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LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

As long-time publisher of *The Security Times,* I'm honored to welcome you back to Munich for the MSC. This year's issue is perhaps our most vital yet.

Wolfgang Ischinger, CEO of the MSC, and Germany's Foreign Minister **Heiko Maas** kick off our commentary on pages 2 and 3 with their analyses of the upcoming foreign policy season.

On pages 4 and 5, Harvard scholars **Graham Allison** and **Joseph Nye** square off on the West's game plan vis-à-vis China: Shore up the defensive line or focus more on soft power?

Is Russia a formidable foe or should the US and Europe give-and-go with Moscow and tackle the world's toughest problems as one team? The international line-up of **Ian Bremmer, Dmitri Trenin** and **Sylvie Kauffmann** takes the floor on pages 12 and 13.

Is peace possible? *The Security Times* special teams examine the state of play in Ukraine, the Middle East, Libya, Yemen and Afghanistan on pages 17 to 21.

And finally, some crunch-time heroics by **Ivan Krastev** on the big league prospects of Europe (p. 29) and **Jessica T. Mathews** on the US defense budget (p. 31).

I hope you enjoy our paper, and may reading it enrich your debates on the pressing issues of our time.

Sincerely,

Detlef Prinz
Publisher

A global order in flux

We must re-address arms control

BY THEO SOMMER

When the history of these times is written, it may well be that the headlines of the day – Iraq and the controversies it has aroused – will pale in comparison to other international upheavals of our period. The center of gravity of world affairs is moving to the Pacific, and almost all major actors on the international stage are defining new roles for themselves."

You may not believe it. This is not a current assessment, but a quote from a *Washington Post* article Henry Kissinger wrote back in 2004. If you add Iran to Iraq, it could have been written yesterday. Kissinger mentioned all the problems that bedevil us nowadays: the structural estrangement of America from Europe; European doubts about the reliability of the United States as a strategic partner; Russia's post-imperial trauma; China's emergence as a great power; and the break-up of the international system. The title of Kissinger's op-ed piece was "A World in Flux," and its central argument: "The global scene is more fluid than it has been for centuries."

In fact, we are witnessing the third dramatic geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic upheaval in the past five hundred years. The first was the rise of Europe around the year 1500; the second, beginning around 1900, turned the United States into the global superpower of the 20th century; the third is the shift of power and wealth to Asia, with China pushing assertively, even aggressively forward and striving to put its stamp on a world undergoing profound change.

The relentless ascent of China has grave political, economic and military ramifications. Equally disquieting, however, is the ideological aspect. Beijing offers all authoritarians in the world an alternative model to the democratic capitalism of the West – autocratic capitalism. The American-led multilateral system that stabilized global relations since 1945 is gradually being replaced by "one world, two systems" – one set of rules and norms for the liberal West, another for authoritarian China and its global devotees.

It is a sad story that US President Donald Trump has been actively undercutting the "liberal international order" the US called into being after the end of World War II. He is a sharp-elbowed nationalist and an unabashed protectionist. His foreign policy – anti-EU, skeptical of collective defense and centered not on the pursuit of broader interests but rather on "America First" – is erratic, to say the least. Trade deficits and a narrow focus on freeriding are his benchmarks, not considerations of balance-of-power, fostering alliances and creating networks. America's segue from over-reach to retrenchment, from perennial interventions to retreat began before Trump, but his unilateralist braggadocio has turned an overdue adaptation into an instrument of disruption.

At the end of a bruising decade, the rest of the West must contend not only with a fickle US president but also with a rising China, a resurgent Russia, ongoing cross-border terrorism, instability and chaos in the Middle East. Despite Trump's skepticism, the unwavering support of America's military establishment has empowered NATO to continue functioning smoothly, yet without a political strategy, let alone vision. French President Emmanuel Macron's shocking statement that the Alliance was suffering "brain-death" has caused NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg to begin a thorough review process. It is supposed to devise an up-to-date grand strategy for NATO to confront the new realities of the 21st century.

One central question is whether the danger of armed conflict is again on the rise. The realist's answer is: It will remain a threat, but an unlikely one. All powers will wish to avoid all-out war. They don't want to fight. Instead they will pursue disruptive strategies: hacking, meddling in each other's internal affairs and orchestrating disinformation campaigns. The danger, though, is that miscalculation and the logic of escalation will turn minor clashes into regional conflagrations. And transnational issues, especially climate change, mass migration and nuclear proliferation, may create quite novel security problems.

Europe must "learn to speak the language of power"

Looking at the international landscape, one cannot fail to notice a number of conundrums.

Conundrum number one: Trump has boosted US defense expenditures to unprecedented heights – $738 billion in 2020. He increased the number of troops in Europe as well as in the Middle East. But basically he does not want to fight wars any more; he wants to bring the GIs home. His way of fighting is with economic leverage. He has weaponized the two dominant phenomena of our times – globalization and digitalization. He has exploited economic interdependence in his rivalry with China and in the confrontation with Iran, but also in his relationship with European and Asian allies. Simultaneously, he has pressed ahead with the securitization of microchips, semiconductors and software. The campaign against Huawei, also focusing on foes and friends alike, is the most egregious case in point.

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Western abdication

Europe and the US have failed in Syria

BY KRISTIN HELBERG

After almost nine years of civil war, the crisis in and around Syria has not been resolved. Nonetheless, it is clear who the winners and losers in the conflict are. Among the winners are the Syrian regime, Russia, Iran and even Turkey, to a certain extent. These countries have always known what they wanted, have proven ready to do anything to get what they want, and have been able to adapt their strategies to the dynamics of the war. Among the losers are the United States and Europe, who championed the desires of Syrians citizens for a life of freedom and dignity but did so in a half-hearted manner and without any tangible plan.

As this gap between its words and deeds grew, the West gambled away its credibility. With its system of international agreements, moral principles and democratically legitimized institutions, the West proved capable neither of helping the Syrians nor of ending the war. The reality we must now face in the case of the Syrian conflict is that liberal democracy has failed, and autocracy has triumphed. This outcome is destined to have far-reaching consequences – for Syrians, the Middle East, Europe and the world.

The current state of affairs in Syria is as it always was, only worse

Syrian president Bashar al-Assad remains in power and is set to regain control of the entire country in the coming months. In Idlib, he will do so by force of arms, and in the northeast, he will do so by means of a gradual takeover of Kurdish self-government. In other words, the current state of affairs in Syria is as it always was, only worse.

Assad's reign hinges on loyalty to the regime, which he secures through a system of clientelism and enforces by means of fear. This results in his two strongest pillars of support coming from wealthy businessmen and a far-reaching intelligence apparatus. Simply put, those who support the regime are rewarded, and those who reject it are punished.

The country's secret services are more powerful than ever. Local militias are involved in a variety of illicit activities, which include bribery, blackmail, theft and threatening or kidnapping citizens. In the years before the war, Syrians were subject to the despotism of the state alone; today, they are at the mercy of non-state and foreign actors as well.

Syria's pseudo-socialist, neo-capitalist economic system has engendered a symbiosis of entrepreneurs and regime representatives. More specifically, the liberalization driven by Assad paired with the war economy of the past few years has created a merger of wealth and political-power structures. Crony capitalists loyal to the regime benefit from the privatization of public property, from smuggling and from monopolies in the service sector. In other words, power and money are bound to each other in modern Syria. This fact should be borne in mind when it comes to handing out humanitarian aid and supporting reconstruction efforts there.

While entire regions of Syria remain in ruin, the Syrian pound continues to lose value and UN figures show more than 80 percent of Syrians living in poverty, the Assad regime continues to focus exclusively on its followers and supporters in an effort to further secure its power. In the case of Aleppo, UN funds are not directed toward the most devastated residential areas in the east of the city, which used to be administered by opposition forces; instead, the money is flowing to areas populated by those loyal to the regime. In the south of Damascus, in an area marked by the ruins of bombed-out middle-class and working-class neighborhoods, the city administration is building luxury resorts rather than social housing. Former residents are being expropriated and/or compensated at ridiculously low costs by the government.

This kind of activity is immune to outside influence because the behavior itself guarantees the survival of Syria's rulers. After decades of being under the regime's thumb, society, state institutions and the private sector form a close-knit network of interdependencies. Any real concessions – such as depriving the secret services of power and ushering in freedom of expression, freedom of the press and an independent judiciary – would result in a system failure that would threaten the survival of the rulers in Damascus. By its very nature, the Syrian regime itself is incapable of instituting effective reforms.

This is an important insight for foreign actors seeking an effective approach to negotiations with Damascus. Since 2012, the US and Europe have tried to achieve a "credible political transition" in Syria that includes a transfer of power, a transitional government, a new constitution and demo-

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Europe is ready for its close-up

In Libya, the EU must demonstrate its willingness to become a true geopolitical actor

BY WOLFGANG ISCHINGER

What are Europeans willing and able to do in order to secure their wider neighborhood? This question is by no means new. But with instability growing and the US footprint shrinking in Europe's southern periphery, the question regularly returns – and each time with greater force.

Encouragingly, it looks as if Europeans are no longer evading the security question. Moreover, by hosting peace talks in Berlin, the German government – in a concerted effort with other capitals – made a courageous attempt to end one of the most worrisome military escalations at Europe's periphery: the war in Libya.

The German government, together with other European countries, succeeded in hosting Libya's chief conflict parties as well as their many foreign backers. The summit secured, at least on paper, all relevant actors' commitment to respect the international arms embargo, work toward a permanent cease-fire, and revive the UN-sponsored political process.

This is no small achievement. By pushing for this outcome, Europeans demonstrated that they finally understand that if they don't try to bring peace and stability to Libya, no one else will. If they want to see an end to a conflict with massive effects on European security interests, they themselves must bring it about.

Forging the Berlin agreement was the easiest part. What comes next will be much more challenging. In Libya, Europe's resolve to become a geopolitical actor will face its first significant test, while Germany can finally demonstrate how it seeks to implement its oft-heard pledge to take on a greater international role.

It is hard to disentangle the Libyan civil war from the migration crisis that hit Europe in 2015 and provoked a significant rise in populist anti-EU sentiment

In many respects, Libya epitomizes the fundamental challenges currently confronting Europeans:

First, what has worked well for a considerable amount of time, namely outsourcing to the US the task of stabilizing Europe's neighborhood, is no longer a viable option. Washington is tired of engaging in far-away conflicts that may strongly affect its European partners yet have few – if any – ripple effects on US citizens.

Second, where the West fails to engage, other powers are increasingly willing and eager to jump in. The goals they pursue, however, are often at odds with European interests. In fact, ceding leverage to other powers rarely gives rise to the kind of environment that Europe desires, one based on peace, prosperity and stability.

And third, while Europeans may have come around to recognizing the need for a considerably more active European foreign and security policy – a policy of jointly engaging in the conflicts and crises that affect them – this realization comes at the worst possible time. It comes at a time when the EU is subject to unprecedented centrifugal forces. Ironically, these same forces have been stifled – and continue to be stifled – by conflicts like the one in Libya. After all, it is hard to disentangle the Libyan civil war from the migration crisis that hit Europe in 2015 and provoked a significant rise in populist anti-EU sentiment.

This leads straight to the question of what Europe can do to secure its surroundings. What can it do to help stabilize Libya? The agreement reached in Berlin will not suffice. It must also be enforced. A potential cease-fire must be monitored while violations to the arms embargo must be sanctioned.

And most importantly: How can the warring parties be motivated to agree to a verifiable cease-fire?

This is where it behooves German and EU diplomacy to remember the hard lessons learned in Bosnia in 1995: A meaningful cease-fire or peace arrangement can only be achieved if and when all parties to a military conflict understand that the road to military victory is definitively closed. Absent the threat of military enforcement measures, the parties involved are unlikely to sign on to a political process and abandon the goal of military and political victory.

In Bosnia and Kosovo, the US stepped in and convinced Slobodan Milošević to engage in peace talks. This time, it's Europe's turn.

For Germany and other EU countries, these are very difficult questions. On the one hand, military measures or enforcement measures mandated by the UN, as rightly considered by the EU's chief diplomat, will likely have to be part of the mix – although when asked about the possible need to deploy their military, German politicians quickly stepped on the brakes. On the other hand, Europeans must not be naïve: Whatever the contours of their engagement in Libya, Europe must prepare for the long haul. Almost 20 years in Afghanistan and even more in Kosovo have hammered this point home.

Either way, Europeans cannot avoid taking action. Whether in the form of migration, terrorism or transnational organized crime, instability at Europe's doorstep is sure to wreak havoc at home.

European attempts to contain these troubles and hold conflicts at bay have regularly produced considerable human suffering – the Libyan detention camps are dreadful proof of this fact. At the conference in Berlin, Germany and its European partners signaled that they have awoken to the changing tides. The next few weeks – including the debates at the Munich Security Conference – will give a first indication of whether Europeans are able to translate this realization into action. Tough decisions lie ahead.

WOLFGANG ISCHINGER
is chair of the Munich Security Conference and professor for international security and diplomatic practice at the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin.

The West and the search for its future

NATO and the EU loom over the debates at this year's Munich Security Conference

BY PETER H. KOEPF AND LUTZ LICHTENBERGER

There was a time when it appeared that history was coming to an end and the future was set to begin. The democratic and capitalist West had brought communism and the command economies of the East to their knees, not least by dint of an arms race the Soviet Union ultimately couldn't keep up with. The battle of the two systems had a clear winner and the era of the Cold War seemed finally to have come to an end. At the time, even the question was occasionally broached as to whether the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was still necessary now that the USSR and the Eastern bloc had dissolved.

Other options would have been for the Atlantic alliance to integrate Russia militarily and work toward a giant common free trade area and a "harmonious economic community stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok," as imagined by Russia's Vladimir Putin, as well as the creation of a "unified continental market." The world seemed ready to become One World.

Anything was possible: Confrontation would give way to cooperation, democracy and peace.

That was then. This is now. For the United States, the Russian Federation has once again become what the Soviet Union had been: the enemy. After the dissolution of the USSR, Moscow was no longer considered to be on equal footing, so NATO, led by the US, used the opportunity to expand its sphere of influence eastward. For its part, the EU, too, took what fell into its lap.

Moscow's pent-up anger was vented at the Munich Security Conference (MSC) in 2007, when Putin fulminated over America's concept of a "unipolar world" and the "uncontained hyper-use of military force" by NATO, which had "overstepped its national borders in every way." NATO and the EU, he argued, imposed their will upon other countries while advancing their military infrastructure "to our borders." Putin would no longer tolerate being patronized and pushed around as a mere "regional power," as President Barack Obama called Russia in March 2014. The Russian president ultimately annexed Crimea and supported the separatists in Eastern Ukraine. Today, once again, NATO faces an enemy on its eastern flank.

This frightens the Eastern Europeans. Having just escaped communism, they embraced the West, only to soon realize that unquestioning emulation did not yield all the expected results. Resistance to the zeitgeist of globalization grew, and more and more Eastern Europeans increasingly felt that the capitalist system failed to deliver them their fair share.

In other words, the beacon of the future – Western democracy and modernization – lost its credibility. In the book he co-authored with Stephan Holmes, *The Light that Failed*, the Bulgarian political theorist Ivan Krastev wrote in somber tones of the "twilight of Europe" (see Krastev's piece on page 29).

Africa's Krastev, the Senegalese scholar and writer Felwine Sarr, has his own doubts about Western hegemony. He does not wish to further "universalize" the Western values system African elites have fallen for. He "refuses to legitimize the rat race" and wants to liberate the black continent "from all that degrades the people and extinguishes their power and creativity." He seeks to "deliver them fully from the monstrous structures of a relentless global economic order." He wants to shed what Africa has adopted from the Europeans; he strives for autonomy and toward an "Afrotopia."

In addition to our liberal society, the trans-Atlantic defense alliance is once again up for discussion, but for reasons that differ from those in 1990. Even a German historian has questioned whether we still really need NATO and the EU. Gregor Schöllgen would like to dissolve these two "anachronistic monsters"; as far as he's concerned, they are mere "reminders of a closed chapter in world politics." As Schöllgen lays out in essays published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *The German Times*, we need a new beginning.

But why? Because the EU and NATO no longer function as they once did. They are failing to find common solutions to the problems of our time. On the issue of asylum for refugees, most EU countries have shown a frightening degree of egotism, while climate change fuels fierce debates. The Brits are leaving the EU, while the US president has pronounced NATO "obsolete."

Ever since this verdict, a certain specter has haunted the security policy debate. Could the US actu-


PICTURE ALLIANCE/DPA

Don't disengage, shape the change

Germany is convinced that a steady hand can make a difference in an unsteady world

BY HEIKO MAAS

This year's Munich Security Report diagnoses the world with a condition it calls "Westlessness," with symptoms that include signs of Western paralysis amid a loss of global significance. Many political observers share similar concerns. While our countries and societies increasingly question their own norms and values, the argument goes, we are losing the power and will to shape the global order for the better.

Indeed, Western power and heft in the world, both economically and politically, may no longer appear as dominant as they once were. But we should not forget that this current state of affairs is a result of Western success, not a sign of failure. The very system built, led and defended over decades by liberal democracies around the world – including their support for open markets – gave rise to an international order that was stable and balanced enough to allow other countries to rise, thrive and prosper. This should not be a cause for anxiety or self-doubt, but rather a source of additional motivation to preserve and strengthen the rules-based system that we helped create in order to get there.

The speed, force and ubiquity of change may no longer surprise us, yet it continues to challenge our capacity to adapt. Globalization and digital transformation are accelerating the global reshuffle of power and wealth – within and between countries. Germany, in concert with other liberal democracies, supports the legitimate claim of billions of people to have their say on the global stage. There is no reversing the shifts, nor should there be. We should be ready to brace ourselves for change.

In order to peacefully manage this change and to penalize foul play, we need a critical mass of countries willing to stand up for the norms and rules that have served us so well. As the world is turning into an ever more interconnected set of chessboards, we cannot flip a coin to determine our next move. We must uphold the rules of the game and strengthen the organizations, institutions and alliances that enforce them. This must include the willingness to reform institutions when they lack effectiveness and amend the international order where new challenges require new norms and rules. Prosperity, security and, ultimately, peace will otherwise be at stake.

Last year at the 55th Munich Security Conference, my French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian and I introduced the idea of an Alliance for Multilateralism. As an individual state no longer has full control over its destiny, we will need flexible, strong and maneuverable multilateral formats and forums in order to tackle issues from climate change and security to arms control, global trade and migration. At a time when key principles of the rules-based international order and well-established instruments of international cooperation are being challenged, the Alliance for Multilateralism aims to bring together those that believe in strong and effective multilateral cooperation. An international network of states willing and able to mobilize partners and leverage our political influence can solve critical issues incrementally, one by one.

In September 2019, over 60 foreign ministers from all continents met in New York to show their political commitment to the Alliance for Multilateralism. Since then, the idea and the informal network have spread. We will jointly work to protect and preserve international norms where they come under pressure. We will help advance the reform of key multilateral institutions when it is necessary to keep them effective and to adapt them to changing realities. And we will take the initiative to devise multilateral solutions for policy areas where new challenges require collective action. The recent adoption of guiding principles on lethal autonomous weapons systems by the 125 signatories of the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons is one such area where the Alliance has started to deliver.

The European Union remains the cornerstone not only of Germany's perspective on multilateralism, but also of our approach to engaging with the world. Brexit has just demonstrated that the merits of EU membership are not self-evident. The EU was created as a project for peace and prosperity; in today's world of new great-power competition, Europeans are becoming increasingly aware that it is also their only hope of controlling their own fate.

During Germany's EU Presidency in the second half of 2020, we will focus on Europe's position on the global stage. How can we become more resilient in an interconnected world? How can we achieve and maintain digital sovereignty, and at what cost? We will have to continue to improve the competitiveness of our national economies while preserving and strengthening our common social standards. Consequently, we will need to expand and deepen existing networks. With the EU-China leaders' meeting and the summit between the EU and the African Union, we will emphasize Europe's global aspirations and perspectives.

In the field of security and defense, close trans-Atlantic cooperation with the United States and other European partners will remain crucial. NATO has guaranteed security and prosperity in Europe for 70 years; it has been our lifeline. Our goal remains a strong European pillar on which our trans-Atlantic alliance rests. Just recently, I suggested that NATO embark on a process of reflection on the political dimension of the Alliance, which was endorsed at the NATO summit. This is a case in point for NATO's problem-solving capacities – and for democracies and networks of democratic states more broadly.

International crises right on Europe's borders remind us not only of a need for collective action by the West, but also of our neighbors' need for a united Europe. In Ukraine, we are continuing to work together with France to help resolve a conflict at the heart of Europe (the OSCE's crucial role along every step of the way is another testimony to effective multilateralism). While progress is far from satisfactory, the past year has seen renewed and earnest efforts to improve the humanitarian situation and chart a path toward a peaceful solution.

On Libya, we have taken the initiative to corral international actors in support of the United Nations' Special Representative's peace plan, to help get the conflict parties to the negotiating table and to restore compliance with the Security Council's arms embargo. This Berlin Process has only just begun – indeed, all sides have thus far continued to supply weapons and personnel to the conflict parties in spite of their commitments not to. However, this new cycle of escalation has only solidified the military stalemate, at increasing cost to both sides. The Berlin Process offers the parties an off-ramp from this destructive cycle. We believe it is in their interest (not to mention the interest of the Libyan people) to take this off-ramp sooner rather than later. At our meeting in Munich, we will work to keep this option open.

None of this is easy, and success is far from guaranteed. But we are convinced that a steady hand can make a difference in an unsteady world. Our untiring efforts will ensure that the future will not be a "Westless" one. ■

HEIKO MAAS
is foreign minister of Germany.

MSC

ally leave the Alliance and take all its weapons with it, including their nuclear missiles? One year ago, Congress put to rest any such considerations with its NATO Support Act, which passed the House of Representatives 357 to 22 and cleared the Senate by a margin of 97 to 2. Also, at the top of this year's agenda is Defender Europe 20, the largest exercise contingent of American soldiers to leave the US for Europe since the mid-1990s.

But what if the US were to leave Europe?

Could Europe defend itself? Even if Russia's defense spending is equal only to that of France, Moscow's mid-range missiles are capable of reaching the heart of Europe. Would all European NATO members honor the mutual defense clause to, say, protect the Baltic states from Russian aggression?

Such considerations in the Baltics and even in Poland would cause teeth-chattering. While majorities in these regions are critical of the EU, the idea of spurning NATO or doubting the value of its existence is viewed as nonsense.

NATO's greatest troubles appear to be homemade. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has ordered missile defense systems from Moscow, asserted Turkey's right to possess atomic weapons and invaded Syria in violation of international law. And Europe is sorely lacking a reliable partner in the White House.

When the US makes a decision, the Europeans – often gritting their teeth – have no choice but to comply. Former Assistant US Secretary of State Victoria Nuland gave expression to this state of affairs in a leaked telephone conversation with a colleague in 2014: "Fuck the EU." Obama's successor pulled out of the INF Treaty, which prohibited the stationing of mid-range nuclear missiles in Europe, while the last remaining disarmament treaty from the 20th century, New START, is now in peril. Trump terminated the nuclear deal with Iran and, without any consultation with allies, announced a retreat from Syria, which gave Erdoğan the green light to launch his offensive from the north.

Who will cover the costs of the new arms race? Who will pick up the pieces in Iran and Ukraine? And who will help the Kurds, who may soon again end up in the torture chambers of Assad?

The crises of NATO and the EU are simmering as the more than 500 experts from the worlds of politics, science and the military convene in mid-February at the Hotel Bayerischer Hof in Munich for the 56th Munich Security Conference. China's ambitious expansion will also be a topic, and Russia even more so. Should the Western world show Putin the carrot or the stick?

The MSC will also address the issue of terrorism; indeed, French President Macron is seeking reinforcements for the fight against Islamist insurgents in Mali.

Germany's defense budget will certainly be a topic. A "country of our size and our economic and technological might" can defend its own "global interests," instead of "simply spectating from the sidelines," says a convinced Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, chairwoman of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Germany's Minister of Defense.

But what does it mean when experts say Europe must become "weltpolitikfähig," that is, able to influence global politics, as Jean-Claude Juncker argued at the MSC 2018? How can it gain more influence over global policy and learn the "language of power," as President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen put it? These and other issues will be discussed at the MSC 2020.

According to Oliver Rolofs, MSC spokesman from 2009 to 2016, the big show – that is, the events on stage and all the footage broadcast on television and the internet – "is the least important." Much more significant for the resolution of global conflicts is the shuttle diplomacy between hotel suites at the Bayerischer Hof. Behind the scenes, politicians from enemy states can engage in informal negotiations on neutral turf. "At the Bayerischer Hof, quarters are so crowded that you simply can't avoid encountering others, friend or foe," says Rolofs. This regularly produces what we call "Munich Moments."

In 2009, after years of trans-Atlantic bickering, Joe Biden used the back rooms of the Bayerischer Hof to negotiate the arms control agreement known as New START with the Russians. In 2011, its ratification documents were exchanged in the hotel. Munich is where politicians from Transnistria and Moldova held secret meetings, and where Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon and the former Saudi Director of Intelligence Prince Turki al-Faisal famously shook hands. In the conference hall, Vitali Klitschko confronted Ukrainian Foreign Minister Leonid Kozhara with photographs of severely wounded Maidan demonstrators in 2014. And year after year, the MSC was a venue where Iranians and Americans could actually converse without intermediaries.

Perhaps this year will bring more Munich Moments – the world could surely use them. ■

PETER H. KOEPF is editor-in-chief and **LUTZ LICHTENBERGER** Senior Editor of the *The Security Times* and *The German Times*, both published by Times Media in Berlin.

Big gestures, big talk (from left to right): In 2019, MSC CEO Wolfgang Ischinger showed up in his cult-classic EU hoodie. Vitali Klitschko confronted Ukrainian Foreign Minister Leonid Kozhara with photographs of severely wounded Maidan demonstrators in 2014. On the MSC podium in 2012, Senator John McCain held up the cover of *The Security Times*. In 2011, Hillary Clinton and Sergey Lavrov exchanged the ratification documents of the New START arms control agreement. In 2009, Joe Biden (here with Henry Kissinger) used the back rooms of the Bayerischer Hof to negotiate the New START treaty with the Russians. Angela Merkel and Vladimir Putin were all smiles in 2007 – until after his speech.

The Thucydides Trap

Beyond trade: the confrontation between the US and China

BY GRAHAM T. ALLISON JR.

Could China and the US be stumbling down the path Germany and the United Kingdom took at the beginning of the last century? The possibility will strike many readers as inconceivable. But we should remember that when we say something is "inconceivable," this is a claim not about what is possible in the world, but rather about what our limited minds can imagine.

My answer to the question of whether we are sleepwalking toward war is "yes." The following is a summary of my argument in four tweets: First, the risks of war in the decade ahead are eerily similar to those faced by Germany and the UK a century ago. Second, the primary driver in what became World War I and what could become World War III was clearly identified by Thucydides 2,500 years ago in his analysis of the great war between Athens and Sparta. Third, preventing war in this case will require strategic imagination far beyond anything seen in Washington or Beijing to date. And fourth, the potentially most helpful but missing actor in this picture is Europe.

At the beginning of the 20th century, few could imagine what the future held. In January 1914, the world's richest man, Andrew Carnegie, sent New Year's greetings to leaders around the world, announcing a new era of permanent peace. "International Peace" would, he proclaimed, "prevail through the Great Powers agreeing to settle their disputes by International Law, the pen thus proving mightier than the sword." One of the most influential books of the decade, *The Great Illusion,* published in 1910, sold over two million copies. In it, Norman Angell explained that war was a cruel "illusion," as the cost of war would exceed any benefits the victor could hope to achieve.

How then could the assassination of an archduke in Sarajevo spark a conflagration so all-encompassing that it required historians to create an entirely new category of conflict called "world war"? The short answer is: the Thucydides Trap. When a rising power threatens to displace a ruling power, alarm bells should sound: extreme danger ahead. Thucydides explained this dangerous dynamic in the case of Athens' rise to rival Sparta in classical Greece. In the centuries since then, this storyline has been repeated over and over. The last 500 years saw 16 cases in which a rising power threatened to displace a major ruling power. Twelve ended in war.

As Thucydides explained, the objective reality of a rising power's impact on a ruling power is bad enough. But in the real world, these objective facts are perceived subjectively – magnifying misperceptions and multiplying miscalculations. When one competitor "knows" what the other's "real motive" is, every action is interpreted in ways that confirm that bias.

Under such conditions, the competitors become hostage to third-party provocations and even accidents. An event as bizarre and otherwise inconsequential as the assassination of an archduke forces one or the other principal protagonist to respond. Doing so triggers a vicious spiral of actions and reactions that drag both toward an outcome neither wanted.

If Thucydides were watching today, he would say that China and the US are right on script, competing to show which can best exemplify the role of the rising and ruling power, accelerating toward what could be the grandest collision of all time.

One plausible candidate for the spark to war is Taiwan. As Taiwanese watch carefully what has been happening in Hong Kong, they have grown less and less interested in living in China's party-driven autocracy. The idea of one nation under two systems as a mantle for sustaining its autonomy is now dead. If, in riding the surge created by the overwhelming vote against the mainland earlier this year, the Taiwanese government were to make a sharp move toward greater independence, most China watchers agree Beijing would have to respond violently. No government in Beijing could survive the "loss" of Taiwan. If the Chinese response included a 21st-century version of the missile tests they conducted in 1996 that threatened to choke Taiwan's lifeline of ships delivering oil, food and other essential supplies, how would the US respond?

Most observers have failed to grasp the significance of the tectonic shift in the *relative* power of the US and China in the three decades since the end of the Cold War. Never before in history has a rising power ascended so far, so fast and in so many different dimensions. To paraphrase former Czech President Václav Havel, things have happened so fast that we have not yet had time to be astonished.

The US share of global GDP has fallen from almost one-half in 1950, to one-quarter at the end of the Cold War in 1991, to one-seventh today. (Although GDP is not everything, it does form the substructure of power in relations among nations.) In 1991, China barely appeared on any international league table. But in the past generation, its GDP has soared: from 20 percent of the US level in 1991 to 120 percent today (as measured by purchasing power parity, the metric both the CIA and the International Monetary Fund use to compare national economies). Although China faces many internal challenges, there are more reasons to expect this basic economic trend to continue than to bet that it will stop soon. With four times as many citizens as the United States, if Chinese workers become as productive as Portuguese workers today (that is, half as productive as Americans), China's GDP will double that of the US.

The impact of this tectonic shift is felt in every dimension of every relationship – not just between the US and China, but between each of them and other nations. In Asia, the economic balance of power has tilted especially dramatically in China's favor. As the world's largest exporter and second-largest importer, China is the top trading partner of every other major Asian country, including US allies. And as an aggressive practitioner of economic statecraft, Beijing does not hesitate to use the leverage this provides, squeezing countries such as the Philippines and South Korea when they resist Chinese demands. A similar story is emerging in Europe.

China will most likely continue challenging America's accustomed position at the top of every pecking order. If Xi succeeds, China will displace the US as the predominant power in East Asia in his lifetime. Unless the US redefines itself to settle for something less than being "Number 1," Americans will increasingly find China's rise discombobulating and push back. This is not just another case of what Washington now calls "great-power competition," but a classic Thucydidean rivalry in which each sees the other as a threat to its identity.

European hopes that this is just a passing Trumpian detour are an illusion. Across the American political spectrum, attitudes toward China have hardened. A nation that Presidents Obama, Bush and Clinton called its "strategic partner" is now seen by all as a "strategic adversary." Instructively, Democratic candidates for president are scrambling to find a way to get to the right of Trump on China.

Does this mean that war – real bloody war – is inevitable? No, most certainly not. Four of the sixteen cases in the Thucydides Trap case file ended without war. Nonetheless, if American and Chinese leaders settle for statecraft as usual, we should expect history as usual. The goal in recognizing how devastating that war would be, and understanding how such rivalries have so often ended in catastrophe, is to motivate strategists and statesmen to rise above history.

Since the publication of *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* three years ago, I've been searching for what I call "avenues of escape." I am now most actively exploring a possibility that would combine President John F. Kennedy's insight about a "world safe for diversity" and a Chinese concept of "rivalry partners."

After having survived the Cuban Missile Crisis, and just five months before he was assassinated, Kennedy proposed a major revision of America's strategy in the Cold War. To avoid future confrontations that risked nuclear annihilation, the US and the Soviet Union would have to accept serious constraints on their competition, and even compromise. They would have to find a way to live and let live in a world of diverse political systems despite diametrically opposed values and ideologies. In a bit of rhetorical jiu-jitsu, Kennedy stood Woodrow Wilson's long-standing call for a "world safe for democracy" on its head and insisted that the priority in the Cold War going forward would have to be to build a "world safe for diversity." In that future, the two rivals could compete vigorously – yet peacefully – to demonstrate whose values and system of governance could best meet the needs of its citizens.

A millennium earlier, the Song emperor, having found his troops unable to defeat a northern Mongolian tribe, the Liao, negotiated the Treaty of Chanyuan that established a "rivalry partnership." The two parties agreed to compete ruthlessly in some arenas and cooperate intensely in others. In an unusual version of Chinese tributary relations, the treaty required the Song to pay tribute to the Liao, who in turn agreed to invest that payment in economic, scientific and technical development in Song China.

Could American and Chinese statesmen construct a new strategic rationale for a "rivalry partnership" in which they would simultaneously compete and cooperate? The two nations will inevitably be fierce rivals in economic production and trade, advanced technology, military capabilities, forming alliances and alignments and demonstrating how governments can best meet the needs of their citizens. But at the same time, there are other arenas in which neither can ensure its most vital national interest of survival without serious cooperation from the other. These include not only avoiding war, especially nuclear war, but also tackling climate change to sustain a biosphere in which human beings can live, preventing the spread of the means and motives for mega-terrorism, containing pandemics and managing global financial crises to avoid great depressions – and their political consequences. Thus, while intense rivalry is inescapable, if the brute fact is that neither can kill the other without simultaneously committing suicide, intense competition becomes a strategic necessity.

