotiations. Even President Igor Dodon, who had earlier been keen to accelerate the negotiations with Tiraspol, suggested to the visiting diplomats to prioritize “human rights and democratization in Transnistria” over political negotiations (Moldpres, July 12; see EDM, July 17). Thus, slowing down and rethinking the negotiations, and linking them to internal change in Transnistria, is an idea that is taking shape in Chisinau following the regime change.

A related Western assumption relates to the settlement’s process, both formal and, especially,



*Unofficial leader of Transnistria, oligarch Viktor Gushan
(Source: fc-sheriff.com)*

informal. The assumption previously held that Moldova's informal ruler Vladimir Plahotniuc and President Dodon would, through parallel efforts, continue to deliver "progress" in the negotiations. This assumption has also been invalidated—on both counts—following Moldova's recent regime change. Plahotniuc had delivered on the "small steps" in 2017–2018, using both his internal authority and direct relationship with his separatist counterpart, Viktor Gushan, Transnistria's informal "oligarchic" ruler. However, Plahotniuc fell from power in June 2019. For his part, Dodon was thwarted in his frantic efforts to negotiate with Transnistria's "official" leader, Vadim Krasnoselski, toward a faster resolution. The Kremlin, content with the "small steps," has declined to nudge Krasnoselski into negotiations with Dodon. Instead, Moscow wants Tiraspol to deal with Western diplomats directly. This has worked well for Tiraspol until now.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's triple-headed management of these negotiations (Slovakian rotational chairmanship, German leadership of the OSCE's Chisinau Mission, and Italian occupancy of the Special Representative's post) undoubtedly planned for 2019 on that old, accustomed basis. But Plahotniuc is no more; and Dodon is deeply frustrated by Moscow's preference for direct negotiations between Tiraspol and Western diplomatic envoys, bypassing Chisinau and depriving Dodon of his domestic political card as Moldova's reintegrator. This helps explain Dodon's remarks to Western diplomats about the need for political change in Transnistria (see above).

A third Western assumption, invalidated by Moldova's regime change, concerns the internal political basis for negotiating a solution to the Transnistria conflict. That assumption held that it was at least desirable, perhaps necessary, to bring Plahotniuc and Dodon to a consensus on this issue. However, three changes have intervened: a) Plahotniuc's fall, b) Dodon's official abandonment of the goal of federalization and his new, go-slow approach to political negotiations (see EDM, July 18); and c) the sharp questioning of the "small steps" policy by the ACUM

("NOW") block in the ACUM-Socialist governing coalition. These recent developments have totally changed the prerequisites to a political consensus in Chisinau regarding the resolution of the Transnistria conflict.

The only consensus in Moldova's bicephalous governing coalition is that a faster pace of international negotiations (in the 5+2 format) could fatally split the coalition. Both of its components prefer to delay any such denouement as long as feasible. Both prioritize cooperation on pressing domestic issues over divisive "geopolitical" issues.

The coalition's two components will be equally influential in shaping Chisinau's position in these negotiations; and they will not necessarily come into confrontation with each other. The chief negotiator, Deputy Prime Minister Vasiliu Shova, closely linked with Dodon, has handled the Transnistria dossier in one way or another ever since 1991 (Noi.md, July 1, 2019), personifying Chisinau's institutional-bureaucratic memory on this issue. Shova is hardly a strategic conceptualizer but rather a meticulous executor of presidential instructions.

On the ACUM side, a number of parliamentary deputies, first and foremost Oazu Nantoi and Igor Munteanu, are the top experts on the Transnistria conflict from the perspective of the pro-Western civil society, and now as parliamentarians. They have a strong track record of resisting "federalization," "special status" or "small steps," and of proposing alternative concepts of conflict-resolution. These include a concept of Transnistria's political transformation and demilitarization as a prerequisite to any settlement of the conflict, but also a blocking concept of the unacceptable "Red Lines" of an externally-driven solution.

These two centers of influence will probably balance each other out in the governing coalition. Such balance—and, probably, informal consultations between them—should avoid both pitfalls that lie ahead: either continuing "small steps" (sovereignizing Transnistria, de-sovereignizing Moldova) or a breakup of the governing coalition over this issue.

Part Three

A syndrome of impunity characterizes Transnistria's attitude toward the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the lead international actor in the Transnistria conflict-management and -resolution process. With Moscow's support, Tiraspol is continually stretching the limits of the OSCE's tolerance of Transnistrian breaches of the ground rules of this process (see Parts One and Two, EDM, July 17, 22). Several recent episodes provide a representative snapshot of the politics and the psychology of this relationship.

On July 11, Transnistria's representative, Leonid Manakov, delivered a speech during an official session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, seeking observer status for Transnistria—a form of international quasi-recognition. Manakov is the head of the "Transnistrian Republic's Official Representation in the Russian Federation," which opened in January this year in downtown Moscow. The Moldovan government protested against the existence of this office more than once, and also over the Geneva speech. The OSCE kept silent, although both of Tiraspol's moves contravene its status in the OSCE-led negotiating process. On July 12, Chisinau protested against Tiraspol's decree that tightens the restrictions on movement across "Transnistria's state border" (demarcation line within Moldova) by "foreign citizens" (i.e., Moldova's citizens). The OSCE remained silent again, although it officially promotes free movement on the negotiating agenda.

At the same time, the OSCE Mission has even-handedly urged both "sides" to refrain from holding military exercises in the buffer zone, although it is Transnistria that routinely holds such exercises, sometimes jointly with Russian troops. Most recently, Tiraspol militarized its unlawful "border" checkpoints (on the demarcation line from the rest of Moldova) and installed additional "Transnistrian border troops" there. The OSCE Mission does not make an issue of all this, possibly

for fear of exposing the organization's incapacity to react effectively (Mfa-pmr.org, President.gos.pmr.org, July 11, 12; Moldpres, July 11, 12, 26; RFE/RL, July 24).

The OSCE Mission tolerates all this passively because Russia is the real actor behind Tiraspol's moves. It is Russia that is hosting Transnistria's representation in Moscow, Russia that co-opted Manakov into its delegation in Geneva—giving Tiraspol the floor there—and it is Russia that regularly conducts joint exercises of its troops with Transnistrian-flagged troops (themselves integrated into Russia's command chain). The OSCE's internal system, however, precludes the organization and its field missions from taking positions contrary to Russia's interests on European security affairs (participant countries may do so in their own name within the OSCE, but not the organization or its representatives). Unable to cope with Tiraspol's day-to-day provocations at the tactical level, and gagged by Russia's veto, the OSCE presides over a negotiating process that consolidates Transnistria's functional separation from Moldova.

The OSCE, however, is also a proactive contributor to this process. The current name of that process is the Berlin 2016 Package of "small steps," which OSCE diplomats work to complete and develop further. This process requires unilateral Moldovan socio-economic and legal concessions to Tiraspol, cementing at the same time the political and military *status quo* that favors Tiraspol and Moscow. They win thereby on both counts.



Source: OSCE

The primary origins of this process are traceable to the measures proposed by Russia's then-prime minister Dmitry Medvedev in 2009 as preconditions to any political resolution of the Transnistria conflict. Moscow went on to block the whole process from 2011 until 2016, the year of the OSCE's German chairmanship and final year of Frank-Walter Steinmeier as foreign minister. Steinmeier's small-steps package, coordinated with Russia *ab initio*, is more substance-filled and streamlined than Medvedev's concept had been; but the basic rationale remains that of meeting Russian preconditions to a resolution of the Transnistria conflict. Another Russia-friendly diplomat, Franco Frattini, was appointed by the OSCE's Italian and Slovakian chairmanships in 2018 and 2019, respectively, to promote the Berlin Package (see Parts [One](#) and [Two](#)).

Russia's tactic consists of adding precondition upon precondition to withdrawing its forces from Moldova's territory. The OSCE's 1999 summit decisions (not vetoed by Russia) had stipulated the early, complete, unconditional withdrawal of Russian forces. In 2002, however, the OSCE decided, at Russia's insistence, to introduce the notion of "conditions," without specifying what they were, thus leaving them up to Russia's interpretation. In 2003, the OSCE simply eliminated the withdrawal deadline. From 2005 onward, German diplomacy under Steinmeier argued, in the OSCE and elsewhere, that Russian "peacekeeping" troops are a stabilizing factor and should remain in place (their illegal status notwithstanding). In 2009, Russia introduced Medvedev's concept (see above), a precursor to Berlin's 2016 "small steps" and their current expansion.

