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Review

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We are pleased to welcome you to this new issue of *Articles Journal 25*, corresponding to the first half of 2025. In this edition, we continue with our firm mission to offer rigorous and up-to-date analysis on the most relevant issues that define the complex geopolitical, strategic and technological landscape of the 21st century. Through contributions from leading experts, we explore everything from global geopolitical tensions, such as NATO's role in the face of isolationism and multipolarity, to the most disruptive technological advances, such as artificial intelligence and quantum cryptography, which promise to redefine the rules of the game in international security. This semester, we also offer a critical reflection on historical issues, such as relations between Russia and the West, as well as a detailed study of the dynamics of power in cognitive warfare and nuclear deterrence.

As always, our goal is to provide our readers with a deep and multidimensional understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing global actors in an increasingly interconnected and dynamic world. We invite you to explore each of these articles, which will undoubtedly contribute to academic reflection and debate on issues of great importance. We also extend our warmest invitation for you to continue accompanying us on this intellectual journey, as *Artículos Revista 25* reaffirms its position as a benchmark in the dissemination of specialised, high-quality knowledge.

In *Chapter 1*, Magí Castelltort Claramunt introduces us to an in-depth analysis of NATO's role on the 75th anniversary of its founding, placing it in a postmodern geopolitical scenario marked by three major features: regulatory fragmentation, social demilitarisation and the West's identity crisis. The author points out that, in this context, the Atlantic Alliance faces three strategic challenges of enormous significance. The first is *US neo-isolationism*, resulting from both its energy autonomy and its internal priorities, which are pushing it to turn inwards. The second challenge

is *Russian neo-imperialism*, defined as a postmodern project that seeks to recover areas of influence without the need for direct territorial occupation, but rather through strategic, political and even hybrid pressure. The third is *multipolarity*, a narrative that erodes the structural hegemony of the United States and presents a new, more competitive and decentralised international scenario. Faced with this triple challenge, Castelltort Claramunt argues that NATO must rethink and transform itself into a platform for democratic resilience. Moreover, he presents it as an indirect guarantor of the Western welfare state: by sharing the defensive burden among its members, it frees up resources for social investment and thereby reinforces the democratic legitimacy of collective security in the 21st century.

In the following chapter, *Antonio Legaz* focuses his attention on a classic aspect of war: the element of surprise, which is undergoing a process of change in the context of the 21st century, dominated by information and disinformation. The author argues that the revolution in information gathering and analysis—with surveillance technologies, big data exploitation and the growing use of artificial intelligence—has drastically reduced strategic uncertainty. This limits the ability of actors to carry out surprise attacks in the traditional sense. However, he warns that this "end of surprise" is not absolute, as a new challenge has emerged: *disinformation*. The proliferation of false information, data manipulation and information poisoning have given rise to a veritable "digital fog of war," in which information overload and strategic noise generate dangerous false certainties. The work of Legaz does not only trace this transformation of the concept of surprise, but also highlights how intelligence analysis becomes the key to filtering information chaos and turning data into useful knowledge. In this way, he underlines the vital importance of distinguishing between truthful information and strategic manipulation in order to avoid critical vulnerabilities in contemporary conflicts.

In his part, *Arturo García-Vaquero y Pradal* takes us on a historical journey through attempts to fit Russia into Europe since the end of the Cold War. The author explains how, since 1989, the dynamics of power redistribution have pitted Moscow's aspirations against the strategic decisions of the West. While the United States and NATO led the way in security matters, the European Union did so in the commercial and economic spheres. The result of this process was a failure: what began as cooperation ended in rupture and confrontation. The chapter reviews the different stages of Russian-Western relations up to 2022, highlighting both Russian initiatives, conditioned by its perception of insecurity, and Western responses, characterised by a stance that the author describes as exclusionary and clumsy. The conclusion is that mutual distrust and Western misunderstanding have prevailed in a scenario in which the West has acted according to its own interests within international norms, while Russia, still only partially recovered, has failed to escape its own strategic culture.

In the same framework of reflection on Russia, *Francisco Javier Quiñones de la Iglesia* offers a different contribution, focusing on the development of international relations as a discipline in this country. The author recalls that the discipline became academically established after the Second World War, closely linked to US hegemony, which allowed the consolidation of the realist paradigm in the West. In contrast,

in the Soviet Union, the discipline was subject to official Marxist ideology, which reduced analytical approaches to the strategic interests of the state. Only when Soviet specialists were able to access Western literature did they realise that their approaches were close to capitalist structural realism. Quiñones thus traces a path from the Soviet era to the present day, highlighting how the realist approach has prevailed absolutely in Russia, as it offers an ideal theoretical framework for addressing practical foreign policy issues. The conclusion is clear: the primacy of national interest, as a central category of realism, continues to shape Russia's international praxis.

The next contribution, by *Guillermo Pulido Pulido*, takes us into innovative territory: that of "multi-unstable deterrence". The author explains that the proliferation of long-range precision munitions has fundamentally altered the classic concepts of deterrence and strategic stability. First, there is the *levelling effect of precision*, whereby even contenders that are very unequal in size or potential can inflict massive damage on each other thanks to guided weapons. Secondly, this proliferation leads to the emergence of a new type of military conflict, *salvo warfare*, characterised by massive exchanges of precision projectiles. Thirdly, the damage caused by high-precision conventional munitions generates an unprecedented strategic phenomenon: *multi-unstable deterrence*, in which the balance is not maintained in a stable manner, but is fragmented into multiple unstable equilibria. All of this constitutes what Pulido calls the third nuclear era, marked by instability and escalation, in contrast to the stability of the first nuclear era during the Cold War.

Next, *Emma Memmi* takes us to the Mediterranean, particularly to the case of Tunisia, as a key transit area for migration to Europe following the Arab Spring. Her article examines how Tunisian migration flows have created a real security dilemma for the foreign policy of the European Union and its southern-border Member States. Memmi explains that the multipolar context and the anarchic structure of the international system have conditioned European migration policy, leading to a process of *externalisation of borders* towards North African countries. In this context, Tunisia has become a key point of departure and transit on the Central Mediterranean routes. The author also highlights the need to move beyond the Eurocentric approach of current debates and to recognise the power asymmetries between Europe and its southern neighbours. Her work is a critical reflection on how to address this security dilemma in a regional context of growing uncertainty.

The journey continues with *Carlos Alegre Agulló*, who analyses the US Marine Corps' *Force Design 2030*. In a world marked by the so-called "era of competition" and disruptive conflicts such as the war in Europe, the Marines have become an example of a bold transformation process aimed at regaining deterrence capabilities against emerging powers such as China. Alegre Agulló examines how this strategic planning process, guided by the US political will to *pivot to Asia,* constitutes a model of coherence and continuity that can serve as a reference for Spain in its own military reform processes.