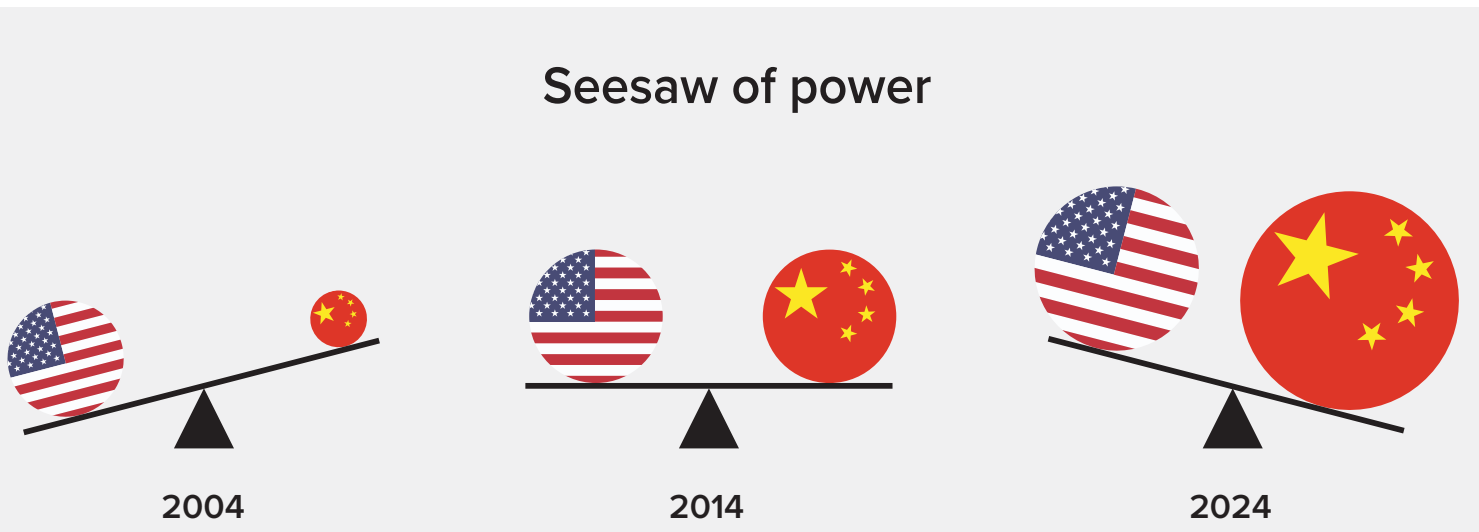
And as this great drama is unfolding, where is Europe? Missing in action. Collectively, the European nations have the heft and sense to play a significant, constructive role. But the prospect that Europe will punch anywhere near its weight seems dimmer today than at this time last year. As Wolfgang Münchau of the *Financial Times* wrote recently, Europe increasingly seems resigned to becoming a "playground of conflicting interests."

The 5G race provides a telling example. While the performance by the US in this race has been pathetic – it has no major supplier of 5G systems – Europe has two entries: Nokia and Ericsson. While they technically pose, or at least could pose, a serious challenge to Huawei and Samsung, the US is focused on putting sticks in the spokes of Huawei wheels and European regulators appear more concerned with maintaining what they regard as appropriate competition between Nokia and Ericsson than with finding ways to assist them in the global race. All the while, China's champion, Huawei, is plowing ahead.

If an evil genius intended to jolt Europeans from their slumber in order to motivate a serious effort to get its act together, it is hard to imagine how he could improve on what could be referred to as the "Trump treatment." Nonetheless, Europeans seem resigned to accepting observer status as rule takers, not rule makers. In that future, Europe will find itself further squeezed between the two giants: to its east, a "systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance," as the European Commission recently described China, and to its west, what some Europeans are coming to regard as an abusive spouse.

In last year's issue of *The Security Times,* Theo Sommer noted: "The geopolitical rivalry between the US and the People's Republic of China is not going to end. It will be the dominant element of international politics in the 21st century." The question this year is whether Europe must remain, in Sommer's words, "a helpless and clueless bystander." As we watch the US and China stumble toward a dangerous collision, anyone who cares about international peace and security must fervently hope not.

Seesaw of power



GDP (PPP) in billions of dollars

	2004	2014	2024 est.
China	5,760	18,228	35,596
U.S.	12,275	17,393	25,093

Source: IMF, Economist Intelligence Unit

China will most likely continue challenging America's accustomed position at the top of every pecking order

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The mild West

The US and Europe hold a hand that's too good to fold

BY JOSEPH S. NYE JR.

With the end of the Cold War, many believed the West had prevailed. In his 1992 book *The End of History and the Last Man*, Francis Fukuyama wrote that humanity had reached "the end-point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." A few years later, Samuel Huntington issued a gloomier prognosis in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* that "the rise of China and the increasing assertiveness of this 'biggest player in the history of man' will place tremendous stress on international stability in the early 21st century."

Western civilization did not exist in full flower until 1500, and before 1800, Asia was home to more than half the world's population and world economy. By 1900, however, while Asia still represented more than half the world's population it constituted only 20 percent of the world economy. The industrial revolution in Europe and North America and domination of the seas had made Europe the center of the global balance of power until it tore itself apart in World War I.

After the United States tipped the outcome of the war, it was clear that the country featured not only the world's largest economy but was also crucial to the global balance of power. However, the US failed to act in its new role, and instead continued to behave as a free rider in the provision of global public goods, a role that Britain could no longer afford.

Lacking a global government, the world depends on the largest country to provide order and global public goods; in the nineteenth century, the Pax Britannica contributed security, economic stability and protection of global commons such as freedom of the seas. Instead, the US "returned to normalcy" and there was no liberal Western order in the 1930s. The result was a disastrous decade of global economic depression, genocide and eventually World War II.

Leaders like Franklin Roosevelt saw the mistakes of US isolationism and created the Bretton Woods institutions in 1944 and the United Nations in 1945. A turning point was Harry Truman's postwar decisions that led to permanent alliances and a continual military presence abroad. The US invested heavily in the Marshall Plan in 1948, created NATO in 1949, led a UN coalition that fought in Korea in 1950, and in 1960, signed a new security treaty with Japan.

These actions were part of a realist strategy designed to contain Soviet power, but containment was interpreted in various ways. Americans had bitter debates over intervention in developing countries like Vietnam and, more recently, Iraq.

But while interventions were highly contentious, the liberal institutional order enjoyed broad support until the 2016 election when Donald Trump became the first candidate of a major party to attack it. His populist appeal rested on the economic dislocations of globalization that were accentuated by the Great Recession in 2008 along with cultural changes related to race, the role of women and gender identity that had polarized the American electorate.

Trump successfully linked white resentment over the increasing visibility and influence of racial and ethnic minorities to foreign policy by blaming economic problems on bad trade deals and on immigrants competing for jobs. In January 2017, Martin Wolf wrote in *The Financial Times*: "We are at the end of both an economic period – that of Western-led globalization – and a geopolitical one, the post-cold war 'unipolar moment' of a US-led global order."

What comes next? Realists argue that world order rests on the global balance of power and that a rising China is not interested in a liberal or Western order. Some go further and predict a "Thucydides Trap" in which war between a rising power and an established power tears the world apart, much as Europe suffered in 1914.

But these gloomy projections rest on exaggerations of China's power and Western weakness. China's economy is about two-thirds that of the US, and an even smaller fraction if Europe, Japan, Australia and other Western allies are included.

China is a country of great strength but also important weaknesses. The US has some long-term power advantages that will persist. One is geography. The US is surrounded by oceans and neighbors that are likely to remain friendly. China has borders with 14 countries and has territorial disputes with India, Japan and Vietnam that set limits on its soft power.

Energy is another American advantage. A decade ago, the US seemed hopelessly dependent on imported energy. Now the shale revolution has transformed it from an energy importer to exporter. At the same time, China is becoming more dependent on energy imports, while much of the oil it imports is transported through the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, where the US and its allies maintain a significant naval presence.

The US also has demographic strengths. Seven of the world's 15 largest economies will face a shrinking workforce over the next decade and a half, but the US workforce is likely to increase by 5 percent while China's will decline by 9 percent. China will soon lose its superlative population rank to India, while its working-age population already peaked in 2015. Many Chinese say they worry about "growing old before growing rich."

China is not interested in kicking over the card table but in tilting the table to pocket more winnings

The US has been at the forefront in the development of key technologies (bio, nano, information) that are central to this century's economic growth, and Western research universities dominate higher education. In a 2017 ranking by Shanghai Jiao Tong University, none of the top 20 global universities were Chinese.

China is investing heavily in research and development. The country also now competes well in some fields – including artificial intelligence – and its technological progress is no longer based solely on imitation. However, a successful Western response will depend upon steps taken at home.

In short, the US and the West hold high cards in this poker game, but we must resist hysteria if we are to play our hand skillfully. Discarding our high cards of alliances and international institutions would be a serious mistake. If the US maintains its alliance with Japan, China cannot push the US beyond the first island chain, because Japan is a major part of that chain.

Another possible mistake would be to try to cut off all immigration. When asked why he did not think China would pass the US in total power any time soon, former Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew cited the US ability to draw diverse and creative talents from around the world and recombine them in a way that was not possible for China's ethnic Han nationalism. If Trump's populism leads the US to discard its high cards of external alliances and domestic openness, Lee could be proved wrong.

As China's power grows, some worry we are destined for war, but few consider an altogether different kind of disruption. Rather than acting like a revolutionary power in the international order, China may decide to be a free rider like the US in the 1930s. China may act too weakly rather than too strongly and refuse to contribute to an international order it did not create.

On the other hand, China knows it profited from the post-1945 Western international order. China is one of the five countries with veto power in the UN Security Council. China is now the second-largest funder of UN peacekeeping forces and participated in UN programs related to Ebola and climate change.

China has benefited greatly from economic institutions, but it has started its own Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and its Belt and Road Initiative of international infrastructure projects that some see as an economic offensive. China has not practiced full reciprocity as a market economy, and its rejection of a 2016 Hague tribunal ruling regarding the South China Sea raised many concerns. Thus far, China has tried not to overthrow but rather increase its influence over the Western world order from which it benefits, but this could change as Chinese power grows.

The Trump administration labeled China a revisionist power, but so far – unlike Hitler's Germany or Stalin's USSR – it reflects that of a moderate revisionist. China is not interested in kicking over the card table but in tilting the table to pocket more winnings.

As Chinese power grows, the West's "liberal international order" will have to change. China has little interest in liberalism or Western domination. We will need to think in terms of an "open and rules-based" world order to manage economic and ecological interdependencies like climate change.

Ideological differences will persist over values like human rights, but this should not prevent negotiations and institutions from managing interdependencies. Even as he worried about conflicts of civilizations two decades ago, Huntington proposed a "commonalities rule: peoples in all civilizations should search for an attempt to expand the values, institutions and practices they have in common with peoples of other civilizations."

More recently, in 2017, Bill Emmott wrote in T*he Fate of the West*: "Yes, the barbarians are at the West's gates. Certainly, China's pressure to dominate its neighborhood and be treated as an equal partner to the US is hard to deal with." But in his view, "the response begins with allies, friendships and legitimacy: ... the greatest assets the West has."

And as I argue in *Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump*, the future of the West is put at risk more by the rise of nativist populism at home than by the rise of China abroad. The answer will depend on our choices.

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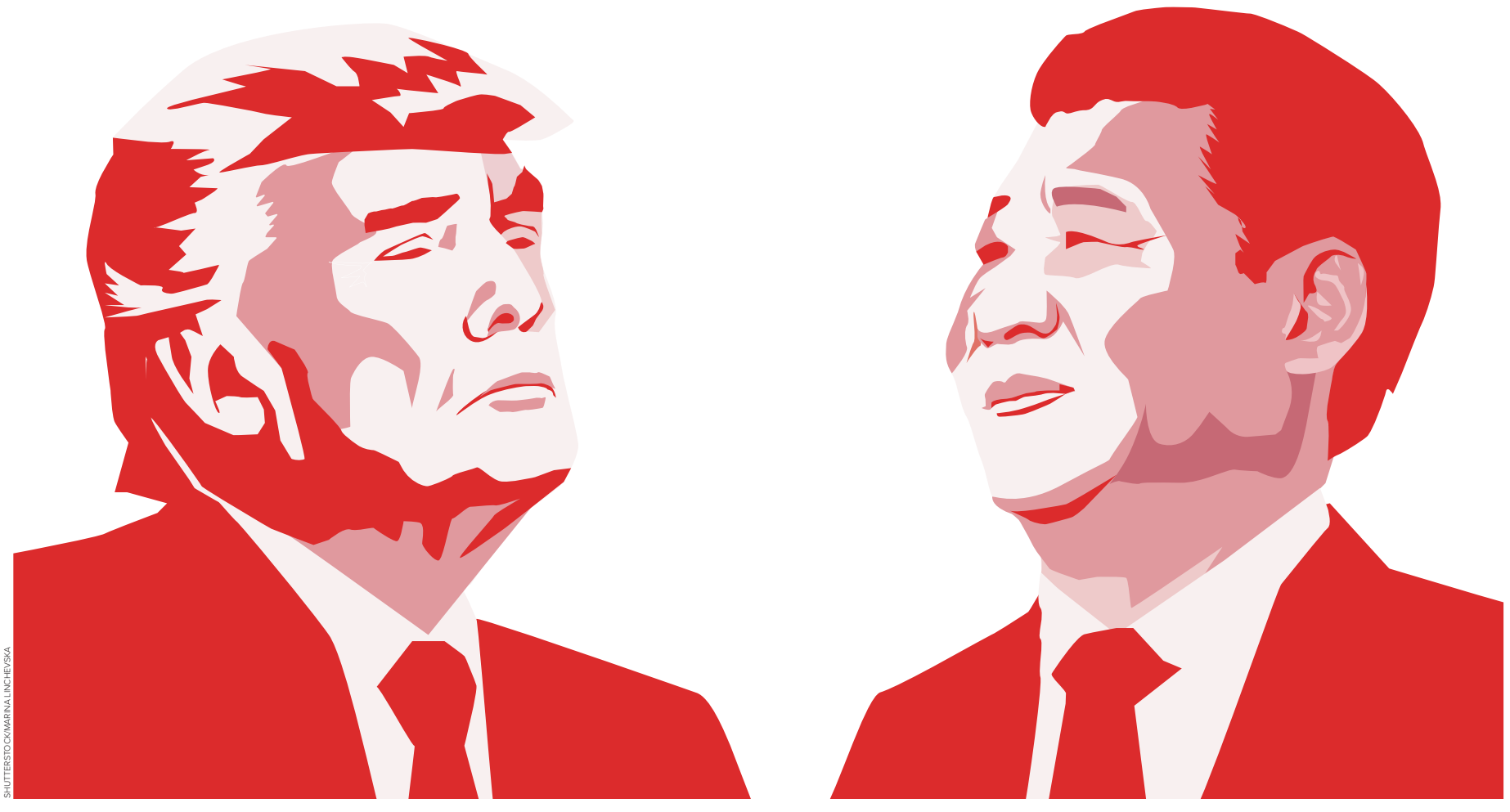
BY VOLKER PERTHES



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The new global paradigm

America, the People's Republic and the complexity of their rivalry

The rivalry between the United States and China has become a guiding paradigm of international relations, shaping strategic debates, but also real political, military and economic dynamics. This is not to say that competition between Washington and Beijing – or even great-power rivalries in general – determines all other international problems and conflicts. However, Sino-American competition increasingly provides the framework through which various actors view significant events and developments. At least for the US, the strategic rivalry with China has replaced the "war on terrorism" paradigm that had prevailed since 2001.

In 2017, the US government began calling China a "long-term strategic competitor" in its national security strategy. NATO, in its London Declaration of December 2019, spoke for the first time of the challenges – but also the opportunities – arising from China's weight and international policy. China's political elite is convinced – and probably rightly so – that the US intends to contain the expansion of Chinese influence.

Disputes over trade policy or trade balances are indeed at the forefront of public statements by US President Donald Trump and have a direct impact on the world economy. Nevertheless, trade disputes are only one aspect of the rivalry, and by no means the most important one. Only by understanding the multidimensionality of the US-Chinese conflict constellation can we find appropriate policy responses and develop the necessary instruments.

The global balance of power and the status of the two powers in the international system is one key issue. Trump seems to regard superiority, especially military dominance, as an end in itself, not primarily as a means to advance certain interests and values.

For his part, President Xi Jinping is apparently driven by a vision of an order "with Chinese characteristics" in which superiority is both a means and an end. But the competition between the rising and the established superpower also has its own economic, technological, ideological and security-related dimensions. Personalities of the figures involved play a role as well.

Influence on other states, regions and societies is yet another factor at stake. From a Chinese perspective, the US will never voluntarily grant China greater international influence. In the US, China is regarded as a revisionist power striving for global supremacy in the long term. More balanced positions exist in both countries, but their influence on the public discourse is marginal.

At the same time, perceptions of military threat are increasing in China and in the US with regard to the respective other. A classic security dilemma is gradually developing, where efforts by one state to strengthen its security reinforce the feeling of insecurity in the other.

This is particularly true in the maritime sector. China is expanding its fleet to secure supply routes, extend its influence and prevent containment by US bases and allies; the US sees China's growing military capabilities as a threat to its own military bases and to its alliance system in the Indo-Pacific region.

Economic competition and conflicts over trade and economic policy form a real and distinct dimension of the rivalry. US criticism of unfair competition or breaches of rules by China is widely shared in Europe. The trade conflict is closely linked to global governance issues, which are of vital importance, especially from a European perspective. This applies, for example, to the future of binding, multilateral trade rules and institutions.

Decision makers in Western democracies sometimes underestimate how threatened Chinese leadership still feels by liberal values and worldviews

In contrast to the past 30 years, bilateral trade between the US and China is no longer a stabilizer with the ability to balance out political conflicts. Instead, the rivalry between the two powers will continue to have a decisive impact on international politics, even if Washington and Beijing conclude a comprehensive trade agreement before this fall's US presidential elections.

The technological dimension of this rivalry would also survive a settlement of the trade dispute. While technological competition is primarily about the distribution of real and relative economic gains, it is also relevant to security policy and linked to geopolitical as well as political and ideological aspects, which is evident in the debate on the use of Chinese components in the development of 5G networks and other future-oriented and critical infrastructure.

Concerns are not only related to the risk of espionage or sabotage. More important, perhaps, is the fact that technology is not value neutral. The sooner technological developments touch on fundamental questions of political order – be it in data acquisition and use, artificial intelligence or biotechnology – the more strongly technological competition becomes linked to the politico-ideological dimension of strategic rivalry, that is, the competition between liberal-democratic and authoritarian concepts of society.

In the US, both the rise of China and the idea of being overtaken by the competitor are raising fears. In Europe, the focus is more on how and whether the development and export of technologies that enable new forms of social control might be used by authoritarian regimes in their own realm as well as to help promote the spread of illiberal models of government to other parts of the world.

This concern over ideological influences is not limited to one side. Decision makers in Western democracies sometimes underestimate how threatened Chinese leadership still feels by liberal values and worldviews. Human rights, the rule of law and liberal democracy continue to have strong appeal in relevant parts of Chinese society.

This explains the Chinese state leadership's nervousness when looking at events in Hong Kong, as well as their seemingly exaggerated fear of color revolutions and their massive effort to find technocratic solutions designed to secure the rule of the Communist Party and, ideally, a "harmonious society."

The Sino-American rivalry extends beyond the bilateral relationship. It also has global impact on, among other things, the work of international organizations and regional development, even within Europe. While the Trump administration undermines or withdraws from existing multilateral institutions, China is building new international fora and organizations that correspond to Beijing's own ideas of order.

China also increasingly contributes to and participates in the activities of the United Nations and its sub-organizations. While the US, as but one example, has left the UN Human Rights Council, China is actively using this forum to relativize the importance of individual human rights.

And Europe?

The European Union and its member states are directly and indirectly affected by the Sino-American rivalry. Europe's view of China has also become more critical, not least in view of China's more aggressive regional posture, the authoritarian hardening at home, the spread of "alternative" (i.e. authoritarian) ideas of government in other parts of the world, and Beijing's attempts to censor the international debate on China and its policies.

In a strategy paper published in spring 2019, the EU defined China as a "systemic rival," as well as an economic competitor and a cooperation partner for Europe "with whom the EU has closely aligned objectives" – not least in tackling climate change and other global challenges. "Decoupling" – that is, cutting technological, scientific or economic ties with China, as advocated by various segments of the US political spectrum – is simply not an option for the EU.

Democracies will have to meet the challenge of China's growing influence in the world and Beijing's attempts to internationalize its own authoritarian model, while taking care not to undermine economic and technical cooperation, interdependence or the foundations of multilateral order. Under the paradigm of the strategic rivalry with China, US and US-influenced debates tend to overemphasize the vulnerabilities that come with interdependencies. The stabilizing effects of such relations, especially the interest of antagonistic powers in maintaining mutually beneficial relations, are too often forgotten. For Europe, but even more so for countries in the Asia-Pacific region, such as India, Japan, the ASEAN community and Australia, abandoning interdependent relations with China is not an option. Yet all these states can do better in avoiding unilateral dependencies.

Europe has begun to develop its own instruments for achieving a confident, prudent policy towards China, such as a European investment-screening scheme supplemented by national legislation. Europe should not only consider its own resilience vis-à-vis China; it should address its international engagement.

Many states and societies in Asia and Africa appreciate China's economic commitment as well as its Belt and Road Initiative but fear dependence on China. The goal here is to offer alternatives without forcing or trying to pressure these states into abandoning their relations with China, which they must see as advantageous.

The EU's connectivity strategy towards Asia as well as the infrastructure funds provided by the European Investment Bank for sustainable infrastructure projects in Africa are useful approaches. In general, European states should strengthen their practical commitments to the UN and other multilateral organizations. They will also have to fill the vacuums left by Washington's withdrawal or lack of interest. And all the while, Europe can demonstrate in a practical sense how its understanding of multilateralism and the international rule-of-law differ fundamentally from China's Sino-centric multibilateralism.

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Divorce settlement

Brexit is a challenge shared by the UK, the EU and the US

BY NICHOLAS BURNS

PICTURE ALLIANCE/AA

Brexit, stage left: Staff members permanently remove the Union Jack from the Council of the European Union in Brussels on Jan. 31, 2020.

Global leaders congregating at the annual Munich Security Conference this year must wrestle with a multitude of crises. The coronavirus pandemic is imperiling people in every region of the world and may threaten global economic growth and stability. The Middle East has been upended by an uneasy US-Iran truce after the attack on Qassim Soleimani. US President Donald Trump's ill-advised Middle East Peace Plan has exacerbated tensions, and fierce fighting in Libya, Syria and Yemen continues. Europe is wrestling with divisions over 5G, how to handle Russian troublemaking and the fact that China is suddenly at its doorstep seeking expanded influence on the continent.

Add Brexit to the list of Munich challenges that have made the first six weeks of 2020 unusually destabilizing and worrisome. While some see Brexit as yesterday's story after the United Kingdom's formal exit from the European Union on Jan. 31, its reverberations will be felt for months and years to come in an unsteady Atlantic Alliance.

Brexit's most troubling impact will of course be felt by the people of the UK. While Prime Minister Boris Johnson can take credit for engineering a surprisingly swift resolution to Britain's tortuous three-and-a-half-year debate, there are rocky waters ahead.

The UK has just 11 months to negotiate the formal terms of its divorce from Europe in 2020. These negotiations will test the ingenuity, patience and energy of both London and Brussels.

After nearly a half century as a member of the EU, Johnson must now disentangle the EU's regulatory tentacles from the British market, initiate formal trade agreements with the EU, the US and dozens of other countries, rethink the country's entire global network of political and commercial partnerships and decide how close to stay to the EU on issues ranging from the faltering Iran nuclear deal to climate change. He will also need to construct a renewed special relationship with a US led by the erratic and unpredictable President Trump.

Brexit's most profound impact will be on the former global superpower assembled in the 1707 Act of Union – the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. No country has played a more vital, continuous and, at times, dominant role across the world during the last three centuries. It now faces a possible fracturing and even dissolution over the next decade or two. The Scottish National Party is actively contemplating the advantages and disadvantages of seceding from the UK to join a European Union, a popular notion among Scotland's five million inhabitants.

And could Brexit ultimately lead to the unification of Ireland with its capital in Catholic Dublin? Who would have dared predict such an outcome even five years ago? Very few of us in the sprawling Irish diaspora in North America and Australia ever dreamed that the land of our ancestors (in my case paternal grandparents) would ever see Britain's 700-year domination of the Catholic population abated. But such is the seismic impact of Brexit and its long reach across the Irish Sea. Given the fact that Northern Ireland will remain in the EU Customs Union at a time when demographics also favor the Catholic population there, the previously powerful Protestants may slowly melt into the embrace of the more prosperous south over the next decade or two.

Beyond the UK, not enough has been made of the damaging impact Brexit will have on the European Union itself. Think of it this way: On Jan. 31, the EU lost its second largest economy, its strongest and most deployable military and its most globally oriented and sophisticated member state. Over the past five decades, successive British governments have acted to temper French statism, align at key moments with German chancellors from Willy Brandt to Angela Merkel and speak for many EU countries – such as the Netherlands, Denmark and Poland – to ensure the EU maintained close ties with the US across the Atlantic.

Since the Cold War's end, the UK has been a dependable bridge to new EU and NATO members in Eastern Europe. It has been a strong and steady voice in arguing for stiff sanctions against a recalcitrant and avaricious Putin. The UK will be missed in Brussels, especially at a time when France and Germany are divided strategically on pivotal issues concerning Europe's future.

American leaders in both the Trump and Obama administrations have watched the Brexit debate play out in the UK with a degree of detachment. They are in for a rude awakening.

In many ways, the UK is still America's most trusted friend and ally. One underreported aspect of our alliance has been the decades-long middleman role played by British governments as an interpreter of sorts between Washington and Brussels. When I was Under Secretary of State, more than once I asked my British counterparts in the Foreign Office, whom I trusted completely, to pass messages to and intercede with my counterparts in Paris and Berlin during the occasional tempests we experienced across the Atlantic.

Since the 1970s, British Prime Ministers have played a unique backroom role in translating distant and often difficult-to-read Americans to European leaders on the continent and then translating French Gaullists and German Social Democrats back to Washington.

The UK's voice and weight will also be missed in Brussels at a time when Europe is experiencing a moment of self-doubt, as Putin and Xi seek greater influence in the East Mediterranean and Balkans and anti-democratic populists across the continent challenge the status quo and the ideals of the EU itself.

Looking ahead, perhaps the most we can hope for is a period of national rest, recuperation and reflection for the exhausted British. They might then be in a better position to recover from the economic, political and social dislocation that is likely to follow their divorce from Europe.

With steady leadership in Downing Street, the UK could refashion itself as a close friend and trading partner of the EU, a strengthened and reconfirmed NATO ally, and a committed global leader of its vast and often underestimated Commonwealth.

A revived UK will be critical in helping the democratic West to meet its greatest test in the coming decades – to sustain and promote democracy, the rule of law and an open internet in the trans-Atlantic world and beyond. That is the challenge China and Russia, as well as lesser authoritarians in Turkey, Hungary and countries at Europe's populist fringe, pose to what made the UK, the US and Europe forces for good during the last half century.

Brexit has opened up a Pandora's box of challenges for the UK, Europe and the US. They must recognize what's at stake and act together to defend the principles and policies at the heart of our democracies.

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A world without a keeper

America's retreat is giving rise to a new world order that lacks legal foundations and ethical norms

SHUTTERSTOCK/CURRAHEESHUTTER

BY HERFRIED MÜNKLER

Will the American century indeed give way to the Chinese century? While this may be the case in terms of industrial production, it will be some time before China can dominate the international order and become the actor dominating the globe. At the moment, the US commands the economic potency and the military might to pursue its global interests. China, on the other hand, will not possess such resources for at least another decade, and perhaps for even longer.

Chinese leadership is, in fact, not targeting global domination, but rather large-scale zones of influence. In its crosshairs are Southeast and Central Asia as well as parts of Africa, not worldwide supremacy, as such grand ambitions would overtax China's resources and capabilities.

The foreseeable transformation of the international order, therefore, does not entail the emergence of a new "world's policeman," but rather a fundamental reconfiguration of this order. The existing world order relies on the presence of a custodian, but there is no country willing to step up and assume this responsibility. The US no longer wants it; China is unwilling and unable to pick up the mantle; and the same is true for the Europeans. At the dawning of our new decade, we are thus equipped with an international order that ought to have a guardian to enforce normative rules and regulations, but such a guardian no longer exists.

This is a politically perilous situation. There is a growing risk that misunderstandings and political power vacancies will lead to confrontations and ultimately to wars that no one wants.

What happens when large swaths of political geography are lacking a sorely needed custodian can be ascertained by examining current developments in the Middle East as well as the neighboring Black Sea region. These areas are rife with hegemonic conflict like that between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which functions as a magnet dividing the region into friend or foe while drawing in neighboring powers, as is currently the case with Turkey.

The range of tasks facing a custodian of transnational order is as complicated as it is demanding – the oft-used term "world's policeman" falls far short of capturing all the facets of the role. "Investor in common goods" comes considerably closer to the mark. Such common goods can be an international currency that connects national economies with one another, or a binding international law of commerce, or even the organization of transnational goals like limiting climate change and preserving biodiversity. But the role can also include security policy tasks like mitigating arms races by issuing security guarantees, for example in the form of nuclear protection umbrellas to stem the proliferation of atomic weapons.

Thus, it is soft power rather that best characterizes the duties of a custodian. But when necessary, the guardian must also muster hard power to secure that order prevails.

By no means do these custodial systems need to have global dimensions; they can be limited to specific regions. In the second half of the 20th century, "the West" – Western Europe and the US – was one such system, as was the Eastern Bloc. In the West, the US was the custodian, in the East, the USSR; their roles were similar, while the means of executing their roles varied significantly.

This bipolar system was not truly global, as it was mainly limited to the Northern Hemisphere, but it had considerable radiance from the north into the global south. It was a system with tiered ambitions and expectations.

Spatial limitation and the gradation of obligations were beneficial to the responsibilities of the custodian, as goods that were once common became club goods. As a consequence, at the blessing of the custodian, only those who belonged to a club – i.e. a particular system of alliances – could participate, and entrance to the club was contingent on a proportional contribution to the provision of these goods. This prevented freeloaders and minimized the general burden of the custodian.

At the beginning of the 1990s, all this changed, as it was expected that the West would undergo a global expansion. Club goods then reverted to common goods, to which all had access, even those who did nothing to contribute to their availability. As a result, the burden on the custodian grew, whether or not it was prepared or even able to shoulder it. Under President Barack Obama, the US slowly retreated from its global commitments, and under President Donald Trump it demonstrably turned its back on them. "America First" became the catchphrase for this retreat, and it applied not only to the international order, but increasingly to the former West as well.

If China does not assume the responsibility temporarily shouldered by the US, it's because it has recognized that global systems always ultimately overwhelm their custodians. Paul Kennedy has spoken of "imperial overstretch."

In other words, a custodian can only persist if the common goods for which he is responsible are transformed into club goods. For this reason, contrary to expectations prevalent in Germany, the United Nations will never be able to assume a global custodial role, however desirable such a scenario may be under normative conditions.

But what does this mean for the current transformation of our international order? It says a lot that the reconfiguration is leading to a system without custodians. The result will be an international order with fewer regulations and a reduction of its normative framework. In short, the project of adjudicating international policy is over.

In its wake, a series of major players will determine the global order, and they will only forge agreements among one another that are in line with their own interests. These major players will include the US, China, Russia (above all for its nuclear weapons and its ability to deliver them), the European Union (yet only on the condition that it develop a greater ability to negotiate as a collective) and presumably India. There will also be a second tier of powers – and then all other states that are objects and not subjects of this international order. The US and the EU will perhaps cooperate more closely with one another than with others, but the old West will be a thing of the past.

International systems without custodians function most reliably if each member of the system is prone to forming coalitions with all other members; thus, each player must carefully consider which opposing coalitions it will provoke through its negotiations. This new world order lacks legal foundations and ethical norms and rests solely on unilateral calculations and self-interest. In terms of normativity, this is a great leap backward.

It says a lot that the decade ahead of us is already marked by the emergence of such a system. The further this development progresses, the more meaningless and ineffectual becomes any policy that attempts to adhere to the old model of order and that focuses on moral suasion, international standards and other elements that would call for a custodian the likes of which no longer exists.

This goes particularly for Germany's foreign policy, which already often seems stale and rather helpless. It has the propensity to warn against developments that have long since become fixed realities. Yet, the more one adapts to the new constellations, the more effectively Berlin can contribute to making Europeans the subjects – not objects – of the new world order.

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Continued from page 1

Western abdication

cratic elections under UN supervision – none of which have come to pass.

The mantra repeated by heads of state and foreign ministers in the West – that is, their insistence that resolving the conflict requires a political rather than military solution – has become an embarrassing phrase. It exposes the West's lack of strategic vision and sheer inability to act.

This mantra disregards one of the most basic rules of diplomacy: that a negotiated solution is only possible when all parties to the conflict no longer see the point in continued fighting. The situation in Syria would have to reach a stage where none of the stakeholders see any benefit to military escalation; only then would we see genuine willingness to compromise, thereby providing the diplomatic leeway needed to negotiate an agreement.

The conflict in Syria never reached such a point. For Assad, it's always been worthwhile to fight for survival, and his regime had everything it needed to win the war in military terms: weapons of mass destruction and the readiness to use them against its own citizens; a supporting world power – in this case Russia – that wanted to keep its last ally in the Middle East in power and was therefore willing to use its air force to destroy or expel all opponents of the regime; a regional power – in this case Iran – experienced in asymmetrical warfare and capable of organizing Shi'ite militias on the ground; a war-weary world power – in this case the US – that was cautious and in retreat; divided Europeans with no plan at all; a blocked UN Security Council; and, finally, the ignorance of the world community.

SHUTTERSTOCK/FLY AND DIVE

Aleppo in ruins, 2019.

Attempts by the Americans and Europeans to put pressure on Damascus were limited to a complex regime of sanctions (painful for the Syrian leadership, but tolerable thanks to the help of allied trading partners), half-hearted arms deliveries to alternating rebel groups (too few arms to win, but too many to lose) as well as two symbolic and inconsequential attacks on military bases – both in violation of international law – as a way of punishing Syria for the use of chemical weapons. None of these actions led to any change in the Syrian regime's behavior or any increased willingness to compromise.

Against this backdrop, the idea that Europe could influence the balance of power in Syria and the realities on the ground by leveraging financial incentives for rebuilding the country is utterly naive. Any European parliamentarian – whether they represent a left-wing anti-imperialist or a right-wing nationalist party – who travels to Damascus to be shown "normal everyday life" and the "stable security situation" by regime representatives, will automatically become an unwitting propagandist for Assad. And an effective supporter of Vladimir Putin's strategy.

In contrast to the US and Europe, the Russian president has a functioning plan in Syria. It comprises three stages: rescue, recapture and rehabilitate. Today, we are moving through the transition to phase three, the aim of which is to make the Syrian regime an accepted member of the international community once again.