Meanwhile, Russia has added the "permanent neutrality of Moldova under reliable guarantees" as yet another precondition to the resolution of the Transnistria conflict. Russia refuses to withdraw its troops until a political solution is agreed upon. And that solution must (under the Russian-written ground rules of the 5+2 format) be "acceptable to both sides," i.e. subject to Tiraspol's veto, which conveniently frees Russia from the onus of using its own veto.

It is, therefore, chimerical to believe, and mis-

leading to pretend, that satisfying Moscow on the Berlin Package would suffice to meet Russia's preconditions for negotiating a political and military resolution of this conflict. Chisinau had apparently chosen to believe in this linkage during Vladimir Plahotniuc's rule, but is reconsidering its view after the regime change. The small steps are not preconditions to a solution, but merely to starting negotiations toward a solution. The participants in the 5+2 negotiating format define the eventual solution as Transnistria's return to Moldova with a "special status"—the euphemism for a negotiated federalization.

Russian and Western diplomacy in consonance employ that euphemism because federalization is anathema in Moldova. Even President Igor Dodon has acknowledged this fact, following the recent regime change in Chisinau. A long-time proponent of federalization, Dodon has now cast this goal aside, declining to be rushed into political negotiations and suggesting a slow-down instead (see [EDM](#), July 18).

The Berlin Package is not a finite one but seemingly open-ended, now being referenced as "Berlin Plus." Its "small steps" are a pied piper's tune. It seeks to guide Moldova toward sovereignizing Transnistria in the form of a special status, pre-determining its elements without political negotiations, and without seeking a *quid pro quo* in the form of progress on the withdrawal of Russian troops from Moldova's territory.

Part Four

The 5+2 group—Russia, Ukraine, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the United States, the European Union, Chisinau, Tiraspol, in this shape since 2005—is officially titled as "Permanent Conference for Political Questions in the Framework of the Negotiating Process on the Transnistrian Settlement" (its Russian-defined terms of reference). Even under these terms, the 5+2 group is officially tasked to promote and negotiate a political solution. However, this group has in recent years been downgraded and used for promoting socioeconomic measures with legal consequences in Tiraspol's favor. Those "small steps" in the Berlin Package (see Part Three, [EDM](#) July 29) have be-

come the heart of the 5+2 group's work. They are officially promoted as "measures to improve the life of the inhabitants on both sides," as if to redefine the 5+2 from a political-diplomatic to a social-work forum. Some residents might benefit in some peripheral ways, but the main beneficiaries are Transnistria's authorities.

The 5+2 annual meeting this coming October seems set to consider the possible recognition in some form of Transnistria's distinctive banking system, its telephone network, and its railroad. These would become the next "small steps" under the generic, open-ended Berlin Package. The OSCE looks forward to the approval of those measures in a "result-oriented meeting" (Mfa.gospmr.org, July 24; Moldpres, July 24, 25).

The socio-economic "small steps" began producing legal consequences already in 2018: recognizing distinctive Transnistrian car license plates for international traffic, erasing Moldova's law on private agricultural land ownership in the Tiraspol-controlled territory (thus turning Moldovan farmers into conditional tenants), renouncing Chisinau's earlier legal jurisdiction over the "Moldovan"-language schools that use the Latin script (these schools are merely tolerated now, and barely) (see EDM, [July 23, 2018](#); [September 20, 26, 2018](#)).

Such steps are cumulatively eroding Moldova's formally recognized titles to sovereignty in Transnistria. The steps currently under discussion on banking, the telephone system, and the railroad, could advance this trend further. While piecemeal, the trend points toward a de-sovereignization of Moldova and, correspondingly, sovereignization of Transnistria.

Those arrangements (and the planned ones ahead) are, ostensibly, bilateral ones between Chisinau and Tiraspol under the OSCE's mediation. Yet, they need moral-political blessing in the 5+2 framework in order to be seen as legitimate—which, from Moldova's standpoint, means the blessing of the EU and the US within that col-

lective framework.

Brussels's and Washington's presence in this format is only symbolic. They are merely observers to the negotiations (they can look on and comment), a status inferior to that of Russia, the OSCE, and Ukraine as full participants. But the OSCE—outwardly the lead mediator—is not an independent actor, labouring as it does under Russia's veto power inside the organization. Washington has, from time to time, worked around the 5+2 group, using instead the US-held post of OSCE Mission Chief to nudge Chisinau into the small steps of the Berlin process in 2017–2018. This confused Chisinau at the official level and disappointed Chisinau's core pro-Western groups. Brussels is practicing its own economic diplomacy toward Transnistria, while the EU's position in the 5+2 group follows Germany's "small steps" policy. Germany also pursues its own policy, outside the 5+2 format; but Germany has recently entered the 5+2 format semi-officially by taking (from the US) the helm of OSCE's Chisinau Mission and promoting the Berlin Package. Slovakia is chairing the OSCE in Vienna this year but has agreed to prolong the mandate of Moscow's self-declared friend, Franco Frattini, as the OSCE chairmanship's representative in these negotiations. Ukrainian diplomats, worried that a possible special status for Transnistria could set a precedent to be used against Ukraine, have nevertheless hunkered down in the 5+2 forum until now (RFE/RL, July 1).

The 5+2 forum has failed both to provide a genuine negotiating platform and to protect Moldova's interests. Failure was unavoidable since Western diplomacy accepted Russia's terms for



Source: Moldova.org

this group's composition and ground rules. From 2005 onward, Russia used this forum to imitate negotiations while Transnistria consolidated its *de facto* statehood. Western diplomacy went along passively for a decade but shifted to a more active stance from 2016 onward with the Berlin Package. This is a rare case (and the only case of a post-Soviet conflict) in which Russian and Western diplomacy seem to have worked out a consensus.

The official designation, "negotiating process," correctly suggests that it is not "frozen." It is crawling forward but in the wrong direction. A temporary, undeclared freeze would be the least bad option in this situation and could still be considered informally by some of the participants in the 5+2 negotiating format, ahead of the annual meeting in October and the OSCE's own year-end meeting.

Advancing this process any further is possible only at Moldova's expense and to Russia's and Transnistria's continuing satisfaction. The OSCE's institutional-bureaucratic interest drives it to "move forward" and "show results," particularly by conference deadlines (twice in Bratislava this year). Berlin is also vested in this process in the context of its own policy toward Russia. But there is no discernible reason for Washington, Brussels or Kyiv to promote such a process. They could justifiably halt this process temporarily, for a thorough reconsideration of its premises and its objectives. A pause for thought is long overdue, and it need not be termed a "freeze" even if it would amount to one.

A NEW APPROACH TO SERBIA AND KOSOVO



Ben HODGES¹

I was recently in Belgrade this past May, at the annual NATO Week, co-hosted by the courageous and indefatigable Jelena Milic of the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies, Ambassador Bjornstad of Norway, and the NATO Public Diplomacy Directorate. I also had the privilege to meet with President Vucic of Serbia.

I left Belgrade concerned but strangely optimistic.

It is time for a strong, concerted effort, led by the United States but in coordination with the European Union and NATO, to create the conditions that will enable Serbia and Kosovo to reach mutual consent on their ultimate relationship.

The **three keys** to achieving this are:

#1 Give them space...create space for President Vucic of Serbia and President Thaci of Kosovo to talk, negotiate, compromise. The West should refrain from imposing red lines and lecturing these Leaders. We've got to give them hope...Western integration must feel real, with tangible economic benefits...this will enable both Presidents to push back on those groups in their own populations who don't see the benefit in Western integration. The United States, NATO, and the EU can do this.

1. Lieutenant General (Retired) Frederick Benjamin "Ben" Hodges holds the Pershing Chair in Strategic Studies at the Center for European Policy Analysis. His last Military assignment was Commander, United States Army Europe from 2014 to 2017.

Starting with his tenure at the command of USAREUR, Ben Hodges has been one of the greatest supporters of the Eastern Flank of NATO, with a particular focus on the Black Sea Region. His genuine, passionate yet outstandingly professional views and approach to European security have produced a profound impact in Washington DC among both policymakers and experts.

Most recently, Ben Hodges traveled the region in May-June 2019 and was one of the featured guest speakers at the third edition of the Black Sea and Balkans Security Forum (Mamaia, Romania, June 12-14). He brought a crucial contribution to the success of the Forum hosted on the Romanian shores of the Black Sea by identifying the main threats to the security and stability of the region and ways to counter them.

2. The article above was originally published by Ben Hodges on his personal blog at the Alpen Group. The Alpen Group (TAG) is an informal network of leading strategic thinkers who have come together to consider the future of the transatlantic relationship and European security and defence, and do something about it.