Marcos Checa Rubio's chapter focuses on *cognitive warfare* as a strategic vanguard and proposes a dialectical perspective on strategic thinking. Based on a critique of

the fragmented knowledge of modern science, the author advocates the holistic approach of dialectical materialism as a more effective way of adapting to the current geostrategic environment. Cognitive warfare, he argues, has come to occupy a central place in national security strategies, transcending the military to permeate the social and political spheres. In this sense, cognitive warfare becomes a conscious extension of politics by other means, integrating the military, social and state spheres. Checa concludes that China and Russia have a strategic advantage over the West precisely because they apply this holistic vision, while the United States lags behind with its more fragmented approach.

In another academic field, *Iván Soto Maciá* takes us to the technology sector with a topic of great significance for global security: *quantum key distribution* and its geopolitical impact. The author warns that the emergence of quantum computing will pose one of the greatest challenges to modern cryptography and, with it, to information security in the 21st century. In this emerging field, the position of the major powers is decisive. The United States, explains Soto Maciá, maintains a cautious and sceptical approach, while China has made a decisive commitment to leading the research and deployment of this disruptive technology. The chapter examines the reasons behind these divergent approaches, as well as the main scientific advances achieved to date and the practical implementations currently underway. It also analyses the underlying strategy of the actors involved and how the race for secure communications of the future is becoming a privileged arena for projecting interests and consolidating positions of power in the coming international order.

Next, *Antoni Mestre Gascón and Javier García Rodríguez* focus their analysis on *artificial intelligence (AI) as a geopolitical asset*, with special attention to China's strategy and its global impact. The authors describe how technological development has become a determining factor in 21st-century geopolitical competition, placing China as one of the most influential actors. Through initiatives such as *DeepSeek* and an ambitious national plan that sets the goal of AI leadership by 2030, Beijing seeks to consolidate a strategic advantage in security and defence. The chapter examines three key fronts: the role of AI in cybersecurity and hybrid warfare, the deployment of autonomous systems in military operations, and the regulatory and strategic challenges arising from its global expansion. It also analyses the responses of the United States and the European Union, highlighting the urgent need for international regulatory frameworks to limit the risks of proliferation. Mestre and García Rodríguez conclude that China's technological rise not only reconfigures the global balance of power, but also poses major challenges in terms of security, digital governance and international stability.

In a change of register, *Jorge Alcaraz Pérez-Ros* takes us back to a specific episode in recent military history: the role of British signals intelligence on Argentine naval communications during the Falklands War. Although its strategic relevance was decisive, many questions remain unanswered due to the lack of declassification of official documentation. The chapter examines the most likely means of obtaining information, intelligence activity prior to the Argentine landing and, above all, the context of Anglo-American cooperation on intelligence, which provides a robust

explanatory framework for understanding how the interception operations unfolded. This way, Alcaraz Pérez-Ros does not only provide keys to assessing the real scope of these interceptions, but also invites us to re-evaluate the factors that conditioned both the outcome and the development of the conflict.

The work concludes with a review that broadens the perspective to the cross-cutting challenges of our time: *Medio ambiente, seguridad y salud: grandes retos del derecho del siglo XXI* (Tirant lo Blanch, 2024). In its more than 300 pages, this collective work explores the links between environmental challenges, security issues and implications for public health in a globalised context. The review highlights the multidisciplinary nature of the volume and the need to integrate these dimensions into contemporary strategic and legal debate, emphasising that environmental and health issues are increasingly intertwined with security, forcing us to rethink classic categories of law and international relations.

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From the Cold War to the identity crisis: NATO in the face of isolationism, imperialism and multipolarity

Abstract

On the 75th anniversary of its founding, NATO's role in a postmodern geopolitical landscape is marked by normative fragmentation, social demilitarization, and a Western identity crisis. Specifically, there are three strategic challenges: the U.S. withdrawal toward a "neo-isolationism" based on its energy autonomy and domestic priorities; Russian "neo-imperialism" as a postmodern project to recover spheres of influence without territorial occupation; and multipolarity as a narrative that weakens U.S. structural hegemony. In the face of this triple challenge, NATO should transform into a platform for democratic resilience and be understood as an indirect guarantor of the Western welfare state, by enabling the sharing of defense efforts among its members and freeing up resources for social investment, thus reinforcing the democratic legitimacy of collective security in the 21st century.

Keywords

NATO, United States, Neo-isolationism, Russia, Multipolarity

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"No security arrangement for Europe can be effective unless the free European governments and peoples are prepared to pool their resources and to resist by every means at their disposal, including armed force."

Director of the Office of European Affairs (Hickerson) to the Secretary of State

8 March 1948

1 Introduction

NATO's 75th anniversary is not just a historical event; it is a key opportunity to reflect on the role the Alliance has played in shaping the international order and the challenges it faces in an increasingly challenging geopolitical context. Emerging in the midst of the Cold War, under the shadow of the Berlin blockade and the Soviet nuclear threat, the Atlantic Alliance was conceived as a political-military coalition anchored in a modern vision of the world: a bipolar order, structured around ideological blocs, where democratic values, respect for sovereignty and mutual containment were the pillars of the international system. In this framework, NATO was not only a collective defense mechanism, but also a club of liberal democracies, committed to protecting the Western order from communist totalitarianism.[1]

In the current context, however, NATO operates in a "postmodern" environment, characterized by the fragmentation of the normative and identity frameworks that defined the 20th century (Bauman, 2005), particularly after its expansion into Eastern Europe through the incorporation of post-Soviet states with varying degrees of democratic consolidation.

"Post-modernity", as a cultural and epistemological phenomenon, is conceived, according to Lyotard (1979) as "disbelief in the meta-narratives" that previously provided coherence and legitimacy to the international order, a transformation driven by scientific-technical progress itself, but which has simultaneously provoked a crisis in the traditional mechanisms of political and institutional legitimization[2]. This systemic transformation has generated a structural modification in the parameters of internal cohesion, manifested in: (1) questioning of post-Cold War international regulation, (2) increase in nationalist tendencies, and (3) processes of "demilitarization" in certain Western contexts[3]. The obsolescence of the great legitimizing narratives corresponds,

1 And perceived as a temporary creation, unlike the EU, as stated by General de Gaulle "The Treaty of Union constitutes a permanent and definite commitment of the six States, whereas NATO is a circumstantial organization, born of the Soviet threat and called upon to fire one day" Peyrefitte A. (1994). C'était de Gaulle. Vol1. De Fallois/Fayard.