The logic behind this strategy seems plausible: Assad has won and remains in power, so it makes sense to acknowledge this reality, to work constructively toward rebuilding the war-torn country, to improve conditions for its poor and to allow Syrian refugees to return.

The only problem is that anyone who wants to actually help the people of Syria would be wise not to support the Syrian regime. Indeed, every dollar and euro sent to Damascus with good intentions will only serve to further consolidate the very regime structures that led to the uprising nine years ago.

What unsuspecting politicians, journalists and bloggers perceive as stability in Syria is actually nothing more than what we would call *Friedhofsruhe* in German, namely that deathly calm felt in cemeteries. Assad needs the money to reward his cronies, to pacify the militias, to draw supporters closer to him through better living conditions and to maintain the secret service apparatus. He has no interest in the return of Syrian refugees from abroad; indeed, he deliberately drove most of them out of the country in the first place as a way of ridding himself of his enemies.

At the moment, Assad is delighted. After all, the UN has been working for years with government-related organizations, companies and individuals who continue to distribute aid money in a manner that suits his wishes. Some of these partners are even on US and European lists of sanctioned organizations; this is a true scandal, given that Washington and Berlin are the largest bilateral donors of humanitarian aid to Syria.

While Europeans and Americans continue to provide humanitarian aid to Syrians, thereby relieving Assad of that burden and freeing him up to pursue his Idlib campaign, Russia, Iran and Turkey are working to safeguard their long-term presence and commitment in Syria. The autocratic leaders of each of these countries simply don't see foreign policy as a diplomatic negotiation of compromises; instead, they see it as the pursuit of a strategy of pure self-interest.

Of course, these leaders have no problem with Assad's authoritarianism, and this means that the Syrian regime can do whatever it wants on the domestic front. Not even the Kremlin can influence Assad's secret services. As a result, there can be no security guarantees from the Russian side for any Syrians wishing to return to their home country.

The efforts made by the three interventionist powers in the Syrian civil war have paid off. Although Ankara moved away from its original goal of regime change in Damascus, it is still able to use some of the Syrian insurgents as Islamist mercenaries to assert its own interests east of the Euphrates against the Kurds and now also in Libya. With its offensive in northeastern Syria in October 2019, Turkey drove the Democratic Union Party (PYD) into the arms of Assad and Putin, thereby preventing the creation of an autonomous Kurdish state in the medium term.

A rapprochement between Ankara and Damascus is possible; their secret service chiefs met in Moscow in January. Russia maintains three military bases in Syria and will therefore remain a presence in the East Mediterranean for decades. In addition, Russian companies succeeded in signing largely one-sided contracts for the extraction of oil, gas and phosphorus there.

Moscow is eager to strengthen state structures and contain militias in Syria – in contrast to Tehran, which is working to create a state within the state in order to secure its own military, political, economic and social influence. The recently murdered General Qassim Soleimani was in the process of setting up Syrian paramilitary groups modeled after the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and fighting for Assad under local leadership. Iran's goal there is to repeat in Syria what it achieved with Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hashd al-Shaabi in Iraq. This would complete the Shi'ite "axis of resistance" extending from Tehran via Baghdad, Damascus and Beirut all the way to the Mediterranean and to the borders of Israel. However, this would be quite difficult in Syria, which has a Shi'ite population of only 2 percent.

The US and Europe have lost the conflict in Syria. In the short term, they should stand firm against the Syrian regime and against Russia's attempts at "peacemaking." They should put pressure on the UN to ensure that any humanitarian aid is given to the neediest people and not to Assad's network of cronies. In the long term, Europeans can place their hopes on the desire of the Syrian people for change, supporting their quest for freedom, justice and reconciliation wherever they can.

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Modern architecture

Europe must deliver on the issues people care about

BY MARK LEONARD

The more European leaders talk about developing a "geopolitical commission," the further they are from getting there. In the months since Ursula von der Leyen stated this as her goal, actors within each of the EU pillars of decision-making seem to have taken a step backward.

The Iran nuclear deal, which was already in intensive care, is now taking its last breaths. While Europeans have tried to uphold it through extraordinary efforts, they are struggling in the face of US President Donald Trump's sanctions and diplomacy. In Libya, freewheeling players like Turkey and Russia are having more impact than France and Germany. And even when it comes to climate issues, in spite of the Green New Deal that has been touted as Europe's key priority, Europeans will struggle to shape the global agenda at the climate change summit in Edinburgh – that is, if they manage to come to agreement even among themselves. In the Balkans and parts of Eastern Europe, although Europeans offer the biggest market, visas and aid, they are increasingly taken for granted – as we saw in Volodymyr Zelensky's leaked conversations with the White House.

None of this means that von der Leyen was wrong to target this goal, but it does mean that she needs to be willing to help Europeans act differently if she wants her slogan to be anything more than the butt of jokes in the White House and the Kremlin.

First, Europeans must be willing to play hardball rather than lead by example. In today's world, it is the rogue actors who have the most influence. On climate, it is the big emitters who set the pace for diplomacy and convert their bad behavior into subsidies. In the Middle East, it is the escalatory policies pursued by Russia in Syria and by Turkey in Libya that are rewarded. And in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, Russia is an important player because it is willing to offer benefits and to take them away.

The EU wants to move toward a rules-based world where people behave constructively. But sometimes you need to be tough in order to disincentivize bad behavior. For example, the EU is willing to introduce tariffs on Harley Davidsons and bourbon as part of an effort to stop the US from introducing tariffs on European steel. That is not because Europeans want protectionism but because they realize that opening up other people's markets means a willingness to deter bad behavior.

This mix of sticks and carrots has yet to be developed as a response to US secondary sanctions. And it is also not common in our relations with our neighbors. In the Balkans, Ukraine and Libya, Europeans spend much more effort and resources than Russia, Turkey or the United States. But since Europeans are not willing to take any of the benefits away, Russia can easily acquire a clout with a minimalist approach.

We need to rewire Brussels to develop a habit of thinking strategically and to build strategic sovereignty by placing trade, economic and competition policy in the service of geopolitical goals. This includes fostering a greater international role for the euro and pushing back against secondary sanctions. It could involve establishing a European investment screening system and a new European competition policy as well as stricter control of state aid granted to foreign competitors. It will mean fortifying the European pillar in NATO with concrete critical capabilities so that the EU can be a better partner to the US as well as developing a pan-European capacity to respond to cyber-attacks. Finally, the EU must hedge against blockage of international institutions such as the WTO and allow Europe's institutions, such as the European Investment Bank and the European Stability Mechanism, to engage outside the EU beyond their current mandates.

IMAGO IMAGES/XINHUA

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen

But the problem is not just that the EU's institutions are set up in a way that fragments power between different levels and makes it impossible to combine economic instruments and geopolitical strategy. A number of member states have recently taken to blocking EU decision-making as a way of courting favor with third powers. Hungary, Greece and Slovenia, for example, have blocked or diluted resolutions challenging China on the issues of the South China Sea and human rights.

The long-term challenge is to build a form of de facto solidarity by showing that the EU is the first line of defense for many countries' core interests. The President of the European Council Charles Michel and the new High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell should seek to broker a new grand bargain within the European Council that will define the core European approach to key global issues, including climate change, cybersecurity and human rights. It should also describe how the EU should relate to other great powers like China, Russia and the US, as well as in key areas such as Ukraine, the Balkans and Africa.

A European Security Council could be a powerful tool for having a strategic discussion, engaging the UK and allowing the willing and able to make progress. Another way to facilitate the reconciliation of different positions would be to then appoint core groups of member states to work through divisive issues in an attempt to develop options and joint positions above the lowest common denominator.

The EU has the largest market in the world, the second-highest defense spending (after the US), 55,000 diplomats and the world's largest development-assistance budget. There is an enormous opportunity to make the EU more fit for purpose in a geopolitical world and to demonstrate that the EU can deliver on the issues that its member states and its population truly care about.

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Macht + PUISSANCE ≠ POWER

Europe's navel-gazing means missed opportunities to gain relevance in the new world order of great-power politics

BY KATJA GLOGER

Let's face it: Germany and Europe may one day be thankful for Donald Trump. After all, his destructive and cynical unpredictability is finally forcing them to sufficiently appreciate their responsibility for foreign and security policy in an ever more fragile world.

Six years ago, German President Joachim Gauck attempted to give direction to his country's security policy. The Federal Republic must "be ready to do more to guarantee the security that others have provided it with for decades," he warned. When it comes to deploying Bundeswehr troops, "Germany should not say 'no' on principle. Nor should it say 'yes' unthinkingly." Yet Gauck called for more intervention, "earlier, more decisive and more substantial."

A new global order is emerging, a perilous process that can be compared to tectonic shifts in the Earth's crust. This includes the retreat of the US from its role as the world's chief super power. Weary from all its wars, America is no longer prepared to bear the burden of acting alone as the "world's policeman." Trump's "America First" is not the cause, but rather the expression of this development.

In the days of crisis following the targeted US drone strike that killed Iranian General Qassim Soleimani, Trump's message to Europe was clear: The problem of the Middle East would henceforth fall largely into the hands of the Europeans. NATO must take more responsibility in the region. As a country enjoying newfound energy independence, America will no longer rely on oil from the Middle East. "These historic accomplishments changed our strategic priorities," the US president announced in early January. And because the country's new priorities include contending with its Far East strategic rival, China, Europe is losing its importance to the US.

Meanwhile, other "sovereign powers," notably China and Russia, are filling the geopolitical void caused by the end of the Pax Americana. They are marching in as the authoritarian avantgarde of a "conservative internationalism," as it's referred to in Moscow. In the new global order defined by them alone, rival great powers strengthen their military power and weaponize their influence and their veto in the UN Security Council. They broker fragile alliances based on the law of might, with little regard for democratic principles, the rule of law or human rights.

Europe and particularly Germany are in danger of becoming a plaything in this development. Although the upheaval could hardly be greater and the challenges hardly more daunting, German and European foreign and security policy seems almost dispirited.

Maintaining the status quo, however, is no longer an option. An alliance of multilateralists must be based on more than just consolation and reassurance. The Germans must at last engage in an earnest debate on security and defense. For decades, the commercially prosperous Federal Republic profited tremendously from the rules-based – if never perfect – liberal world order guaranteed by the US. Especially in Europe, this system fostered democracy, the rule of law and the proliferation of human rights. Comfortable and showing a penchant for moral superiority in its strategic position of self-restraint, Germany savored its post-reunification peace dividends, including a free ticket to further prosperity through its role as an export nation *ne plus ultra*. In this scenario, the country's values-based foreign policy very rarely stood in the way of its economic interests.

Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea pulled Germany out of its comfort zone. Russian President Vladimir Putin's eventual renunciation of the European security architecture formulated in the 1990 Paris Charter was a shock to the West – a reaction that had been underestimated by Moscow. All the while, China's global ambitions solidified the Middle Kingdom in its position as the world's second largest economic power. And then came Trump, who simply scoffs at the liberal world order, if he even knows what it is.

Germany is obligated to formulate answers – as sober as they are bold – to fundamental questions concerning its role and responsibility in a new world order. "Europe needs to carve out its own geopolitical role" reasoned Angela Merkel in the *Financial Times,* while the EU's new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, has expressed that Europe must learn the "language of power." Taking on greater responsibility is not tantamount to conceding to Trump. Put another way, it's sensible to be prepared for conflict.

Security policy proposals like that of German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, who argues for engagement in northern Syria, could provide a piece of the puzzle. But proposals thrown into the wind like confetti – with no recognizable strategy and without consultation – are counterproductive.

German foreign and security policy is always European policy; it considers the interests of other European countries to be as important as its own. Grounded in its inextinguishable guilt and responsibility for the greatest tragedy in twentieth-century Europe, the two fundamental principles of German foreign policy remain unchanged: "Never again" and "Never alone." However, Germany's self-evaluation as Europe's model citizens sometimes approaches a denial of reality.

Many countries in Europe regard the country more as an egotistical profiteer prone to double moral standards than as Europeans in solidarity with their neighbors. This conflict in perception was most recently on display in the debate over the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. As spelled out in the EU's Energy Union, "solidarity and trust" were to be the critical ingredients for achieving EU climate protection goals as well as for minimizing the EU's dependence on Russia through a diversification of its energy supply. Berlin is happy enough to act as Europe's overlord, say its critics, but if its own economic interests were at stake, then Germany would pursue realpolitik under the banner of "Germany First."

And in the US, it's not just Trump who disparages the Germans as freeloaders who shirk their commitments to the 2-percent goal while brokering deals with Putin worth billions of euros; recent sanctions on companies working on Nord Stream 2 were passed by a large bipartisan majority in Congress.

French President Emmanuel Macron is impatiently urging "European sovereignty"; the addressee of his demands is Berlin. Macron believes the EU needs more engagement – in Mali, perhaps – and less cheap and timid self-restraint. Macron paints a picture of a multipolar world in which the EU remains marginalized and ineffectual as the last bastion of democratic values and freedoms.

Europe urgently needs strategic autonomy, and so does Germany. This includes the capability not only to formulate, but also to implement foreign and security policy goals. Economic might and the power of innovation are critical, but so is hardware: Europe must become stronger militarily, combining national sovereignties at the military level and intermeshing with NATO. Europe will have to organize its own defense more independently while Germany must pay more for defense on a permanent basis.

European sovereignty – and with it the recognition of a truly equal partnership with the US – could flourish by way of the European Intervention Initiative proclaimed three years ago by Macron. By now, 14 European countries have signed on to the project that also includes non-EU-member European states. Yet it does not constitute an intervention force; it is rather a sort of coalition of the willing-to-project-power. It is hoped that cooperation will give rise to a strategic culture of joint action that could, in the distant future, facilitate joint European military operations, perhaps to address humanitarian crises. It deserves to be given a chance, above all by the hesitant Germans.

And what will become of NATO, which has been so successful over its 70 years? "To preserve NATO," posits former German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, "the EU must act as if the Alliance were already gone." While neither "obsolete" nor "brain-dead," NATO is in deep crisis. Europe's security remains dependent on the nuclear umbrella held aloft by the US. Berlin's clear obligation to rapidly meet the 2-percent goal would promote unity within NATO more than would perhaps any "expert group," such as the one proposed by German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas.

NATO is in need of a hard reality check. Just next door is the Middle East, ablaze with conflict; further east lies the strategic challenge of China; and then there are the authoritarian developments within the NATO member states of Hungary, Poland and Turkey. A fruitful debate over potential sanctions is urgent; after all, an alliance based on shared values can tolerate only so much realpolitik and cynicism.

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Continued from page 1

A global order in flux

Conundrum number two: Last year, Russia conducted one of the largest military exercises in the Far East. This spring, NATO is going to stage Defender 2020, the largest US military training maneuver since the 1990s. About 37,000 GIs are scheduled to take part, including an entire division of 20,000 soldiers specially deployed to Europe. For months, they will rumble through Germany to the border of Russia in Poland and the Baltic republics. The point is to prove that rapid deployment can enhance deterrence. Without a doubt, the Russians will respond with another massive Zapad exercise along their western border. Both, however, must know that tank battles are obsolete. No future war will see engagements like the Battle of Kursk, which involved 6,000 tanks, 4,000 aircraft and two million troops. Drones and cyber warfare have drastically changed the realities of war. Defender 2020 and Zapad are primarily psychological demonstrations, not simulations of warfare in times ahead.

The third conundrum relates to Europe. Many feel that it must step forward as America steps back. Trump has been making noises to this effect. German politicians vow to take on greater international responsibility. Ursula von der Leyen, the new president of the European Commission, and Josep Borrell, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, argue that Europe must "learn to speak the language of power." Several conservative pundits hint at increased military engagement of the Europeans in the Middle East, while some left-of-center gurus think the military should be employed to enforce human rights in authoritarian countries.

But let's face the facts. Realism would strongly advise us not to militarize Europe's foreign policy. For one thing, the EU simply does not have the military capabilities to take on huge missions in its near abroad. Moreover, the US record is rather discouraging. It teaches us that wars are costly – on Operation Iraqi Freedom alone, the US spent $730 billion between 2003 and 2010. The wars last far longer than advertised; the war in Afghanistan – the longest in American history – has dragged on for nearly twenty years. Pretty soon, the US will have been tied down in Iraq for just as long. And rarely do military interventions have the intended outcome; usually they create new unforeseen and more complex problems (see Kosovo or, more recently, Libya). It taxes conventional wisdom to assume that Europe's much weaker forces could succeed where America's military behemoth has failed.

It is a deep and sincere wish that the Trump administration might moderate its transactional "America First" approach and once again strengthen the traditional pillars of US policy – standing by its allies, supporting free trade and upholding rules-based global institutions. It could do worse than heed Henry Kissinger's recent statement: "The most urgent question is whether the Atlantic nations will operate with some sense of common purpose, and hence strategy, on the larger issue of world order. Or whether, in the course of adjusting to changing circumstances and redefining roles, they pursue above all their national or regional interests."

Sixteen years ago, in his 2004 *Washington Post* op-ed, the grandmaster of realpolitik formulated a truism that is a valid and relevant today as it was then: "American power is a fact of life, but the art of diplomacy is to translate power into consensus." US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo should have this adage printed, framed and placed on his desk.

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LEGAL NOTICE

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Zone defense

NATO and the EU are muscling up

BY HEINRICH BRAUSS

Europe and the US face unprecedented challenges and threats. To the east, Russia's aggressive actions aim to destabilize and intimidate neighbors and undermine NATO and the EU. To the south, continuing crises and violence across North Africa and the Middle East (MENA) have fueled terrorism and mass migration that are affecting Europe's stability. Russia's operations in Syria, growing tensions between the US and Iran and conflicts between regional powers have aggravated the risks posed to Europe's security.

At the same time, China's global ambitions, its growing economic, technological and military potential and an emerging entente between China and Russia pose a double strategic challenge to the democratic West. For the United States, China has become the key strategic competitor – with implications for NATO's cohesion and effectiveness.

Europe is struggling to position itself within this new and emerging global power structure. Its unity and ability to act as a valuable partner to the US and as a recognized geopolitical actor on its own are at stake.

NATO is currently addressing the implications of global developments on Euro-Atlantic security while focusing on immediate challenges. These include strengthening its deterrence and defense posture while maintaining a dialogue with Moscow, and helping project stability by assisting partners in providing for their own security. As NATO has to be able to respond to threats from various regions across its area – at short notice and simultaneously – it must retain maximum awareness, flexibility and agility to ensure it has the right forces in the right place at the right time. This requires rapid decision-making, forces stationed at high readiness and the ability to move them rapidly over great distances to reinforce threatened allies.

Since 2014, NATO has taken a range of measures:

■ The NATO Response Force has been augmented to become a joint high-readiness force of some 40,000 troops.

■ European Allies alternate in leading its spearhead force of some 5,000 troops – ready to move its initial elements within a few days.

■ The multinational battlegroups in the Baltic states and Poland with 20 contributing allies, led by United Kingdom, Canada, Germany and the US, demonstrate that even in case of a limited incursion, Russia would immediately be countered with allied forces, including from NATO's three nuclear powers.

■ In the Black Sea region, NATO's presence is being enhanced through multinational exercises and additional air and maritime activities. Prompted by the 2018 NATO Readiness Initiative, European Allies are providing 30 maneuver battalions, 30 kinetic air squadrons and 30 warships at a maximum of 30 days' notice to employ in the theater. They will develop into a number of larger formations – combat brigades, maritime task groups and enhanced air wings at very high readiness.

■ NATO has enhanced cyber defense and set up a Cyber Operations Center. Two new commands, one in the US, one in Germany, are in charge of moving forces across the Atlantic and across Europe.

■ EU and NATO work together to create the legal, logistical and infrastructure conditions for military mobility; the European Commission will co-finance the improvement of infrastructure in Eastern Europe: roads, bridges, tunnels, harbors, airfields.

■ The Alliance has reinvigorated its nuclear deterrence. Its response to the deployment of new land-based, intermediate-range nuclear-capable missiles by Russia will be defensive and balanced, focusing on conventional capabilities. It must preserve Alliance unity and the credibility of NATO's posture as a whole while denying Moscow any option of decoupling Europe's security from that of the US with its extended nuclear deterrence.

The EU, in turn, has built significant momentum in improving its capacity for civilian and military crisis response missions as part of its Common Security and Defence Policy. While the collective defense of Europe remains NATO's sole responsibility, the European Defence Agency contributes to projecting stability beyond Europe and thus to trans-Atlantic security. Its two flagship projects, the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Defence Fund (EDF), help member states engage in multinational cooperation to develop more capabilities, reduce duplication, converge capability development plans and consolidate the European defense industry.

To date, EU nations have launched 47 cooperative projects. Enhancing their capabilities also benefits the Alliance and reinforces its European pillar, as 21 NATO allies are also EU members. NATO and EU staffs work together to ensure that capability development within the two organizations is complementary and that respective priorities and outputs are coherent.

Since 2014, NATO and the EU have enhanced their collaboration to an unprecedented level. They are now cooperating on 74 projects in a range of areas that include countering hybrid threats and expanding cyber defense, capability development, military mobility, defense capacity-building for partners and maritime security. It is essential to ensure complete transparency and the fullest possible involvement of non-EU NATO members, especially the UK after Brexit, since they provide substantial contributions to Europe's security.

As the US shifts its strategic focus to the Asian-Pacific region, however, European nations will need to take far greater responsibility for the security of Europe, for NATO's deterrence and defense and for crisis management in the MENA region, as well as supporting the US in upholding freedom of navigation, which is vital to Europe's own economies. In addition, the disruptive technologies of the digital age will profoundly change the nature of conflict and defense in the future. The Alliance as a whole must invest in innovation programs to maintain its technological edge and interoperability.

The totality of all these challenges posed to the trans-Atlantic partners makes equitable burden-sharing between the US and Europe a strategic necessity. European nations must make vigorous efforts to restore, strengthen and transform their armed forces. They need to increase defense expenditure considerably to invest in high-end capabilities. And there is progress: By the end of 2020, European allies and Canada together will have spent some $130 billion more than they did in 2016.

The multiple strategic challenges, however, also require the EU to further enhance its contributions to Europe's security. PESCO and EDF should be used to support the development of those capabilities that are essential to the entire mission spectrum – crisis response and high-end defense alike – and help develop technologically advanced capabilities required to protect Europe, such as missile defense and long-range precision weapons. Furthermore, European nations should assume a challenging level of responsibility and ambition for their fair share of NATO's entire set of capability requirements – in quantitative and qualitative terms – and its demand for high-readiness formations. These efforts would strengthen the trans-Atlantic alliance and its European pillar as well as Europe's capacity to act on its own.

North America and Europe must stand together against the multitude of challenges that concern both continents. The US must remain a European power to counterbalance Russia's military potential. But it also needs Europe to remain the global superpower it is today. Europe, in turn, must take on far greater international responsibility, and act as a unified, self-determined and capable partner of the US. ■

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SHUTTERSTOCK/JOERG HUETTENHOELSCHER

Combat ready? A KSK soldier of the Bundeswehr's special forces

Eastern promises

For an active EU policy towards Eastern Europe

BY DIRK WIESE AND REINHARD KRUMM

The future looked brighter 30 years ago. In 1990, the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe gave its brand-new Charter of Paris the title "For a New Europe." The 30-page document began with the words: "A new era of Democracy, Peace and Unity."

Much progress has been made in Europe since then. The Central and Eastern European countries of Poland, Slovakia, Czechia and Hungary are now equal members of the EU and NATO, and their citizens have carried out a remarkable economic and social transformation.

The results have not always been stable, however, as developments in some countries show. Above all, European unity has not been achieved. The split in the continent now lies further east.

On the other side of that border lie the states of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), which include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine – but also the Russian Federation.

Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have signed Association Agreements with the EU; Armenia, which is part of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), signed a watered-down version of the same. The other states conduct trade with the EU without any political ambitions toward Brussels.

In the 30 years since 1990, people living in these countries have undergone a major transformation process. And yet, prosperity and stability are still fragile, and people are dissatisfied with the results of the transformation.

This goes for the field of international relations, as well. According to a survey conducted last year by the Vienna-based Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace in Europe (ROCPE) affiliated with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation together with the Paris-based global market research company IPSOS, citizens in Latvia and Poland are not satisfied with the international standing of their respective countries, in spite of their membership in the EU and NATO. Russians and Ukrainians also express a similar dissatisfaction.

Moreover, the world is now in an era of increasing competition between China and the US. For its part, Russia has regained military strength and is also getting involved. In other words, the EU cannot exempt itself from this field of conflict.

Even before taking office, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stated that she intended to lead "a geopolitical commission," whereby the concrete political formulation of that goal is still pending. The volatility that characterizes international relations at the moment is likely to increase rather than decrease. In the meantime, the US is redefining its interests and involvement in Europe while its economic sanctions continue to impact EU countries.

The EU's policy toward Eastern Europe is unclear and based on three separate concepts: the Eastern Partnership (EaP), the Russia policy (steered by five principles credited to Federica Mogherini, the former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy) and the Central Asia strategy. The EU's policy toward Eastern Europe will have to tie together these strands and come up with a viable strategy going forward. For example, in the future, EaP civil society projects carried out at the EU level could – depending on their relevance – include the Russian side.

European policy toward eastern neighbors is burdened by a tangible historical distrust felt by Poles, Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians as well as Georgians and Ukrainians. They fear a potential agreement between Russia and EU countries, such as Germany and France; an agreement that would, in the worst-case scenario, be carried out over their heads.

It is of the utmost importance to take these objections into serious consideration. Still, it should not prevent us from seeking out political solutions together. For example, the situation in Ukraine is no cause for satisfaction on the part of us EU citizens.

Fifty years ago, at a time when the situation was just as muddled as it is today, Egon Bahr – a key political figure in the era of *Ostpolitik* – called for a policy of small steps. At that point in time, Germany's long-term strategic goal was reconciliation with the countries of Eastern Europe and, ultimately, German reunification. For the EU today, the long-term strategic goal should be a united Europe.

In 2019, OSCE chairman and Slovak Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák argued that OSCE rules and regulations were entirely sufficient to ensure security in Europe. According to Lajčák, the decisive move would be a shift away from a zero-sum game "toward dialog that can actually lead us to compromise." The prerequisites for this shift would include publically naming differences without reservation, exploring interests and designating potential areas of cooperation. It would behoove the EU to initiate such a dialog, most importantly out of respect for the victims of World War II and the subsequent responsibility to ensure a peaceful Europe.

Today, the export-oriented EU relies on a strategic foreign policy. It is in their interest to formulate a concrete policy toward Eastern Europe. After all, if the EU seeks to achieve peace and unity in Europe, it will have to act with energy and foresight. ■

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FROM COLD WAR TO HOT PEACE

Russia is benefiting from its new confrontation with the West. But murkier times may lie ahead

BY IAN BREMMER

In the nearly three decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's relationship with the West has undergone a dramatic transformation – from establishing economic ties the 1990s to being partners in the wake of 9/11 to once again being adversaries in the post-Bush era. There's plenty of blame to go around, not least the absence of even considering true reconstruction of the former Soviet states after collapse. But many of these shifts have to do with the political trajectory of one Vladimir Putin, who has gone from relative unknown to the longest-serving leader of Russia since Joseph Stalin. And with Putin's announcement earlier this year of forthcoming constitutional changes, he has signaled that he has no intention of relinquishing power when his term ends in 2024, even if he does give up the presidency.

With all that in mind, here are five key trends likely to shape the "hot peace" between Russia and the West in the coming years.

1. Russia will continue to seek tactical wins it can score internationally, enabled by a US pullback from global leadership and inevitable foreign policy missteps taken by the West more generally.

Putin has been quick to take advantage of the US pullback from areas where it once played a dominant role. It has also taken advantage of those cases in which Western powers have not fully committed themselves (e.g., Syria and Libya). This also includes Ukraine, though there the cost to Russia has been higher in lives lost, budget outlays and in terms of sanctions (more on this below).

More generally, Putin has sought opportunities to improve Russia's position in key regions, at limited financial or military costs. In so doing, he has succeeded in raising Russia's profile in the Middle East as a diplomatic broker, and as an intermediary of the war in Syria. Similar moves are being made in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, and with Russian support for Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela. These have increased Russia's clout on the international stage – not to the level of the United States or China, but to a notable degree nonetheless. This feat is made more impressive by the fact that while the US and China are the two largest economies in the world, Russia ranks 11th, behind countries like Brazil and Canada. Russia will continue looking for such low-risk, high-reward opportunities for intervention. Putin is also primed to take advantage of the continued souring of US–EU relations during the Trump era. Which brings us to...

2. Europe increasingly desires a return to some sense of normalcy. That will be difficult given just how much division there currently is within the EU, Germany's weakening leadership of the EU and, of course, Trump. All of which plays into Russia's hands.

Deep-rooted antipathy toward the Russian government remains bipartisan in Congress

Since 2014, Europe has been rigorously debating the proper response to Russian actions in Ukraine and other malign activities in Europe (election interference, targeted or attempted killings of émigrés). There are many states (Hungary, Italy and, most recently, France) that want to forge closer ties with Moscow, while Poland, the Baltic States and the UK have been far more hostile toward a rapprochement. Germany has shown signs of both arguments – German Chancellor Angela Merkel was instrumental in maintaining sanctions against Russia after its land grab in Ukraine, but Germany has also been the lead advocate for the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

Ultimately, European unity will stick to sanctions, largely because they are tied so closely to the specific goal of ending the war in Eastern Ukraine. Thawing tensions between the EU and Russia will necessarily be a slow process, even if the current momentum is aimed at normalizing relations with Moscow.

3. Trump really does want to work with Putin, though the US Congress will continue to stymie such efforts on most counts.

Trump's presidency has not produced the direct benefits Russian leaders had obviously hoped for, though Moscow has still managed to capitalize on Trump's foreign policy – cementing its role as intermediary in Syria being the most obvious example. Also noteworthy is the fact that US-China tensions have pushed Moscow and Beijing closer together. Deep-rooted antipathy toward the Russian government remains bipartisan in Congress, and US lawmakers have built up ways to constrain Trump's ability to unilaterally change US policy toward Russia, as demonstrated by the 2017 Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions legislation. Trump can talk about improving the relationship all he wants, but it is hard for him to actually translate that into policy. Take NATO as another example. Both Putin and Trump have reservations about the organization – albeit for much different reasons – but Congress has already made attempts through legislation to limit what Trump can do to undermine the security alliance even further.

Both Trump and Putin have learned the hard way that having strong leader-to-leader relations is far from enough when at least one of those leaders hails from a robust and still-functioning democracy.

4. Russia is struggling with growing challenges at home, but Putin's foreign policy victories are not helping.

Polling in 2019 has shown that the Russian public wants Putin to focus more on domestic issues, including an economy that is producing growth of only 1 to 2 percent a year. In general, there is limited domestic support for foreign adventures. Signs from the Kremlin suggest it has become more cautious regarding foreign engagements, both in terms of committing formal troops and getting involved in tit-for-tats that do further damage to the investment climate as the US ads more sanctions.

Still, there are limits to the impact of domestic pressures on Russian foreign policy. First, growth is sluggish, but there is macroeconomic stability – the budget has been running surpluses, currency reserves have been replenished in recent years and stand at over $550 billion, inflation has been under control, and the currency has been fairly stable. In other words, the government does not face an economic emergency, and it is in a better position than in the past to deal with an external shock. Longer term, there are legitimate concerns about stagnant growth, low foreign direct investment and demographic challenges. But the short-term state of affairs is stable enough that Putin feels he can avoid undertaking any major reforms.

Second, public opinion is not the key driver of foreign policy decisions. Putin has prioritized geopolitics over economics, at least when it comes to what he identifies as core interests, and he is not going to change course in response to polls. There are also some foreign policy priorities that will remain important enough for Putin to risk Western punishment, such as maintaining Russian influence in Ukraine and Belarus.

Going forward, the key question will be how Putin transitions his power post-2024. He is establishing a system in which he can remain highly influential even after he (presumably) leaves the presidency that year. How and indeed if he disperses power remains unanswered by the recent changes. But foreign policy and security questions may be among the very last things he is willing to surrender.

5. Russia must increasingly worry about being dominated by China – a reminder that while Putin is playing the short-term game capably, he's not playing the long-term game nearly as well.

The Russian government does not have an answer for how to fully address the China relationship over the long term. Russia's hopes for China are especially high at the moment – with Western economic links frayed, China is of growing importance as an export market for energy and as an investor in a range of Russian sectors, particularly oil and gas. But the power dynamic is even starker since the days when Putin first steered Russia toward a revisionist foreign policy. The imbalance will grow even stronger as China continues its geopolitical ascent. Russia's approach at present is to accommodate China's growing influence in Central Asia and even in countries like Ukraine and Belarus. China, for its part, is happy to avoid stepping on Russia's toes, even as it becomes more influential in what Russia views as its historic sphere of influence. Over time, that Chinese presence will create tensions with Moscow, and there's only so much Russia will be able to do about that.

In short, Russia will remain an opportunist on the international stage despite the risks of blowback from citizens at home and the West more generally. But a European continent looking to stabilize itself and its greater surroundings will offer Moscow an opportunity to improve relations with a significant part of the West, even as relations between the US and Russia remain chilly. And while the current standoff between the US and China has pushed Moscow and Beijing closer together, Russia should be concerned about the long-term trajectory of that relationship – if Russia isn't careful, its biggest challenger in this era of "hot peace" will be coming from the East rather than the West in just a few short years.

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Je ne sais quoi

Can the French president convince his EU partners to pursue a new political purpose?

PICTURE ALLIANCE/ JOHANNA GERON

BY SYLVIE KAUFFMANN

There he goes again. In his speech on nuclear deterrence delivered on Feb. 7, French President Emmanuel Macron followed the traditional line of his country's nuclear doctrine. But this time he gave it a certain European twist, with hopes of opening a strategic dialog among his EU partners: "France's vital interests have now taken on a European dimension," he said. "Our nuclear forces reinforce, by their very existence, the security of Europe and therefore have a genuinely European dimension."

Macron is a man on a mission; he's out to convince his fellow European leaders that the EU can, and must, defend its own interests. This mission has proven costly more than once in the past. Last November, less than four weeks before the London summit due to mark NATO's 70th anniversary, the French president's calculated assertion, in an interview with *The Economist,* that "we are experiencing the brain death of NATO" set off diplomatic shockwaves. And that was exactly the intended consequence: "The last thing we wanted was another summit where leaders would be patting each other on the back while ignoring the real issues," said one French official.

Yet for all the noise, what most allies considered really offensive was not the "brain dead" accusation but the skepticism the French leader voiced in the same interview about NATO's Article 5. "That was a big shock," said a senior British official. "It was sending a terrible message to our enemies." The fact that Macron had unilaterally, in late August, tried to launch a new dialog on European security with Vladimir Putin did not help.