#2 Local solutions...look at what happened in Northern Macedonia. Thanks to the political courage of two leaders, and to the external support which created space for them to negotiate, and despite efforts by the Kremlin to derail it, the name issue was resolved and thus the future looks much brighter for the people of Northern Macedonia. The Serbia-Kosovo conflict is a different situation of course and may be more difficult to resolve. But give Presidents Vucic and Thaci the chance to demonstrate that same sort of courage and statesmanship by allowing them to come up with their own solutions...they're the ones who'll have to live with the consequences.

#3 Strategic options...President Vucic needs strategic options for Serbia...other than becoming the "Cuba" or "Venezuela" of South-eastern Europe...a satellite state that is tied only to the Kremlin which gains no long-term benefits for its people as a result. Instead, Serbia can become a responsible, stabilizing influence in the region by reaching a peaceful agreement with Kosovo.

Why is this so difficult?

The Serbian President is under immense pressure from inside Serbia and from Russia. Kosovo's 100% tariff on Serbian goods crippled his negotiating position. He was also recently criticized by the Serbian Orthodox Clergy, denounced as a traitor if he contemplates recognizing Kosovo independence.

The Kremlin's principal leverage in Serbia comes from Serbia's need for Russian Federation support in the UN Security Council when Kosovo declared its independence. The Kremlin knows this of course and therefore has no incentive to resolve the situation.

Moscow often bypasses President Vucic, applying pressure through the Clergy, fringe trade unions of active military and police

personnel, and others who sense they will lose something if Kosovo gains formal Serbian recognition of its independence.

President Thaci faces similar challenges where frustration too often leads some Kosovar political groups to call for more aggressive action towards Serbia or a union with Albania.

Despite all of this, President Vucic and President Thaci have both demonstrated statesmanship in the past several months, trying to find a solution to what seems to the West an intractable situation. All this underscores the fact that both these Leaders need Western support.

The Balkans Summit in Berlin was not a success...but the Serbian delegation showed maturity and Statesman-like poise...and that perhaps offers some hope for the upcoming Paris Summit in July.

We may soon have a window of opportunity to build fresh impetus towards resolution. The European Council, supported by a new European Commission could restore hope for EU membership for Serbia and Kosovo, assuming they make progress towards meeting EU standards. NATO could also use the coming Summit in London to re-emphasize the KFOR mission. NATO is aided in this effort as both militaries are led by General Officers who understand and respect the West,



President Vucic of Serbia and President Thaci of Kosovo

and recognize that NATO provides stability, not a threat.

But the military domain in Serbia also remains uniquely susceptible to Russian influence. For example, a recent military parade in Nis to commemorate the end of World War II featured only Russian and Serbian troops. This was an insult to the Western Allies and was part of an effort to revise history to demonstrate that Russia is the only friend on which Serbia can depend. It is incumbent on President Vucic to correct this mistake in time for the 75th Anniversary next year.

So what needs to be done?

America could have decisive effect in the region if we employ a comprehensive strategic approach (well-integrated with EU and NATO efforts) that creates the political space for these Leaders, protects them from internal and external pressures, and offers hope on the other side of what will be very tough but necessary compromises...but only if we convey the same level of commitment we showed during the Dayton Peace Accord negotiations and prior deployment of the IFOR and SFOR, which eventually brought a fractious but sustainable peace to the Western Balkans.

Critically, the West needs a respected senior diplomat to conduct "shuttle diplomacy" for this situation...similar to the role played by Ambassador Richard Holbrooke during the Dayton Peace Accords. Someone who can imbue the negotiations with a sense of urgency and who has the backing of the major and regional powers, the EU, and other key stakeholders, such as Romania, which also has a key role to play, given its strategic location connecting the Balkans and the greater Black Sea region. Indeed, even though Romania has not recognized Kosovo's independence, it can have a moderating effect on Serbia.

NATO's KFOR mission must also be kept in place. Senior Albanian and Serbian leaders pleaded with me in the past, when I was Commanding Gen-

eral of US Army Europe, to keep it there because it was the only anchor of stability in the Region. More NATO cooperation with Serbian Armed Forces must also be encouraged, as well as a responsible and effective transition for the Kosovo Armed Forces established.

Finally, Serbia and Kosovo must make serious progress towards meeting the requirements for EU Membership, instead of constantly bashing Brussels.

Conclusion

We are back in Great Power Competition and it's time for the West to use positive influence in the Region. We should continue to defend principles and uphold values...but that doesn't have to mean lectures or red lines. Instead, let's compete there...the Russians and Chinese will surely fill any vacuum...let's compete and enable the development of potential and hope. We have a better story to tell.





THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN: TURKEY BETWEEN CYPRUS' ENERGY RESOURCES AND THE RUSSIAN S-400

*Ambassador Professor
Dumitru CHICAN*

I

On the 10th of July 2019, Brussels was the host of a series of intense consultations and discussions between European Union experts, whose main topic was the possible adoption and implementation of new international sanctions against Turkey. The reunions took place as a response to what the European community believed to be the “illegal” and “provocative” policy conducted by Turkey lately, a policy that threatens the stability and geostrategic balance in the Eastern part of the Mediterranean. The direct causes of these concerns lie with two of the most dynamic decisions taken by the Turkish regime. Firstly, the declarations and measures to resume geological drillings in order to find and exploit

oil and natural gas reserves in the exclusive economic zone of Cyprus. This is an area of competing economic interests of Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon on one hand, and on the other, of some European countries that claim primacy of exploitation of the major hydrocarbon reserves that have been recently discovered here. Secondly, the decision of Turkey – an important NATO member – to purchase and deploy on its territory Russian S-400 missile systems. All of a sudden Turkey’s decisions place the country in opposition with European countries and economic partners on one side, and with the USA and NATO on the other side – strategically, militarily and politically speaking.

As foreseen, the Turkish have rejected the accusations and measures considered against them by the Western community and Turkey’s regional neighbours. A declaration issued by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that those who accuse Turkey have lost their sense of neutrality and with it their impartiality as mediators



in the Cyprus conflict. It also announced that the drilling vessels "Fetih" and "Yavuz" have been relocated east off the coasts of Cyprus, where they would begin geological surveys and drilling operations. Moreover, the foreign affairs minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu warned the European Union in a press release that any eventual action against Turkey would produce no results; on the contrary, it could have unpredictable consequences on a military level. The Turkish politician also stated that unless the parties agree on a fair distribution of natural reserves in the region, Turkey will continue to protect the rights of Turkish citizens in Cyprus by all necessary means.

For its part, the US State Department issued a statement expressing "deep concern" over Turkey's actions, calling on all riverine states to commit themselves to "restraint" and "dialogue" in order to peacefully manage the crisis generated by Turkey's "provocative attempts", and warning with new sanctions.

The past three years of major natural gas discoveries in the exclusive economic zones of Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus, and Israel and the prospects of the exploitation of new oil resources have

turned the Eastern part of the Mediterranean into a theatre of complicated political tensions. These tensions caused heated disputes and debates that focused on the necessity to restore the geopolitical balance and redesign the sea borders between regional countries and world players on the contemporary market of conventional energy resources. Drawn after the creation of Israel in 1948, these borders have been a permanent source of conflict and diplomatic and political confrontations that threaten to get worse. The substantial gas reserves, in the billions of cubic meters, show that this part of the Mediterranean may become a first class actor on the global energy market. Energy, if one may say so, as the only common factor in the regional economic identity, has become and continues to be a key and decisive element in the context of the current extensive geopolitical confrontation on the regional chessboard.

Under these circumstances, the intensification of conflicts and disputes generated by the recent discovery of hydrocarbons and natural gas in the exclusive economic zones of Cyprus and Israel in particular, constitutes one of the most unstable evolutions in the eastern part of the Mediterra-



Air defense systems S-400 <https://www.zerohedge.com>

nean. This is one of the most complex and disputed region in today's geopolitics, both on short as well as on long term. And, as long as they are not rationally and cautiously dealt with, these multiple challenges will face the consequences of a hasty short term solution - an attribute of regional policies - and the situation will become, sooner or later, a new and explosive epicentre of regional conflict.

II

Beside Turkey's determination in dealing with existing tensions, new ones threaten to emerge and add to the destabilizing factors deriving from the fierce competition for energy resources. We should not forget the increasingly vocal American warnings to Ankara regarding the "serious" consequences and penalties entailed by any decision of president Recep Tayyip Erdogan to add to his country's military arsenal Russian S-400 systems. The State Department warned Ankara several times that either the Administration or the Congress will take punitive sanctions if Turkey chooses to ignore the commitments it has taken as a strategic ally to the US and as a founding member of NATO, as well as a strategic ally to the Euro-Atlantic region, in general. In their turn, Turkish officials haven't hesitated to accuse NATO of affecting Turkey's interests in the Eastern Mediterranean through the Alliance policy to "contain" and "suppress" Ankara's regional programmes. According to the same Turkish officials, Erdogan's regime is ready to respond "with determination" to NATO's policies, which inevitably means another tension point in a region already filled with tensions.