2 Lyotard, J.-F. (1979). La condition postmoderne. Rapport sur le savoir. Les Éditions de Minuit.

3 In the case of Spain, this phenomenon can be explained by two surveys: According to an international survey by Gallup International/Sigma Dos (November 2023), only 29% of Spaniards

as Lyotard points out, to a crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the institutions that depended on it, which in the field of international relations translates into a decrease in the indexes of institutional trust and a growing divergence in strategic priorities among member states (Nye, 2011).[4]

The nationalist tendencies present in key actors adopt specific manifestations. In the United States, an orientation towards what could be called "neo-isolationism" is identified, characterized by policies of strategic selectivity (Posen, 2014) and a pragmatic and transactional approach to traditional multilateral commitments[5]. This repositioning, determined by structural factors such as energy self-sufficiency and domestic fiscal pressures, substantially modifies Washington's role as the main security provider in the Euro-Atlantic space, generating imbalances in the distribution of responsibilities within the allied structure.

For its part, in Moscow, nationalism seems to manifest itself in the form of "neo-imperialism." The behavior of the Russian Federation exhibits a systematic revisionist pattern with respect to the international order consolidated after 1991. Far from seeking a classical territorial restoration, Russian geopolitical revisionism aims to consolidate a normative, energetic and military sphere of influence, often through hybrid tools. Its military interventions in post-Soviet spaces and the Middle East shape a multidimensional strategy aimed at the recovery of spheres of influence. This positioning incorporates elements of the postmodern paradigm through the relativization of normative principles and the fragmentation of hegemonic narratives, creating an environment of strategic ambiguity that hinders NATO's cohesive response.

Thus, postmodernity and its identity crisis, U.S. withdrawal and Russian revisionism define a complex strategic environment, characterized by the coexistence of internal centrifugal pressures and external threats. In order to analytically delimit this scenario, this article poses the following guiding questions:

1. How does postmodernity, understood as a crisis of normative and identity referents, affect NATO's internal legitimacy as a multilateral political-military alliance?

2. To what extent could the strategic retreat of the United States be explained as a structural phenomenon, beyond contingencies associated with the new Trump administration?

would be willing to fight for their country in the event of war, while 53% would not (https://www.sigmados.com/uno-de-cada-dos-espanoles-no-esta-dispuesto-a-luchar-por-su-pais/). However, the Armed Forces enjoy a high social recognition and are repeatedly the most highly valued institution in our country, with an average score of 6.8 out of 10. For example, CIS Barometer of May 2025 (https://www.cis.es)

4 Nye, J. S. (2011). The Future of Power. PublicAffairs.

5 Posen, B. R. (2014). Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy. Cornell University Press.

3. Does Russian geopolitical revisionism constitute a systemic threat or is it a reactive strategy limited by internal factors?

4. Does the emerging multipolarity reflect a structural change in the global distribution of power or does it respond to a postmodern narrative that blurs a persistent US hegemony?

To answer these questions, a qualitative methodology with an interpretative approach will be adopted, based on critical documentary analysis, the study of strategic discourses and the contrast with empirical indicators. The aim is not to offer a definitive diagnosis, but to contribute to the understanding of the processes that are redefining NATO's role in an increasingly uncertain international order.

The article will rely on a combination of techniques: on the one hand, the study of geopolitical discourse focused on the public narratives of U.S., Russian and NATO leaders, diplomats and strategic doctrines; on the other hand, a comparative contextual analysis relating these discourses to material indicators, to assess the coherence between strategic narratives and actual capabilities.

The selection of documentary sources will be structured in five categories:

1. Official and institutional documentation: Reports from multilateral organizations and government agencies that provide verified data on military capabilities, strategic frameworks and budgetary developments.

2. Political-diplomatic sources: Public statements, memoirs and publications of high-level foreign policy and defense officials –both American and Russian– whose direct participation in key decisions gives them a unique empirical value for interpreting the configuration of the contemporary geopolitical scenario.

3. Specialized academic literature: Reference works and articles on international relations, strategic studies, political sociology and polemology, which allow contextualizing current dynamics.

4. Updated sectoral analysis: Recent studies that contribute to update the strategic position of NATO and its main actors.

5. Empirical indicators and databases that allow contrasting the geopolitical discourse with the structural reality.

Since the subject of this study is NATO, the analysis will deliberately focus on the Euro-Atlantic sphere. Although occasional references will be made to China's role in the multipolar narrative, the focus will remain within the scope of the Alliance's direct action, in order to avoid a thematic dispersion that would dilute the depth of the analysis.

With this scaffolding, the study sets out to examine how postmodernity has altered the normative and functional foundations of the Alliance, which will be addressed in the following sections.