Having launched his hand grenade, Macron then used the NATO summit and Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg's visit in Paris a few days earlier to repeatedly reassure his allies on France's commitment to NATO and its confidence in Article 5. Russia, he conceded, was definitely "a threat" to its neighbors. French officials pointed out their president's frustration over Syria to explain his outburst: the withdrawal of US forces, abruptly announced in October by US President Donald Trump, had opened the doors to a Turkish offensive in northern Syria. These decisions by two major NATO allies were taken without consultation with other members of the Alliance who, like

SHUTTERSTOCK/ALEXEY LYSENKO

Vodka on the rocks

Russia's relations with the West are not about to get any better

BY DMITRI TRENIN

US-Russian relations continue to deteriorate. Expectations on both sides are extremely low. Arms control is unraveling fast, with the Trump administration seemingly more likely to let the New START treaty expire within a year than to extend it. Opens Skies may be another agreement that US President Donald Trump would like to discard. The coming US presidential election might well result in new accusations of Russian meddling, which would lead to new sanctions against Russia.

But whatever the outcome, more sanctions are a near certainty. As has been the case for the past six years, the most one can realistically achieve in the foreseeable future is to prevent an inadvertent direct military collision between Russia and the United States. In the absence of meaningful US-Russian dialogue, communication channels between the two countries' top defense and security officers remain the only instruments of keeping the peace between the two adversaries.

Russia's relations with Europe continue to disappoint. Expectations of a breakthrough or at least significant progress on Donbass, which were raised as a result of the Ukrainian presidential and parliamentary elections of 2019, have had to be significantly rolled back. It is possible that the line of contact in Ukraine's east may see a prolonged lull in shelling and shooting, with more civilians freely crossing the line to go about their daily business and prisoners still kept by both sides returning to their families. What also seems probable, however, is a long-term freeze of the political status quo in Donbass.

The Minsk agreement, whose implementation is a sine qua non for the lifting of EU sanctions against Russia, will remain unfulfilled. Moscow's insistence on a special constitutional status for Donetsk and Luhansk remains anathema to Kyiv. The late-December Russian-Ukrainian gas transit agreement, under which Moscow agreed to honor a court decision in favor of Kyiv, has failed to avert the US imposition of sanctions on companies involved in laying the Nord Stream 2 pipeline across the Baltic Sea. The German government called the US action unacceptable, but the construction has stopped and the completion of the project will be delayed.

Even with the sanctions in place, it appeared at one point that the leading EU member states were poised to initiate a rapprochement with Moscow. French President Emmanuel Macron invited Russian President Vladimir Putin to his summer residence for a wide-ranging private discussion of the relationship. Coming on the eve of the G7 meeting, this sparked a brief debate on the merits of inviting Russia to re-join the group from which it was expelled in 2014. In a subsequent interview with *The Economist*, which caused quite a stir, Macron, while pronouncing NATO "brain-dead," talked of the need to open a dialogue on European security with Moscow. Some in France and Germany voiced concern that isolating Russia would only serve to push it even closer to China, with negative implications for Europe.

These arguments have been less than compelling. The formal cancelation in 2019 of the INF Treaty raises the possibility of a new US-Russian missile stand-off in Europe. Yet, to Moscow's surprise, this worrisome prospect has failed to stir European governments into action to prevent an additional confrontation. Indeed, European calm has only confirmed the fact that Europe's security on the Western side is fully managed by NATO. French leaders can make statements, but little more, particularly when their views are not even supported by France's closest partner, Germany, which remains steadfast in its Atlanticism. Chancellor Angela Merkel recently made a rare visit to Moscow, but only to discuss Libya's security, not Europe's, with Putin.

The coming 75th anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany in World War II has opened a new front in European-Russian relations. Moscow angrily rejects the notion, contained in the European Parliament's resolution, of the joint responsibility of the two totalitarian regimes, Hitler's Nazism and Stalin's Soviet Bolshevism, for the outbreak of World War II. Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945 is key to both the official and popular Russian historical narrative as well as the country's very self-image; any attempt to undermine it is widely regarded as a vicious case of Russophobia.

Against this background, Moscow's relations with – and public attitudes toward – a number of Eastern European countries, from Poland to the Baltic States to Ukraine, have reached new lows.

Looking ahead, Russian-Western relations are unlikely to improve in the next few years. If history is any guide, US sanctions, enshrined in law, will outlive most of today's politicians. There are limits to the daylight that can be allowed to emerge between US and EU policies on Russia. As for Moscow, while the cost of adversity is considerable, Russia's resources are not exhausted. Putin's position remains more or less solid, so strategic concessions are out of the question. The past six years have proven that the Kremlin's foreign policy will not change under Western pressure.

Even as the Russian president has now launched a long process of political transition, it has become clear that while Russians will vote for a different head of state in 2024, the new governance structure and the personalities filling it will be Putin's choices. It is widely accepted that Putin himself will likely act as the country's top authority for years after 2024.

The bad news is that the Moscow-Washington confrontation will continue; the good news is that there will be some guardrails built around it. Russia's relations with European countries will vary from the pragmatic, such as with France, Germany and Italy, to the highly toxic, such as with several Eastern European neighbors. The conflict in Donbass is unlikely to rekindle or escalate, but nor will it be solved anytime soon. Crimea will stay Russian, but will not be internationally recognized as such. There will be no hostilities in the Baltic Sea area, but hostility on both sides of the NATO-Russian divide will become more deeply entrenched. The Arctic will become busier commercially, but more militarized as well. The Balkans, while no longer an East-West battleground, will be a sandbox for small-time geopolitical games. The Eastern Mediterranean, however, is emerging as an area where Russia, again, is competing with the West.

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France, were involved in the fight against Islamic State (IS) in the area and were exposed to the fallout of Trump's decision.

This episode was typical of Macron: take advantage of a major disruption to add another layer of disruption in order to "shift the parameters," as one of his advisers puts it. In this case, most NATO allies admitted that, despite its strength and activity as a military organization, the Alliance itself, as a political umbrella, was in trouble. "Macron has opened a strategic conversation at a political level, and this is important," a NATO official acknowledged. But there was collateral damage. Questioning NATO's relevance increased suspicions surrounding his push for European defense among France's partners. Yet the French are now convinced that they are making inroads. As long as they avoid the words "strategic autonomy," they feel that the concept itself is gaining traction as their European partners finally take stock of Trump's contempt for global rules and of his chances for re-election.

What does Macron want – apart from disruption? His long speeches, press conferences and interviews all point to a clear vision of a world where great-power competition has returned, presenting Europe with a drastic choice: prey or power. The changing trans-Atlantic relationship was identified early on as a long-term, fundamental challenge: "For the first time," Macron says, "we have an American president who does not share the idea of the European project." And now the European project itself is at a crossroads. Having lost its main external enemy with the collapse of communism, the EU has lost its sense of history; it needs a new political purpose. The rise of China is another factor of fragility for Europe, with a risk of bipolarization – a US-China "G2" that, in Macron's view, would deprive the EU of the ability to pursue its own course. The only way for Europe to survive, therefore, is to think of itself as a global power.

The only way for Europe to survive is to think of itself as a global power

All the tools of soft, smart and hard power should be used. As the US multiplies its threats of tariffs, trade becomes a major instrument of foreign policy. Trying to save the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action nuclear deal with Iran was seen as a European effort. Building up European defense is an obvious priority – and in Macron's thinking, European defense includes a post-Brexit United Kingdom. European defense also includes industry. Paris never misses an opportunity to point out that US pressure for increased defense budgets in Europe goes hand-in-hand with pressure to buy American equipment. "NATO solidarity is Article 5, not Article F-35," French Minister of Defense Florence Parly snapped last year in Washington. Within the EU, Macron has pushed for the creation of a new Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space, which, under the control of European Commissioner for Internal Market and Services Thierry Breton, will manage the European Defence Fund.

Early on, though, the French president's crusade for a stronger Europe was met with inevitable suspicion. Call it "Gallic prejudice" or the "Gaullist edge" – what he wants, it is feared, is a French Europe serving France's interests.

Macron's style and method feed this suspicion. His unabashed tendency to act unilaterally in order to strengthen a multilateral organization irritates his European partners – not least the closest of them, Germany. "This is what leadership means," says one source at the Elysée. "Either you are a leader or you are not. He is." But others argue, notably in Brussels, that leadership also means building up support behind you. His Russian initiative is a case in point. By deliberately omitting Berlin – where it would have encountered little opposition – he fed accusations of selling out to Russia from angry Northern and Central European member states. Ambassador Pierre Vimont, a smooth operator well liked in European circles, was belatedly dispatched to mend fences and brief wary partners on the Elysée's Putin strategy. Sending him before the announcement of Macron's plan might have helped. The same goes for the controversy over the EU's enlargement process. France produced merely a non-paper in Brussels, with proposals to reform the EU enlargement process, after refusing to open accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania.

The paradox is that with Russia, Macron is probably genuinely convinced that he was acting in Europe's interests. Facing the end of the nuclear arms control agreements, he sees a security vacuum on the horizon and wants European interests to be taken into account, including those of the countries closest to Russia that are not covered by the INF treaty and its range of 500 to 5,500 kilometers. His proposal of a new "architecture of trust and security" remains elusive. Forget about "architecture"; the key words are "trust" and "security." Macron's hope – that there is room for discussion between reluctant European partners and Moscow's divisive efforts – seems to be hitting a wall, as Putin shows no signs of movement despite a few positive steps in the Minsk process on Ukraine. The Russian president's attention will now likely be focused on the transition process in the Kremlin.

One parameter has been constant in Macron's foreign and security policy: the priority given to the fight against terrorism. Hit by mass terrorism in 2015 and still under active threat, the French generally support maintaining 5,100 French troops in the Sahel, as they have for seven years now, to combat jihad, even at the expense of casualties and even with an increasing feeling that, like Afghanistan, it is a war that may never be won. This is also a crucial element in the complex relationship Paris has with Washington. European support for this combat force will not compensate for the assistance provided by US intelligence and logistics. The French and US militaries have learned to work well together, but every threat of withdrawal tweeted by Trump resonates deeply in Paris – probably more than do his threats of tariffs on French wine.

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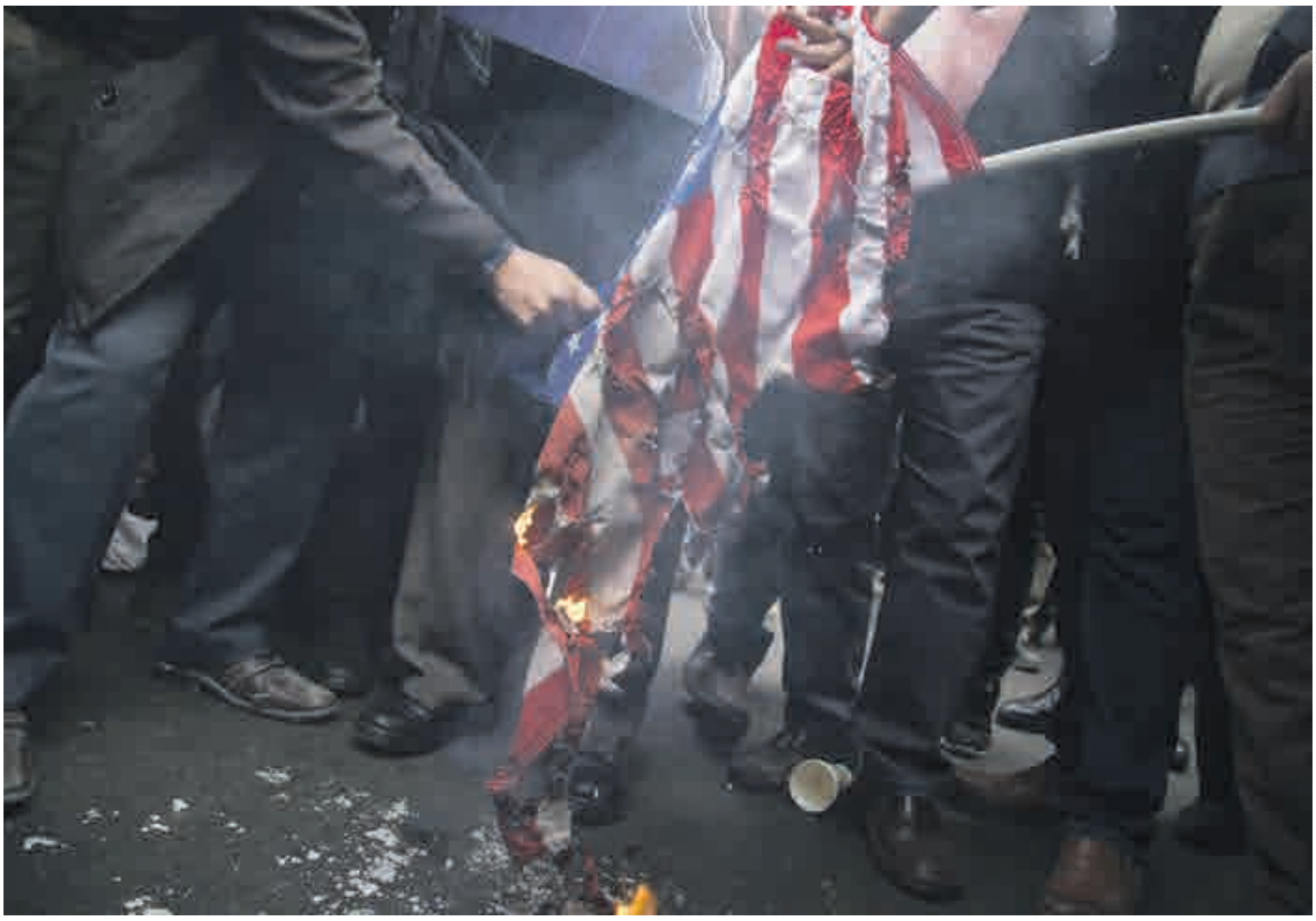

IMAGO IMAGES/ZUMA PRESS

Fire and fury: Supporters of the Iran regime burn the US flag during a protest against the US following a Friday prayer led by Supreme Leader of Iran Ali Khamenei in January.

The other quid pro quo

The conundrum of the Washington-Tehran stalemate

BY ROBERT MALLEY

The United States and Iran have been on a predictable collision course since the Trump administration withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in May 2018. The drivers of this heightened tension are two fundamentally clashing and self-reinforcing approaches: Washington is convinced that a policy of "maximum pressure" will prompt Iran to succumb to its demands – and should such pressure fail, the US response should apply even greater pressure. Conversely, Tehran believes that the most effective reaction to pressure is counter-pressure – a policy of calibrated escalations on the nuclear and regional fronts to demonstrate it will not fold under duress, but instead raise the stakes.

The dangers of this standoff were fully evident in late December 2019 and early January 2020, when the two sides came to the brink of war after the US killed Major General Qassim Soleimani, head of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' elite Quds Force. A more costly confrontation was avoided this time, but the underlying dynamics that led to the precipice remain unchanged.

The burden is now on European and other third-party mediators to seek a tactical détente between the two rivals that reduces regional tensions and averts a renewed crisis over Iran's nuclear program.

Since pulling out of the nuclear agreement, the Trump administration has articulated a sweeping set of demands for what should take its place. The list is long, ambitious and wholly unrealistic. It includes, inter alia, an end to all uranium enrichment, ballistic missile proliferation and Iranian support for its various local allies and partners across the region. Unilateral US sanctions have served as the primary tool for securing these concessions and succeeded in subjecting the Islamic Republic to considerable financial strain, in particular by precipitating a substantial drop in Iran's vital oil exports.

But the sanctions have otherwise failed. They have so far produced neither the greater regional stability Washington seeks nor the more stringent nuclear constraints it has targeted. Instead, they have resulted in heightened tension and an Iranian nuclear program increasingly unshackled from the JCPOA's key restraints. Moreover, and despite episodic and at times serious unrest, the Islamic Republic remains in full control at home.

For the first year of the US "maximum pressure" campaign, Iran's approach was to wait it out and hope that the JCPOA's remaining parties – France, Germany, the UK, Russia and China – could muster the economic dividends at the core of the agreement's quid pro quo. That strategy began to shift in May 2019, as the burden of US sanctions weighed more heavily, and Europe failed to fashion a financial lifeline. Facing what it considered an intolerable status quo, the Iranians adopted their own version of "maximum pressure": provocations on the regional and nuclear fronts to underscore the fact that Washington's siege will not be met without a cost, and to prompt greater urgency toward stabilizing the JCPOA by means of an economic reprieve.

From Tehran's perspective, the nuclear and regional escalations are thus two sides of the same coin. They are gambits aimed at breaking the financial stranglehold placed by sanctions, which have in turn fueled economic and political discontent within Iran and strengthened the hand of hardliners for whom the JCPOA specifically, and international engagement more broadly, were strategic mistakes foretold and now seemingly fulfilled. But just as Washington's approach has failed to yield Iranian concessions, Iran's brinkmanship failed to deliver a favorable breakthrough.

At the regional level, tensions have risen steadily over the past year. Attacks against oil tankers in the Gulf in May and June preceded the brazen attack against Aramco's Abqaiq-Khurais facilities in Saudi Arabia in September. Iran has denied involvement but is suspected in each of these incidents.

The burden is now on Europe and others to seek a tactical détente between the two rivals

October saw the beginning of an uptick in rocket attacks against Iraqi military bases hosting US and other international troops, one of which, on Dec. 27, resulted in the death of a US contractor in Kirkuk. Events then quickly took a turn for the worse. The US struck bases of the Iran-backed Iraqi paramilitary group, Kataib Hezbollah, claiming it was responsible for the Kirkuk operation. This led to a mob attack against the US embassy compound in Baghdad. Just a few days later, the US killed Major General Qassim Soleimani – one of the Islamic Republic's senior military officials and mastermind of its network of proxies and allies across the Middle East. On Jan. 7, Iran responded with a barrage of missile strikes against Iraqi military bases, injuring 64 US soldiers at the Ain al-Assad base.

While the guns have since gone silent, that salvo is unlikely to be the end of Iran's or its allies' response, and the possibility of further direct or indirect retaliation against US or allied targets remains significant.

Meanwhile, Iran has been steadily and methodically breaching its JCPOA commitments: breaking the 300kg cap on its stockpiles of enriched uranium, upping enrichment rates beyond the deal's 3.67-percent limit, activating advanced centrifuges, reviving enrichment activities at its bunkered Fordow site and running more centrifuges than the deal allows. However, in key respects there may be less to these breaches than meets the eye. For example, uranium enrichment levels are still well short of the pre-JCPOA 20-percent level, and rigorous inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency continue apace. In other words, Iran has been staggering its non-compliance with the likely intent of jolting greater efforts to salvage the agreement, rather than abandoning the deal outright in pursuit of weapons capabilities.

Nevertheless, the JCPOA's three Western European signatories concluded they could no longer act as if the deal were still respected by Iran and, on Jan. 14, launched the dispute resolution mechanism (DRM) that could see the case eventually referred to the UN Security Council. Should that transpire, and the pre-JCPOA international sanctions return to force, it would herald the agreement's collapse. The consequence would be rolling the clock back a decade and reviving discussions on whether military action by the US and/or Israel is necessary to contain a nuclear program the JCPOA had successfully kept in check.

With the region on a knife-edge, the nuclear deal increasingly at risk and the prospects for direct diplomacy between Tehran and Washington looking increasingly dim, third-party intervention may well be the only way to break the impasse between the two sides. Efforts by French President Emmanuel Macron to fashion a US-Iran détente at the UN General Assembly in September 2019 stumbled at the last minute, but they revealed the contours of a potential arrangement: economic reprieve for Iran in exchange for Tehran's compliance with the JCPOA and regional de-escalation.

Soleimani's killing likely precludes the already unlikely presidential summit the White House was keen to showcase and thus reduces the scope of what could be agreed upon. But a more modest arrangement remains plausible. In particular, more vigorous European steps to operationalize the Instrument for Support of Trade Exchanges with Iran could buoy trade, be supplemented through credit lines for Iranian humanitarian goods and go hand-in-hand with a resumption of Iranian adherence to the deal.

At a minimum, this would buy time, avert a UN showdown and perhaps press the pause button until the US presidential elections in November. Although Soleimani's killing has significantly soured the atmosphere, Iran and the US might also seek to build on the successful exchange of detainees last December and pursue additional discussion on releasing US and other foreign nationals held by Iran on highly dubious charges.

Now that the E3 (France, Germany and the UK) have triggered the DRM, they will likely be pressured by the US to take the case to the Security Council as quickly as possible, not least with the end of a UN arms embargo looming in October, unless UN sanctions are re-imposed. That makes it all the more imperative for the E3 to use the coming period to engage Tehran, seek to the greatest extent possible to provide sanctions relief or economic reprieve, get Iran to resume full compliance and, possibly, to agree to the initiation of broader negotiations. Considering how close the region came to a conflagration, Iran and its Gulf rivals – Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in particular – ought to build on initial steps in parallel and develop diplomatic engagement of their own.

Finally, Tehran should recognize that the combination of quashing dissent, avoiding major reforms and playing a perilous nuclear and regional game of chicken is unlikely to prove sustainable. Sanctions have exacerbated many of Iran's political and economic problems, but they did not create them. Tackling the endemic ills of corruption and mismanagement, refraining from adding fuel to regional fires and avoiding brash moves that could see it increasingly isolated financially and diplomatically may be a tall order. But the alternative could be considerably worse. ▬

ROBERT MALLEY
is president and CEO of the International Crisis Group.

BY YASSIN MUSHARBASH

Hurry up and wait

The end of the caliphate does not mean the fight against Islamic State is over

Almost a year has passed since the Battle of Baghuz Fawqani in eastern Syria, where in March of 2019 fighters of the Islamic State (IS) terrorist organization took their last stance against the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces and the US-led Global Coalition against Daesh. It was there and then that the IS "caliphate" came to an end.

Nothing remains of the pseudo-state the jihadists had set up in 2014. But at its zenith, the caliphate comprised an area the size of Austria across large parts of Syria and Iraq, with an estimated 8 million people as its – mostly – forced citizens.

It took another half year to track down and eliminate the group's notorious leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. He had overseen the merciless rule his group imposed on anyone under IS control and organized a string of brutal terror attacks against targets as far away as Paris and Brussels as well as genocidal campaigns against Yezidis, Shiites, Christians and other groups in the region. The self-styled caliph, or ruler, over all true believers died on Oct. 26, 2019, in his hide-out in Syria's Idlib province when, to avoid capture by US special forces, he activated an explosive belt.

It is understandable that leaders across the globe hailed both the end of the jihadist wannabe-state and the demise of al-Baghdadi as victories of historic proportion. US President Donald Trump boasted that the caliphate had been defeated "100 percent." But – unfortunately – this is true only in the narrowest sense.

To understand that the specter of IS isn't quite over, one need simply travel to northern Iraq. At the base of the Qara Chokh mountains at the border between the areas under control of the Kurdish Regional Authority and those controlled by Iraq's central government, a community of roughly 400 IS fighters is still holding out. The men, women and children live in tunnels and natural caves.

The fighters hide during the day, but at night they enter surrounding villages and extort food, money and what they call taxes. They also plant mines that regularly kill civilians.

The Kurdish Peshmerga Forces make sure not to penetrate these areas. The Global Coalition conducts sporadic air strikes against them. But the Iraqi army is hardly ever to be seen.

Peshmerga officers claim that dozens of Western and Asian IS fighters joined this jihadist community only after the battle of Baghouz. That means that some of the estimated 40,000 foreign fighters who had joined ISIS in its heyday survived that battle and have now taken refuge in the Qara Chokh mountains. Several such IS pockets continue to exist across northern and eastern Iraq.

In Syria, the *Washington Post* recently reported, former IS members have been re-recruited as recently as in June of 2019. An unknown number of underground IS cells dot the east of the country, conducting attacks, bombings and assassinations on a regular basis.

While it is true that tens of thousands of IS fighters have been killed and arrested in past years, as many as 14,000 IS fighters might still be living underground in Syria and Iraq alone.

Although they may be mostly busy with survival rather than with planning global terror attacks, they remain battle-hardened, die-hard jihadists waiting for their next opportunity to contribute to the cause.

Eliminating them is not an easy task; it may indeed prove impossible. And it certainly doesn't help that the future terms under which the Global Coalition will be able to operate in and out of Iraq have become a lot less clear in the wake of the killing of Iranian General Qassim Soleimani and subsequent Iraqi calls to end the presence of Western military forces in the country.

The state of affairs is all the more concerning since IS – and its predecessors – know how to prevail in situations like this. Before their ascent in 2013/14, the group had almost been reduced to insignificance. The total number of fighters was in the low hundreds.

The conditions that helped the IS rise still exist or can return

IS knows how to expand when circumstances allow it. And under adverse conditions, they know how to lay low, wait and survive.

This picture becomes even gloomier when global developments are taken into account. Even though al-Baghdadi has been replaced by a successor about whom virtually nothing is known apart from his nom de guerre, Abu Ibrahim al-Qurashi, not one of the terrorist groups in the Middle East, Africa or Asia that pledged allegiance to IS in the past has terminated their affiliation. They all remain in the fold and have for the most part even renewed their pledges. In other words, the end of the caliphate does not mean their fight is over.

In fact, some of these affiliates have grown to become menaces in their own right. Jihadists in West Africa, many of them associated with IS, are considered a regional threat by intelligence analysts. In Afghanistan, at least 2,000 fighters act in the name of IS. In Libya, that number is believed to be 800, with experts fearing that each of these branches could already have acquired the ability to plot terror attacks in the West. The Philippines is home to likely as many as 750 IS fighters, while Egypt's Sinai Peninsula is expected to have an equivalent amount.

In Egypt alone, the terrorist group claimed 180 attacks in 2018. On Easter Sunday 2019, jihadists killed over 250 people in multiple suicide bombings across Sri Lanka. The perpetrators belonged to a non-affiliated local militant Islamist group, but they chose to let IS take credit for their attacks — at a time when the caliphate was already history.

Why is it that the IS label is apparently still seen as an asset?

In order to understand this fact, we have to accept that IS adherents and sympathizers see the organization very differently from the way Western analysts do.

While it may sound counterintuitive to us, the IS and its adherents see the caliphate project as an almost unconditional success. They focus on the fact that their "state" managed to exist for four years and that it took a coalition of 81 global partners four years to defeat it. They also interpret the caliphate as a first – and by far not the last – attempt at accomplishing a vision.

They know that the experiment in all likelihood cannot be repeated any time soon. But their ideology isn't based on the idea that success must be achieved now or soon or even in their lifetimes.

What they see instead is that the global jihadist movement has learned valuable lessons that will help them to get it right the next time around. Veterans of the caliphate will thus be influential people for years to come, as they are the bearers of this knowledge.

One of the main lessons already being implemented is that the best prospects for jihadist success exist in places where older conflicts can be exploited and re-framed as part of the global jihadist struggle. This is particularly evident in West Africa and the Sahel, where jihadists of all stripes, including IS, are branding themselves as representatives of disenfranchised and oppressed groups. They offer a merit-based system of power distribution, as well as a degree of accountability and order often unknown in these regions. In some areas, they even offer people a livelihood.

This works quite well in localities that are ungoverned or, at best, poorly governed. Analyst Shadi Hamid recently drove home this point in a Brookings Institution paper when he explained why "it matters that many people prefer cruel governance to no governance."

This is not to say that the setbacks are not real. They are very real indeed. IS leaders are underground and most likely unable to communicate to the extent they would like. They can no longer perform their original function as an international headquarters for the movement. Moreover, the influx of volunteers from abroad that the IS previously enjoyed is a trickle of what it once was.

Their propaganda machinery has been significantly reduced. Their capacity to strike the West – traditionally a recipe to gain recruits as well as burnish their reputation – has suffered substantially. And lastly, funding has largely dried up – although it should be noted that the group may still have access to tens and perhaps hundreds of millions of dollars.

Our current world is generally a safer place with respect to jihadist terror attacks. For the moment, that is. After all, jihadist ideology dictates that one of the most highly prized virtues is patience. Jihadists tend to think in historical terms.

Analysts in the West, on the other hand, tend to envision scenarios that encompass only the next few years. For the international community, there is a certain risk to underestimating jihadists' stamina and ability to plan long-term.

Smashing the dangerous IS state-building enterprise should not be confused with a permanent defeat of the group. The conditions that helped IS rise still exist or can return – and in more than one place.

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HUAWEI

Towards a trusted partnership in the establishment of EU 5G networks

Cyber security is key in establishing trust in the digital world

With the global proliferation of new technologies like 5G, cloud computing, internet of things (IoT), and artificial intelligence (AI) come increased cyber security risks. As a global technology provider, Huawei is acutely aware of just how important cyber security is for ensuring trust in the digital world we all share. Unfortunately, cyber security is increasingly entangled with geopolitical issues, trade barriers, and declining trust between nations. However, politically motivated suspicion does not address challenges to enhance cyber security. Frequently, cyber security is used as an excuse to erect trade barriers, and this has further obscured the real issues.

Effective solutions must always be firmly based on facts. Huawei encourages all stakeholders in the digital ecosystem to evaluate risks in a rational, objective, and evidence-based manner. Cyber security involves many elements and stakeholders. An all-industry, full-society approach to collaboration is therefore essential to enhancing systematic cyber security governance for everyone.

Cyber security is the top priority at Huawei. We are committed to supporting the secure and stable operations of customer networks. Since its founding, Huawei has operated in more than 170 countries and regions, serving over three billion people around the world. Our equipment has never caused a large-scale network breakdown, and we have never experienced any serious cyber security breach. Huawei has never done anything to jeopardize the security of our customers' networks or devices, and thus no evidence of such actions exists.

Recent debate has focused on several questions: Is cyber security a political or a technical issue? Is an equipment vendor's country of origin a relevant risk factor? Are 5G networks less secure than 4G? Can equipment vendors control data flowing through telecom networks? Could an equipment vendor disable a carrier's network with a "kill switch"? As a global technology provider, Huawei always tries to present a clear position on questions like these, so that governments, the industry, and other stakeholders can correctly analyze the issues and find effective solutions.

Geopolitical issues must not jeopardize the enormous potential of the digital economy

Information and communications technology (ICT) is helping to unlock the enormous potential of the digital economy. The world's digital economy has grown 2.5 times faster than global GDP over the past 15 years. The digital economy will produce 23 trillion US dollars in new economic potential by 2025. In other words: by 2025, the digital economy will represent almost a quarter (24.3%) of the global GDP.

5G is playing a major role in this accelerated growth. According to data from the GSMA released in Barcelona 2019, the number of 5G connections will reach 1.4 billion by 2025. The number of global IoT connections will triple to 25 billion by 2025. 5G will contribute 2.2 trillion US dollars to the global economy over the next 15 years, with sectors such as manufacturing, utilities, and professional and financial services benefiting the most from the new technology.

Although the world grows evermore connected, almost half of the global population remains without access to the internet. Being connected goes beyond convenience and drives basic economic inclusion. By making digital universal, affordable, open, and safe, we can bring more people together and drive fundamental global progress. Devices and systems will increasingly become more intelligent and more connected in government processes and cross-sector industrial applications.

As an independent company, Huawei abides by established standards

Huawei is an independent company, committed to supporting the secure operations of our customers' networks and services. No government or any third party holds shares in our company, intervenes in our operations, or influences our decision-making. Although we are not a public company, we abide by many established standards and norms for public companies, including the publication of an Annual Report audited by KPMG, an independent third-party organization. We do this to provide people outside the company with additional assurance of our business integrity, our independence, and the transparency of our finances.

Regardless of the discussion surrounding 5G, we firmly believe that no company should ever be forced to give up its customer's data to the government for malicious purposes. We expect every company that we work with to be completely independent and we welcome that our partners expect the same from us. This not only applies to 5G, but to any business we conduct, whether it be in Asia, Europe, the United States or any other place.

There has been much debate about Chinese intelligence law and how it affects our company. Some groups of lawmakers claim that Chinese law allows the government to force companies to collect intelligence on its behalf. This is simply not true. The Chinese government has been explicitly clear about his, as have multiple independent legal scholars and practitioners: Government requests for company assistance must be in accordance with the law. There is no Chinese law authorizing the state intelligence agency to require a telecommunications equipment manufacturer to collect intelligence information, implant backdoors or disable customer networks.

Let us be clear: The Chinese government does not interfere with our business or the security of our products. If any were made to force us to do so – from any country or organization – we would reject it outright. We have been very clear on this point: If we are ever put in a position that jeopardizes our independence, the security of our products, customer networks, or security of foreign nation states, we would rather shut down the company than violate our principles.

If we continue to focus on irrelevant factors like a vendor's country of origin, it will not advance the resolution of security challenges. If our approach to risk is based in emotion or bias, then results will be ineffective and we will be unable to benefit from the countless opportunities of 5G technology. Instead, governments and industry should work together on unified cyber security standards. These standards should be technology-neutral and apply equally to all companies and networks.

Ken Hu
Deputy Chairman of
Huawei Technologies

CHALLENGES

SHUTTERSTOCK/ LALS STOCK

In the thick of it: The Motherland Monument in Kyiv, Ukraine

UKRAINE

IS PEACE *possible?*

Borderland: Ukraine is not at full-blown war – but it's not at peace either

The people of Ukraine remain highly skeptical of all negotiations with Moscow

BY VIKTOR LOSHAK

The war in Donbass has already lasted longer than Russia's involvement in World War II. Seventy-five years ago, the grandfathers of most of those who are still killing each other in Eastern Ukraine today, toiled in trenches nearby. As in every war, the logic of revenge and forgiveness has long since ripped itself away from politics.

We all remember how, a few months ago, the Ukrainian president flew to the front to persuade volunteer groups to comply with the decision of the authorities and leave the front as the withdrawal of troops began. They did not believe him, and one of the most popular volunteers, Masha Zveroboy, spoke about the president and his visit in such a way that she is now under heated criticism in Kyiv for her statements.

A Moscow newspaper has published revelations of a heroine from the other side of the front – a female sniper from Donetsk. She has deliberately killed enemy combatants and would like to kill more. She is about 30 years old, has a husband, two children and a house full of beloved pets. She says that she has never shot at soldiers in Ukraine's armed forces, but only at volunteers. One soldier she wounded deliriously shouted "Mummy!" She emptied a whole cartridge of her sniper rifle into him and does not regret it. War. She will never forget how her husband was shot and seriously injured near the city of Horlivka.

Over the past five years, thousands of people on both sides of the conflict have become professionals in war, which allows them to write everything off. For example, it's noticeable that some of the volunteers fighting on both sides have fled to escape their debts, as creditors have no hope of finding you on the other side.