All the above led, lately, to an important question - is Recep Tayyip Erdogan's vision part of a pre-set plan already set in motion, or is it the result of a series of set-backs and failures that Turkey has accumulated over past few years? The failures that marked the Turkish involvement in Syria, the swift Russian and Iranian military interventions in a political region that Turkey sees as a "vital

space" to its regional projects, the series of concessions the Turkish president has made to Vladimir Putin, the fading of the slogans regarding the Turkish "paradigm" of eastern Islamic evolution and the loss of meaning of the "zero problems" relationships with its neighbours are just a few.

In the end, Turkey's regional policy obsessively and almost exclusively focuses on one objective only - the annihilation of the "existential danger" that the Kurdish minority poses to the national unity and sovereignty of this country - an obsession that resulted in the severe degradation of the relations between Turkey on one side, and the USA and Europe on the other.

Under such circumstances, one should not be surprised that analysts and observers show concern and openly ask whether we are witnessing an undeclared cold war and Turkey's leaning towards Russia, with all the consequences such an evolution inevitably has over the relations with, and reactions from, from NATO and the area stretching towards the Golden Horn. All the above mean new concerns regarding the security of the three seas that NATO and Turkey are neither far from, nor strangers to.



INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

THE UNITED STATES - IRAN: NEITHER PEACE NOR WAR

Reza SHAHRESTANI

I

For the past 40 years, since the Iranian Islamic Revolution, the relations between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran haven't been what one may call *normal* – as the concept is defined by international law and the diplomatic customs and practices.

These past four decades the White House hosted seven US presidents – three democrats and four republicans – while Iran had six presidents serving ten mandates. Neither abandoned their hostility nor gave up the defining concepts of "Great Satan" (as Tehran calls Washington) or "the Rebel State" and the leader of the "Axis of Evil" (as Washington calls Tehran). The only exception was the adoption of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), an agreement signed between Iran, on one side, and the permanent members of the UN Security Council, Germany, and the European Union on the other. The document was meant to regulate and establish a control mechanism over the Iranian nuclear programme and thwart Tehran's efforts to build a nuclear arsenal. On the 8th of May 2018, President Donald Trump made public the decision for his country to withdraw from the JCPOA and initiate a programme of severe sanctions against the Iranian theocratic regime.

Looking beyond analyses, arguments and partisan positions, there is the fact that, the current upsurge in tensions (since spring 2019) between the Trump Administration and Ali Khamenei's theocratic regime is accompanied by the danger of an unpredictable degradation of the security situation that may lead to a conflict and, no matter its size or the seriousness of threats from both sides, requires caution. When we speak of this, we think of the Persian Gulf, an area that has been weathered by numerous and dramatic conflicts with a potential of expansion and de-

struction difficult to quantify only through the lens of the outdated formula "winners versus losers". We believe it would be totally counter-productive to look at these tensions with a subjective eye, given the fact that both actors provide arguments that lack substance and counter-arguments that are in their own interests and support their views.

After the apparition of the Islamist regime in Iran, in 1979, the area of the Arab-Persian Gulf had to cope with three major conflagrations that have deeply marked the long term stability and security equation in this part of the world:

- The war between Iraq - lead by Saddam Hussein's Baas regime - and the Islamic Iran. The eight-year conflict (1980-1988) has led to many victims – around one million dead – and a financial damage of approximately 900 billion dollars, on both sides;

- The second Gulf War (1990-1991). It was triggered by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and concluded with the latter's liberation, with the help of the UN forces and decisive American and British military contributions (the "Desert Storm and "Desert Fox" operations);

- The third Gulf War, in April 2003, when a coalition of forces including troops from the US, Great Britain, Australia, and Poland intervened in Iraq. They removed Saddam Hussein from power, which marked the beginning of a long Iraqi civil war and the rise of the terrorist Jihadist phenomenon in Iraq.

After the US withdrawal from the JCPOA and the upsurge in tensions between the Trump Administration and the Iranian theocratic regime, the question that equally comes to everyone's mind and raises concern is "will there be a fourth Gulf War"?

This question has known many forms, under various circumstances and has been raised every time the temperature of tensions between the

USA and the Islamic Republic of Iran rose to the boiling point. It has been overanalysed by specialists and observers on a regular basis who keep on wondering whether the world will witness a conflict between two sworn enemies or a third World War.

And every time the question was given an answer it was by the conflicting parties before anyone else.

Ever since the beginning of May 2019, one may observe the same pattern in tensions between the current US administration and the Ali Khamenei's theocratic regime.

Both sides have put up a formidable display of controversial rhetoric that has been accompanied by pragmatic measures, which, as far as the USA is concerned abide by the concept of "maximum pressure". These measures have been challenged by the Iranian regime with the same kind of concept – "resistance and retaliation". The more or less sporadic calls for reasoning and exertion of "maximum caution and restraint" have been scarce and not convincing enough.

By orders of President Donald Trump, the USS "Abraham Lincoln" aircraft carrier has been relocated in the vicinity of the Arab-Persian Gulf. And, as a real "armada" made of US Air Force B-52H Stratofortress bombers, Patriot batteries, and an extra 1500 US troops was announced for the region, American officials intensified their warnings and threats.

Iran didn't back down either and responded with no less damaging and venomous rhetoric, as well as specific actions. It advertised so called "secret weapons" able to annihilate any US force venturing in a conflict. And, by manipulating Yemen's Houthi, Iran attacked Saudi Arabia's commercial ships and one of its vital oil pipelines, apparently just to see Saudi reactions.

After a fortnight of intense psychological war, the scale lowered all of a sudden, only to reach a state of limbo – neither peace nor war – where a "desire for peace" was nevertheless voiced. And, during his visit to Tokyo on the 27th of May 2019, President Donald Trump said he was willing to negotiate with Iran directly ... if the latter

wished to as well! The Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe went on a visit of good offices in Tehran, but the visit ended without expected results.

On the other side, the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei stated that "any negotiation with the US is a poisonous trap". However, he authorised an intense diplomatic campaign in search of good offices for peace. The Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif went on a tour to Japan (before Donald Trump's visit), Kuwait, Iraq (that openly stepped away from the US policy on Iran), Oman, and Pakistan. At the same time, following President Hassan Rouhani's footsteps, Javad Zarif pleaded with the neighbouring Arab countries to negotiate and sign a Non-Aggression Treaty. The proposition, though, came in the context of deep suspicions and mistrust affecting the relationships between the Arab countries and the theocratic regime. Tehran rejected USA's proposal to negotiate a new bilateral nuclear treaty and this was because of the Iranian logic originating from the same suspicions mentioned above: if Washington wasn't able to follow a collective agreement signed by the members of the UN Security Council, Germany, and the European Union, what are the guarantees that it would honour a bilateral agreement with Iran?

On the other side, it is difficult to predict whether the Arab monarchies in the Gulf area would give up the US security blanket in favour of a non-aggression agreement with Iran that, for the same Arab states, represents the perfect model of dishonesty and hypocrisy.

II

Following the intensification of good-will and non-belligerence declarations and the diminishing of the belligerent tone adopted by both sides this summer, most commentators agree with the fact that an eventual war in the Gulf area has been at least put on hold for 60 days (the deadline Tehran has given the parties involved in the JCPOA, including the EU, to decide whether they will exit the agreement with Iran or not). The imminence of a war has been impeded but not eliminated. For when the 60 day period ended, Tehran announced the resumption of its enrich-

ment program and acceleration of efforts to obtain uranium enriched over the limit set by the JCPOA.

Under these circumstances, it is expected that the current state of things (neither war nor peace) between the USA and Iran will turn into a psychological war of attrition, where Donald Trump will act based on his conviction that the most effective course of action is the continuation and extreme tightening of penalties until Iran is forced to accept the US president's offer of negotiations.

One can only assume that this offer won't remove the "ghost of war" as long as the US peace offering comes with a preset condition that the Iranian regime has already rejected. That is, any negotiation must lead to the acceptance and implementation of the 12 conditions that secretary of state Mike Pompeo announced at the beginning of May 2018. Iran sees these conditions as a declaration of war. A brief recollection of Pompeo's 12 conditions might prove useful.

1. Iran must give the International Atomic Energy Agency a full detailed report on the status of its nuclear programmes and be available for a thorough and permanent inspection regarding the full stop of all its nuclear activity.