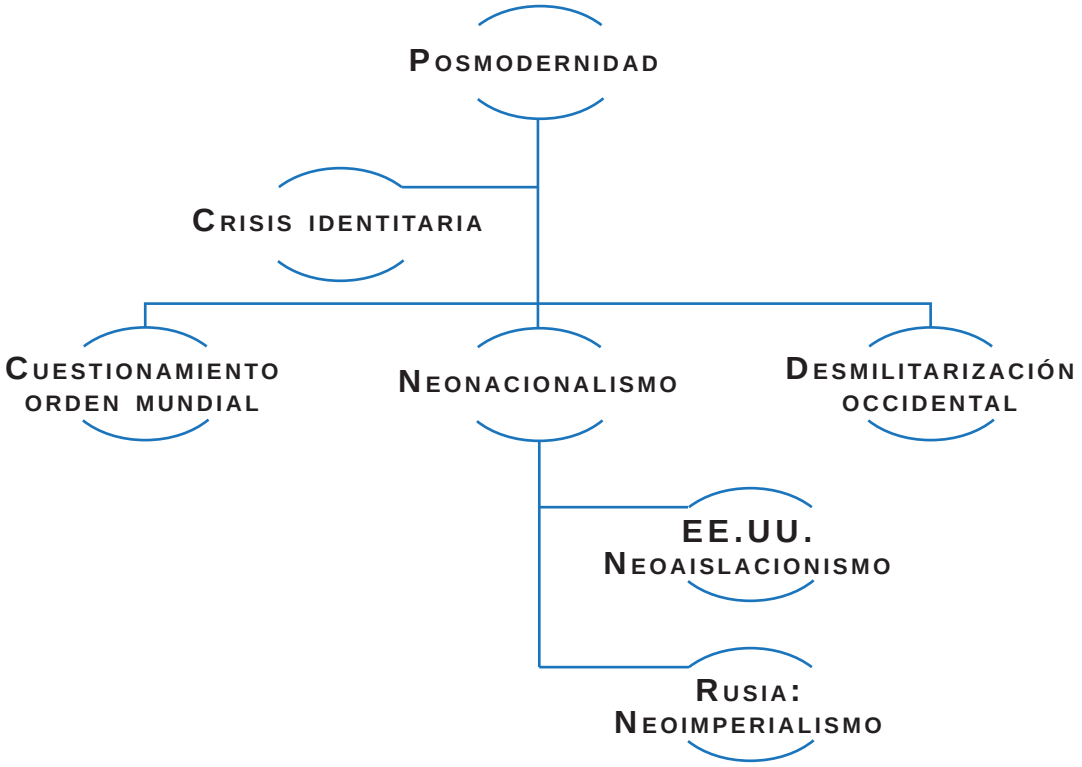


Gráfico 1. Posmodernidad y geopolítica. Fuente: elaboración propia

2 NATO in the face of postmodernity: from democratic bastion to identity crisis

NATO was created to protect the Western democratic-capitalist system against the communist threat. As President Truman (1956) explained, "The Marshall Plan had brought some relief, but the constant threat of unpredictable Soviet measures gave rise to an atmosphere of insecurity and fear among the peoples of Western Europe. (...). Only an inclusive security system could allay these fears." In other words, NATO was to play the role of economic guarantor in countries threatened by the USSR in order to anchor investments and their *postbellum* recovery. It was the era of the German *Wirtschaftswunder* or the French *Trente Glorieuses*, marked by a collective confidence in the system, which motivated citizens to defend it.

During the Cold War, the West clearly positioned itself as the defender of freedom and democracy against communist totalitarianism, in a historical context marked by the *postbellum* optimism of economic recovery in which the Alliance, as envisioned by Truman, provided the necessary institutional stability. As Jervis (2010), scholar and CIA advisor, noted, "the Cold War was not merely a bilateral contest; it was a global struggle in which the identities of the superpowers played a crucial role in shaping alliances"[6].

6 Jervis, R. (2010). Identity and the Cold War. In M. Leffler & O. Westad (Eds.), The Cambridge History of the Cold War (Vol. 2). Cambridge University Press.

However, the oil crises of the 1970s and the successive deindustrializing waves due to globalization seem to have ended up forming, in the West, a "disappointed Postmodernity", according to Lassalle (2017), with a proletarian class for which "voting takes on a contrite character in which rancor surfaces as a kind of vengeful catharsis for having failed to achieve the expectations to which it believed itself entitled"[7]. Western institutions are subjected to the critical examination of their foundations, which favors their external detractors.

This "deconstructivism" would no longer be purely philosophical but real and would be undermining the very foundations of the current world order. For this reason, the postmodern populism that seems to be eating away at Western democracies is creating a new scenario for which NATO does not seem to be prepared. With the current geopolitical fragmentation, postmodern deception seems to break the conviction of citizens in the goodness of the system, which morally disarms the Atlantist democracies in ideological confrontations.

As Colonel Pardo de Santayana (2021) emphasizes, "the question of whether Western values are universal is now a geopolitical question. Ideas and beliefs are once again part of the battlefield."[8] And the fact is that both Russia and China have driven, in their own way, a "de-Westernizing" movement, which aims to unite countries not aligned with the US, the so-called Global Majority (глобальное большинство, globalnoye bolshinstvo), a phenomenon that coincides in turn with a profound Western identity crisis.

Moreover, NATO's eastward enlargement has failed to consolidate it as a true club of democracies. Certainly, the new members of Eastern Europe are experiencing a different, somewhat more optimistic mood because, precisely due to their recent "re-westernization", they are experiencing an improvement in their living conditions. For example, in the last 20 years, the human development indices (HDI) of Poland, Romania, members of NATO and the EU and former members of the Warsaw Pact, have shown greater progress than those of Serbia and Belarus, also former members of the Eastern Bloc but now close to Moscow[9]. Among NATO states, only Albania (0.789) and North Macedonia (0.764) recorded a lower Human Development Index (HDI) than Serbia (0.807) and Belarus (0.797) in 2022[10]. Thus, as President Truman

7 Lassalle, J. M. (2017). Against populism: Cartography of a postmodern totalitarianism. Debate.

8 Pardo De Santayana, J. (2021). Should we oppose the de-Westernization of the world? IEEE Analysis Paper, (37). https://www.ieee.es/. https://www.ieee.es/.

9 Poland has led with an increase in its HDI from 0.855 in 2003 to 0.910 in 2022. Romania has followed closely behind, improving from 0.785 to 0.842. Both Belarus and Serbia have experienced somewhat smaller increases, rising from 0.740 to 0.797 and from 0.750 to 0.807, respectively. Source: hdr.undp.org/en/reports.

10 Latest available data. For guidance purposes, Serbia, with 6.7 million inhabitants, generates a GDP of 65 billion euros, while the Valencian Community, with 5 million inhabitants, produces a GDP of 130 billion, more than twice as much.

envisioned, European military and economic integration has generated tangible social benefits.

However, this "re-Westernization" has not necessarily been accompanied by greater democratization of the new allies nor, most especially, by greater respect for rules, a key aspect of a liberal order based on rules, which NATO is called upon to preserve. Illustratively, the evolution of the World Justice Project (WJP) index reveals marked differences between Western and Eastern European Atlanticists. The former, such as Denmark (1st), Norway (2nd), Finland (3rd) and Sweden (4th), lead the way, reflecting robust justice systems and strong protection of fundamental rights. In Eastern Europe, on the other hand, Poland (31st), and Hungary (73rd) register declines in judicial independence and fundamental rights due to controversial reforms. Turkey (117th) is the member state with the worst score[11]. In this sense, the recent incorporations of Sweden and Finland could represent a turning point in the democratic relativism that seemed to permeate the Alliance in recent decades.

NATO, despite clear U.S. leadership, is an organization based on consensus among its members, where common values play a fundamental role. This operating model is facing growing difficulties in a context of identity fragmentation and differences in adherence to democratic values among its members. As former U.S. Minister Albright (2020) warned, "a NATO whose acceptance of democracy is in doubt would have far less claim to public approval than it has enjoyed in the past."[12] This risk is compounded in an environment where the current Neo-Cold War is fought in a context of more blurred ideologies; although Moscow insists on defining itself as anti-Western, the truth is that its conservatism, especially its Orthodox Christianity, brings it identitarily close to sectors of the U.S., particularly evangelical-based Trumpism[13]. In fact, only 58% of US Republicans perceive Russia as an enemy, compared to 67% of Democrats.[14]

Finally, contemporary post-modernity also seems to favor a "demilitarization", the result of the rejection by societies, especially democratic ones, of war and external interference, which makes NATO's military missions more difficult. A comparison between the Korean War (1950-1953) and the Afghan War (2001-2021) illustrates this evolution. The former would represent a "modern" approach, a contest between states with unquestionable popular support, as demonstrated by General McArthur's return to New York despite having been dismissed by Truman. At its peak, more than 325,000 U.S. troops were stationed on the Asian peninsula, of which today, seven

11 WORLD JUSTICE PROJECT (2024). https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/global. Accessed 11-05-2025.

12 Albright, M. (2020). Hell and Other Destinations. HarperCollins.

13 According to Karaganov (2025), a former Kremlin advisor, "God, and therefore faith in the higher destiny of man, should become part of the Russian dream-idea, even if someone does not believe in Him" in what seems like a simile of the American "In God we trust".