Those seeking peace must not only balance the interests of the warring parties and find compromises, they must also overcome human ambitions, traumas and faith in the bullet as the only justice possible.

Now there is a lull in Donbass. In three hot spots, Zolotoy, Pervomaysky and the town of Luhansk, opposing troops are separated by 50 kilometers. At another three hotspots, the separation has been scheduled, but for various reasons is not underway. As usual, the warring factions blame each other. Pensioners are

Putin insists that giving Kyiv control of the border between Russia and Donbass could unleash a new Srebrenica

taking advantage of the lull; on days when Ukrainian pensions are issued, thousands of elderly people cross the border – that is, the front – in order to queue for hours at ATMs.

It seems that their lives will not become more peaceful just yet. Ukraine would like to change the Minsk Protocol, both in terms of content and scheduling. Thus, Kyiv would like to take control of the border between Donbass and Russia before the elections in the People' Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, not after them. Russia is adamant that it is impossible to amend the agreement. Putin refuses to transfer control over the border to Ukraine ahead of schedule. Giving the Ukrainian side control of the border between Russia and Donbass, he argues, could unleash a new Srebrenica – there could be mass killings of the local population by the National Guard of Ukraine. This fear is not altogether groundless. "Strangle the hydra of separatism" is a widely accepted phrase in Ukrainian political discourse.

Germany and France, the other two partners in the Normandy Format, can moderate meetings between the presidents of Russia and Ukraine, but they cannot, and don't even want to, insist on changing the so-called "Steinmeier formula." This proposal envisions Ukraine regaining control of its border with Russia provided that free and fair local elections be held in Russian-occupied Donbass under Ukrainian legislation, which, in turn, would allow the region to receive its self-governing status. As a result, hopes for peace in Eastern Ukraine are again giving way to distrust and confusion.

This is due primarily to overblown expectations of the Paris meeting held at the end of last year. Clearly, there is sympathy for the young Ukrainian president, even among Russians, many of whom are aware of Zelensky's efforts to maintain his election promise and achieve peace in Donbass. This includes his telephone conversations with Putin – during the last year-and-a-half of Poroshenko's reign, the Russian president had refused to talk to Ukraine's president. It also includes the return of Ukrainian ships held in the Kerch Strait.

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UKRAINE

IS PEACE *possible?*

The people of Ukraine remain highly skeptical of all negotiations with Moscow

BY DMITRI STRATIEVSKI

Ukrainians are weary of war. Seventy percent of them chose peace as their top wish for the new year, despite several other crises facing the country, like poverty and corruption. Such were the results of the most recent survey of its kind at the end of 2019. Much like it was during his successful campaign for president, peace in Ukraine was the centerpiece of Volodymyr Zelensky's new year's address to his fellow citizens.

But what would constitute peace in Ukraine?

Although the Minsk II agreement signed in February 2015 put an end to the bloodiest battles in Donbass and only seldom are sizable tank units and heavy artillery deployed in the area, the war is decidedly not over and continues to claim an immense human and financial toll.

Since 2014, more than 13,000 people have died in the crisis region, including almost 4,000 Ukrainian soldiers, most of whom were young recruits and volunteers. In 2019 alone, almost 100 members of the Ukrainian Army were slain in battle, while survivors have returned home with new cases of physical and psychological trauma.

Furthermore, the monetary burden has been enormous. In 2018, Petro Poroshenko revealed to*La Repubblica* that Ukraine's military commitments in the east of the country cost the government $5 million each day. The war zone comprises about one-third of Ukraine's peacetime industrial output. Major factories and coal facilities are now in ruins; unemployment in the region has reached 60 percent.

More than one million internally displaced persons have had to abandon their homes due to military skirmishes, the ravages of war and an overall lack of prospects. It should come as little surprise that the overwhelming majority of Ukrainians place urgent priority on finding a swift end to the military conflict. However, it is not prepared to pay for peace at any price.

What will peace cost?

Any cession of territory to the benefit of another country or long-term territorial loss such as the establishment of a quasi "independent" entity not controlled by Kyiv would be unacceptable to the majority of Ukrainians. A survey from October 2019 revealed that almost three-quarters of those questioned will not even entertain the idea of ceding the territory of the self-proclaimed "republics." That "Donbass will remain Ukrainian" also enjoys political consensus. Even the Russia-friendly parliamentary group Opposition Platform advocates for Ukrainian unity.

Furthermore, the Ukrainian population remains steadfast in its criticism of the idea of issuing a special status within the country for several regions of Eastern Ukraine. Fifty-six percent of those surveyed see Donetsk and Luhansk as part of a unified state under conditions similar to those before 2014. Only 13 percent could accept greater autonomy rights for Donbass.

For the broad spectrum of the political, financial and cultural elite, a special status for the unsettled region would be a nightmare, as it could mean noticeable political influence on the balance of powers and on blocking further ties to the West. A federal ordinance to affix a special status to the region, which a few years ago was still a subject of public debate, is now considered to be on equal terms with separatism.

The Ukrainian people are aware that an end to the war and the reintegration of the – in official jargon – "various districts in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk with special autonomy" requires compromise. But the willingness to broker one is limited. Renouncing a possible future membership in the EU and NATO, recognizing Russian as a second official language, terminating the association agreement with Brussels and granting amnesty to all separatists – are all nonstarters. More than half of those surveyed refuse to work toward this goal while the violence continues.

Is peace possible?

Seventy-two percent of respondents consider the conflict in Donbass to be nothing short of war with Russia. After all, Moscow is backing the autonomy of renegade Ukrainian regions and will not relinquish its hold on this strategic lever of power without a fight. But the majority of Ukrainians fears the expansion of Russia's sphere of influence. It wants to reintegrate Donbass without changing the political status quo across the entire country; Ukraine's policymakers share this desire.

France and Germany, the other two parties of the Normandy Format, are evidently not prepared to ramp up their efforts – a stance that was made patently clear at the group's most recent meeting in Paris. In other words, the guns have little chance of falling silent for any significant period of time in the foreseeable future. Even partial successes such as the latest prisoner swap do little to change this grim truth.

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And there were two exchanges of prisoners, including key figures such as the Luhansk militia officer Volodymyr Tsemakh and the Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov, who had been sentenced to life in a Russian prison. Sentsov expresses little faith in a possible Donbass settlement: "Putin doesn't regard us as a state. For him, we are little more than a rebellious province that the empire should call to order."

Before nationalists staged mass protests, Zelensky had expressed his faith in achieving a breakthrough toward peace at the Paris talks. Not long beforehand, Andriy Yermak, Zelensky's top adviser, spoke of Kyiv's readiness for constitutional reform and the provision of special powers for Donetsk and Luhansk. The problem with this approach, however, is that it would turn the separatist-controlled territories into a state within a state. It's easy to see how other ethnic enclaves – such as Hungarians in Transcarpathia – would react to this. The fact remains that the Minsk Protocol had the support of Kyiv. But creating a territory within the country that is beyond Kyiv's control would have catastrophic consequences for Zelensky's career.

Speaking the night after the talks in Paris, the president expressed views on key political issues that were almost in line with his rival and predecessor Poroshenko: Ukraine will not accept constitutional changes that will lead to a violation of the country's unity, and the government will never negotiate directly with the leaders of the DPR and LPR.

What will happen to Donbass if Russia rigidly supports the "Steinmeier formula," Ukraine insists on changes to the agreement and Europe continues to pressure Moscow with sanctions? The answer to this question remains elusive in the Russian capital because everyone suspects Donbass will gradually become another Transnistria. Just as in Moldova, Eastern Ukrainian authorities will not be able to find a common political denominator. But economically and in terms of everyday life, people will learn to live together.

There are reports that the Ukrainian government is now considering resuming railway links with the districts of Donetsk and Luhansk, regions not controlled by Kyiv. Given its coal-oriented CHP power plans and industry, it's proving difficult for Ukraine to live without coal from Donbass. Yet, despite the ban, there are all sorts of ways to acquire coal.

For example, one Belarusian oligarch has received a large quota for the sale of Russian coal to Ukraine. Whether the coal is from Russia or Donbass is an open question. And finally, the question of the transit of Russian gas through Ukraine has been settled and takes into account the interests of the territories occupied by the separatists.

Geopolitics has played a cruel joke on everyone: on those who were in a hurry to become part of the liberal world; on those who did not want to; and on those who, like in Putin's Russia, tried to prevent it by all means possible. It seems that the new political generation will have to start from a point even more distant and incomprehensible than the Belovezha accords that regulated the end of the USSR.

VIKTOR LOSHAK
is strategy director for the Moscow daily *Kommersant.*

MIDDLE EAST

IS PEACE *possible?*

A reconciliation process cannot get underway without the participation of the two parties directly involved

BY GISELA DACHS

When Federica Mogherini became the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in November 2014, she was optimistic about the future of the Israeli-Palestinian relationship. At the time, she suggested that it might even be possible to reach a two-state solution within her five-year term. Today, Mogherini's successor, Josep Borrell, has taken over the reins at the EU foreign office, and there has been no progress whatsoever on the Israeli-Palestinian front. It is also highly doubtful that President Trump's recently published Middle East Peace Plan will bring the parties any closer to resolving the conflict.

In fact, the word "peace" is seldom heard these days in the public debates on both sides. For domestic political reasons alone, neither Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who remains in office even after being indicted and is seeking re-election on March 2, nor the 85-year-old Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas, who last received direct legitimization from Palestinians in the West Bank 15 years ago, are in any major way interested in a process of reconciliation.

From today's perspective, the Oslo Accord signed by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO chief Yasser Arafat on the lawn of the White House in 1993, belongs to a bygone era. At that time, the hawks in Rabin's camp were convinced they had reached a point where Israel was strong enough to deter its Arab neighbors from plans to wipe it off the map. According to this logic, the historical compromise with the Palestinians would ultimately bring Israel more security and more "normalcy." A lot of water has passed under the proverbial bridge since then. Today, many Israelis have adopted a narrative that is not entirely unjustified, namely that whenever their army withdraws from territories – for example, from Lebanon in 2000 and the Gaza Strip in 2005 – the tendency is for Islamists to then take control in those areas and maneuver into a better position to attack Israel. In this case, however, security concerns also overlap with ideological claims.

This is why the remarks made in November by US Secretary of State Pompeo came at just the right moment for Israelis in the right-wing camp. Pompeo announced that the US would no longer categorize West Bank settlements "per se" as illegal. Since then, particularly in radical circles in Israel, demands for the immediate annexation of large areas of land are being expressed in increasingly loud tones. However, in each of these cases – with the exception of some rather adventurous transfer plans – these radical voices have yet to provide an answer to the question of the status of the Palestinian populations residing in these areas. Rabin's basic premise that the Israeli state cannot be simultaneously Jewish, democratic and all-embracing continues to apply to this day. This premise is also ultimately accepted by Israelis who see it as their historical birthright to settle on biblical soil. In other words, in order to safeguard the Zionist project, they see it as necessary to separate from the Palestinians.

Among those who adhere to this school of thought is Benny Gantz, Netanyahu's challenger from the Blue and White party. Gantz vaguely embraced the "important statement" from the US government, noting that it demonstrated America's firm stance alongside Israel and its "commitment to the security and future of the entire Middle East." In Gantz's opinion, however, the fate of the settlements should be decided by agreements that "meet security requirements and can advance peace." In other words, if Gantz happens to become the next Israeli prime minister, it could mean a change of course in the Israeli-Palestinian relationship. Indeed, if he succeeds in forming a more centrist government and relegating right-wing forces such as the Palestinian-American commentator Daoud Kuttab to the sidelines after a decade in power, it wouldn't necessarily deliver an overnight breakthrough, but it might mark the beginning of a brand-new peace process.

IMAGO IMAGES/ZUMA PRESS

Deal of the century? Palestinian demonstrators during a protest against the Trump administration's proposed Middle East Peace Plan in Gaza City.

Just in time for Israel's third election within one year, Washington has re-entered the game with its long-awaited Middle East Peace Plan

If this were to occur, the next question would be who exactly the Israelis would meet at the negotiating table. The Palestinians are still deeply divided into two political camps. Hamas, an Islamist party, has ruled in the Gaza Strip since 2006, while President Abbas' Fatah party remains in power in the West Bank. New elections have been promised and, this time, all sides have stated at least their theoretical desire to participate. However, both camps are struggling for legitimacy in the eyes of their own populations, and many Palestinians would like to see new forces come to power.

In order to counter growing criticism of the Hamas regime, its leaders will have to do a lot more for the two million people in their charge. It is no longer enough to rally these people – most of whom are barely eking out a living in the Gaza Strip – in hatred of the Zionists. This is the reason why Hamas held back during the last exchange of blows between Israel and Islamic Jihad in Gaza, thereby proving that it is capable of creating and maintaining an atmosphere of calm. A long-term cease-fire between Israel and Hamas under the aegis of Egypt and with the help of UN Special Representative Nikolay Mladenov has been under negotiation ever since. If this succeeds, it could mean at least a few years of rest for Israelis living on the edge of the Gaza Strip – that is, no siren alarms and rocket fire. In return, the population in Gaza would have the opportunity to recover economically and take advantage of increased freedom of movement. This would by no means be the equivalent of peace, if only because Hamas would not be obliged to recognize Israel. At the same time, however, an agreement such as this would enhance Hamas' standing both domestically and internationally.

And now, just in time for Israel's third election within one year, Washington has re-entered the game with its long-awaited Middle East Peace Plan. As expected, the plan is more strongly in line with the views of the Israeli right than all previous US drafts. The plan also displays Trump's desire to help his friend Netanyahu politically while simultaneously mobilizing American evangelicals for his own re-election in the fall.

Beyond this, however, it remains highly questionable whether this move by Trump can actually achieve a breakthrough. As expected, the Palestinian leadership immediately rejected the plan. At the same time, they also had to acknowledge a loss of standing. Since the onset of the Arab uprisings in 2011, many have viewed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as just one of several conflicts in the region. The authors of the US plan are relying on the plan being accepted by those Arab states whose interests coincide with US and Israeli positions regarding Tehran. To date, such voices have been very restrained, if heard at all. Although the number of optimists has declined over the years, such hopeful voices argue that the plan has at least brought the issue back onto the table and that it could lead to the resumption of a peace process. But that will also depend on the results of the elections in Israel and the US. At this point, it would be wise for the Palestinians to take time to reflect on and perhaps even question their past political strategy of categorically rejecting proposals – some of which were better than what lies before them today.

Ultimately, a renewed peace process cannot get underway without the participation of the two parties directly involved. These days, it looks like neither the time nor the region is ripe for that step.

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IS PEACE *possible?*

LIBYA

Libya is prey to the machinations of a host of external actors

BY TAREK MEGERISI

The complexity of the conflict raging in Libya has long been well known. Yet the underpinnings of a tenable process that could stabilize if not reverse the country's downward spiral since 2011 are also well known – among the country's small pool of experts, diplomacy professionals and by the UN Special Representative Ghassan Salamé.

The general framework of such a process is apparent in Salamé's consistent proposals, beginning with his first action plan in 2017. The oft-cited tale of how each of these proposals was sabotaged – by states who claim to support his work – before they could even be implemented explains why peace is unlikely to return to Libya anytime soon.

Libya's geostrategic location at the heart of both the Mediterranean and the Arab world, its hydrocarbon wealth and immense economic potential have lured many opportunists to meddle in its politics. The craven nature of Libya's political class and its sustained search for foreign support opened the doors to foreign influence from Qatar and the United Arab Emirates as early as 2011. That is when the proxy war in Libya began.

The forceful attempt by the UAE, along with Egypt and France, to push the would-be strongman Khalifa Haftar into a position of de facto power has defined Libya's past five years – even as several other European states attempted to create power-sharing deals and a unity government. Yet Haftar himself got mired in an increasingly internecine war with little hope of a clean victory.

Libya's immediate neighbors could be destabilized if the country continues to burn. Europe, too, has found itself increasingly vulnerable to Libya's destabilization. The migration crisis is only temporarily contained. Moreover, the lawless and hostile environment of war continues to be an incubator for jihadism while Libyan counter-terror forces remain distracted with their battles against one another.

More recently, the prolonged state of civil war has drawn Turkey and Russia into the region in a way that uniquely threatens Europe.

While Turkey responded to an official request for security assistance by the embattled government in Tripoli, President Putin decided to back Haftar. Russia has become an increasingly crucial part of the general's war effort.

The formation of zones of Russian and Turkish influence in Libya poses threats to European energy interests. Turkey's grabbing of the East Mediterranean gas fields has made headlines, but the possibility that Russia adds the Greenstream pipeline – exporting Libyan gas to Italy – to its growing collection of gas channels into Europe should perhaps be the cause of greater concern.

PICTURE ALLIANCE/ZUMAPRESS.DE

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte (back row, 2nd from right) later complained about his position in the photograph at the Libya conference in Berlin on Jan. 19. "This was a mistake by German protocol officials. This is not where the Italian prime minister belongs."

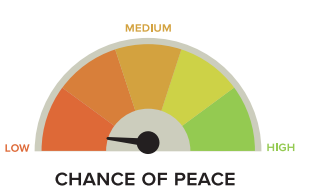
All the while, the United States has been noticeable for its absence. Having long held the position that Libya is Europe's responsibility, the US is unwilling to get embroiled in a new Middle East adventure where its allies are fighting one another through proxies. If Europe wants to make peace more likely, it will have to take action before it is entirely frozen out by rival powers.

As Salamé himself has said, the international nature of the conflict demands an international solution. This means having a state, or coalition of states, willing to play the role of referee and provide the UN the space it needs to proceed with policies that prioritize Libya's stability.

At the Libya conference held by the German government in Berlin in January, 16 states and international organizations attempted to unify international support for a political solution of the Libyan crisis. "There can be no military solution in Libya," they declared. "Only a Libyan-led Libyan-owned political process can end the conflict and bring lasting peace." They called for a sustained cease-fire; for observing the arms embargo, the cessation of financing military capabilities and of recruiting mercenaries; respect for international humanitarian law and human rights. A 5+5 Military Committee – five representatives each for Prime Minister Fayez Sarraj and Marshal Khalifa Haftar – was installed for substantial and serious talks.

Unfortunately, neither the arms embargo nor the cease-fire have been upheld since the Berlin conference. The two Libyan parties started their negotiations in Geneva, but a lasting truce is not yet in the offing, let alone a durable peace.

Yet peace in Libya is possible, provided that outside powers pursuing their own national interests agree to stop interfering. The likelihood of that happening is now directly tied to Europe's willingness to establish order in its southern neighborhood.



CHANCE OF PEACE

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YEMEN

IS PEACE *possible?*

No peace in sight in Yemen, just slender hopes for a cease-fire

BY SAID ALDAILAMI

PICTURE ALLIANCE / AA

Suffer the children: A malnourished infant at Sabeen hospital in the Yemeni capital of Sana'a, Oct. 7, 2019.

Since March 2015, a horrific war has raged in Yemen under the direction of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. All rules and norms relating to international law and laws of armed conflict are being trampled underfoot. The result is the worst humanitarian crisis of the 21st century.

Even after five years of fighting, a peace deal appears unlikely in the medium term. Too many parties and small groups now profit from the war and the war economy. Moreover, the two chief protagonists, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have yet to achieve their geostrategic objectives. The only hope is that a UN-sponsored ceasefire deal in 2020 could clear the way for a political resolution to the conflict in the coming years.

Yemen today is more fragmented than ever, territorially, socially, ethnically and religiously. The country's infrastructure has been destroyed. The education and health care systems have ceased functioning and the country is facing total economic collapse.

Any future agreement designed to settle the conflict in Yemen would automatically imply a redefinition of the country's statehood. The unified state authority, citizenship and contiguous territory would probably give way to a mosaic of states, the pieces of which would be beholden to the various regional powers. This scenario would no doubt create fertile ground for additional wars in the near future.

By March 2020, the war in Yemen will have lasted a full five years. Back in the spring of 2015, Saudi Arabia and the UAE decided to start bombarding Yemen with the help of a military alliance of Arab and African states and to use mercenaries on the ground to force the country to capitulate. Although it violated international law, the US and many other Western states supported this war under the pretext of seeking to reinstate the legitimate government of President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, who had been driven from the capital Sana'a by Ansar Allah's Houthis.

The Saudi military's initial four-week blitzkrieg – Operation Decisive Storm – has long since become a ruinous war of attrition and annihilation that has so far cost tens of thousands of lives. Seemingly random airstrikes against military, civilian and cultural targets have only added to the suffering.

The humanitarian situation in Yemen deteriorates with each additional day of fighting. Hospitals, schools, markets, civilian factories, warehouses, reservoirs, and farmland as well as even prisons, orphanages, festival halls and community centers are all targets of the Saudi air campaign.

The toll of this war is appalling. As of December 2019, more than 100,000 people had been killed in direct conflict action, in addition to at least 130,000 mortalities indirectly caused by the fighting. Add to this 3.65 million refugees and internally displaced persons, 20 million who live in poverty – including 14.3 million acutely threatened by famine – and some two million children who cannot go to school.

Yet the military alliance has failed to expel the Houthis from Sana'a, the capital, and return the ousted government to the country. Hadi and his cabinet continue to conduct their government work mostly from exile.

Support for this government-in-exile among the Yemeni population has largely withered. Still, the Saudis are sticking with Hadi because he provides justification for their military intervention. While he was still the country's head of state, Hadi reportedly requested the intervention to expel the Houthis from Sana'a.

Early on, the Saudi-Emirati plan seemed to be working. Within weeks, Houthi fighters that had advanced as far as the port city of Aden at the start of 2015 were driven from virtually all their conquered territory in the country's south. The alliance's superiority in the air and on sea swiftly shut down supply routes for the Houthis, who then pulled back within the territory of former North Yemen. Despite the uneven fight, however, the alliance's publicly declared objectives continue to be elusive.

Sana'a remains firmly in the hands of the Houthis. They continue to control most of former North Yemen and are consistently cementing alliances with the area's influential tribes, which have since declared their allegiance to the new leader of the Houthi movement, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi. Relations between the Shi'ite Houthis and Iran – once only marginal – are steadily expanding as the war progresses. They now constitute a stable axis that will remain in place after the war has ended.

It was the David and Goliath war that drove the Houthis firmly into the Iranian camp. Their fighting tactics, internal structure and national and international agendas have since come to mirror those of their alleged role model, the Hezbollah militia in Lebanon.

What went wrong with Operation Decisive Storm? Why did the alliance fail to continue its string of early successes? How can it be that this military alliance under Saudi leadership, equipped with the most modern arms and Western know-how, has yet to recapture Sana'a?

The answers are multi-tiered and focus on the alliance's two main protagonists: Mohammad bin Salman (MBS), Defense Minister and Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, and Mohammed bin Zayed (MBZ), brother of the sidelined president of the UAE and de facto leader of the Emirates.

On a personal and psychological level, MBS displays signs of paranoia and an urge to stand out from others. His paranoia focuses mostly on a possible alliance between Iran and a Houthi-controlled Yemen. In that event, Saudi Arabia would find itself in a "Shi'ite vise" between a powerful Iran to the north and a weaker but battle-hardened Shi'ite Yemen to the south.

As crown prince, MBS is seeking to hone his profile for when the time comes to succeed his father, who is now 84 years old. Only as a bold and successful commander-in-chief and putative victor over Iran can he gain the support of the Saudi people, who have been ruled by a gerontocracy since the founding of their state and are unaccustomed to young political figures.

At the foreign policy level, Saudi Arabia under MBS is seeking to create the image of a regional power that is open to the world yet sets the rules in the Arab realm and beyond. This is the motivation behind the country's top-down liberalization, its willingness to strike deals with Israel and its medium-term objective of ensuring its own security without the need for US help.

For this, the Saudis need a seasoned military capable of responding to and coping with the region's breakneck pace of change. As the training ground for his previously weak and inexperienced army, the PlayStation aficionado chose Yemen, where he could convert his world of war games from virtual to real. As an aspiring regional power, Saudi Arabia is taking its first steps at the expense of the defenseless Yemeni population while testing its most modern weaponry. There has been much ridicule of Saudi Arabia's waste of expensive military equipment in Yemen; Western arms makers can barely keep up with the Gulf state's appetite for more military machinery.

Similar dreams of regional power have also long been occupying the mind of MBZ. His pragmatic alliance with MBS is meant to help realize the Emiratis' own dreams of hegemony. One of their key aims is to bring as many ports as possible on both sides of the Red Sea under their control. Most already are. Control of the port of Aden and the key offshore islands in the Arabian Sea constitute an incalculable strategic advantage. This is why the Emiratis' attention is directed mainly at Yemeni towns on the Red Sea coast and the many islands that can be exploited both militarily and for tourism.

For some time now, the UAE has proudly claimed the nickname "Little Sparta" and, in the medium term, wants to replace Israel as the premier US ally in the Middle East. Over the past decade, the Emirates has broadened its influence in the Middle East both economically and militarily. Huge investments in port facilities along the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden are planned or already going ahead.

Additional ground and maritime bases would aid the UAE in securing its vital oil transport routes while helping curtail Iranian expansion. In addition to Assab in Eritrea and Berbera in Somaliland, these projects include Port Sudan, Mukalla in Yemen and Bosaso in Somalia.

The Saudis, meanwhile, are focusing on controlling important governorates in Yemen's interior. The aim is to secure broad stretches of the country as quasi-protectorates under complete Saudi control once the fighting ends. Saudi forces are especially present in the eastern governorate of Al Mahrah, which stretches along the entire Yemeni-Omani border.

The Saudis are also building a pipeline through the governorate of Hadhramaut. Occupation of Al Mahrah would allow them to ship their oil from the southernmost parts of the Arabian Peninsula, conveniently bypassing the Persian Gulf and freeing the Saudis from having to navigate the Strait of Hormuz, which their archenemy Iran can threaten at will.

Moreover, a Saudi occupation of Al Mahrah would deprive Yemen of its border with Oman, leaving Saudi Arabia as Yemen's sole neighbor. Oman disapproves of this expansion, regarding it – as it does the Yemeni governorate on its southwest border – as a buffer region and its own sphere of influence in Yemen.

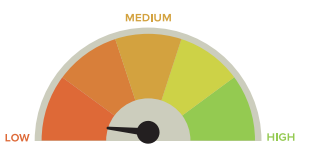
In 2018, when the alliance nearly retook the strategically important port town of Hodeida from the Houthis, they were forced to relent at the last minute. The case of murdered journalist Jamal Khashoggi attracted huge public attention and put the Saudi leadership on the defensive. Khashoggi's abhorrent killing inside a Saudi consulate revealed the true face of the state driving the war in Yemen. For the Saudis, an immediate cessation of the fighting in and around Hodeida was the logical choice to prevent even more unwanted public scrutiny and hostility.

In 2020, two big events will have the potential to halt the war in Yemen, at least temporarily, and enable a ceasefire.

Saudi Arabia took over the G20 presidency at the end of 2019 and is planning to hold this year's G20 summit in Riyadh. The UAE has long been advertising its Expo 2020, due to begin in October. If these two Gulf states want to ensure big turnouts for these two key events, they will first have to burnish their images.

The Emiratis moved first, withdrawing nearly all their troops from Yemen, yet without providing their allied groups in Yemen with necessary financing and equipment. And for several months now, Saudi Arabia has been conducting direct talks with the Houthis. The tangible results of these talks will become clear in the coming months.

Regardless of all the speculation over a truce in Yemen, the country's fate seems already sealed. The most likely result of this war is a partitioned country, divided into at least two autonomously ruled areas in which the Yemeni people are not their own masters and most inhabitants remain vulnerable to famine, drought and intermittent conflict.



CHANCE OF PEACE

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IS PEACE *possible?*

AFGHANISTAN

Afghan v. Afghan – Civilian casualties caused by pro-government forces increased in 2019

BY EMRAN FEROZ

The situation here is not good. Actually, this place is never considered safe," said Mir Suleiman, a teacher from the northern Afghan province of Baghlan. He grew up in an area called "the factory," which is named after a sugar works built in the 1940s near Puli Khumri, the provincial capital.

The area, once an economic hub that attracted laborers and merchants from all around the country, is now haunted by violence. Several parts of Baghlan are controlled or contested by the Taliban. Fighting between insurgents and security forces occurs on a daily basis. "The other side of the river belongs to the Taliban. You can see and hear their motorcycles," said Farzad Sattar, a local engineer.

While some youngsters are busy fishing nearby, Sattar describes how the war continues to tear apart families and friends in the province. "We all know each other here. But you will find people fighting on different sides, even within families. There's one brother who joins the Taliban, and there's another one who goes to the Afghan National Army." Young men can be easily recruited by the Taliban and then leave their families. "I think it's not just the propaganda they're trapped in. We have to consider the fact that everyone in Baghlan grew up with violence. They don't know anything else," says Sattar.

While the US re-initiated peace talks with the Taliban at the end of 2019 in Qatar, people in Baghlan do not think that even a peace deal would bring any immediate change to their lives. The US-Taliban talks are focused on the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan. It's not about ending the war in which Afghans are fighting Afghans. Most battles are taking place between the Taliban and the Afghan security forces.

"Any peace deal would be good, but we need to stop killing ourselves. A deal with the Americans would not guarantee enduring peace in Baghlan and many other parts of Afghanistan," said Mohammad Sultan, a local. He points out that government forces have become extremely violent as well, and often target civilians. "They don't care if you're an insurgent or not. They just attack you and question later."

Recent reports emphasize that civilian casualties caused by pro-government forces increased in 2019. For example, a new report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) documents the violence caused by CIA-backed Afghan militias known for night-time raids at homes in remote villages, forced disappearances, torture and summary executions.

PICTURE ALLIANCE / AA

"CIA-backed Afghan forces in case after case have disregarded protections to which civilians and detainees are entitled, and have committed war crimes. In case after case, these forces have simply shot people in their custody and consigned entire communities to the terror of abusive night raids and indiscriminate airstrikes. The US and Afghan governments should end this pathology and disband all irregular forces," Patricia Gossman, HRW's Associate Asia Director and the report's author, told *The Security Times* after speaking to three dozen witnesses of such operations.

In the 50-page report released last October, the New York-based rights group documents 14 cases across nine provinces over the last two years. According to HRW, the cases clearly illustrate that the Afghan forces trained and funded by the US intelligence agency have shown little concern for civilian life and or accountability to international law. The militias are active all over the country, most recently in the provinces of Khost, Paktia, Paktika, Nangarhar and Wardak.

According to the UN, Afghan and international military forces were responsible for at least 484 civilian deaths and 777 civilian injuries in 2019. At least 468 of those civilian deaths were attributed to foreign military forces. Most of these casualties are the result of airstrikes. US forces conducted at least 7,423 air strikes in 2019, a new high that amounts to an average of 20 strikes a day, according to the Pentagon.

"Airstrikes happen in Baghlan too, but there are considerably more in neighboring Kunduz," said Mohammad Sultan, who grew up in the region. Large parts of Kunduz province are controlled by the Taliban. In 2015, its provincial capital fell into the hands of the insurgents for a few days. The temporary fall of Kunduz was a shock for both President Ashraf Ghani and his international backers. It was the first large city captured by the Taliban since 2001.

The city was later liberated, but "it's wrong to believe that the Taliban are gone," said another local resident. "They don't control the city, but they are everywhere else. Their fighters regularly come to Baghlan. This is happening because we have a weak and corrupt government."

CHANCE OF PEACE

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FORGOTTEN AND HIDDEN CONFLICTS

Armed conflicts have become a constant feature of political reality in the world today: For years, the number has remained between 30 and 35 (33 at the end of 2018, according to the annual *Alert!* report compiled by the Autonomous University of Barcelona), with almost half of the conflicts taking place in Africa. They have been raging for years if not decades, and analysis shows that most of them have little chance of being resolved any time soon. The causes of the conflicts vary, but can be broadly sorted into four categories: opposition to domestic or international policies of respective governments; opposition to the political, economic, social or ideological system of a state; disputes over identity-related demands and self-government; and struggles over the control of resources and territory. In most cases, government forces face non-state actors, with a variety of external parties involved either directly or indirectly through proxy forces. We feature here 19 of the conflicts that are rarely reported, hidden from view and at risk of being forgotten. They nonetheless contribute to the fear, displacement, deprivation and, in many cases, deaths of millions all across the globe.

BY MARC ENGELHARDT

1. COLOMBIA

BEGINNING 1964

KEY STAKEHOLDERS Government, ELN, FARC dissidents, EPL, paramilitary groups

Violence between various paramilitary groups, criminal gangs and government forces continues despite a 2016 peace treaty with the main guerilla group FARC. The conflict dates back to 1964 when left-wing rebel groups tried to seize power and were repelled by government forces. By the 1980s, right-wing paramilitary groups, drug lords and organized crime were colluding to defend the status quo through a campaign of terror. While FARC and its allies declare they are fighting for the rights of Colombia's poor, and the government claims to be for order and stability, all sides have been accused of human rights violations and are involved in drug-trafficking and terrorism. The situation is deteriorating, with more than 100 human rights activists killed in 2019, mainly in former FARC strongholds. More than 260,000 have died overall while more than 7 million have been displaced.

INTENSITY Low/deteriorating

2. WEST SAHEL (BURKINA FASO, MALI, NIGER)

BEGINNING 2018

KEY STAKEHOLDERS Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Group to Support Islam and Muslims (GSIM/Al-Qaeda) and other Islamist groups

EXTERNAL ACTORS G5 Sahel Forces (including Mauritania, Chad), MINUSMA, France (Operation Barkhane)

In January 2020, the UN called terrorist violence in the West Sahel region unprecedented, with the number of casualties in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger having risen to more than 4,000 in 2019. Islamist groups taking over the north of Mali in early 2012 have reorganized, built alliances and spread further south. Attacks on military camps like Inatès and Chinagodrar, which saw hundreds of Islamist militants fighting as a coordinated force, killed dozens of soldiers while showcasing their new military capabilities. Attacks on civilian targets including churches and mosques, are a near-daily occurence. Protest against the French army – despite its assistance in the states' fight against Islamists – is rising.

INTENSITY High/deteriorating

3. CHAD BASIN (PARTS OF CAMEROON, NIGER AND NIGERIA)

BEGINNING 2011

KEY STAKEHOLDERS Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Chad, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), Boko Haram (Shekau faction)

EXTERNAL ACTORS MNJTF regional forces (including Benin), US

In 2016, the Islamic sect Boko Haram, nurtured by politicians in the first decade of this century and occupying large swaths of northern Nigeria over the last 10 years, split into two major factions allying with the Islamic State and Al Qaeda respectively. Raids, kidnappings and suicide attacks in the north of Nigeria have continued since, with more than 1,600 victims in 2018 alone. Boko Haram fighters are also terrorizing southern Niger, northern Cameroon and parts of Chad. At the end of 2019, the Islamic State faction of the former Boko Haram killed some 50 members of island communities on Lake Chad where a caliphate has been established.