2. The country must permanently and irrevocably end its uranium enrichment programme and, at the same time, shut down and disable all heavy water reactors.

3. Iran must allow unlimited access on its territory to all IAEA inspectors.

4. It must stop all military support to Houthi rebels in Yemen and refrain from taking any action that might interfere with the political peace process in this country.

5. Iran must withdraw from Syria all Iranian forces and/ or troops under its command.

6. It must end all support to Taliban rebels in Afghanistan and to other "terrorist" groups in the region, including harbouring senior Al-Qaeda leaders (on Iranian soil).

7. Cease the support that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-linked Quds Force gives to "terrorists" and "militants" around the world.

8. Irreversibly end the Iranian production of

ballistic missiles, the ballistic missiles testing and the programmes to develop vectors capable of delivering missile systems.

9. End all Iranian support given to certain "terrorist groups", including the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Palestinian Hamas.

10. Release all US nationals, as well as citizens of US allies and partners that are under Iranian arrest or custody.

11. Iran should respect Iraq's sovereignty and government and dissolve all Shiite militias in this country that are under Iranian influence.

12. Iran should put an end to policies that threatens its neighbours, including US allies such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Israel.

One can see that only four of these 12 conditions have a direct link with the "renegotiation" of the nuclear agreement; the other eight seem to be made up from the perspective of an ultimate power that has won a war against another belligerent power, which is not yet the case with the two countries – Islamic Iran and the USA.

If the directly involved parties won't give up the concept "all or nothing" a very long and hot summer can be predicted.

Note: On the 2nd of June 2019, during a joint press conference with the Swiss foreign minister Ignazio Cassis (Switzerland represents US interests in Iran), the secretary of state Mike Pompeo stated that the US Administration is willing to have an *unconditioned* dialogue with Iran when the latter will prove that it is able to act as a "normal country" (which from an US perspective means following Mike Pompeo's 12 conditions!). The declaration of the US secretary of state came in the context of the drills jointly conducted by B-52 Stratofortress bombers and fighter jets from the USS Abraham Lincoln in the Shatt Al-Arab area (the border between Iran and Iraq), to simulate eventual attacks on Iran.

Iran's decision to restart its programme to enrich uranium up to levels allowing the production of a nuclear warhead has suddenly drawn the attention of a European Union under recovery from the recent parliamentary elections and

busy with filling in decision-making positions in Brussels.

On the 8th of July 2019, Emmanuel Bonne, the head of Emmanuel Macron's advisory group travelled to Tehran. Individually, or as part of a group, the European signatories are trying to find solutions with their Iranian counterparts that will both avoid the degradation of the Iran-USA relationship and make possible the continuation, at a reasonable level, of the economic and trade relations with Iran – without drawing upon themselves Donald Trump's penalties.

Under such circumstances one can believe that the unstable state of things – neither peace nor war – will keep on “hovering” over the “Iranian dossier” and remain a source of surprises that might burst at any time and might be hard to predict and control.

Engaged in the presidential elections campaign, Donald Trump must balance, on one hand, the campaign promises that he will not involve his country in a new military conflict in the Middle East and, on the other, the pressure coming from the warmongers in his team. With Donald Trump caught between Scylla and Charybdis, surprises may come up at any time and have damaging consequences for all parties, whether actors or spectators.

REMEMBER: "THE SIX DAY WAR"

Ambassador prof. Dumitru CHICAN

On June 5, 1967 the third Arab-Israeli war started, eleven years after the so-called Suez Crisis in 1956 when Israeli, French and British troops invaded Egypt because of the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser decision to nationalize the Suez Canal.

Known as the “Six Day War”, it has imprinted the Arab memory as “Al-Naksa Al-Kubra” – the Great Defeat and has been “remembered” by the Israelis as “Milhemet Sheshet Ha-Yamim” - the War, or the Six Days Saga. The 5-10 June 1967 conflagration was, subsequent to the establish-

ment of the state of Israel in 1948, the period that deeply marked the tumultuous history of the Middle East. It has had political, geopolitical and geostrategic effects that are still visible in modern times.

In short, its “war log” seems simple and only its statistics can provide a better picture of the people it engaged and the losses it produced.

- **Fifth of June at dawn** – the Israeli air forces bombed Egypt, destroying on the ground almost half of the country's air forces and military aviation infrastructure.

- **Sixth of June** – the Israeli army took over the Gaza Strip that was under Egyptian administration. Southwest of there, Thazal armoured units occupied the Sinai Peninsula, opening the route to the Suez Canal.

- **Seventh of June** – Israel conquered the West Bank and the Eastern part of Jerusalem.

- **Eighth of June** – after the Israeli armoured units reached the bank of the Suez Canal, Egypt surrendered. In a pathetic radioed speech, Gamal Abdel Nasser resigned and took responsibility for defeat. The next day, following the public requests of millions of Egyptians, he reconsidered. Nasser, the leader that had created the illusion of unity of the Arab world would die three years later.

- **Ninth of June** – the Israeli army attacked Syria and took over most of the area known as the Golan Heights, threatening Damascus.

- **Tenth of June** – hostilities came to an end.

At the end of the war, the Israeli controlled territory was four times larger than before (the war).

As far as human losses are concerned, official western sources confirmed that 21,800 people died (779 Israelis and 21,800 Egyptians, Syrians and Jordanians) and 47,563 were wounded (2,563 Israelis and 45,000 Arabs).

* *

As far as the background and direct causes that lead to the start of this “Six Day War”, it would be unfair to name only one of the two parties as sole responsible for the outcome. Wrong diplo-



towards the Lebanese Litani and Syrian Hermon rivers. Incited by their Soviet ally as well, some Arab states took confrontational steps and actions. Egypt mobilized large units of its Armed Forces while asking and, at the same time, obtaining the United Nations Emergency Forces withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula. On the 22nd of May

matic and political approaches and assessments were undertaken by both sides. One must not forget, though, the fact that the global political powers of that time were involved in a cold war and in a fierce competition for the control and influence over this strategic region. And this competition made its presence known in the realignment of the ideological and security alliances within the Middle East. Based on their own national interests, these alliances split into two major groups – Eastern and Western. At the same time, a major change occurred in the regional political and security equation – the birth of the Palestine Liberation Movement supported by different Arab regimes that promoted the well-known slogan “throw the Jews into the sea”. Israeli officials warned on numerous occasions that they would use “decisive force” to put an end to the violent attacks of the “Palestinian liberation fronts” benefiting from foreign sponsorship.

Israel’s attempts to change the course of the river Jordan and the sharp reactions of the Arab community also contributed to a situation already worsened by litigious/confrontational statements of some Israeli political forces. These forces promoted Israeli access to neighbouring water resources, including by territorial movements/inclusions

1967, Gamal Abdel Nasser blocked the Straits of Tiran – situated between Aqaba Bay and the Red Sea – and choked the Israeli maritime navigation. Bearing in mind a similar decision of Gamal Abdel Nasser that led to the war in 1956, Israel saw it as a *casus belli* and decided to retort. And they fought back on the 5th of June 1957.

* *

International law and collective diplomacy see the war that took place 52 years ago as beneficial as well – at least as far as the Middle East is concerned. On the 22nd of November, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted the famous 242 Resolution. The Resolution imperatively demanded (Article 1) the following: “Withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict and termination of all wars and *casus belli*, acknowledgment and respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political



independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized borders free from threats or acts of force”.

Unfortunately, the provisions of the resolution were never observed, due to well-known motives.

The Middle East had to witness another war between the Israelis and the Arabs (1973) and another two major Palestinian *Intifadas* so the Arabs and the Israeli could acknowledge that no one but themselves can bring lasting peace, stability, and a normal coexistence.

A NEW US STRATEGY IN SYRIA?

Ambassador professor Dumitru CHICAN

After a period of calm, the Syrian front became active once again at the end of this May. The area of Idlib in the north-western part of Syria was put through a series of new strikes and violent confrontations. The opposing forces were, on one hand, the loyalist army backed up by Russian troops and, on the other hand, the Syrian opposition, mainly represented by jihadist fighters from the Syrian Liberation Front (the former Jabhat Al-Nusra, the Syrian branch of the Salafist-jihadist Al-Qaeda) and other Islamist groups.

The resumption of military actions in a sensitive region of the Syrian front came at a time when at least three other political and military evolutions were on the agenda of international observers.

- The new UN Special Envoy to Syria, the Norwegian Geir Pedersen, resumed contacts and attempts to intensify steps leading to the development of a new Syrian constitution and activation of Geneva protocols to find a solution to the Syrian conflict.