14 PEW RESEARCH CENTER (2024). Partisan Divisions Over NATO and Ukraine. https://www.pewresearch.org

decades later, almost 29,000 still remain in a Republic that has established itself as a democratic-capitalist bastion in Asia.

In contrast, the international mission in Afghanistan would exemplify a "post-modern" context, with a larger NATO-led coalition fighting a complex and diffuse terrorist network. Citizen pressure, especially through social media and the press, forced the contending to formulate extremely vague objectives and narratives, sometimes contravening strict military logic. Moreover, to avoid civilian casualties and abuses of power, the rules of engagement were very restrictive, drafted by jurisconsults rather than military men, which would have demoralized the deployed troops and hindered the success of the mission. As General McMaster (2024), President Trump's former chief of staff, recalls in his memoirs, [U.S. embassy staff in Afghanistan] "lamented the lack of authority for our military to pursue the enemy, describing the restrictive rules of engagement as a sign that "we were not taking the war seriously"".[15]

And is that, as stated by General Mattis (2019), former US defense minister, "if a democracy does not trust its troops, then it should not go to war."[16] This is the question that every society should resolve before embarking on military conflict resolution; the media and political pressure to intervene in foreign genocides and civil wars contrasts with the high citizen intolerance to own human losses, which motivates a sort of "pro-forma intervention", where the stated objectives are not accompanied by the necessary resources to achieve them.

3 U.S. "Neo-isolationism": the "demilitarization" of post-modern democracies

The phenomenon of "demilitarization" described above perhaps finds its most evident expression in U.S. "neo-isolationism." This trend, particularly visible under the new Trump administration, reflects the structural limitations experienced by advanced democracies in sustaining global military commitments in the face of domestic social demands. The U.S. electorate that voted for the current president, composed mostly of a non-college working class from the *Rust Belt* and rural areas, clearly prioritizes economic protection, strengthening national identity and a foreign policy pragmatism that generates tangible benefits for the country (Ruffini, 2023)[17]. In this context, Trump's promise to end "endless wars" –such as those in Iraq and

15 McmEaster, H.R. (2024). At War With Ourselves. HarperCollins Publishers.

16 Mattis, J. N. and West, F.J. (2019). Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead. Random House.

17 Ruffini, P. (2023). Party of the people : inside the multiracial populist coalition remaking the GOP. Simon & Schuster.

The Rust Belt is a region of the northeastern and midwestern U.S., marked by its industrial past and an economic decline following deindustrialization. In the 2024 election, Donald Trump won in the key Rust Belt states of Pennsylvania (with its economic capital Philadelphia), Michigan (Detroit) and Wisconsin (Milwaukee).

Afghanistan– and withdraw U.S. troops from theaters of conflict has been central to his discourse and responds to the weariness of his electoral base regarding prolonged military engagements abroad[18].

Against this backdrop of retrenchment, two factors seem to emerge as defining the new paradigm of post-modern American demilitarization: energy sovereignty, the foundation of unprecedented strategic autonomy, and the pressure of a growing social bill, which competes directly with military spending for limited budgetary resources.

3.1 Energy self-sufficiency: a pillar of neo-isolationism

The US energy transformation represents one of the most significant geopolitical shifts of the 21st century and constitutes the main material support for its neo-isolationism. In 2018, the United States became the world's largest oil producer, culminating an evolution that took its crude oil generation from 6.5 million barrels per day in 2012 to a record 13.4 million in August 2024 (U.S. Energy Information Administration [EIA], 2024a)[19]. In parallel, natural gas extraction soared from 66 billion cubic feet per day in 2012 to 103.6 billion in 2023 (EIA, 2024b).[20]

This energy revolution has not only shielded the United States from the traditional vulnerabilities of the global market, but has fundamentally redefined its international position, allowing it to contemplate a strategic retreat unthinkable in previous eras. As O'Sullivan (2017) points out, this new reality configures a geopolitical scenario with "a Russia more petulant than powerful" and a China less antagonistic to the international order because it would not be forced to control resources vital to its economy.[21]

The tension between European NATO allies with the Reagan administration during the Cold War, with a very similar scenario over the construction of the Trans-Siberian gas pipeline, is a long time ago: sanctions against the former USSR for martial law in Poland, which Germany and France did not support; an attempt to delay the construction of the pipeline, and the promotion of the development of alternatives in the North Sea and Norway (Department of State, 1982)[22]. Current US energy

18 Indeed during his first term, the Trump administration oversaw the withdrawal of troops from Syria, Iraq, Somalia and Afghanistan, and signed the Doha Agreement with the Taliban for a conditional total withdrawal from Afghanistan, which was later culminated by Biden.

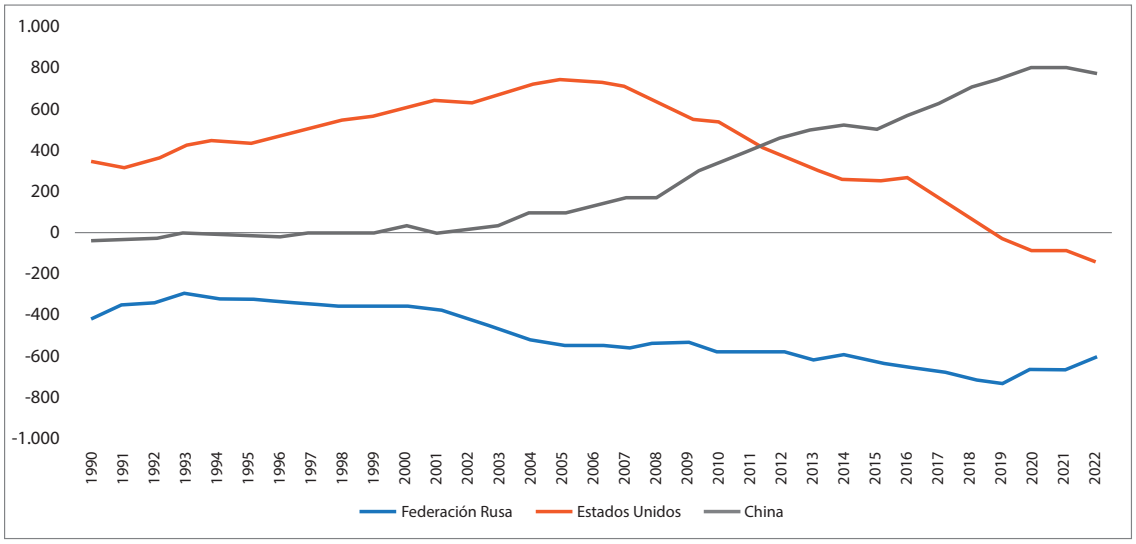
19 U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA). (2024a). U.S. crude oil production hits record high. Retrieved from https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=63824

20 U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA). (2024b). Annual dry natural gas production. Retrieved from https://www.eia.gov/naturalgas/annual/

21 O'SULLIVAN, M. L. (2017). Windfall: How the New Energy Abundance Upends Global Politics and Strengthens America's Power. Simon & Schuster.