INTENSITY High/deteriorating

4. CAMEROON (ANGLOPHONE/FRANCOPHONE REGION)

BEGINNING 2018

KEY STAKEHOLDERS Government, self-proclaimed Government of Ambazonia, armed groups and militias

What started as protests among minority English-speaking Cameroonians against marginalization by the Francophone government in 2016 escalated when security forces attacked demonstrators and arrested a main opposition figure. This led to rising support for a secessionist movement seeking independence for Ambazonia and then a full-fledged civil war that claimed an estimated 1,500 lives. The situation has calmed recently but tensions remain. The Major National Dialogue that was carried out from Sept. 30 to Oct. 4, 2019, produced a number of resolutions yet excluded the opposition.

INTENSITY Medium/unchanging

5. CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (CAR)

BEGINNING 2006

KEY STAKEHOLDERS Government, former Séléka rebel group, Anti-Balaka, other militias

EXTERNAL ACTORS France (Operation Sangaris), MINUSCA, EUFOR, Russian Private Security Company Wagner Group

The majority-Muslim Séléka coalition from the north toppled authoritarian president François Bozizé in 2013. The Séléka subsequently committed gross human rights violations in the Christian and animist south, leading to the emergence of Christian militias (Anti-balaka) and civil war. Despite several peace agreements and an AU and UN presence, a climate of chaos and widespread impunity prevails. Attacks against civilians and humanitarian organizations are frequent; more than 640,000 persons are internally displaced. The situation is set to deteriorate after the recent return of Bozizé and former Séléka-leader Michel Djotodia.

INTENSITY High/deteriorating

6. DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC)

BEGINNING 1998 (East), 2014 (Northeast), 2017 (Kasaï)

KEY STAKEHOLDERS Government, former rebel groups, FDLR factions, ADF, Mai-Mai militias, various ethnic militias

EXTERNAL ACTORS Uganda, Rwanda, MONUSCO

Eastern DRC has been in turmoil since dictator Mobutu Sese Seko was toppled by Laurent-Désiré Kabila in 1996, and several African states became involved in the conflict. Factions of non-demobilized groups are fighting for control of land and resources in Kivu, including former Rwandan génocidaires of the FDLR and soldiers of the former M23. In the northeast, groups like the Ugandan ADF and countless splinter groups are fighting the army, which is frequently accused of human rights violations. Attacks on humanitarian workers trying to fight an Ebola epidemic are frequent. An unrelated conflict for power in the Kasaï regions escalated in 2016 and led to intercommunal violence and the large-scale recruitment of children. Despite a massive UN presence, the situation remains volatile, especially in the east.

INTENSITY East and northeast high/deteriorating; Kasaï: medium/unchanging

7. BURUNDI

BEGINNING 2015

KEY STAKEHOLDERS Government, factions of armed groups

EXTERNAL ACTORS Rwanda, DRC

The fraudulent election of autocratic president and former warlord Pierre Nkurunziza and a failed coup d'état led by Major General Godefroid Niyombare in 2015 exacerbated latent political violence and fostered the emergence of new armed groups. Following the attempted overthrow, Nkurunziza purged his government and arrested several figures, yet protests continued. 1,200 people died and over 430,000 left the country. The situation has somewhat stabilized but is set to worsen with elections scheduled for 2020. Violence by armed groups remaining from the civil war is a frequent occurrence in regions bordering the DRC and Rwanda.

INTENSITY Low/unchanging

8. MOZAMBIQUE

BEGINNING 2017

KEY STAKEHOLDERS Government, Ansar Al-Sunna, Islamic State (IS)

EXTERNAL ACTORS Russian Private Security Company Wagner Group

Islamist groups are fighting for control and the establishment of a caliphate in Cabo Delgado Province in the north of Mozambique. Natural gas discoveries off the coast have contributed to the recent escalation. The traditionally neglected region has been hard hit by cyclones such as Kenneth in early 2019, which further worsened living conditions for the population. Fatalities since fighting began in 2017 are estimated to be in the hundreds.

INTENSITY High/deteriorating

9. EGYPT: SINAI

BEGINNING 2014

KEY STAKEHOLDERS Government, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM), various armed groups

Jihadist groups based in Sinai have increased their activities since the ouster of authoritarian President Hosni Mubarak in 2011, with the military being the target of operations, especially since the coup d'état against the Islamist government of Mohamed Morsi in 2013. In the wake of the overthrow and after serving as deputy prime minister for just over eight months, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, one of the leaders of the successful coup, was elected to be the sixth president of Egypt. ABM's pledge of allegiance to IS in late 2014 escalated the situation further, with attacks taking place beyond the peninsula. The number of deaths is thought to have been 500 in 2018, but massive military operations largely prohibit media and observers from entering Sinai, so more precise estimates are difficult to obtain. The neglected Bedouin population of Sinai is negatively affected on both fronts.

INTENSITY Medium/deteriorating

10. SUDAN

BEGINNING 2003 (Darfur), 2011 (South Kordofan, Blue Nile)

KEY STAKEHOLDERS Government, pro-government militias, various rebel groups and factions

EXTERNAL ACTORS UNAMID (Darfur), South Sudan (South Kordofan, Blue Nile)

Protest of local armed groups SLA and JEM led to civil war in 2003 when the government of then-President Omar al-Bashir armed Arab militias (Janjaweed) to fight alongside government troops. 300,000 people died in the conflict; a hybrid AU-UN mission – UNAMID, established in 2007 and scheduled to leave the region soon – has been unable to protect civilians. Opposition groups have long fragmented and, despite toppling al-Bashir in 2019, conflict continues. 100,000 new internally displaced persons were counted last year. The conflict in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, regions bordering South Sudan, seems to be improving thanks to the willingness of the new government to negotiate with southern rebel forces. Humanitarian groups were granted access for the first time in 10 years.

INTENSITY South Kordofan, Blue Nile – low/improving; Darfur – medium/unchanging

11. ETHIOPIA

BEGINNING 2019

KEY STAKEHOLDERS Separatist militias (Oromo, Amhara, Tigray)

Ethiopia has opened up politically since Abiy Ahmed became prime minister in April 2018. A promoter of peace and reconciliation, Abiy speaks fluent Afaan Oromo, Amharic and Tigrinya – as well as English. While Abiy formally ended the war with Eritrea, freed political prisoners and allowed former separatist groups back into the country – earning him the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019 – tensions between ethnic majority and minority populations have escalated in various parts of the multi-ethnic country. Some have blamed ethnic violence on Abiy's lifting of bans on groups like the Oromo Liberation Front. Oromo, Amhara and Tigray nationalists, among others, have attacked members of other ethnic groups, especially in the border regions of their territories, and displaced 1.4 million Ethiopians in 2018 alone.

INTENSITY Medium/unchanging

12. SOMALIA

BEGINNING 2004 (following conflict since 1991)

KEY STAKEHOLDERS Government, Al-Shabaab, clan militias, various Islamist militias

EXTERNAL ACTORS AMISOM, US, Turkey, EU NAVFOR

Islamist militia Al-Shabaab, active since 2004, continues to control large parts of the country. Government forces are unable to prevent frequent bombings like the one in December 2019 that took 85 lives. Direct elections due in 2020 are again in jeopardy. Islamist terror is exacerbated by shifting alliances of warlords and clan militias that have been fighting since the toppling of Siad Barre in 1991. At least 300,000 people have since died.

INTENSITY High/deteriorating

13. IRAQ

BEGINNING 2003

KEY STAKEHOLDERS Government, Peshmerga forces, Shia militias, Sunni militias, ISIL

EXTERNAL ACTORS Iran, Turkey, PKK, Anti-IS coalition led by the US

Iraq is still suffering from the fall-out of the 2003 invasion by the US-led international coalition, with the main factors being violence among sectarian militias and armed opposition against international forces in the country. Public protests against rising political influence by Iran in 2019 were met with brutal force by the government. The unlawful killing of Iranian General Qassim Soleimani by the US army on Iraqi soil has further escalated the situation, while the return of IS to Iraq following destabilization continues to be a concrete threat. According to UN data, IS had between 20,000 and 30,000 fighters in Syria and Iraq in 2018.

INTENSITY High/deteriorating

14. PAKISTAN

BEGINNING 2001 (Balochistan: 2005)

KEY STAKEHOLDERS Government, Taliban, various armed forces, various nationalist militias (Balochistan)

EXTERNAL ACTORS US, Iran

Taliban fleeing the US intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 eventually created the Pakistani Taliban Movement (TTP), which has been waging war against the state and civilians ever since. The TTP relies on the tribal belt – a region along the Afghan-Pakistani border – for its recruits and looks to Al Qaeda for ideological inspiration. Many militants have been killed by military operations carried out by the Pakistan Armed Forces. The insurgency is mainly located in the northeast of the country and in the so-called tribal areas that are partly beyond government control. Major anti-terror operations in recent years have seen the number of attacks falling for the first time. In Balochistan, nationalist groups on both sides of the Iran-Pakistan-border are demanding greater control of the poor province's rich natural resources.

INTENSITY Taliban – medium/improving; Balochistan – low/unchanging

15. INDIA

BEGINNING 1967

KEY STAKEHOLDERS Government, CPI-M (Naxalites)

The armed Marxist group CPI-M, called Naxalites after the town of Naxalbari, the site of a peasant revolt in 1967, has been waging a low-level insurgency since its inception that same year. The conflicts ultimately date back to the Indian government's failure to enact the fifth and sixth schedules of the constitution of India, which had stipulated certain tribal rights for the autonomous exploitation of local natural resources. Related violence has ebbed and flowed over the 50 years of the conflict. According to the South Asian Terrorist Portal (SATP), more than 300 people were killed in 2019 in several Indian states, mostly in the east and northeast of India. Violence had been escalating after peace negotiations failed in 2004. It decreased again in 2011, but never stopped.

INTENSITY Low/unchanging

16. MYANMAR

BEGINNING 1948

KEY STAKEHOLDERS Government, various armed groups

Since independence in 1948, dozens of armed ethnic militias have fought the government of Myanmar, demanding recognition of their ethnic and cultural rights and – some – independence. Under military dictatorship since 1962, violence escalated and the situation has improved only since 2011, when a nominally civilian government was installed and cease-fire agreements were agreed to by most groups. The Rohingya crisis of 2017 has led to another escalation. While the situation inside Myanmar is now calm after 750,000 Rohingya fled government-led pogroms to neighboring Bangladesh, a return could well lead to new fighting, including with the armed group ARSA currently based there.

INTENSITY Low/unchanging

17. THAILAND (SOUTH)

BEGINNING 2004

KEY STAKEHOLDERS Government, armed separatist groups

The conflict in southern Thailand dates back to more than 100 years ago when the Sultanate of Pattani was divided between today's Thailand and the colonial power of the United Kingdom, which is now Malaysia. The fight for cultural identity continued throughout the 20th century and escalated in 2004 after a brutal counterinsurgency strategy by the government. In 2005, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra claimed a broad range of emergency powers to quell the violence in the south, but his controversial efforts were in vain, as the insurgency only escalated. According to Deep South Watch, more than 7,000 people have since died in southern Thailand, one of only four Muslim majority provinces in predominantly Buddhist Thailand. The violence has recently receded, but is still present, while the movement is said to demonstrate high levels of coordination throughout its attacks.

INTENSITY Low/improving

18. PHILIPPINES

BEGINNING 1991

KEY STAKEHOLDERS Government, Abu Sayyaf, BIFF, Islamic State of Lanao, various Islamist militias

Militias on the majority-Muslim archipelago of Mindanao have been fighting Manila for the independence of the Moro people since 1991. BIFF has been the most active group in the struggle, suffering hundreds of casualties. Abu Sayyaf, an Islamist group, has also been fighting for a caliphate and laid siege to the city of Marawi in 2017, with 1,100 dead and over 600,000 displaced. IS-affiliated militias have launched attacks as well. A counterinsurgency by the Duterte government has been criticized for its disregard of human rights.

INTENSITY Medium/deteriorating

PICTURE ALLIANCE/ZUMA PRESS

Emmanuel Macron presides over the tribute to the 13 soldiers who died for France in Mali, at the Hotel National des Invalides in Paris on Dec. 2, 2019.

Slouching toward Africanistan

The EU's preoccupation with its own security interests in the Sahel is driving the local population into the arms of IS

BY BARTHOLOMÄUS GRILL

On a map distributed by the UN information service to humanitarian workers in the Nigerian state of Borno, each major traffic route is highlighted in a specific color. For example, green means workers can travel freely and yellow means they should travel only with an armed escort. Most of the streets are marked in red, however, which means that if workers were to travel these routes, they should expect fatal attacks at any time.

Borno is a particularly stark example of the miserable security situation in a region of Africa that has been haunted by Islamist terrorist militias for years. The entire Sahel – a semi-arid land belt that stretches across the continent from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea – is now affected. It is home to one of the poorest and most dangerous zones on the planet. French political scientist Serge Michailof recently coined the term "Africanistan" to describe the area, warning that militant Islamism has the potential to spread and destabilize large parts of West Africa.

And it's not just the Sahel that's suffering from excessive violence. Today, neighboring countries, such as Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, are also affected. In the Horn of Africa, the Somali al-Shabaab militias are exporting terror to Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Jihadists recently started carrying out their nefarious activities in northern Mozambique as well.

Major terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb are networked across the continent; some are even cooperating with the Islamic State (IS). Should these organizations expand their "crusades," the consequences would be devastating, and include even larger numbers of innocent victims, further anarchy and hardship, and more refugees, who would increase migration pressure on Europe. In short, growing terrorism in Africa has long since become a geopolitical challenge of top priority.

The relentless rise of Boko Haram – a gang of murderers that emerged in 2009 from an Islamist sect in Nigeria – shows just how serious the situation is. Within only a few years, a group of around 20,000 fighters conquered a territory the size of Portugal in the northeast region of the country. Once there, they founded a caliphate and expanded their area of operations to the border regions of the neighboring countries of Cameroon, Chad and Niger.

The South Africa-based Institute for Security Studies has identified Boko Haram as one of the "deadliest terrorist groups in the world." The UN also made a truly devastating assessment after the group's 10 years of jihad, noting that it was responsible for nearly 20,000 deaths, including roughly 1.8 million internally displaced persons, 1,400 destroyed schools, 2,295 murdered teachers as well as famines, epidemics, misery and an ever-present fear.

The second major theater of terror is Mali, where a corrupt power elite "governs" a weak state that is constantly threatening to collapse under the weight of excessive violence. In 2013, a French intervention force was able to drive out a large number of the jihadists and insurgents operating in the northern half of the country. Since then, roughly 15,000 UN peacekeepers have been trying to secure the fragile peace. Operation MINUSMA is considered the UN's most dangerous mission underway.

Germany is currently helping build a powerful Malian army in the context of an EU training mission there. Five Sahel states have come together to form the "G5 Sahel" military alliance, designed to stem the further rise of Islamists in the region. The US expanded its bases in West Africa after 9/11, and the US Africa Command has coordinated operations there since 2008. "Find, fix and finish terrorists" is the unofficial marching order of the mission.

The region south of the Sahara has become a virtual playground for intervention forces. Unfortunately, however, their efforts have had little impact to date. Military experts like Hans-Georg Ehrhart have gone so far as to speak of a "chimera." Only one thing is certain at this point: the murderous attacks have not abated and, in some areas, are even increasing. As recently as last fall, more than 100 Malian soldiers were killed in the region.

France, too, has lost a total of 38 soldiers as part of its Operation Barkhane. Paris is now calling on its European partners to assist by sending more special troops to the Sahel, with Berlin already announcing its intention to provide support.

However, the question as to whether the problem can even be solved by military means is being utterly neglected. Instead of analyzing the structural causes of the misery more thoroughly, stakeholders are contenting themselves with finely worded commonplaces, such as "there is no development without security and there is no security without development."

While there are some accompanying initiatives in the civilian sector as well as some projects designed to strengthen education, health care and state institutions, armed intervention in the region is first and foremost serving the security interests of the intervening countries. And only after those interests have been served is there time to focus on the well-being of Africa. For example, the EU's priority is not merely to fight terrorism and organized crime; it also wants to reduce illegal migration. The EU is engaging in a type of advanced border-security system and thereby financing – by means of its migration partnerships – questionable allies such as Chad, where the dictatorial regime does more to aggravate problems than to overcome them.

The West has only itself to blame for this debacle. And, unfortunately, it has not yet learned any tangible lessons from it

Militant Islamism is gaining ground, particularly in neglected regions where the state and its institutions have clearly failed on a massive, nationwide scale. Those countries that find themselves in a state of persistent crisis, such as Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger and Somalia, have few prospects for development, their populations are poor and their battles over scarce resources are exacerbated by ethnic strife, enormous population growth and the effects of climate change.

These factors form an ideal breeding ground for terrorist movements. In this context, Islam is merely instrumentalized as a "liberation theology" that blames Western influences – including democracy, free elections, the rule of law, co-ed schools and vaccination campaigns – for all evils. Still, these same religious fanatics are quick to make use of technology made in the West, including off-road vehicles, rapid-fire weapons, rockets, drones, GPS, the internet and mobile phones.

At the same time, the jihadists have established a lucrative war economy, thereby making a living from looting, robbing banks, arms and drug-trafficking and demanding ransoms for kidnappings. There is yet another key source of income for these holy warriors: their smuggling services for migrants and refugees. Many young and unemployed men join these militias voluntarily, as they offer not only an income and food, but also power, an alternative world view and concrete potential for action.

The fight against these terrorist groups is made even more difficult by the fact that they operate in a system of extensive networks that benefits criminal gangs, corrupt politicians, religious leaders and local tyrants. In addition, rich foreign Salafists provide clandestine financial aid, and there has been no shortage of weapons in West Africa since Libya's collapse.

In general, these holy warriors are despised by the population for a number of reasons: they kill innocent people, kidnap and rape women and obliterate entire villages and cities in order to establish their theocratic reign of terror. Today, however, there are also areas where they are respected. For example, in the northern districts of Borno, a splinter group of Boko Haram called Islamic State West Africa Province has assumed some of the functions of a state. It controls traffic routes, levies customs and taxes, regulates the trade of fish and agricultural products, supports the construction of farms, drills wells and builds clinics and public toilets.

In other words, these militants are pursuing a type of development policy designed to win people over. This is precisely what military strategists fail to consider when discussing potential military interventions. And this is also where the real dilemma lies.

The military response in the Sahel is not only part of the solution to the crisis, "it is part of the problem," noted the Norwegian Refugee Council, making reference to the 80,000 internally displaced persons forced to flee due to military operations. Aid organizations lament the fact that, in 2019, the number of people suffering from food shortages in the central Sahel was three times that of the previous year.

One might expect the challenge of combating terrorism to be one of the most urgent tasks assumed by the African Union (AU). Yet this continental union of nations contributes the least of all to such efforts. In Addis Ababa, where the organization is headquartered, there has been a great deal of talk for years about an African security architecture and a rapid reaction force; unfortunately, there is also a considerable lack of institutional capacity, financial resources and often political will.

Moreover, when the AU actually makes a tangible attempt to avert a serious conflict by means of clever proposals, it is often skipped over and ignored. For example, in 2011, when the AU sought to prevent an escalation of the civil war in Libya through diplomatic means, it was ultimately forced to stand by and watch as NATO countries – under the leadership of France and the US – proceeded to bomb the country without further ado.

These developments brought about the subsequent crisis in Mali, as thousands of heavily armed Touareg mercenaries who had previously served the dictator Muammar Gaddafi fled back into their homeland, conquered the north of the country together with Islamist militias and founded the Islamic Republic of Azawad. During its short existence, this republic was a strategic retreat for terrorist militias from the region, including Boko Haram.

The West has only itself to blame for this debacle. And, unfortunately, it has not yet learned any tangible lessons from it. In this case, too, South Africa's Institute for Security Studies issued a devastating balance sheet with regard to Washington's military operations: "Without fail, US interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya and Somalia have exacerbated local situations and facilitated the spread of violent Islamist extremism."

When French soldiers defeated the jihadists in northern Mali, they were celebrated as liberators by the local population. Today, for many of Mali's citizens, these soldiers are an occupying force. Even though several battles have been won, the mood has shifted, mostly because the war on terror has continued. And it's now true that if European and African allies fail to find alternative strategies, the Sahel could, in the upcoming years, become an "Africanistan."

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Talking Turkey

The story of Ankara's relationship with NATO is full of misconceptions

BY MEHMET YEGIN

Every time I check my news feed alerts set for "Turkey and NATO," I see analyses concluding that efforts to improve the relationship are a lost cause.

Some observers claim that Turkey will withdraw from NATO and enter an alliance with Russia. Others argue that the country's authoritarian turn will continue, with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan possibly staying in power for the next decade or even longer. Still others underscore the fact that Turkish public opinion about its trans-Atlantic allies is alarmingly negative.

Taken together, the claims made by these experts seem convincing. Nonetheless, close scrutiny indicates that the first is superficial, the second highly fragile and the third overrated.

Many analysts view Turkey's coordination with Russia and Iran in Syria as a dangerous move in the Mediterranean. Many also view Turkish involvement in Libya as taking a step closer toward separating from NATO. Yet these analysts forget that the ability to make such strategic moves is only possible with a security architecture based on NATO membership.

It is true that the purchase of S-400s from Russia and the forging of long-term energy deals indicate an increase in Turkey's dependence on Russia. Its "frenemy" relationship with Iran sometimes involves moves that put it at odds with NATO allies. Nevertheless, NATO membership is the core component of Ankara's balanced relationships with Moscow and Tehran. Being a member of the trans-Atlantic alliance is what differentiates Turkey from other countries being bullied by Russia. Its NATO membership encourages Tehran to avoid confrontation and escalation in the Middle East. Moreover, Ankara's moves in the Mediterranean have not evolved into military confrontation between Turkey and Greece, since NATO prevents an intra-alliance military confrontation.

Rather than a withdrawal from NATO, the most likely scenario is the intensification of intra-Alliance negotiations, in which allies should avoid the transactional approach that gives a free pass to authoritarianism.

Whether it's the purchase of Russian missiles, military incursions in Syria or engagement in Libya – each move is intended to rally the Turkish public and minimize criticism of a failing economy.

But this strategy may have run its course, as Erdoğan can no longer rely on the ballot box. Especially since his party lost the local elections in Istanbul. Forcing a recount only delivered a humiliating second defeat.

The failure of Erdoğan's hand-selected candidates in three major cities to win local elections has fueled the opposition and helped establish two new political parties.

More importantly, the recently elected mayors of Istanbul and Ankara, Ekrem Imamoğlu and Mansur Yavaş, both of whom are members of the opposition, are emerging as possible presidential hopefuls.

Yet the argument that Turkey is moving away from the West, even if Erdoğan leaves office, is overblown. In Turkey, public opinion largely follows the opinions of political leaders, whoever they are. It is highly likely that any successor will seek normalization in Turkey's foreign policy and set its sights once again toward the West.

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No man's land

Kurdish dreams and nightmares amid the long night of great-power games

BY ANDREA BÖHM

After a stunning series of events…" – this is the typical opening line these days for an analysis of developments in the Middle East. Kurdish affairs are no exception. Only a short while ago, the Kurds were considered the big winners of a decade of upheaval in the region, having achieved de facto autonomy in northern Syria and inched closer to independence in northern Iraq. But as of 2020, the military force and geopolitical machinations of much larger powers have shattered both of these gains.

For most Kurds, history just seems to repeat itself. Their dreams and several short-lived attempts to carve out a territory of their own have been dashed time after time – by the infamous Sykes-Picot Line drawn in 1916 and the treaties following World War I as well as today's deals between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Vladimir Putin and the erratic foreign policy of Donald Trump.

So, for the time being, the Kurds will remain the world's largest ethnic group without a country, comprising about 35 million people, the vast majority of whom are dispersed over four nation states – Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria.

SHUTTERSTOCK

Each of these states has repeatedly initiated brutal waves of repression. And in each case, Kurds have resorted to armed resistance and guerilla warfare. Given this history, it is remarkable that the Kurds have never figured prominently in larger visions and strategies to stabilize the Middle East. But clearly, there will be no peace and no stability without a solution for the Kurds.

There is a problem, however. The Kurds are not united as a single national identity. Not only do the Kurds have a long history of suffering at the hands of others, they have also suffered from infighting and political ineptitude. Whenever Syrian or Iraqi dictators, the Turkish army or the Iranian regime set out to suppress a Kurdish struggle for independence or autonomy, they could always find Kurdish collaborators. And even without an external enemy, Kurdish factions have shown a disturbing propensity to weaken their own cause. Northern Iraq and northern Syria are currently two cases in point.

For almost 30 years, the Iraqi Kurds have had an opportunity to develop a more diversified economy and modernized state structures. A no-fly zone established by Western powers in 1991 protected them from Saddam Hussein's terror. After Saddam's fall in 2003, they enjoyed close ties to the United States, growing revenue from oil fields and a good relationship with neighboring Turkey. But they never managed to leverage their strength.

Without a doubt, the Kurdish Autonomous Region (KAR) remains the most stable area in Iraq. Its civil society and administration can muster great efforts in times of acute crisis, such as during the war against the Islamic State (IS). But the KAR still struggles with establishing an operational framework for development. The economy is at a standstill, youth unemployment is soaring and public employees often work without pay for months or even years. This is partly due to a conflict with the central government in Baghdad about oil revenues and budget allocation, but the problem is also rooted in the endemic corruption, nepotism and antagonism that plague the two dominant political parties.

Both the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) are run like fiefdoms by powerful families. Both use large parts of the Kurdish armed forces, the Peshmerga, as their private militias and have repeatedly clashed militarily.

The Kurdish Autonomous Region has justified complaints about the way it is being treated by Baghdad. But the referendum for independence in September 2017 was primarily a power gamble by then-President Massoud Barzani. The Barzani family rules the KDP and the western part of the autonomous region. In his attempt to drown public anger about corruption amid a wave of independence euphoria, Barzani completely miscalculated the international reaction to the prospects of an independent Kurdistan – and to a disintegrating Iraq. His long-time ally in Ankara was as adamantly opposed as were the EU, the US and neighboring Iran. The Iraqi army and Iraqi Shia militias buried Barzani's dream of independence with a quick incursion. The PUK, never fond of the referendum, quickly cut its own deals with Baghdad and Tehran.

The KAR's economy is still a mess. The political mood in the streets of Erbil, Dohuk or Sulaymaniyah is one of apathy as their inhabitants brace themselves for another influx of refugees from Syria.

The KAR is perhaps the latest case of another dream of Kurdish self-rule falling apart, but likely with much more dramatic consequences. Just like their Iraqi kin under Saddam Hussein, the Kurds in Syria have suffered greatly under the Baath regime in Damascus. However, when in 2011 the popular uprising began against Bashar al-Assad, they did not close ranks with the Syrian opposition, but instead cut a deal with the regime. Damascus withdrew its security forces from the Kurdish north. The Kurds thus gained control over large parts of the north and promised not to participate in any attacks by the opposition against al-Assad's army.

Syrian Kurds now live under the tight control of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), an offshoot of the leftist Turkish Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK). Ideologically, both are despised by most of the political establishment in Iraqi Kurdistan. During the war against IS, they became distrustful allies. But it was the People's Protection Units (YPG) – the PYD's military wing – who proved the most effective ground force against the jihadist movement, not the somewhat rusty Peshmerga fighters in Iraqi Kurdistan.

When in 2014 the US chose the YPG as a partner for military operations against the IS in Syria, YPG leaders mistook this for a long-term guarantee of US protection for their own territorial project: three self-administered but geographically separate cantons in Syria's north unified under the name "Rojava." It was a tempting but strategically reckless undertaking.

Over the last few years, Rojava has been a relatively safe haven within war-torn Syria. It is also a cause célèbre among parts of the European left, which generously overlooks the PYD's authoritarianism. But to neighboring Turkey, the existence of Kurdish self-administered zones run by a PKK-affiliate along the Syrian-Turkish border has been a red rag and a source of fury directed at its NATO partner, the US. So, once the IS was on the run in Syria, Washington began to seek reconciliation with Ankara – the Donald Trump way.

In 2018, the White House and Pentagon looked the other way when the Turkish army ended Kurdish self-rule in Afrin, the western-most of Rojava's three cantons. In October 2019, after Trump's impulsive announcement that US troops would be withdrawn from Syria, the Turkish army invaded parts of eastern Rojava. Erdoğan then went to the one big power that really counts in Syria – Russia – to get the green light for a "safety zone" of 120 kilometers along the Syrian side of the border. It is here that he wants to relocate Syrians that have fled to Turkey – thereby not only lowering the number of refugees in his own country, but also creating a buffer zone of Sunni Arabs in the Kurdish region.

When the PYD begged the regime in Damascus to help against the Turkish incursion, Assad was only too happy to oblige. His forces are now back in the north.

For now, Putin has proven surprisingly adept at keeping a lid on this combustible set of different interests, drawing red lines for Erdoğan and Assad while feeding the Kurds some hope of political survival. Other global actors are barely to be seen. Trump has performed a small turnaround and left several hundred US soldiers in Syria, although no one knows for how long. The EU still seems preoccupied with keeping out new refugees, thereby exposing itself to Turkish blackmailing. Erdoğan has already threatened to open the route for Syrians in Turkey into the EU, should the EU not support his "safe zone" on Syrian territory.

From a Kurdish perspective, the light at the tunnel's end – if there is an end – is barely flickering.

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Return fees may apply

How to deal with Western IS fighters returning from Syria and Iraq

BY PETER R. NEUMANN

BBC

Travel ban: Shamima Begum left London in 2015 to join the Islamic State in Syria. The UK stripped her of her citizenship.

When US President Donald Trump declared the defeat of Islamic State (IS), he specifically referred to the group's territory in Syria and Iraq – nearly all of which had been taken back by December 2018. What he did not mention were the thousands of IS supporters from all over the world who had been captured in the process. Yet, for many governments, especially in Western Europe, these individuals are the group's most challenging legacy. Resolving this issue will have major impact on the terrorist threat for years to come.

Between 2013 and 2016, more than 40,000 jihadists traveled to Syria and Iraq, thereby marking the greatest mobilization of foreign jihadists ever. These individuals came from nearly 100 countries. The largest contingent – about 60 percent of the total number – originated from the Middle East and North Africa, especially Saudi Arabia and Tunisia. Around 20 percent were from countries of the former Soviet Union, above all Russia, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. More than 5,000 individuals – around 12 percent – came from Western Europe, including not just France, Germany and the UK, but also smaller countries such as Austria, Belgium, Denmark and Sweden. A further 500 people were from other Western countries, such as Australia, Canada and the United States.

In contrast to previous waves of foreign fighters, the Caliphate also attracted sizable numbers of women and entire families. According to various estimates, more than 20 percent of the total number consisted of women and girls who "emigrated" to the Caliphate in order to become teachers, nurses, doctors, propagandists or to give birth to the next generation of fighters.

Yet, the "jihadist international" that had formed in Syria and Iraq during the middle of the decade quickly fell apart. By the time of the Caliphate's official defeat, nearly a third of the jihadist "travelers" had already returned to their home countries, while another third was dead. Of the remaining third, some managed to flee to Turkey, but the vast majority ended up in Kurdish camps and Iraqi prisons. Only a few hundred are still believed to be free and fighting for IS.

For many governments, the key question has been how dangerous those returnees and potential returnees are. Two studies have examined the phenomenon from a historical perspective.

The Norwegian researcher Thomas Hegghammer looked at nearly 1,000 Western jihadists who had fought in the conflicts in Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan in the 1990s and 2000s and found that only one in nine were charged or sentenced for terrorist crimes after returning to their countries.

Jytte Klausen of Brandeis University conducted a similar study that yielded a significantly higher result. Of the nearly 900 foreign fighters in her sample, approximately one in four engaged in terrorism after going back.

While the differences between the studies are striking, they show that the vast majority of returnees do not become terrorists. Yet there remains a substantial risk, and the reason is not just the exceptionally large number of people who went to Syria and Iraq in recent years, but also how the conflicts have changed them.

The experience of war, Hegghammer points out, has given them military know-how, desensitized them emotionally and granted them access to new and international networks, which enables them to mount larger and more sophisticated attacks. He shows that terror plans made with the help of returnees are statistically one-and-a-half times more likely to be carried out than plans made without them and twice as likely to lead to fatalities. Simply put, those returnees who decide to become terrorists are better – that is, more deadly – terrorists.

It is precisely for this reason that the debate over returnees has become so contentious. Although the problem has been on authorities' radars for years, many governments have hoped that the returnees would be killed or seek martyrdom in the final battle for the Caliphate.

In reality, however, thousands of them – including large numbers of women and children – survived, and are now stuck in Iraqi prisons or camps in the Kurdish-controlled areas of Syria. What should be done with them?

The seemingly easiest way of resolving the problem is to strip individuals of their citizenship. Many Western governments have resorted to this measure, even in cases where potential returnees had no other citizenship, and thus doing so made them stateless. In the case of Shamima Begum, for example, a 20-year-old British woman who traveled to Syria when she was 15, the government's decision to strip her of her citizenship was justified by citing that she was entitled to a Bangladeshi passport, although she had never asked for one, and had never – in fact – been to the country.

The more fundamental issue is that stripping citizenships merely passes the problem on to other countries – typically ones with which the returnee has less of a relationship and which are less well-equipped to deal with terrorists. When Australia attempted to remove the citizenship of Neil Prakash, a well-known foreign fighter who had appeared in many IS videos, it effectively sought to shift the problem to Fiji, where Prakash's father came from but Prakash himself had never lived. At the time, many commentators described Australia's efforts as irresponsible.

Another solution would be to create an international tribunal in the spirit of The Hague. This idea has been put forward by the government of Belgium, which believes that smaller countries do not have the capacity to deal with – or even understand – the IS phenomenon in its totality. They have also argued that the crimes committed by IS were of such significance that they should be regarded as crimes against humanity and be tried by an international court.

Many countries have supported the logic behind this idea, but little action has been taken to put it into practice. It remains unclear where the tribunal would be located, what its mandate would be and where the people convicted under its jurisdiction would be imprisoned. Given the pressing nature of the situation in the Kurdish camps, most experts believe that there would not be enough time to get an international tribunal up and running.

A more realistic suggestion would likely be to try returnees in local courts. And indeed, on the Iraqi side, dozens of foreigners from countries like Germany, France and Turkey have been convicted for supporting IS. However, many of them have been given harsh sentences, including – in some cases – the death penalty. This has created dilemmas for European governments that have been accused of allowing their own nationals to be treated according to standards incompatible with human rights and the rule of law.