- The relationship between the USA and the Russian Federation has worsened after the US Administration warned the Assad regime that it was suspected of using chemical weapons. The Russian Federation responded to these warnings

saying that the USA was in fact encouraging opposition groups to take such provocative actions.

- According to information within diplomatic circles, the USA is about to come up with a new strategy to either convince or force Iran to withdraw its military presence from the Syrian territory, given the rising tensions between the Washington Administration and the Iranian theocratic regime.

Geir Pedersen's approach is meant to be a new platform built on a formula that combines the principles of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 that endorses the road map for the peace process in Syria, some of the principles from the "Astana Process" (the group made of the Russian Federation, Turkey and Iran), and the involvement of a new group of states - mainly made of the USA, Great Britain, France, China, and a small number of Arab countries. Despite the fact that the political steps taken towards solving the Syrian conflict appear to have stopped, the new international representative (Geir Pedersen) has had a series of intense talks with Moscow. Following these talks, both Geir Pedersen's staff and the Russian presidency have announced, in mid July, the immediate start of the activity of this controversial committee. It will draft a new Syrian constitution which will then follow the regular legal course for adoption. This will pave the way to general and presidential elections in Syria.

In this context, it is worth mentioning the letter addressed not so long ago by 400 American congressmen - both republican and democrat representatives and senators - to president Donald Trump where they requested the adoption of a "new strategy" regarding the Syrian civil war, that is in the interest of USA's national security. The co-signers believe that "the conflict in Syria is complicated and the potential solutions are not perfect, but our only choice is to advance policies that can stop the growing threats to U.S. and Israel interests, as well as to regional security and stability [...] as some of our closest allies in the region are being threatened".

What are the threats coming from the Syrian civil war, according to the US congressmen? Here is a short follow-up:



(Damascus, the Syrian desert etc). At the same time, Russian steps to providing the Syrians with the S-300 missile system and keeping away from actions that might lead to the diminishing and elimination of the Iranian presence in Syria put “unacceptable” limits to Israel’s ability to ensure its national security.

4. *The political and military Lebanese group Hezbollah.* According to US congressmen, it “poses a more potent threat to Israel”. Its offensive

1. *Terrorism.* In areas not controlled by the Syrian regime there still are highly adaptable and resilient Islamist terrorist groups. And, despite Islamist statements claiming that these groups only act on Syrian territory, against the Assad regime and its supporters, they have the necessary capabilities and will power to plan and execute large scale terrorist attacks against Western targets, against the US and their allies and partners, with all the incurred consequences.

2. *Iran.* According to US representatives, Iran represents a significant source of destabilization that is actively working to establish a permanent military presence in Syria and to create an overland route connecting Iran to Iraq and Lebanon. The route would facilitate the supply of the necessary logistics and equipment to the Lebanese Hezbollah as well as other militias financed and armed by Iran and deployed throughout the Middle East. At the same time, the Iranian Islamic regime is working on destabilizing and undermining its neighbours and the countries in the region that are USA’s partners and allies.

3. *The Russian Federation.* Just like Iran, Russia is directly and actively interested in making its military presence in Syria permanent, including by building ground, aerial, naval, and mixed military bases on the Eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, as well as in other strategic areas

arsenal rises to almost 100,000 rockets and launchers and is capable of “striking anywhere in Israel”. Hezbollah’s potential also includes offensive infrastructure (underground tunnels, ammunition storage facilities, disguised fortifications for personnel etc.) at the border between Israel and Lebanon. All of the above enable the pro-Iranian group to orchestrate unpredictable strikes against Israel’s security interests.

In order to face all these threats, president Trump is required to quickly adopt a comprehensive strategy on Syria, with a number of priorities:

1. Adoption and dissemination, by the American administration, of a clear message to its enemies, allies and partners altogether, so that they understand that the US main policy regarding Syria and the Middle East is to ensure the security of Israel and its right to self defence by all suitable means. This implies the improvement and implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the USA and Israel for a ten year period. The document grants Israel access to unlimited resources and logistics that are necessary to maintain its national security.

2. The USA and its allies and partners will put pressure on Iran and the Russian Federation and on the destabilizing actions that they are taking, both in Syria as well as in the Middle East. Thus, in cooperation with its allies and partners, the USA will make use of a combination of diplomat-

ic measures, harsher penalties, as well as economic and trade sanctions on both Iran and the Russian Federation.

3. Putting more and more pressure on the Lebanese Hezbollah, by enforcing the Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act of 2015 to prevent international sponsoring of the group. At the same time, adequate pressure should be put on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) so they exercise their mandate as decided by the UN Security Council, according to which they must monitor and expose all clandestine military actions and capabilities that the Hezbollah uses in cross-border attacks against Israel.

*

As far as the Syrian territory under conflict is concerned, the USA have come up with a ten point action plan, whose final purpose is to get a new political regime in Damascus that has a different view on domestic, regional and international policy. The long and short term agenda of this plan is as follows:

1. Maintaining the US military presence in the north-eastern part of Syria. The US will cooperate with the European Union and, simultaneously with the withdrawal of 2000 American US troops the EU would replace them with its own. In this context, observers have noticed a decrease in the intensity of the US military actions in Syria and their active support to the Kurdish and Syrian opposition forces. President Donald Trump has asked Germany to provide troops that could take over some of the missions the US troops have been carrying out. Chancellor Angela Merkel did not comply with Donald Trump's request.

2. Taking the necessary measures to stop Iran from reaching the area of the Eastern Euphrates, where 60,000 members of the Syrian Democratic Forces and the Syrian opposition coalition forces currently operate with American support. The USA and Turkey have long feared that a joint Syrian and Russian offensive will soon, most likely, dispose of the rebel forces in the north eastern part of Idlib.

3. An extension of the memorandum on air safety between the USA and the Russian Federation to avoid any incidents during their operations in Syria's air space.

4. Support of the Israeli raids and combative missions in Syria's air space and territory against Iran and Hezbollah forces in this country.

5. A closer cooperation with the European Union in enforcing sanctions against the Syrian government, its institutions, and dignitaries.

6. Pressuring the Arab countries in order to convince them to refrain from normalizing relations with Syria both individually (bilaterally) and jointly (the Arab League).

7. Stopping or freezing all the contributions to Syria's reconstruction until Damascus meets the necessary criteria and standards of political reform.

8. Similar sanctions will be applied in the case of Syrian businessmen that are financially or economically engaged in the reconstruction process.

9. Maintaining the illegitimacy of the current political regime within international agencies and organizations and preventing their involvement in any cooperation with the Syrian government.

10. Air strikes or other against Syrian state institutions and against the Iranian presence in Syria.

One can easily see that Syria does not represent a priority for the USA anymore. It is subject to change if this matter is useful to USA and Israel's strategy to minimize and eliminate the Iranian threat. This basically makes Vladimir Putin the only decision maker over the future of Syria and implicitly over Middle Eastern geopolitics.

“FROM PEACE TO PROSPERITY” VIA BAHRAIN

Ambassador Professor Dumitru CHICAN

On the 20th of May, a Bahraini-US cooperation workshop was announced at the initiative of American administration. The workshop took place on the 25th and 26th of June, in Manama, and was entitled “From Peace to Prosperity”. The event hosted government officials, businessmen and financiers, representatives of the Arabic civil society and other countries, as well as the chairman of the International Monetary Fund, Mrs. Christine Lagarde. The workshop was intended as an economic forum, based on the idea that peace between the Israeli and Palestinians be provided by means of economic progress.

What drew attention – as far as achieving economic goals was concerned – was the fact that the workshop lacked the presence of representatives from both countries involved in the peace process – Israel and the Palestinian National Authority.

While far from being one of the many attempts to solve the disputed Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the event was a chapter in a long series of similar activities over the past few years sharing a common focus – the old and complex issue of the “Palestinian dossier”.

In February 2018, the Polish capital Warsaw hosted a conference planned by the same US Administration and entitled “Peace and Security in the Middle East”. One may say this was a first, since the conference benefited from the presence of both leaders from the Arabic and Middle Eastern countries as well as that of the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. Of course, it came naturally to talk about the Palestinian issue among other. They

just talked. A month later, the White House hosted another workshop named “The Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza”. Over a year passed since and nobody mentioned either the forum or the humanitarian crisis. It is the same case with the forum in Manama which has now been forgotten.