22 DEPARTMENT OF STATE (1982). Debrief of Under Secretary Buckley's Trip to Europe. https://history.state.gov/

self-sufficiency, on the other hand, has kept the Atlantic bloc united against Russia, largely due to lower fuel costs[23] , a scenario that was unimaginable during the Cold War. Europe, by geography, will continue to depend on Russian gas supplies, but the global abundance created by the US will limit its use as a diplomatic weapon, making NATO less vulnerable in this Neo-Cold War than in the previous one, demonstrating how demilitarization does not necessarily imply a weakening of collective security when it is backed by complementary economic strengths[24].



Energy balance of payments. Source: Enerdata (2024)

This new US energy position has eliminated the strategic need to control regions such as the Mediterranean to secure access to Middle Eastern resources, one of the fundamental historical reasons for the integration of Italy, Greece and Turkey into NATO (Department of State, 1951)[25]. It has also allowed Washington to dispense with privileged relations with actors such as Saudi Arabia, previously crucial for stabilizing oil prices in times of crisis. Moreover, the traditional Persian Gulf allies may now see Washington as a rival because it is the world's largest producer and because it is no longer their main customer, which is now China and, in time, perhaps India as well.

23 The Brent price averaged $83 per barrel for the full year 2023, compared to $101 in 2022; By mid-February 2024, the Brent price was $85 per barrel, similar to the average price for the full year 2023, and well below $101 in 2022.

24 In 2023, the US produced almost 50% of the liquefied natural gas imported by Europe, followed by Qatar (14%) and Russia (13%), when in 2021 it had been 27% (Zaretskaya, 2024); European imports from Russia fell from 150 billion cubic meters in 2021 to less than 43 in 2023 thanks to the US and Norway, both NATO member states, which offset the falls and reduced dependence on Russian imports. Consequently, US energy autonomy has shielded Europe from the possible impacts of a global shortage of key materials for economies such as France, Spain or the Netherlands, the main EU importers.

25 DEPARTMENT OF STATE (1951). Briefing Book Prepared in the Department of State for the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (Eisenhower)2.

https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951v03p1/d251

Energy sovereignty thus represents the material support of neo-isolationism, providing Washington with the unprecedented ability to reconsider its global commitments and develop a more selective and less interventionist foreign policy. This retreat, far from being a sign of decline, would reflect the strategic adaptation of a postmodern democracy that prioritizes efficiency in the use of its budgetary resources over indiscriminate commitments.

3.2 Social bill (and fracture): defense versus welfare?

U.S. neo-isolationism can also be explained to a large extent by an increasingly visible structural tension: the growing pressure of social spending on public resources, drastically limiting the capacity to mobilize for military purposes. This fundamental transformation, characteristic of postmodern democracies, represents a paradigm shift that U.S. Minister Eagleburger (1993) clearly anticipated: "During the Cold War it was relatively easy to justify national security expenditures and generate support for sustained U.S. involvement abroad. It is infinitely more difficult now."[26].

The budget figures reveal this transformation in stark contrast. As Figure 3 shows, in 1962, the United States spent 9% of its GDP on defense, whereas in 2024 this proportion fell to 3%, a drop of two-thirds in relative terms. This decline has not been accidental but the result of a shift in priorities towards social spending. Social Security has doubled to 5% of GDP, Medicare now accounts for 3.8% of GDP and Medicaid accounts for 2.3% of GDP[27]. These three programs, which barely existed in the 1960s, now total $2,980 billion, quadrupling the defense budget (U.S. Congressional Budget Office, 2024)[28].

This structural dilemma between "guns or butter" represents the very essence of postmodern demilitarization: citizens of advanced democratic societies increasingly prioritize investment in social welfare over military projects[29]. This trend generates

26 Eagleburger, L. S. (1993). Memorandum For Secretary Of State - Designate Warren Christopher. 5 January. https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/1993-01-05-Memorandum-for-Secretary-of-State-Designate-Warren-Christopher-from-Lawrence-S-Eagleburger.pdf

27 Medicare is federal health insurance for people age 65 and older and for some people under 65 with certain disabilities or conditions, while Medicaid is a joint federal and state program that helps cover medical costs for people with limited income and resources.

https://www.hhs.gov/answers/medicare-and-medicaid/what-is-the-difference-between-medicare-medicaid/index.html

28 U.S. CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE (CBO) (2024). Atlas Of Military Compensation. Retrieved from https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2023-12/59475-Military-Compensation-Infographic.pdf

29 The "guns or butter" dilemma is an economic concept to illustrate the choice faced by governments between spending on national defense or on food in times of conflict; it has its origins in the debate over the use of nitrate as fertilizer or as gunpowder during World War I. For a Spanish analysis: Jurado-Sánchez, J., and Jiménez-Martín, J. A. (2019).

unavoidable political pressures to reduce defense spending, a phenomenon that President Eisenhower (1953) anticipated with remarkable prescience: "Every gun made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, means, in the final analysis, a theft from those who are hungry and not fed, those who are cold and not clothed"[30].

The urgency of this budgetary reorientation is evident when analyzing the social shortcomings of the United States: despite being the world's largest economy, the country presents worrying indicators such as an infant mortality rate of 5.6 deaths per 1.000 live births –much higher than that of Spain (3.0)– and profound inequalities, as the mortality of African-American babies (10.9) is double that of whites (4.5) and far exceeds that of Hispanics (4.8) and Asians (3.5);[31] furthermore, the rate varies from 8.9 in Mississippi to 3.1 in Vermont,[32] which underlines the internal pressure to allocate more resources to social needs instead of military spending.

In this context of budgetary tensions, NATO takes on a new strategic significance: not only as a military alliance, but also as a mechanism for managing the inevitable demilitarization of advanced democracies. By distributing defensive burdens among multiple actors and generating economies of scale, this structure frees resources for social purposes without compromising collective security. Without the Alliance, each member state's military spending would be higher, surely at the expense of its education, health or pensions.[33]

However, the sustainability of this model depends critically on an equitable sharing of responsibilities that, so far, has not fully materialized. The United States continues to assume 68% of the alliance's total spending in 2023, an unsustainable proportion in the long term considering its growing domestic social commitments.