Even more problematic is the situation in Syria. Kurdish authorities are not a recognized state and have no interest in holding on to foreign jihadists. Trying them in Syrian courts, on the other hand, is even less acceptable from a human rights perspective. This is why many Western governments have concluded that local trials are not practical for dealing with the majority of potential returnees.

The only realistic – and responsible – solution, therefore, is the controlled repatriation of foreign nationals to the countries from which they came. Many European governments have long tried to avoid this reality. Unlike the United States and Kazakhstan, for example, which have repatriated most of their nationals, they have failed to adapt their laws to make convictions of IS supporters easier, to beef up prison capacity and to invest in prevention and rehabilitation programs, especially for women and children. The extent to which they are able to catch up will determine how much of a threat the returnees will pose in years to come.

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IS Anonymous

A Berlin-based initiative is proving that former IS members can be reintegrated into society

BY FRANK BACHNER

Thomas Mücke received the photos via WhatsApp. There's one of a groom standing next to his bride, beaming with joy and laughter. Another is of a young man so unabashedly proud of the work uniform he's wearing that he looks as if he's being featured in an ad poster for his employer. Mücke, a social worker with a degree in education, is always delighted to look at these and other photos. They show a great deal of harmony and joie de vivre. And, above all, they are proof that his work has been successful.

But Mücke doesn't provide any details on the individuals in the photos – no names, anyway. He won't even reveal exactly what kind of work uniform the young man is wearing. Mücke doesn't want any information about the men to be known, at least not publicly. One thing is for certain, though; the young man is definitely not wearing a police uniform. How do we know? Because the police force in Germany doesn't accept anyone who was previously a member of the Islamic State (IS).

The photos sent to Mücke show men celebrating moments of happiness in Germany. Only a couple of years earlier, however, these same men – each of whom has a German passport – were wearing black uniforms with black scarves over their faces.

Today, the men are back in Germany, and Mücke and his colleagues are there to ensure their re-integration into society. Mücke is managing director of Violence Prevention Network (VPN), an organization that works with former members of extremist groups. In fact, VPN is at the core of a network tackling a key question and challenge: How can we prevent German citizens who were once active as holy warriors for IS – and who have now returned to Germany – from returning to a life of radical thought and action?

The German government has an obligation under international law to take back its citizens. However, the government naturally does not want to face a permanent threat from these citizens at home.

Many former IS fighters came back willingly. The first group started returning to Germany in 2014, disillusioned by their experiences with the militant group. Others were retrieved from the camps where they'd been held and brought back to Germany.

After coming home, some of the men were simply released, as there was no warrant for their arrest. Many of those who had returned in the previous months landed almost immediately in pre-trial detention. The minimum charge they faced was "membership in a terrorist organization."

In the five years since 2015, Mücke's team has provided guidance to 40 former IS members imprisoned in Germany. Each offender is interviewed and subjected to a threat analysis. In other words, representatives of the police force, the *Verfassungsschutz* (Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution), the justice system and VPN meet together and assess the threat posed by each former IS member.

As soon as any former IS warrior returns to Germany and is locked in prison, it won't be long before they find a VPN employee standing at their cell door. "We offer an opportunity to talk," says Mücke. "The earlier the better." And his approach has been successful. "Out of all of the people we've visited in prison, not one of them refused our help."

This first meeting marks the beginning of a process that involves a great deal of patience. "I would be very skeptical if a former extremist said that he regretted everything he did after just three days of talking," says Mücke. It usually takes three or four months "until we see a development." In that period of time, Mücke has noticed, the person's thoughts become increasingly preoccupied with questions of right and wrong. "It's essential that the person concerned recognizes that it's up to him to take responsibility for his actions," says Mücke.

Mücke and his colleagues also ask for help from the families of the returnees. Indeed, fathers, mothers and siblings can influence the men and encourage them to talk to VPN.

Things have worked well so far. And Mücke has also been lucky. The worst criminals – the murderers and the torturers, that is – are not yet in German custody. They have not yet been brought back from Syria and Iraq. In January, official statistics showed that there were still 124 individuals with a German passport living in IS camps – sometimes under catastrophic conditions.

Those former IS members currently in prison in Germany are not considered to be brutal or ideological hardliners. They're usually able to generate an inner distance to their past very quickly. "A lot of them regret having taken part in something so terrible," says Mücke. "Many say they simply turned a blind eye for a long time." According to Mücke, several of these men set off to join IS after experiencing a brief social or personal crisis, not because they were fanatical Muslims.

Still, regret alone is not enough. When these men are released from custody, they remain under the constant watch of the police force, the *Verfassungsschutz*, probation officers and VPN. "We all follow very closely how each individual is developing," says Mücke.

This is the next phase in monitoring and caring for these former IS fighters. It is essential that the men are not allowed to drift back into the extremist scene. What they need most at this point is a social and personal network as well as a support system. As many left school early, this is the perfect time to go back and complete a degree.

But what kind of educational institution would accept former extremists as students? "We work very hard to get teachers, students and parents on board," says Mücke, whose many years of experience prompt him to take all concerns very seriously. This is exactly why things tend ultimately to work out. "Schools are willing to get involved in cases such as these because they know we monitor and take care of each ex-IS member with great attention," says Mücke. In addition, if there are any problems, students, parents and teachers can contact VPN at any time.

In the case of older returnees, the goal is to have them pursue vocational training or get an actual job. VPN representatives accompany the men to the job center and help with job applications. The extremist past of these new employees always remains a secret. The boss is told nothing about it. This is one of the only ways for reintegration into society to succeed as best it can.

And Mücke has several success stories to tell. He knows many people who now live solid, middle-class lives. "Nobody would guess they used to be members of IS." These are the men who call VPN staff to chat and send pictures of their weddings and vacations. The contact never really ends.

FRANK BACHNER
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True north

It's not the melting of the sea ice, but rather Russia's strategy that's driving the new military focus on the Arctic

SHUTTERSTOCK/JANE RIX

BY ANDREAS ØSTHAGEN AND SVEIN VIGELAND ROTTEM

Few places have been the source of as much speculation, hype and broad statements as the Arctic at the start of the 21st century. Propelled onto the agenda by flag-plantings and resource appraisals, the Arctic has continued to lure researchers and journalists to venture northward to the next great game.

Fortunately, with more attention comes more knowledge as well. Reputable scholars have now debunked the notion of "resource wars" taking place in the north; after all, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea has already granted the Arctic states ownership over most of these areas. The Arctic is not suffering a state of anarchy; states cannot claim rights to resources merely by planting flags at the bottom of the sea. The rights and duties of states concerning the Arctic Ocean are well documented by international law.

Nevertheless, prognostications of Arctic conflict and great-power rivalry over the North Pole keep dominating headlines. Why is this so, if all is well up north?

It is useful to distinguish between the international – systemic – level, and the regional – Arctic – level. Using such an approach, we can tease out the dynamics present in the Arctic and find out *why* the idea of conflict persists, and how it does not run counter to the ideas of regional cooperation and stability. Separating the international level from the regional level can help clarify misconceptions about the Arctic and the interests of the actors involved.

During the Cold War, the Arctic held a prominent spot in the political and military standoffs between the two superpowers, the US and the USSR. It was important not because of interactions *in* the Arctic itself, but because of its strategic role in the systemic competition between the US and the USSR. And now, after a drop in geopolitical and geostrategic relevance in the 1990s – which enabled various regional cooperative schemes to be established in the Arctic – the polar region's strategic importance has grown again.

The renewed strategic importance of the Arctic has evolved primarily because Russia is intent on re-establishing its military power – and sees the Arctic as one domain where it can do just that. Its Northern Fleet is based on the Kola Peninsula, which houses strategic submarines essential to the state's status as a nuclear power on the world stage. It is not the melting of the sea ice that has spurred this military emphasis on the Arctic – it is the importance of the Arctic for Moscow's more general and global strategic plans and ambitions.

Moreover, China has now emerged as an Arctic actor. With Beijing continuing to assert a greater influence on the global stage, the Arctic is one of many regions where China's presence is a component of its great-power politics. China has labeled itself a "near-Arctic state." Despite the inaccuracies of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's warning in 2019 that Beijing's Arctic activities risk creating a "new South China Sea," such statements highlight how the US views the Arctic as yet another arena where the emerging systemic competition between the two powers is becoming sharper.

The US can and will engage in the Arctic, which is an important location for missile defense capabilities, surveillance infrastructure and a limited number of strategic forces.

It is futile, however, to generalize about security interests and challenges across the whole northern circumpolar region. It is more sensible to discuss security in *specific parts* of the Arctic, not in the Arctic as a whole. Of these different segments, the European Arctic is undoubtedly the most challenging. But there is not only confrontation in the region.

In fact, intra-regional cooperation on several issues has flourished. In 2008, in response to concerns about the lack of governance in the Arctic, the five Arctic coastal states – Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the US – met in Ilulissat, Greenland, and declared the Arctic "a region of cooperation." They affirmed their intention to work within established international arrangements, particularly the Law of the Sea regime. Since the Ilulissat meeting, all Arctic states have repeated the mantra of cooperation and articulated it in relatively streamlined Arctic policy and strategy documents. The deterioration since 2014 in Russia's relations with the other Arctic states has done little to change the situation.

SHUTTERSTOCK/PETER HERMES FURIAN

The emergence of the Arctic Council in 1996 as the primary forum for regional affairs in the Arctic is worth noting. An increasing number of actors have applied to the Council for observer status, including China, India and the EU.

The Arctic states have shown their clear preference for a stable political environment that allows them to maintain dominance in the region. The importance accorded to the Law of the Sea and issue-specific agreements signed under the auspices of the Arctic Council ensure that Arctic countries in particular as well as ensure that Arctic issues are generally dealt with by the Arctic states themselves.

On the international level, the Arctic has again risen to the forefront of strategic concerns among great powers (the US, Russia, China). This has little to do with events actually *in* the Arctic (ice-melt, economic ventures, etc.) and everything to do with the strategic importance of the Arctic for these actors. The Arctic states have no rationale for engaging in outright conflict over resources or territory – although local rivalries have persisted, like that between Norway and Russia. Yet the Arctic will not become any less important on the strategic level. The rise of the Arctic on the agenda is no passing trend. Geopolitics has re-entered the Arctic and is there to stay.

SVEIN VIGELAND ROTTEM and **ANDREAS ØSTHAGEN** are senior research fellows at the Fridtjof Nansen Institute in Norway.

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POLICY BRIEFS


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From missionary to monastery

How Europe should counter the rise of illiberal democracies

BY IVAN KRASTEV

On Dec. 10, 1948, shattered by the horrors of World War II, the international community adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Of the United Nations' 58 member states, 48 voted in favor of the declaration, eight abstained (the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies plus Saudi Arabia) and two did not vote. The world was far less liberal in 1948 than it is today, and the concept of human rights wasn't popular with the global public. Nevertheless, it would hardly raise an eyebrow were one to speculate that if the 1948 Universal Declaration came up for a vote in the UN tomorrow, the chances of it being approved would be very slim.

In 1948, the liberal order was a normative horizon; today it is a contested hegemony. The assumptions on which the liberal order rests are being challenged intellectually and politically by states within and outside the West.

Illiberal states like China and Russia contest the West's domination, but do so by violating the rules of the liberal order rather than by offering a well-articulated normative alternative. What is more, when it is in their interests, illiberal states position themselves as defenders of international institutions and global goods instead of offering alternatives to them. The support of China and Russia for the Paris Climate Agreement, for the World Trade Organization and for the Global Compact for Migration in the face of US opposition are cases in point.

At the same time, liberal norms are being challenged within Western societies by rising populist parties and especially by the Trump administration, which has defined America's commitment to the liberal order as the country's major vulnerability in the modern world. Once the liberal hegemon, the US has decided to preserve its power by overthrowing the liberal norms on which its hegemony was founded.

Through the increasing passion and frequency of their attacks on the West for unbearable hypocrisy, illiberal political leaders in Russia and elsewhere have been sending a clear signal to their populations about the revolutionary change they represent.

What are the sources of this all-powerful hypersensitivity about hypocrisy? Is the problem power asymmetries that make relatively less powerful states and societies particularly sensitive to the big boys breaking the rules? Is it the tendency of the US and the EU, more so than any other global powers, to regularly invoke universal principles to justify their conduct of foreign policy?

Finding answers to these "hypocrisy questions" is critical, because the accusation of hypocrisy is the most effective strategy for de-legitimizing the current liberal order –bearing in mind that there is no other set of normative ideas able to challenge it at the moment.

The hypocrisy of Western leaders – lecturing the world about high-minded values while actually being motivated by selfish geopolitical interests – has become one of Russia's gnawing obsessions. The so-called "liberal international order," in Moscow's view, was nothing nobler than a projection of America's will to dominate the world. Western universalism was just a false front for Western particularism. America, in particular, disguised the enlargement of its sphere of influence as an expansion of the frontiers of freedom. What the West celebrated as popular democratic revolutions were simply West-sponsored coups d'état.

In her remarkable book *Ordinary Vices*, the American philosopher Judith Shklar insists that we should not be so harshly critical of *hypokrisis*, for it is a necessary element in any liberal society, in any society that talks values. In her view, it is also an unattractive but unavoidable feature of international relations. At the same time, criticizing hypocrisy is also tricky, because in politics it is almost impossible to criticize hypocrisy without falling into the trap of playing the part one is also criticizing. While anti-hypocrisy rhetoric has its legitimate arguments, it is one of our major findings that the weaponization of anti-hypocrisy rhetoric is partially responsible for the current miserable state of international affairs.

By focusing on the West's hypocrisy, Russia has fatally eroded the trust between Russia and the West. In the Kremlin's view, hypocrisy is the skeleton key for unlocking Western foreign policy.

Alternative explanations for the West's failures to live up to its own ideals – such as poor planning, muddling through, naïveté, self-deception and lack of coordination on the Western side – are strategically downplayed in order to underscore America's principled bad faith. Unmasking hypocrisy implicitly attributes malicious intentions to the adversary. Distinguishing public justifications from hidden motivations is only common sense. But focusing dogmatically and obsessively on this distinction, as Russia seems to do, makes it impossible to arrive at any sensible policy directed at reducing tensions and re-building trust between Russia and the West. We recently heard similar fixations on Western hypocrisy coming from Turkey, China and Brazil.

By relying on the exposure of an enemy's hypocrisy to justify one's own aggressive acts, one can attack the existing world order without offering any positive alternative. But this is not a formula for a sober foreign policy based on proper understanding of the actions and motivations of the other side. Instead, it increases the risks of dangerous accidents.

Once the liberal hegemon, the US has decided to preserve its power by overthrowing the liberal norms on which its hegemony was founded

What should be the policy of any state actor that wants to preserve the normative power of the liberal values in a world in which illiberal great powers have weaponized "Western hypocrisy"? How should the EU act and talk in such a situation, keeping in mind that it as a post-national political project depends on the existence of the international liberal order and that liberal internationalism and multilateralism is the EU's mother tongue? And how should the EU react to the escalating accusations of hypocrisy any time someone dares to speak about values?

The strategy most popular with European leaders today is to ignore the illiberal turn, to treat it as an aberration and wait for America to make a U-turn back to its liberal self once Trump is out of office, and to bet on the exhaustion of the attractiveness of the illiberal actors.

This strategy is a risky one. We have many reasons to believe that even after Trump leaves office, the US will not embrace its former role as the leader of the liberal world and the guarantor of the liberal system. And even more importantly, the US would face many constraints in playing this role.

As indicated in a recent survey commissioned by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), the US is perceived as a security threat rather than as an ally by a sizable segment of European societies. It is also questionable how liberal the post-populist governments in the different parts of the world will be. The failure of populism does not automatically mean victory for liberalism.

The only way for the EU to survive as a liberal actor in an increasingly illiberal environment is by transforming itself from a missionary who wants to shape the world in his own image into a monastery focused on protecting the very exceptional nature of its political project.

When the EU raises human rights issues in its conversations with China, it should make its expectations clear: it is not trying to change China's attitudes, but instead preserve the EU's own exceptional nature. In this sense, China's behavior in the first post-communist decades could be an interesting model to follow. China accommodated itself to many of the global trends that shaped the post-Cold War world, but it defended the role of Marxist language and the Communist Party as the way to preserve its state identity. In the post-communist decades, China acted with the full awareness that some of the assumptions in which it had believed had turned out to be wrong, but at the same time it made Chinese communism the defining characteristic of its exceptionalism. The EU should do the same regarding liberalism.

In other words, if until now the EU was very much colored by the idea of the universality of its values and institutions, in the future it should sharply stress its exceptionalism. If before it was proud of the undefined nature of its borders, now it will have to fix its borders. The distinctive nature of a monastery is that while it hopes to influence the world beyond its door, it is aware that it lives in a different normative space than the outside world. It is insulated from the world, and there is a clear border between being inside the monastery and being outside of it. To focus on the exceptional nature of the EU is the only strategy that would sustain the internal cohesion of the union while at the same time acting as an alternative to growing illiberal trends. Brussels' new climate agenda is also an opportunity for the EU to re-invent its soft power and to stress its belief in multilateralism.

The EU should define itself as a monastery within the world of sin, a monastery that is economically and even militarily powerful enough to preserve its autonomous role and way of life, but one that tries to transform others only through the example of its very existence. And it should refrain from succumbing to desperation, for every monastery is a missionary in waiting.

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His piece is based on the research project on hypocrisy that Krastev initiated and led at the Robert Bosch Academy.

Aiding and abetting

Will European arms manufacturers come before the International Criminal Court in The Hague?

BY MARKUS BICKEL

The allegations are nothing new. Human rights organizations have been accusing European arms manufacturers of aiding and abetting war crimes in Yemen since 2015. That was the year Saudi Arabia's air force began bombing military and civilian targets in the country sometimes referred to as "the poorhouse of the Arab world." As a result of the bombings, the judiciary in Italy launched an investigation into RWM Italia, a subsidiary of the German arms giant Rheinmetall Defence, which produces precision guided bombs on the island of Sardinia. In July 2019, the parliament in Rome revoked the company's export license for the sale of MK 80 aircraft bombs to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Those two Gulf monarchies head up an Arab military alliance that wants to drive the Houthi rebels out of Yemen's capital, Sanáa, and other parts of the country. The UN High Commissioner holds this alliance responsible for one-third of all civilian casualties in the war. For its part, the German government stopped issuing permits for arms deliveries to Saudi Arabia more than a year ago, mainly because of the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October 2018, but also because of the war in Yemen. In 2019, however, deliveries to European arms projects were permitted in some cases.

After submitting their criminal complaint to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague in December, German and Yemeni human rights activists are now seeking to put a stop to these deliveries. In December, the Berlin-based European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, the Yemeni human rights group known as Mwatana and four other organizations filed a lawsuit against Airbus, the European joint venture that also happens to deliver combat aircraft to the warring parties in Abu Dhabi and Riyadh. Moreover, the complaint named the largest German defense company, Rheinmetall Defence in Düsseldorf, whose Italian subsidiary RMW Italia has manufactured bombs dropped on residential areas in Yemen.

The 350-page complaint argues that no party can say that they were unaware of the atrocities being committed with the weapons delivered. It lists 26 air strikes on markets, schools, hospitals and other civilian targets in Yemen, all of which would not have been possible without the supply of armaments and spare parts from Europe as well as training and technical assistance from the Arab military coalition.

The 350-page complaint argues that no party can say that they were unaware of the atrocities being committed with the weapons delivered

The complaint focuses on companies and political actors in Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Italy and Spain. In addition to Airbus Defence and Space and Rheinmetall Defence, the other companies named are Dassault Aviation in France, Leonardo in Italy and the UK's BAE Systems, the latter of which signed a contract with Saudi Arabia in 2007 for the purchase of a total of 72 Eurofighter Typhoon jets.

The ICC took up its duties in 2002 and is responsible for the prosecution of wars of aggression, war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. However, the court is not authorized to investigate the government of Saudi Arabia or its military allies, such as the United Arab Emirates or Egypt, because those countries have not joined the ICC. Germany and other EU countries, on the other hand, are signatories bound by its decisions.

For now, the companies concerned are continuing to show a measured reaction to the charges, though that could change as investigations continue. "The final decision on the export of arms is made solely on the basis of a release issued by the federal government," noted an Airbus spokesman in December, thereby placing the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of political decision makers.

And yet, it is exactly these politicians who for years have raised concerns among the arms lobby, especially because the Grand Coalition in Berlin has signaled its intention to push through an increasingly restrictive export policy. Therefore it is rather surprising that in 2019 German arms sales amounted to a record of €8 billion. A statement issued by the leading lobbying group known as the German Security and Defense Industry Association argued that "if Germany wants to claim a special role for itself – one that is incompatible with its closest European partners – in the realm of arms exports, it will isolate itself in Europe and no longer be seen as a partner for arms cooperation agreements and joint projects." This argument has been heard before under the catchphrase "German-free," which is used at trade fairs so as not to deter potential buyers.

The suspension of arms exports to Saudi Arabia after the Khashoggi murder has already caused turmoil in the arms industry. So far, however, weapons manufacturers have been cautious with regard to the damage claims looming on the horizon. Last year, the Baden-Württemberg-based group Würth alone filed an objection to a decision made by Germany's Minister of Economic Affairs, Peter Altmaier, which prohibits the delivery of switches for armored police vehicles to a French company that would then export the vehicles to Saudi Arabia.

Today, support for the Arab military alliance in Yemen from German corporations and government members is not the only thorn in the side of human rights organizations and opponents of war. It looks like arms deliveries to Turkey, including leopard main battle tanks manufactured by Rheinmetall and Krauss-Maffei Wegmann, might also be the subject of litigation in the near future.

MARKUS BICKEL
is editor-in-chief of *Amnesty Journal,* a magazine published by the German chapter of Amnesty International.

Who's buying, who's selling

Top ten arms-producing and military services companies in the world, excluding China, in 2018

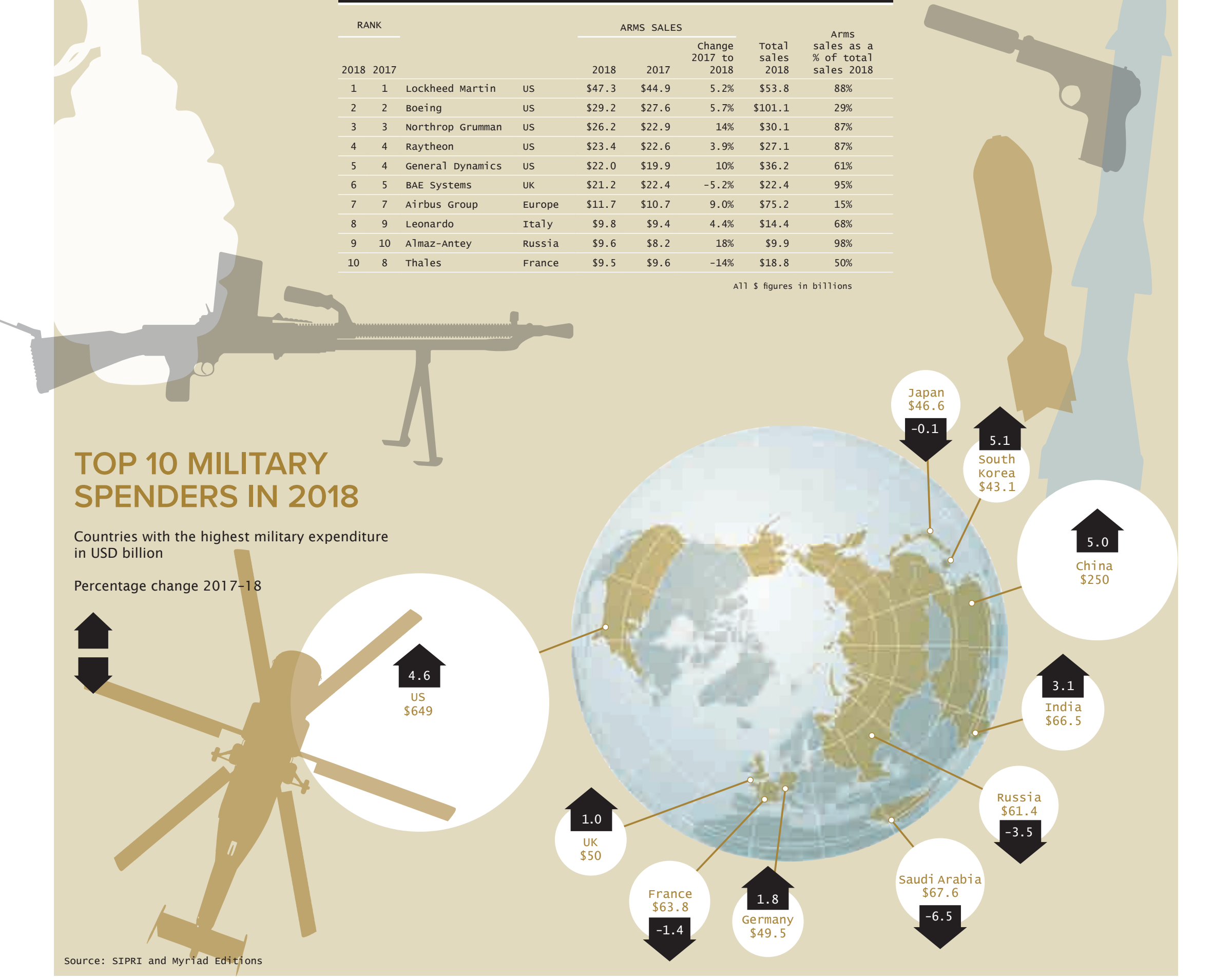
RANK 2018	RANK 2017			ARMS SALES 2018	ARMS SALES 2017	Change 2017 to 2018	Total sales 2018	Arms sales as a % of total sales 2018
1	1	Lockheed Martin	US	$47.3	$44.9	5.2%	$53.8	88%
2	2	Boeing	US	$29.2	$27.6	5.7%	$101.1	29%
3	3	Northrop Grumman	US	$26.2	$22.9	14%	$30.1	87%
4	4	Raytheon	US	$23.4	$22.6	3.9%	$27.1	87%
5	4	General Dynamics	US	$22.0	$19.9	10%	$36.2	61%
6	5	BAE Systems	UK	$21.2	$22.4	-5.2%	$22.4	95%
7	7	Airbus Group	Europe	$11.7	$10.7	9.0%	$75.2	15%
8	9	Leonardo	Italy	$9.8	$9.4	4.4%	$14.4	68%
9	10	Almaz-Antey	Russia	$9.6	$8.2	18%	$9.9	98%
10	8	Thales	France	$9.5	$9.6	-14%	$18.8	50%

All $ figures in billions

TOP 10 MILITARY SPENDERS IN 2018

Countries with the highest military expenditure in USD billion

Percentage change 2017–18



Source: SIPRI and Myriad Editions

The complex

The indefensible US defense budget

BY JESSICA T. MATHEWS

The sheer size of the United States military establishment and the American habit of equating military spending with patriotism have made sound management and serious oversight in the area increasingly rare. For a democracy, that puts the US on an unusual and risky path. Capitol Hill's annual debate about military spending no longer compares military with domestic needs or asks where real cuts could be made – it only asks how much of an increase is needed.

The momentum that drives this growth, disconnected from hard thought about America's responsibilities in a transformed world, could prove unstoppable and have massive consequences. At home, defense spending crowds out funds for things needed to ensure a prosperous economy and healthy society. Abroad, it has led us to become a country reflexively reliant on the military and one quite different from what we think ourselves to be or, I believe, wish to be.

Defense spending is generally expressed as a percentage of GDP. At roughly 3-4 percent, that sounds eminently affordable. But this measure is close to meaningless. It makes no sense to expect that external threats will expand in parallel with a country's economic growth. A country whose economy has grown by, say, 30 percent has no reason to spend 30 percent more on its military. To the contrary, unless threats worsen over time, defense spending as a percentage of a growing economy should decline. The valid measure of affordability is defense spending's share of the national budget – in the US case, of the federal discretionary budget, which pays for everything except for mandatory allotments to social entitlements and interest on the national debt. Defense spending now accounts for 60 percent of that budget: everything else the government does – from education, agriculture, science, infrastructure and the environment, to law enforcement and the regulation of drugs, banks and airplanes – is squeezed into the remaining two-fifths. By this measure, defense spending is neither affordable nor, on its projected growth path, sustainable. What would finally be too much? Two-thirds of the total? Seventy percent?

Is the US as threatened as such lopsided spending suggests? Or, are we achieving, through a rapidly growing military, valued international aims that are otherwise unattainable? If we were forced to make budgetary tradeoffs could we achieve equal or better security for much less money? There are no widely agreed upon answers because for many years now, the questions haven't been asked.

The so-called undernourished military against which Republicans railed at the close of the Obama administration was actually supported by the highest spending (the direct budget plus the contingency for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan) in inflation-adjusted dollars since the end of World War II. Under the Trump administration, the budget has soared by roughly $100 billion more to $738 billion this year. In order to partially pay for these increases, the administration proposed to cut or slash spending for 13 of the 16 cabinet agencies – all but Defense, Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security.

> The United States does not face acute threats, yet it spends more on defense than the next eight largest spenders combined – China, Saudi Arabia, India, France, Russia, Britain, Germany and Japan – and four of these countries are treaty allies

Underlying political dynamics are what drive the money machine year after year. Thousands of people in the Pentagon make up the best long-range planning and budgeting capability in the government. Even if they wanted to, Congressional committees could not attempt a serious analysis of what they produce, beginning with an evaluation of the asserted threats, followed by an independent assessment of the proposed strategy for meeting them and of the forces and facilities needed to execute the strategy. Mostly though, they don't want to even try, preferring to protect spending and jobs in their districts. The result is duplicative spending, funding for weapons systems the armed forces don't want, bases and facilities they would like to close, and bloated, inefficient back-office (noncombat) operations.

For years, the army has tried to convince Congress to stop buying new tanks. The military already has more than six thousand – vastly more than would be needed in any conceivable future combat. New aircraft carriers, at more than $13 billion each are arguably more an outdated symbol of 20th-century power than an effective weapons system for a future in which they will be increasingly vulnerable to attack by high-speed, maneuverable missiles that can be bought for a miniscule fraction of what a carrier costs.

In 2018, an incredible 26 years after Congress required it, the Pentagon was finally able to produce an auditable financial statement. It revealed a nonfunctional accounting system, systemic weaknesses in cybersecurity and such pervasive deficiencies that almost no Pentagon agency could accurately account for its spending. Not surprisingly, one result is waste in overhead. An international comparison by McKinsey & Co. rated the US next to last among the 30 countries it studied in the number of personnel needed to support each combat soldier. A study by the Pentagon's own Defense Business Board concluded that "We can see a clear path to saving over $125 billion in the next five years" in noncombat operations. Many experts with firsthand experience believe the achievable savings are much greater.

The worst consequence of spending on legacy weapons systems, unneeded facilities and over-staffed, inefficient bureaucracies is what isn't done with that money. Militaries of the future will use swarms of cheap, unmanned weapons, targeted and controlled using networked satellites and artificial intelligence, rather than small numbers of very high-cost systems like the new F-35 fighter at more than $90 million per plane. The US is not in the lead in making this politically disruptive yet vital transition. With what former Defense Secretary Robert Gates termed a "gargantuan, labyrinthine bureaucracy" in the Pentagon, manufacturers and subcontractors for each weapons system carefully distributed across the country's congressional districts and backed by aggressive lobbyists, members of Congress determined to protect constituents' jobs and military leaders loyal to the weapons systems they trained on and commanded, it is no surprise that the defense establishment has become extravagant, wasteful and less agile, innovative and forward-looking than it should be. Trump, still defensive about his failure to serve in Vietnam, is making things much worse. Last year, he boasted that with his immense $750 billion proposed defense budget "I think I make up for that right now."

The United States does not face acute threats, yet it spends more on defense than the next eight largest spenders combined – China, Saudi Arabia, India, France, Russia, Britain, Germany and Japan – and four of these countries are treaty allies. The disproportion has held for decades. This level of military commitment might be said to be justified by our choice of a global leadership role that has ensured the security of numerous friends and allies and created and sustained a peaceful world order since the end of World War II. Whether that is true is much harder to judge. Administrations produce a National Security Strategy, a National Defense Strategy and a National Military Strategy. They all say that conditions are dangerous, volatile, disorderly, unpredictable and generally getting worse. More recently, they cite the return of great power threats from Russia and China. Much of this is true, but a strategy is a means to reach a goal and what none of these documents does – and what the country as a whole hasn't done – is to reset its goals for a profoundly altered world.

Five transformations, each nearly revolutionary in scope, have been packed in to the short 30 years since the end of the Cold War: globalization, the war on terror, the advent of digital technology, China's growth explosion, as well as the emergence of populism and weakening of democracy worldwide. Taken together, they have reshaped the world. Yet until the Trump administration, US foreign policy changed little from the goals and practices it followed for the previous 70 years. The past three years have certainly introduced change, but nothing remotely like a coherent approach to new conditions.

Globalization and digital technologies make national security within fixed borders harder to achieve and maintain. The world that lies ahead of us is unequivocally one in which more and more of the greatest challenges – cyber regulation, arms control, nonproliferation, financial stability and trade, climate change, health and the environment, crime and the rule of law – can only be dealt with multilaterally. Yet since the end of the Cold War, the US has rejected most of the international agreements the rest of the world has approved, including the Law of the Sea Treaty, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the Antipersonnel Landmine Ban and the International Criminal Court. It has refused to ratify treaties protecting genetic resources, restricting trade in conventional arms, banning cluster bombs and protecting persons with disabilities. In his few years in office, President Trump has rejected the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement and withdrawn from the Paris Accord on climate, the INF Treaty on intermediate-range missiles, the UN Human Rights Council, UNESCO and the Iran nuclear deal and threatens to kill the last major superpower arms control agreement, the New START Treaty.

During these nearly 30 years of diplomatic withdrawal, America has been engaged in combat for all but a few months. It has undertaken nine large-scale military actions, including three of the five major wars it has fought since 1945. Only one of these – the Gulf War of 1990–1991 – was a clear success. The war of choice in Iraq was a catastrophic mistake and the nearly 20-year war in Afghanistan will almost certainly end in failure. The US has spent more on reconstruction in Afghanistan in inflation-adjusted dollars than it did on the Marshall Plan with almost nothing to show for it.

It has become increasingly clear that the largely intrastate conflicts in which the US has embroiled itself – fighting small groups of shifting, local opponents, rather than national armies – have not been the kind of conventional interstate wars for which its weapons and doctrine were designed. Every approach the US has tried – regime change, nation-building, counter-terrorism, counterinsurgency – alone or in concert with others, has failed to achieve the desired results.