The announcement over the conference in Manama was accompanied by vocal protests from the Palestinian leaders in Ramallah, but also drew the attention of international analysts and observers at least for two main reasons. Firstly, the economic and financial aspects of the conference were seen as important parts of the notorious “Deal of the Century”, strongly advertised by the Trump Administration, whose main architects and promoters are Jared Kushner, Donald Trump’s advisor and son-in-law, Jason Greenblatt, an important member of Donald Trump’s staff and David Friedman, the US Ambassador in Israel. Secondly, we are talking about a very anticipated moment - that never came - during the forum, when, perhaps, the USA would reveal *in integrum* the contents of the long awaited “deal of the century”. The idea that was the starting point of the “US initiative” was to mobilize the Arab world and some western countries to contribute to a 50 billion USD aid package that was to be



offered to the Palestinian National Authority, Jordan, and Egypt over a period of 10 years. It didn't meet the necessary level of support.

Beyond the reactions it caused, the US-Bahraini enterprise generated complex and heated debate over the relationship between the economic and political sides of any initiative meant to find a sustainable and long lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By the way, neither the US "deal of the century", nor the forums that have taken place for the past twenty years come first when speaking of the necessity to give the Palestinian problem a global approach - political, economic and social. This connection is, foremost, included in the 1993 Declaration of Principles, also known as the "Oslo Accords". At that time, the external financial aid to the Palestinians mainly by the European Union and the USA was directly linked to, and simultaneous with, the political peace negotiations process. This was the fundamental piece that determined the Palestinian National Authority to maintain its adherence to the continuation of the political process that envisaged, as stipulated by the Accords, the creation of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state. After all, one should not ignore the fact that the stakes of the Palestinian resistance movement and all those political endeavours were not financial prosperity, but the "land" factor and the sense of national identity. It is well known that, no matter the providers, "economic peace" cannot be acknowledged by a people that, politically, don't have their own sovereign, functional state. And, by the way, the idea of an "economic peace" advertised for years by Benjamin Netanyahu still hasn't taken any shape due to the very fact that what had been missing or had been damaged was the political element of the peace process.

From this point of view, it would be an illusion to believe that taking out the political aspect of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and converting the financial and economic elements into the only argument strong enough to lead to a collectively accepted solution could guarantee the accomplishment of this goal.

What led to more tensions in the aftermath of the Bahrain conference was the press statement

given by Jared Kushner in the beginning of July, when, in reference to the political aspect of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, he alluded to the fact that a possible solution to the Palestinian problem could be the naturalization of the Palestinian refugees in the countries - in the region - where they currently reside. This statement was seen as immature even by the American media. The question asked by the media was the following: if the Jerusalem issue is "done with" as we all know, if other fundamental issues included in the "Oslo Accords" have been removed - the issue of the refugees, respectively, that "the deal of the century" wants to transform into citizens of the countries they currently reside in -, if the issue of the Palestinian state - two-state/confederation - has been forgotten, what is the political component of Donald Trump's initiative and who will benefit from the 50 billion dollars brought up in the Manama forum?

While underlying that the Palestinian government and the National Palestine Authority haven't been informed and consulted regarding the Manama initiative, the secretary-general of the Palestine Liberation Organization's Executive Committee, Saeb Erekat stated that the Palestinians didn't agree with this unilateral initiative and "any attempt to bring the economy to normal in an occupied country would be rejected. [...] Our right to self-determination, freedom, and independence should be honoured through the implementation of UN resolutions and international law. This is the only way to peace and prosperity. Such a peace must start with the end of the Israeli occupation and the creation of a sovereign State of Palestine, within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital".

Since the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian government stated that they stopped seeing the USA as a mediator and negotiator for a solution to the conflict and following USA's decision regarding Jerusalem, such a position was to be expected, especially when the USA haven't made public the contents of the "peace initiative" described as "the deal of the century".

At the basis of the estimates of the Palestinian leaders in Ramallah lies another cause for suspi-

cion and mistrust. In the eyes of the Palestinians the underdevelopment and the social and economic crises in the autonomous territories are mainly caused by the current occupation and embargoes on the West Bank and Gaza Strip and by the settlement policy there. And, as long as politicians won't deal with the main causes of underdevelopment, there is no guarantee that the economic aid will bring real development benefits. Moreover, economic peace may either be regarded as more of a "bribe" for the Palestinians to agree with USA's plan or as a pressure instrument. (Nabil Amro for "Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, issue no. 14,786, 23.05.2019)

The reunion in Manama was, after all, a forum for discussion, where the presence or absence of some wasn't considered an important issue, and it hasn't been a decision making congress. Without a thorough understanding of the US initiative, analyses won't bring changes to the future courses of action. The "deal of the century" might be made public by the end of this summer, but not before the Israeli elections in September. Only then will we be able to talk more accurately about how much peace and prosperity will the "big deal" of the century bring.

ECONOMIC SUMMER: THE WORLD FROM ONE "G" TO ANOTHER

Dinu COSTESCU

On the 28th and 29th of June 2019, world leaders met in Osaka for the annual G20 summit, which gathers the top 20 most economically developed countries in the world, that have high living standards and, at the same time, have the most solid and functional democratic systems in the world.

The powerful world leaders addressed many (and various) issues, with a focus on identifying ways to steer clear of existing crisis and conflicts and stop the occurrence of others that might "overshadow" the "family photo" at the end of the summit. So everybody was happy and the leaders went back to their worries and on giving

migraines to others, a tradition which has almost become routine.

They had their share of disagreements, whether it was about the substantial number of subjects referring to economic and commercial inequities, about the ever-present issue of climate change or about the multitude of "red lines" meaning as many limits separating everyone's interests and that nobody seems willing to compromise over. The general tone of the final G20 summit declaration was defined by the term "we will...", however, without firmly answering questions such as "who" and "how".

This may be because the world leaders thought that, in all likelihood, for all those issues that were not addressed and solved the dialogue can continue, with higher and more optimistic hopes, at the other "G" summit – the "G7", that this time, under the management of Emmanuel Macron, will take place on French soil, in the cosmopolitan resort Biarritz, in the Bay of Biscay, between the 24th and 25th of August 2019.

It is worth mentioning that both the "G20" and the "G7" were born because and under the influence of a series of crises that the world has been subjected to over the past almost 50 years. So, "G7" was launched in 1975, following the first oil shock caused by the Arab-Israeli war, in October 1973 (the "Ramadan War" or the "Yom Kippur War"), while "G20" was born at the end of last century, in 1999, out of the need to fight the threatening financial crisis of the time; it reached its current setup in 2009, following another global financial crisis, this time originating in the USA.

Over time, the two "G" communities have become notorious for being the largest global forums, two collective institutions that meet regularly to talk about the biggest issues of our contemporary world and try to collectively identify, agree on, and contribute to preventing emerging crises and solving those already there.

Biarritz, G7: Expectations and Elements of Newness

As mentioned before, this year's "G7" summit will take place in Biarritz, France, between the

24th and 26th of August. According to various comments and preliminary information this summit will also want to deal head on and thoroughly with issues the members of the group are currently dealing with, both within the group as well as in their individual or collective relationship with the outside world. Another element of novelty is given by the number of participants. Biarritz will benefit from the participation of no less than 17 countries. The first group will be the traditional, now, 7+1: France (as host nation and holder of presidency of the reunion), Germany, Italy, Great Britain, the USA, Japan, Canada, and the European Union (represented by its leaders in Brussels). The second group includes four important partners aspiring to global recognition - South Africa, Australia, Chile, and India. These countries have strong democratic systems and share fundamental principles such as protection of human rights, support for digital development and artificial intelligence, and protection of environment and biodiversity. Africa receives close attention, due to France, as the continent is represented at the summit by four countries besides South Africa. These countries have been invited as a sign of encouragement and appreciation of their status as multilateral actors involved in dealing with global objectives like those included in the Paris Agreement on climate protection. These above mentioned group includes Egypt, Burkina Faso, Senegal, and Rwanda. One of the arguments France

used to invite these countries is their status within multistate organizations. Egypt currently holds the presidency of the African Union, while Burkina Faso presides over the group of five African countries in Sahel that, with the help of the French and the international community are committed to fighting against Islamist jihadist ter-

rorism in the region. Senegal is the current leader of the African Union Development Agency, the former New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and Rwanda held the presidency of the African Union in 2018, which it passed on to Egypt.

To sum up, one may say that the August "G7" summit is a French calendar comprising three main themes - fighting social and economic imbalances, protecting the climate, and spreading and strengthening democracy and its defining values.

The Osaka summit pointed out that the contemporary world is facing less of the traditional and highly resilient challenges and hardships, and more of new tensions and patterns emerging from the global developments in the beginning of this century. Balancing growth and development, understanding the necessity to "shake off" the traditional taboos that divide the present day world into islands surrounded by walls of perfectionism and individualism, as well as the flow of information are just some of those challenges. It remains to be seen whether the participants at the summit in Biarritz are rational and united enough to at least draft some solutions to the future challenges.