Therefore, in order to justify a redistribution of burdens in the Atlantic area, it seems essential to transform the social narrative about NATO, presenting it not only as a military instrument, but also as an indirect pillar of the European welfare state. By distributing the costs of collective defense among member states, significant domestic savings can be achieved without increasing the tax burden.[34]

The need for this rebalancing of responsibilities is increasingly reflected in U.S. policy discourse. Burns (2019), former CIA director under Biden, argued, "a deeper

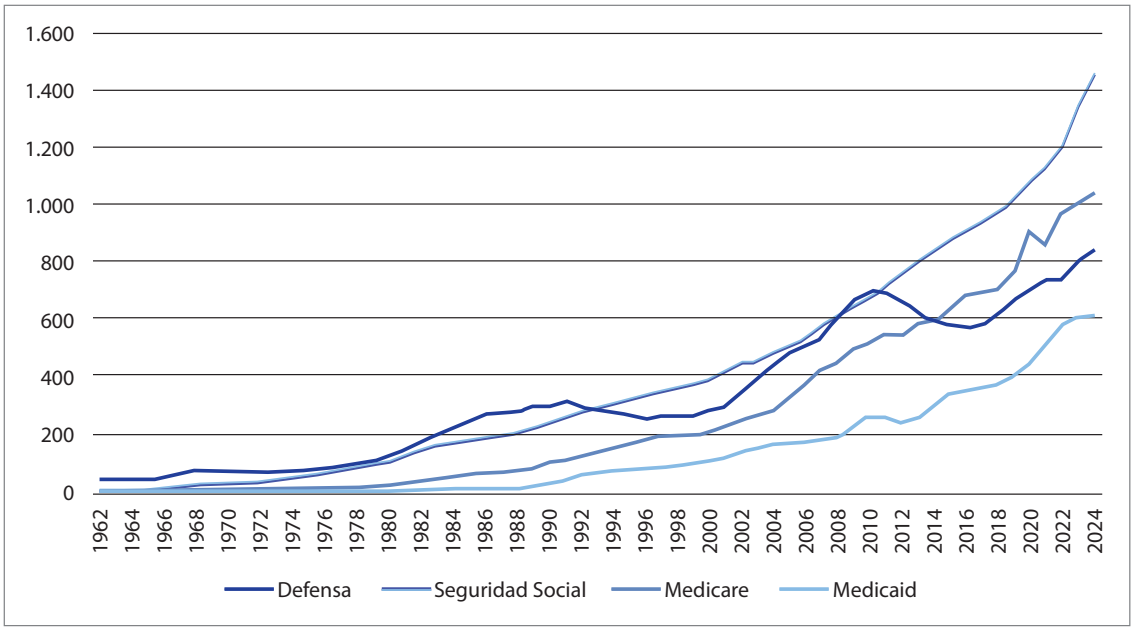
30 Eisenhower, E. (1953). The Chance for Peace. American Society of Newspaper Editors. April 16.

31 CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (2024). Infant Mortality in the United States, 2022. National Vital Statistics Reports, 73(5), 1-28.

32 Ely, D.M., Driscoll, A.K. (2024).

33 As happened in Greece during the 2008 financial crisis, when social adjustments were greater than those of defense spending. Gabellini, G. (2016). Greece, chronicle of a disaster foretold. Perspectives. January/June.

34 For this reason Coffey, L. (2024) proposed that the finance ministers of NATO member states hold regular meetings.



U.S. military and social expenditures.source: Congressional Budget Office (2024)

U.S. focus on Asia makes the transatlantic partnership more, not less, meaningful. It implies a new strategic division of labor with our European allies, where they assume even more responsibility for order on their continent."[35] This view is echoed also by Mattis (2019), former defense minister under Trump: "NATO cannot hold together if the burden-sharing remains so unequal. Europeans cannot expect Americans to care more about their future than they do."[36] Both perspectives, coming from senior officials with different political orientations, underline the structural and not merely conjunctural nature of this change in approach.

In view of this situation, American neo-isolationism would represent not a temporary anomaly but the most visible manifestation of a structural transformation in post-modern democracies, which are facing increasing difficulties in mobilizing resources for military purposes in the face of domestic social demands. Energy self-sufficiency has given the United States greater room for maneuver to reconsider the scope of its global commitments, while the pressure of social spending is driving the search for more collaborative and selective formulas in its foreign policy, to the detriment of traditional unilateral military leadership. This process, rather than an unequivocal confirmation of a multipolar *Weltanschauung*, reflects Washington's adaptation to an international environment characterized by competition between powers and the need for alliances, without necessarily implying the renunciation of its dominant role, but rather a redefinition of its priorities and methods of leadership.[37]

35 Burns, W. J. (2019). The back channel. Random house.

36 Mattis, J. N. and West, F.J. (2019). Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead. Random House.

37 It is worth considering that the collaboration model that Washington finally promotes could be close to that of the international consortium responsible for the development of the F-35, with a business rather than institutional approach. This scheme, for example, allows the exclusion of actors

4 Russian revisionism as a manifestation of postmodern "neo-imperialism"

Russian revisionism represents one of the most complex and determining geopolitical phenomena of the 21st century. Rising from the ashes of the Soviet collapse, this movement has gone from an internal ideological debate to consolidate itself as an imperial project with postmodern characteristics, challenging the international order established after the Cold War. Russia's transformation from a country in the throes of an identity crisis to an actor claiming its space as a global power reveals the profound contradictions of a world where traditional narratives of imperialism intermingle with new forms of power projection and historical nostalgia.

4.1 The evolution of Russian revisionism: from ideological debate to postmodern "neo-empire"

In the current geopolitical landscape, NATO faces its greatest challenge in Russian military aggressiveness, evidenced since the intervention in Georgia (2008) and extended to Syria (since 2015), Kazakhstan (2022) and Ukraine (2014 and since 2022). This phenomenon reflects a paradoxical postmodern manifestation: while the West embraces relativism and the deconstruction of established narratives, Russia has walked an antithetical path, revitalizing its traditional values and imperial ambitions vis-à-vis the Atlanticist bloc[38]. The identity vacuum after the Soviet collapse led to a profound national crisis that resulted in a sense of imperial nostalgia, fertilizing the ground for the current Russian neo-imperialism.

This postmodern nostalgia, however, did not emerge unchallenged within Russian political thought itself. During the 1990s and early 2000s, there developed mainly two clearly opposing currents of thought regarding Russia's future and its position in the world, represented not by mere theorists but by figures who occupied high echelons of power and held the country's destiny in their hands.