Part of the reason is that during this period, administrations of both political parties have allowed support for the government's diplomatic arm to wither to the point that long-standing weaknesses have resulted in serious underperformance. The tools of diplomacy – negotiation, international cooperation, the creation and nurturing of institutions and the making of international law – are disparaged as too slow and ineffective. Unqualified campaign contributors are appointed to important diplomatic posts. Congress responds to the problems it sees by cutting budgets, which creates more problems. The lack of resources often means that the military, simply because it has the money and manpower, is called on to carry out humanitarian and governance tasks for which it is not well-suited.

For many years, the US has increasingly relied on military strength to achieve its foreign policy aims. In doing so, it has paid too little heed to the issues that military power cannot solve, to the need for diplomatic capabilities at least as strong as military ones and, in particular, to the necessity of multilateral problem-solving to address current threats.

We are now allocating too large a portion of the federal budget to defense as compared to domestic needs, tolerating too much spending that doesn't buy useful capability, accumulating too much federal debt, and yet not acquiring a forward-looking, 21st-century military built around new cyber and space technologies. We have become complacent and strategically flabby about adapting to a profoundly altered world. Major change will require a quality of leadership we haven't seen in a long time, leadership from men and women leading the White House, Congress and the Pentagon who are respected for their national security experience and who are willing to pay a steep political price for what must be done. Even then, the process will be hard, slow and painful, but it is surely overdue.

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Legal espionage

Will the US terminate the Open Skies Treaty?

To date, the best thing we can say about the arms control agreement known as the Open Skies Treaty (OST) is that it's not dead yet.

There have been reports, however, that US President Donald Trump raised the prospect of withdrawing from the OST in a memorandum issued in October 2019. Of course, that was also the year that Trump pulled out of the Cold War-era deal known as the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), which banned land-based, short and medium-range missiles. The nuclear arms reduction treaty known as New START, which is up for renewal next year, is also facing the same fate.

The Open Skies Treaty was signed in 1992, entered into force in 2002 and now has a total of 34 members, including Russia. These states all agreed to have unarmed aerial surveillance flights carried out over their territories – a type of "legal espionage" of military facilities between Vancouver and Vladivostok designed to foster transparency and trust among the participating countries. More than 1,500 such flights have been carried out to date. The unique characteristic of the treaty is that pilots from both the surveilling and surveilled countries fly together.

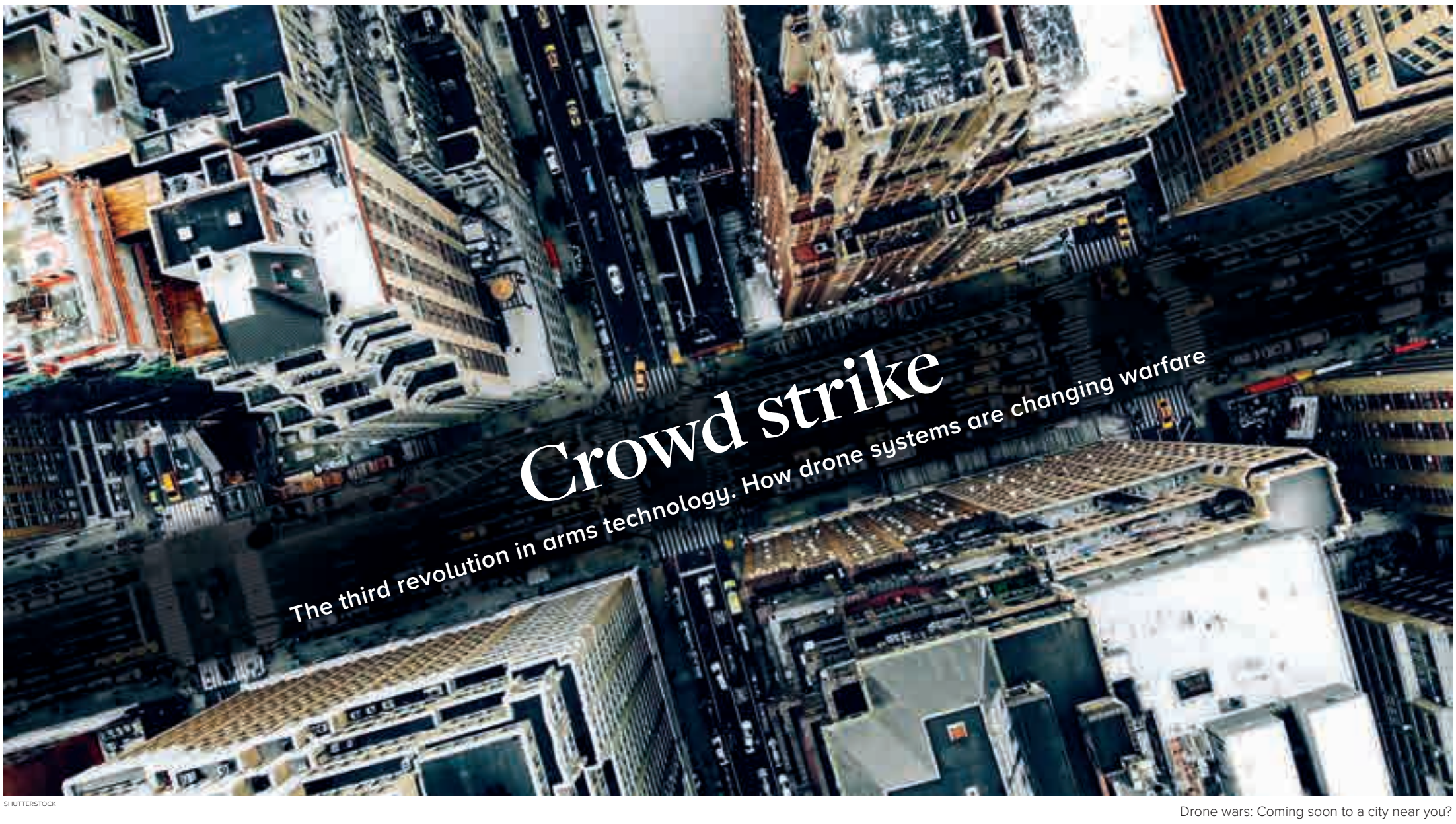
However, buddy-buddy sorties such as these could soon come to an end. The US government has threatened to pull out of the OST, arguing that Russia is restricting observation flights over Kaliningrad and refusing to allow flights on the border with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In return, the United States has restricted flights over military facilities, for example over missile defense systems in Alaska and Hawaii, where its Pacific fleet is located.

According to media reports, the foreign ministers of France, Germany and the UK have warned their US counterpart, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, of actually pulling out of the treaty. Berlin's Foreign Ministry stated that the OST was "one of the last functioning mechanisms for generating trust between Europe and Russia." They also argued that OST was of key importance considering the already severely compromised security architecture in the world today.

There are reasons cited why the US wants to terminate the OST treaty. The two aircraft used by the US Air Force are "decades old and need to be replaced," Peter Brookes, former deputy assistant secretary of defense and senior fellow at the Heritage Foundation, wrote in *The National Interest*. Brookes also noted that the onboard sensor suite needed upgrading, which would involve costs of around $200 million. Some would argue that that's a lot of money to spend on images that could be obtained by other means, such as using state-of-the-art US satellite systems.

Despite these misgivings, Brookes also provides a counter-argument, noting that "indeed, with a number of security challenges worldwide, there are limits on the availability of US military satellite coverage." He goes on to say that a number of US allies and partners "value US participation in the OST for other reasons, including maintaining strong trans-Atlantic ties and as a symbol of the US commitment to peace and security in Europe during a period of Russian belligerence and aggression."

The good news is that even though Trump has the power to withdraw from the treaty without Congressional approval, during negotiations on the defense budget in December 2019, Congress was able to insist that the Defense Department and State Department would first have to prove that leaving the OST was in the interest of the United States.
PHK



SHUTTERSTOCK

Drone wars: Coming soon to a city near you?

BY NANA BRINK

At first glance, the YouTube presentation by DARPA looks a lot like an amateur video. Young men – some in camouflage – holding tablets are flying drones. About the size of a man's palm, they whirr around like a swarm of birds – changing direction on a dime, suddenly dispersing, then reconvening. Cut. The clip then shows the target area, a square. Cut. Hundreds of black dots move onto the square. Cut. The young men look deadly serious. The dots then dissipate. The men smile.

DARPA stands for Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, and the project the young men in the Pentagon research department are showcasing is the "next generation in autonomous warfare," according to the usually well-informed journal *Jane's International Defence Review* in its title article from November 2019. The project – Offensive Swarm-Enabled Tactics (OFFSET) – is reportedly one of more than a hundred programs in the civil and military sectors of the US that are working under great time pressure on the development and refinement of drone-swarm technology. DARPA alone has allocated around $2 billion "to develop the next wave of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies."

This next wave is subject to the highest level of secrecy. The competition over autonomous weapons systems has been underway for quite some time. Drone experts such as Paul Scharre estimate that it will only be a few years before autonomous weapons – also called LAWS, or Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems – become reality. Critics often use the term "killer robots" to refer to drones as well as unmanned submarines and aircraft.

The advent of AI in weapons technology about a decade ago has completely altered the future of warfare. The cutting edge of this technology has long surpassed self-propelled robots and flying objects piloted remotely. The vanguard now focuses on systems that act fully independently. LAWS constitute the third generation in warfare technology: After the invention of gun powder and the atomic bomb comes the ability for humans to place the decision of who should live and who should die into the hands of autonomously operated machines.

The question is: Are LAWS already available for deployment? Or is the DARPA video still a bit of science fiction? The answer is both. Or, in the words of *Jane's* author Andrew White: "The ability to conduct unmanned swarming operations from the air, land and sea continues to gather pace as armed forces seek advanced autonomous technologies to overcome adversaries."

The development of drones has recently made one fact abundantly clear: The deployment of drones is no longer the sole domain of the great powers. Non-state actors such as terrorist groups and militias are now making use of these "Kalashnikovs of the air," which are increasingly unleashed in swarms of "killer robots."

What transpired on Jan. 6, 2018, at the Russian-operated Khmeimim Air Base in Syria was not all that different from the content of the DARPA video. In the early morning hours, a swarm of drones suddenly appeared on Russian Air Force radars. Two days later the Russian defense minister announced that seven drones had been shot down and the remaining six brought under control.

"Islamic extremists" are believed to have planned the attack on the air base in the west of the country. Yet they must have had help. Russian President Vladimir Putin has steered suspicions toward the US, as the technology "could only come from a country that commands a high degree of technological prowess."

The drones did not reach their target, but Russia's defense strategy overshot *its* goal as well. Just a few days after the attack, resourceful reporters from *The Daily Beast* published an article speculating on the origin of the drones. Examples of projectiles almost identical in construction – they were roughly two meters wide, are controlled via GPS and can be loaded with explosives – have surfaced on the social media platform known as Telegram.

This messaging app, also capable of encrypted correspondence, is popular among IS supporters as well as IS sympathizers and terrorist groups. The drones, which can also be seen in photographs held by the Russian defense ministry, appear to be rather simply constructed. The explosives were fixed to the body of the drones using adhesive tape. These "killer bees" seem to have been cobbled together in a garage from an off-the-shelf drone kit for a few thousand dollars.

Although several non-aligned states are pleading for a ban, large countries like Russia and China block any and all attempts at a ban

But it was not the technology that alarmed military experts; it was rather the swarming. Never before had so many drones been deployed in concert. And the approach used in the attack on Khmeimim Air Base appears to have caught on; Sept. 14, 2019, saw a similar attack on two Saudi Arabian oil processing facilities in Abqaiq and Khurais. Houthi rebels from Yemen claimed responsibility for that strike; their weapons of choice were dozens of "Kamikaze drones" that honed in on their targets and deliberately crashed there with precision.

A UN report by the Panel of Experts on Yemen in January 2019 unambiguously showed how drones are manufactured in Iran using Chinese and German motors. These particular drones – referred to as UAV-X by UN weapons experts – can fly 155 mph for over 900 miles. Depending on wind conditions and general capacity, they can carry up to 40 pounds of explosives. And they can also fly en masse.

The swarm itself is the actual weapon. But what makes it so effective that great powers with massive defense industries, such as the US, China, Russia, the UK, Israel and South Korea, are sinking hundreds of millions of dollars into the development of their LAWS?

A glance at the sky can help explain. A swarm of birds seems to rely on instinct to coordinate its movements – a self-organizing system indeed. And one with several advantages: All members of the swarm – right up to the lead bird – appear equal. They fly without impeding any fellow flyers. Even if parts of the swarm fall away, the remaining mass carries on its trajectory. Put in military terms: While a single aircraft can be shot out of the sky, eliminating an entire swarm of aircraft is far more difficult.

But how far are manufacturers away from completing the development of autonomous drone swarms? Despite the effectiveness of large drones such as the American MQ-9 Reaper, which can fly 300 mph and in January 2020 was equipped with Hellfire missiles for the assassination of Iranian General Qassim Soleimani, the trend is toward mini-drones such as the Perdix (which is also the name of a genus of partridges).

Developed by the Pentagon's Strategic Capabilities Office (SCO), the merely 300-gram 3D-printed Perdix drones proved in 2016 that flying in swarms is possible. According to their chief of development, William Roper: "Due to the complex nature of combat, Perdix are not pre-programmed synchronized individuals, they are a collective organism, sharing one distributed brain for decision-making and adapting to each other like swarms in nature." The SCO claims the small drones are not "Kamikaze robots," but serve rather as instuments of reconnaissance. Like their namesakes in nature, the Perdix drones fly under the radar.

However, it does not require too much creativity to imagine how the allegedly harmless "surveillance partridges" could mutate into "killer bees" with explosives under their wings. The Future of Life Institute activist Stuart Russell's viral 2017 video *Slaughterbots* shows what this could look like. The 8-minute drama depicts swarms of mini-drones that, by way of AI, become killer machines that use pre-programmed information to recognize and exterminate political opponents and student protesters.

Future of Life, the self-proclaimed independent research institute in Boston – which has boasted Stephen Hawking and Tesla founder Elon Musk as members – is among the most prominent opponents of the further development of LAWS. It is demanding not only a ban on autonomous weaponry, but indeed the end of collaboration between the military and the private sector.

In a 2018 protest note, Google employees came out against this cooperation: "We believe that Google should not be in the business of war." And in July 2018, the Future of Life Institute issued a public appeal, signed by leading scientists and businesses in the field of AI, with an unambiguous message: "We call upon governments and government leaders to create a future with strong international norms, regulations and laws against lethal autonomous weapons."

While UN Secretary-General António Guterres has deemed autonomous weapons "politically unacceptable and morally repugnant" and calls for their ban under international law, the probability of a treaty in the near future is dismally low. The issue of arms control in our current political climate is a nonstarter. Since 2014, the 125 signatory states of the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) have been debating drone technologies in Geneva. But in August of last year, government experts were only able to agree to extend the ongoing talks for another two years. The main point of dispute is the regulation, championed by experts on international law, that a human must always have ultimate control of the operation of a weapons system. This is known as the principle of "meaningful human control."

Although several non-aligned states are pleading for a ban, large countries like Russia and China block any and all attempts at a ban in order to continue the ongoing development of their LAWS. The US is also generally against such a UN provision and makes no secret of its intent to continue using AI in weapons technology without any restrictions. This stance was justified in its Summary of the 2018 Department of Defense Artificial Intelligence Strategy, noting that America's strategic competitive advantage was at stake: "Other nations, particularly China and Russia, are making significant investments in AI for military purposes. The United States must adopt AI to maintain its strategic position."

Although Germany, which along with France advocates a "conciliatory solution," is targeting a LAWS prohibition as part of a coalition agreement, as John Reyels of the foreign ministry's arms control division stressed at a conference hosted by the Green-Party-affiliated Heinrich Böll Foundation, "the optimal case would be a ban, but this is not attainable." However, neither Germany nor France is currently urging a ban to achieve what is called a "minimal consensus." What form this will ultimately take remains to be seen.

All signs point to an intensified arms race, with no end in sight. Or, as Stephen Hawking wrote in his posthumously published book *Brief Answers to the Big Questions*: "Whereas the short-term impact of AI depends on who controls it, the long-term impact depends on whether it can be controlled at all."

A THE HISTORY OF DRONE OPERATIONS

- At the beginning of the 1990s, the US deploys the first UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicle) for surveillance during Operation Desert Storm and the Yugoslav Wars.
- After the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the armed drone Predator is deployed in Afghanistan to pursue Taliban leaders.
- Under US President Barack Obama, targeted assassinations using drones becomes US policy. The CIA carries out drone strikes in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen using a "kill list." The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (TBIJ) documents 563 drone attacks between 2008 and 2016 in the three countries, none of which was or is at war with the US. Civilian casualties from the strikes are estimated to be between 384 and 807. According to US government data, between 2,400 and 2,600 militants were killed in these attacks. More precise totals are difficult to establish.
- Since 2014, restrictions on LAWS have been under negotiation within the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). Talks have thus far been unsuccessful.
- Since 2015, terrorist groups have been deploying drones (in Syria, Lebanon and Yemen).
- In 2019, drones strike Saudi Arabian oil fields. Houthi rebels claim responsibility for the attack.
- On Jan. 3, 2020, the US uses a drone to kill Iranian General Qassim Soleimani in Iraq. For the first time, a military leader is killed on foreign soil in country that is not his own.

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Artificial turf

Europe needs a plan for AI in the military realm

BY ULRIKE FRANKE

In Europe, 2019 was the year of artificial intelligence (AI). Governments put together expert groups, organized public debates and published national strategies designed to grapple with the possible implications of AI in areas such as health care, the labor market and transportation. European countries developed training programs, allocated investment and made plans for research cooperation. In 2020, the challenge for governments will be to show that they can fulfill their promises by translating ideas into effective policies.

But despite attempts to coordinate these efforts – most notably that of the European Commission, which called upon member states to maximize cooperation through the publication of AI strategies – there is one AI-relevant area in which Europe lacks coherence, and which generally receives too little attention. In fact, an analysis of official documents from various European countries suggests fundamental differences that may be difficult to bridge. This area is the use of AI in the military realm.

Despite a marked growth of work on the economic and societal consequences of the increasing use of AI in various areas of life, the use of AI in the military is largely absent from the public discourse in most European countries. In Germany in particular, officials seem uncomfortable discussing the subject, unless the focus is on whether and how to ban "killer robots," or AI-enabled lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS).

In other countries – most notably France, but also the UK – there is more expert work on the topic, but this does not translate into a broader societal debate. Similarly, the academic discourse on AI in the military focuses on developments in the United States and China, and tends to overlook Europe.

AIRBUS

Doing vids. How revolutionary will AI look in the military realm?

This neglect is not helpful. It means that little information is available about European thinking on AI in the military, and that there is scant discussion of how European armed forces plan to use AI. Yet the fact remains that European companies are already developing AI-enabled military systems.

It would be a bad idea for Europe to try to sit this development out – or to approach it with an exclusively national focus. While no one can predict exactly how revolutionary it will be, AI is likely to have a considerable impact on how militaries operate, and on how wars are waged. As Europeans discuss plans for strategic sovereignty – both in the military and in the technology sector – military AI, which is relevant to both areas, deserves more attention.

One of the problems of the European, particularly German, debate on AI-enabled military systems is the focus on LAWS. These systems can carry out the critical functions of a targeting cycle in a military operation, including the selection and engagement of targets, without human intervention. The potential use of LAWS comes with a range of legal, ethical and political problems that are rightly being discussed in the United Nations. But while concern over LAWS, and work toward regulating them, is to be praised, European policymakers should not forget that military AI goes beyond killer robots.

AI is, for example, famously good at working with big data to identify and categorize images and texts. In a military context, AI can help sift through massive amounts of video footage, such as feeds recorded by drones. Or it can examine photographs to single out changes from one picture to the next – a useful function to indicate the presence of an explosive device hidden in the time between the photos were taken. Other intelligence-relevant AI applications include image and face recognition, translation, image geolocation and more.

AI can also support military logistics through predictive maintenance based on the analysis of various sensory inputs. AI-enabled weapons are also likely to be deployed in cyberspace where it allows actors to both find and patch up cyber vulnerabilities. Due to cyberspace's relative lack of physical limitations, and given that fewer organizational changes are required for it, AI-enabled weapons could be introduced comparatively quickly into the cyber realm.

In many areas, AI can make processes faster, more efficient and cheaper. Such efficiency gains are important, especially for cash-strapped militaries. But technologies are truly groundbreaking only if they provide new capabilities or allow for tactics that go beyond what already exists. Artificial intelligence might be able to provide this in the areas of swarming and autonomous vehicles – including, but not limited to, LAWS.

Swarming refers to the combination of many systems – such as drones, unmanned boats or tanks – that can act independently but in a coordinated manner. Military swarms could provide new capabilities, such as flying sensor networks, flying minefields or coordinated and automated waves of attacks that deny the enemy a massed formation to fight.

Given these extensive areas of application and, judging from past efforts to predict the impact of technologies, there is a good chance the most important changes to warfare caused by AI are not featured in the list above, Europe cannot afford to disregard these developments.

Of the big three European states – Germany, France and the UK – France has shown the most interest in military AI. Defense was designated as a priority AI sector for industrial policy in the French 2018 national AI strategy. In 2019, France became the first European state to publish a military AI strategy. The country's approach to AI is clearly geopolitical and driven by concerns over Europe and France becoming tech colonies of the United States and China.

The UK has published neither an overarching national nor a military AI strategy, but a range of documents, most notably from the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL), and the Defence Ministry's in-house think-tank, DCDC. However, these publications appear to primarily target the expert community.

Among the big three, Germany is the outlier. In its 2018 national AI strategy, the military, security and geopolitical elements of AI are notably absent. Defense is mentioned only in one sentence, which implicitly shifts all responsibility for this area to the ministry of defense. As this ministry traditionally publishes few doctrinal or strategy documents, it is unlikely that a German military AI strategy will see the light of day.

More importantly, the German political realm, spearheaded by the foreign ministry, seems to have taken the decision to deal with military AI primarily from an arms control angle. As a consequence, the German expert community focuses mostly on AI arms control and disarmament. Given the extent to which this angle dominates the debate, and how different it is from the French approach, it poses questions for joint French-German projects like the new Future Combat Air System fighter jet, which will rely heavily on AI elements.

Given the changes expected to be caused by AI in the military realm and given the level of attention paid to the issue in other countries – most notably the US, China and Russia – as well as European yearnings for strategic sovereignty, Europeans should pay closer attention to military AI. It is counterproductive to let valid concerns about LAWS marginalize the debate on all military AI.

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As multilateral as apple pie

Managing a world of weaponized interdependence

BY AMRITA NARLIKAR

PICTURE ALLIANCE/EVERETT COLLECTION

The dismantling of the administrative world: The Bretton Woods Conference of 1944 established rules for economic relations and created the International Monetary Fund.

Speaking at the Bretton Woods conference in 1944, US Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau eloquently declared: "Economic aggression can have no other offspring than war. It is as dangerous as it is futile." His speech reflected an understanding shared by many at the time – that peace and prosperity were indivisible. Many of the multilateral institutions, built in the aftermath of World War II, thus aimed to reduce the risk of economic warfare. The world of today, however, has generated a new set of problems, which our existing multilateral institutions are poorly equipped to deal with: most prominently, the weaponization of interdependence. It derives from the increased opportunities available to states to use economic instruments for geostrategic purposes.

Admittedly, the use of economic statecraft goes back to ancient times, and includes sieges and blockades. But in recent years, a new phenomenon has emerged, which Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman call "weaponized interdependence." Farrell and Newman focus on the interactions between network structures, state power and global supply chains. They demonstrate that at least in certain key areas, network structures have turned out to be highly asymmetric, giving some states disproportionate power to leverage their unique positions on network hubs in an attempt to coerce others. The fact that production is integrated through global supply chains means that some states can use their dominant network positions to extract informational advantages vis-à-vis adversaries. Moreover, they can cut adversaries off from network flows. Farrell and Newman focus on the ability of the US to control financial transactions and internet flows. But we see other actors also recognizing the potential to exercise control in other sectors, such as China's "Made in China 2025" roadmap on integrated circuits and semi-conductors.

Farrell and Newman's logic on weaponized interdependence refers to the power that is embedded in networked structures of global production. At least one reason why their argument deserves more attention in current thinking on multilateralism is as follows: The very economic integration that international organizations like the World Trade Organization (WTO) were supposed to promote may turn out to be a source of greater power asymmetry and conflict. This structural logic can be supplemented by two further arguments, one referring to the differences in domestic political systems, the other to adversarial intent.

The configurations of some domestic institutions may allow states sitting on network hubs to exploit their positions more easily than others. This is precisely the complaint that President Donald Trump's team has voiced most vociferously to China, but previous US administrations and other trading partners have levied similar objections. Multiple actors have protested against China's ready use of subsidies, domestic content requirements, intellectual property rights violations, forced technology transfers and other means to secure an advantage in trade. And they ascribe blame not only to the Chinese government, but also to the WTO, which has seemingly turned a blind eye to China's violations of the spirit of the law, if not the law itself. The fact that China's meteoric rise has occurred in large measure as a result of the opportunities the multilateral trading system has offered it makes the "unfair" practices all the more galling.

There is also the issue of potential adversarial intent. China's adventurism in South and South-east Asia has given many in the region cause for concern. Its Belt and Road Initiative is attracting growing skepticism, even from recipient countries; its human rights record in Xinjiang has many activists in the West concerned; and Huawei's forceful and successful 5G campaign in many countries has awakened Western companies to the security risks that such investment can pose.

The postwar multilateral economic system was built to handle quite a different set of problems. It assumed some amount of like-mindedness and shared purpose among all members; increasing economic interdependence and shared prosperity could then strengthen and deepen these pre-existing affinities. The bifurcation of the system during the Cold War benefited those countries with a liberal, democratic and mixed-economy orientation. It was this group that shared the gains of international cooperation, while the Soviet bloc stood outside the system. At the end of the Cold War, a combination of liberal naïveté and liberal hubris led many researchers and practitioners to expect an increasing confluence of interests on the part of the newcomers into the system. That some actors could use the economic gains the system helps them accrue for geostrategic ends – and that they could cut into systemic rivals by successfully gaming their opponents' system – had simply not been factored in.

The crudeness of Trump's "America First" rhetoric and his angry tweets reviling the international system make it all too easy to overlook the gravity of the dangers posed by the weaponization of interdependence – especially by systemic rivals. The WTO, for example, does not yet have instruments to contend with this phenomenon. Even minimal attempts to facilitate greater transparency on "general economic support measures" in the WTO's Trade Monitoring Reports have encountered resistance by members. Yet a major revamping of the rules is necessary. This will have to include an updated understanding of state-owned enterprises, subsidies as well as special and differential treatment for developing countries. Moreover, it will require a fundamental change in the mindset of an organization that has always stood for trade liberalization.

The postwar multilateral economic system was built to handle quite a different set of problems

For example, a reformed WTO would have to recognize and specify a wide range of conditions in which protectionism might be considered legitimate, particularly to counter economic measures that countries may have instituted for security purposes. Some areas may need to be cordoned off from trade liberalization entirely – such as digital technologies that have direct security implications.

At a minimum, such constraints would result in some level of decoupling from China and potentially others. But such decoupling is already underway as major players – including the US and China – seek greater self-sufficiency in critical sectors. Doing this within a reformed system of multilateral rules could help make this process less haphazard, less unpredictable and less costly. Without a doubt, decoupling – even if well-managed – will generate economic costs for most players, but these economic costs could be balanced by security gains.

There is a rich discussion currently underway on the reform and rejuvenation of multilateralism. To its credit, Germany, often working in close cooperation with France, Canada and others, has taken a lead in this debate. Surprisingly, however, this debate seems largely to be premised on old-school notions of mom, apple pie and economic interdependence. If multilateralism is to be made meaningful again, our leaders are not going to be able to avoid the question of how they plan to manage a much nastier world where interdependence is weaponized. This will occasionally and inevitably draw them into controversies about the values they stand for, and the allies that share these values with them. It will require them to take sides. This, in turn, will produce further decoupling, but will likely make for a limited yet more resilient multilateralism of the like-minded.

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No transparency & no dialog

NATO must address the looming threat of cyberattacks on nuclear weapons systems

BY JULIA BERGHOFER

DPA/KON IMAGES/IAN CUMING

Today, the risks associated with severe cyberattacks on critical infrastructure and military systems in general are drawing increased attention. Not only are cyberattacks becoming more frequent and more professional, their destructive capabilities are also more widely available than ever for state and non-state actors alike. The risk of cyber interference in critical civil and government systems poses a threat with incalculable consequences for the Euro-Atlantic community.

Because of their complacency, most states in the Euro-Atlantic region now struggle to keep pace with the breathtaking development of new technologies. Thanks also to their failure to grasp the complexity of the situation, these states have no holistic or viable counter-strategy to address the perils of cyberattacks. Any form of misuse such as compromised data, false alarms or inadvertent launches can thus have catastrophic consequences.

The lack of transparency and dialog between the military, tech experts, decision makers, security organizations, scholars and private companies is a huge obstacle to developing a holistic counter-strategy. Indeed, even the authorities tasked with addressing such issues tend to evade taking action, suggesting instead that responsibility for the cybersecurity of nuclear weapons in Europe lies solely with the US.

While it is true that all B61 bombs in Europe held at six air bases across the continent are US property, these weapons do not exist in a vacuum. There are entire physical, technical and institutional systems built around them involving personnel, delivery systems, early warning protocols and supply chains. Accordingly, a critical share of funding and responsibility for the cybersecurity of nuclear weapons systems in Europe rests on the shoulders of the respective member states, while maintenance and upgrades remain in Washington's hands.

Germany is an interesting example. The Federal Republic has not only failed to develop cybersecurity institutions and effective measures, it has also launched a number of newly established and still-in-development cyber organizations with poorly defined tasks. To make matters worse, these organizations must compete with a strong private sector in recruiting experts in the field.

Whether modernization helps keep weapons systems safe or puts them at risk as a result of their growing complexity is a matter of debate among experts. However, military leaders argue that modernization is essential in a world of increasingly net-centric warfare that requires a rapid response to events as they unfold on the ground.

If this is the case, cybersecurity measures must become more advanced in lockstep. There is consensus among NATO members that the cybersecurity of nuclear weapons systems must be accorded the highest priority, but the Alliance has nevertheless failed to deal with the issue in a timely manner. This has created two problems, in particular: the first relates to the insufficient budget funds allocated to cybersecurity measures at nuclear air bases in Europe, and the second revolves around the lack of a coherent understanding of the threat.

As a nuclear alliance, NATO is confronted with an incalculable problem that could evolve rapidly in the face of escalating hostilities. There is no time for patience. All Alliance members able to take action must make haste to assess the looming threats and implications of emerging technologies. Simply hoping that US measures will meet the task is not enough. In countries like Germany, there is an urgent need for meaningful strategic discussions and sustained dialog with the community of technological experts.

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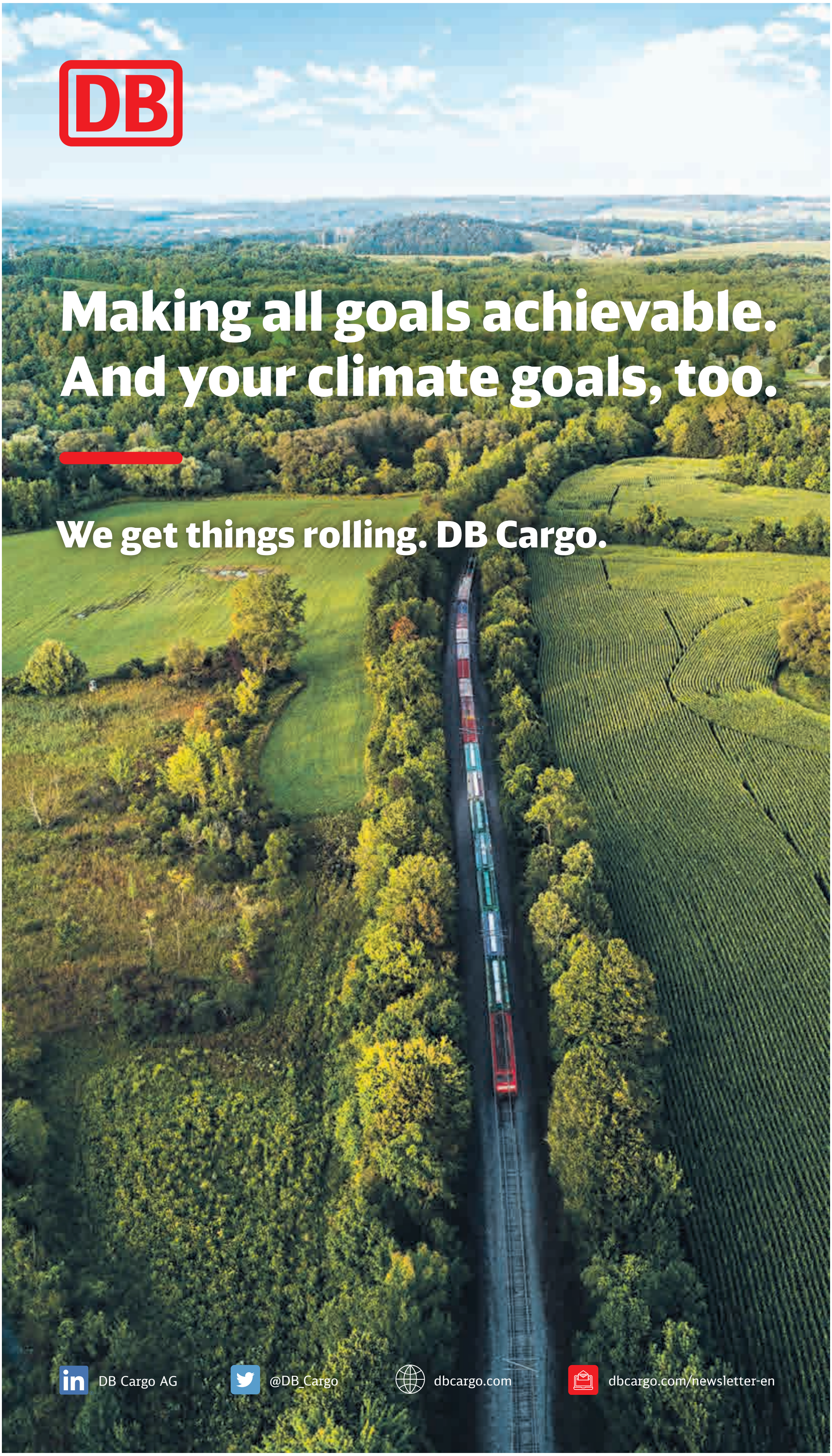
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