Malaysia - Yet Another Crisis Looming?

Murray HUNTER¹

Love him or hate him, Mahathir Mohamed during his first stint as prime minister was able to instill a great sense of national pride and unity.

Mahathir went on a massive infrastructure drive. Most Malaysians were proud of the Penang Bridge that finally linked the island with the mainland. The North-South Highway project changed the nature of commuting up and down the peninsula. Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) was built and the development of Putra Jaya gave the country a new seat of administration.

Mahathir's fait accompli was the building of the KLCC towers in central Kuala Lumpur, which were the tallest in the world at the time. These buildings are now the country's major icon. Langkawi became a must holiday place for Malaysians. He brought elite Formula One motor racing and built a special purpose circuit for the event. He promoted the Tour de Langkawi as a local version of the Tour de France. He spared no expense on building massive new sporting complexes at Bukit Jalil to host the Commonwealth Games in 1998.

When the member nations of ASEAN abandoned the idea to build a regional car, Mahathir went alone, picking up old technology from Mitsubishi, creating the Proton Saga for better or worse although the national car project has been roundly criticized for losing hundreds of millions of dollars and costing more in terms of consumer lost opportunity.

Nonetheless, Malaysia became an Asian Tiger and Mahathir himself became an outspoken leader internationally. The country was proud of what it had achieved. He knew the value of national symbols. The slogan *Malaysia Boleh* (Malaysia Can) was

often heard along with the waving of the *Jalur Gemilang* (stripes of glory – Malaysian Flag) at public displays of national pride and unity.

The Barisan Nasional was a working government coalition that symbolized national unity through the make-up of the cabinet and its true multi-ethnic Flavour. Ministers like Samy Vellu from the Malaysian India Congress and Ling Liong Sik from the Malaysian Chinese Association had high public profiles.

Although Mahathir was labelled as an ultra-conservative Malay, he worked with anyone who could help him fulfil his vision. Businessmen like Vincent Tan, Robert Kuok, Lim Goh Tong, Ananda Krishnan, and Tony Fernandez all had very close relationships with Mahathir. Malaysia Inc. was more important to Mahathir than Malay supremacy.

That's now 30 years ago. The prime casualty has been national pride and unity. The generally positive perception of the Mahathir era drastically changed when he abruptly sacked his deputy Anwar Ibrahim from office in 1998. The accusations and conviction of Anwar for sodomy polarized the population. The goodwill that Mahathir had built up over more than 25 years in



Mahathir Mohamed - Prime Minister of Malaysia

1. Prof. Murray Hunter is an Australian scholar and prolific writer. A long time Asian affairs insider, he is author of several books for the US publishers.

public life was put into question.

Although it was his intention to eliminate his nemesis Anwar from politics, he made sodomy a household word in a conservative society, taking luster away from his legacy. He was painted by the Anwar propaganda machine and the alternative media as a tyrant with millions of dollars hidden away in foreign banks. In addition, two years of headlines and court reports about Anwar's sodomy trial took away a sense of innocence, showing Malaysia's 'dark side' with TV pictures showing a stained mattress being carted into and out of court every day on which Anwar was convicted of performing sodomy.

Under weak successors, belief in government further faltered. Respect for national leaders took another hit with Mahathir's successor Ahmad Badawi painted as someone who slept on the job and enjoyed a luxurious lifestyle while many suffered economically. Badawi was painted by the PKR propaganda machine as corrupt. The dealings of his son-in-law and political adviser Khairy Jamaluddin were portrayed as corrupt nepotism.

Mahathir engineered an ungraceful exit for Badawi, replacing him with Najib Razak in 2009. The Najib premiership was tainted from the outset with rumours of murder and corruption. Najib's wife Rosmah also became an object of ridicule, bringing respect for the institution of government to an all-time low.

However, it's not just the corruption of politicians that destroyed respect for Malaysian institutions. The *rakyat* (people) have always wanted to believe in royalty. Even with stories about royal misdoings, there is no real talk of abolishing the monarchy. Whenever a member of one of the royal families acts in the interests of the *rakyat*, there has always been public praise and support. However, when members of a royal family act against the interests of the *rakyat*, the social media react.

Stories have been circulating for years about the misdeeds of Johor Royal Family. The current spat between Tunku Ismail, the Johor Crown Prince, commonly known as TMJ and Mahathir is extremely damaging for the royal institutions. Only the sedition act, a de facto *lese-majeste* law,

is protecting the institution from much wider criticism.

Royal decorations and titles, VVIP service in government offices and special treatment for some citizens over others, shows a muddled Malaysia still clinging to the vestiges of feudalism. These artefacts are doing nothing to unite the country, a hangover from the old days of colonial class distinction.

However, the most powerful source of destruction for national pride and unity is the *Ketuanan Melayu* (Malay Superiority) narrative which has become much more extreme. One of the basic assumptions is that *bumiputeras* — indigenous peoples — are the rightful owners of the land. From the point of view of the *Ketuanan* proponents, land is not seen as a national symbol and non-Malays are excluded. This is a great barrier to developing any sense of national pride and unity.

The gulf between Malay and non-Malay has widened dramatically over the last two generations as Islam has grown into a major aspect of Malay identity. Citizens once celebrated their diverse ethnicities in harmony. Decrees made in the name of Islam now discourage this. No longer are Hari Raya, Chinese New Year, Deepavali and Christmas shared Malaysian experiences.

The way of life has become Islamized to the point where there is little place for other religions and traditions. Food, dress codes, entertainment, education, the civil service, government, police and the military are all Islamized.

Shared apprehensions about what Malaysia will be have caused the Chinese to close ranks. The influence of *Ketuanan Melayu* in government policy excludes non-Malay participation in many fields like education, civil service and the military, etc. The younger generation of Chinese today tend to see themselves as Chinese first and Malaysians second. Chinese schools promote language and a strong sense of Chinese culture over a Malaysian identity as a mass defence mechanism.

The New Economic Policy, put in place in 1969 after disastrous race riots as an affirmative action program for the majority Malays, has also

done a disservice to those it was designed to help. The thesis of Mahathir's book *The Malay Dilemma* was that Malays were basically lazy and needed help from the government is the faulty grounding assumption. The NEP is actually an attack on Malay self-esteem.

Rather than offering something spiritual, Islam has become a doctrine of conformity, where particular rights and rituals must legally be adhered to. Failure to do so in the case of not fasting during Ramadan can lead to punitive legal action. Any views outside narrow social norms lead to heavy criticism. Just recently the Islamic authorities (JAKIM) in Selangor started investigating a discussion forum on women's choice about wearing the hijab. Not just freedom of discussion is stifled, but also the right to be creative.

Islam has buried the principles of *Rukun Negara* (national principles), the supposed guiding philosophy of the nation. *Rukun Negara* was once a symbol of national pride and unity but has almost totally been replaced by a *Doa* (or prayer) before public events. A sense of nation has been sacrificed for the Islamization of public gatherings. As dr. Djawed Sangdel excellently explained in his 5Es general developmental theory for XXI century, "social consensus makes or breaks nation".

Today we see much less flag-waving during the Merdeka season. There are more divisional narratives on all ethnic sides. There is disappointment with the political system. Islam is seen by many as something overpowering rather than emancipating. People feel they need to conform to be accepted in society.

National pride and unity are at their lowest ebb since independence, where after 30 years of education the younger generations of Malays see Islam as more important than nationalism. Chinese and Indians are apprehensive about what Malaysia is turning into. Even the Orang Asli – the original inhabitants of the peninsula before the arrival of ethnic Malays from Indonesia — and non-Muslim indigenous people of Sabah and Sarawak identify as second-class.

Malaysia has travelled far away from the aspirations of Tunku Abdul Rahman when the Jalur Gemilang was raised for the first time over a free Malaya in 1957. Malaysia's economic prosperity is relatively declining in the region and the nation is increasingly strangled by the need to conform. Malaysia appears to be a ship without a rudder, its reform agenda locked away under the Official Secrets Act.

The possibility of racial violence festering once again cannot be overlooked. Divisive narratives are being pushed until one day an unknown tipping point could be reached. The strong sense of social conformity, the exclusion of a national sense of ownership to all, the current totalitarian nature of authority and the *Ketuanan Melayu* narratives are a very dangerous mix.

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2. University professor at UMEF University based in Geneva, Switzerland. He is the author of the 5 E theory: "we are" (respect), "education", "energy", "entrepreneurs" and "economy". According to Prof. Djawed Sangdel, these are the steps that a state must go through to solve the development problem.

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