On the one hand, the ideological current, represented by figures such as Aleksandr Dugin or Yevgeny Primakov (former Foreign Minister and Prime Minister), advocated a reaffirmation of Russian imperial sovereignty through an autonomous foreign policy and

who do not make significant financial contributions to the project or who dissociate themselves geostrategically, as was the case with Turkey when it acquired Russian military equipment. However, recent reports highlight serious problems in the estimation of costs associated with these programs, which seems to be a recurrent problem in this type of military initiatives (GAO, 2024).

38 For example Dugin (1997) "The fate of Russians and their great future does not depend today on how many Russians are outside the Russian Federation, nor on what our political or economic situation is at the moment, but on whether we will have enough weapons to defend our independence militarily against Russia's only and natural 'potential enemy' - the United States and the North Atlantic bloc."

the consolidation of a sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space. On the other hand, the more pragmatic economist current, led by Yegor Gaidar (former Minister of Economy and Finance and former Acting Prime Minister) and Andrei Kovalev (prominent diplomat in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), advocated the integration of Russia into global economic structures and the adoption of liberal market-oriented reforms.

Gaidar, from his experience as an architect of Russian economic reforms and his empirical and institutional analysis, argued that the Soviet system collapsed because of structural inefficiencies in centralized planning, inability to adapt to technological change and critical dependence on oil exports. He believed that the only viable solution for Russia's future was liberal economic reform and integration into global markets. As the main person responsible for "shock therapy" in the 1990s, he advocated that transforming Russia into a modern market economy was the only path to stability and prosperity, despite the social costs and strong political opposition that these reforms generated[39].

In contrast, Dugin (1997), whose influence extended to military circles and Putin's entourage, offered a geopolitical and civilizational interpretation of the Soviet collapse, placing it within the framework of a historical struggle between "land power" (Eurasia) and "sea power" (Atlantism). According to him, the disintegration of the USSR was not an inevitable systemic failure, but a geopolitical dismantling orchestrated by the West[40]. Primakov (2004), for his part, although less radical than Dugin, adopted his ideas as Foreign Minister and later as Prime Minister to qualify Western military interventions in the former Yugoslavia as "*NATO unilateralism under American leadership*" and advocated a multipolar foreign policy counterbalancing American hegemony[41].

The severe financial crisis of 1998, which erupted precisely during Primakov's term as Prime Minister, triggered by the fall in oil prices and the accumulation of foreign debt, proved to be the turning point that definitively tipped the balance towards Dugin's thesis. As Gilman (2010), IMF representative in Russia during the crisis, states, "Understanding the 1998 default is critical to appreciating the antipathy most Russians still feel toward the 1990s and the comfort they have found since Vladimir Putin and later Dmitry Medvedev came to power."[42] The perceived failure of Gaidar's liberal economic reforms, coupled with the traumatic impact of IMF intervention, deeply discredited the economistic and pragmatic vision, consolidating in Russian society a revisionist view that yearned to regain its lost status as a superpower.

This dynamic has crystallized into what Lo (2015) terms "postmodern empire," where, without seeking direct territorial reconstruction of the USSR, the Kremlin pursues strategic, economic, and normative hegemony over post-Soviet Eurasia,

39 Gaidar, Y. (2007). Collapse of an Empire: Lessons for Modern Russia. Brookings Institution Press.

40 Dugin, A. (1997). The Foundations of Geopolitics: The Geopolitical Future of Russia. Arktogeja.

41 Primakov, Y. (2004). Russian Crossroads: Toward the New Millennium. Yale University Press.

42 Gilman, M. G. (2010). No precedent, no plan : inside Russia's 1998 default. The MIT Press.

exerting influence without the administrative burdens of classical empire[43]. This dual approach reflects the triumph of Dugin and Primakov's *Weltanschauung* adapted to contemporary realities, reasserting Russia's position as an influential power, often at the expense of international norms and regional stability. According to Kovalev (2017), from his diplomatic experience, the ideal international relations paradigm for Moscow would be the Yalta-Potsdam agreements, where the victorious powers of World War II delimited their zones of influence, arrogated to themselves a monopoly on nuclear weapons and the right to veto decisions agreed upon at the UN[44]. This nostalgic vision of a world order where Russia occupied a privileged place contrasted with the post-Cold War model, the unilateral *Pax Americana*, which sought to generalize democratic values in the international arena.[45]

4.2 Geopolitical tensions and the future of Russian neo-imperialism

This emergence of Russian revisionism as an expression of a post-modern neo-imperialism has generated inevitable tensions with the West, the roots of which can be identified in three main causes. Firstly, the persistence of the legacy of the Cold War: the US had relied on Islamism in its ideological confrontation against atheistic communism, which showed that old alliances and misgivings still conditioned the bilateral relationship and hindered a full normalization. Second, geopolitical competition and the dispute over zones of influence: the proposal to integrate Russia into NATO never materialized, in part because Washington had turned to China to weaken the USSR, taking advantage of the rifts between Mao and Stalin. As Clinton advisor Stent (2019) acknowledged, "NATO's open-door policy meant that, in theory, Russia was eligible to join, although that might have raised questions about whether NATO was ready to come to Russia's defense in a potential conflict with China;"[46] Indeed, Primakov (2004) himself acknowledges in his memoirs that several European statesmen had commented to him that "it was absolutely inappropriate to give Russia guarantees against any threat from Asia. If Russia were to join NATO, such guarantees would be necessary". Finally, a third cause could be the fear of a leadership bicephaly within a NATO with an integrated Russia, as Primakov (2004) also noted: "And then what, two centers would be formed in NATO, the United States and Russia?"[47].

43 Lo, B. (2015). Russia and the New World Disorder. Brookings institution press.

44 Kovalev, A. (2017). Russia's Dead End: An Insider's Testimony from Gorbachev to Putin. Potomac Books.

45 The concept of Pax Americana Unipolar refers to a period of U.S. global dominance following the end of the Cold War in 1991, characterized by U.S. military, economic and cultural hegemony. Key proponents of this idea include Paul Wolfowitz, who advocated U.S. primacy to prevent the rise of rival powers, and Madeleine Albright, who promoted American leadership in the maintenance of international institutions and the spread of liberal values.

46 Stent, A. (2019). Putin's World: Russia Against the West and With the Rest. Hachette.

47 Primavok (2004) op.cit.

These fundamental tensions were in turn aggravated by NATO's successive eastward enlargements, which seemed to be more politically than technically driven, lacking the necessary diplomatic and military backing. According to the Czech-born former U.S. minister Madeleine Albright (2020), the Alliance was supposed to expand without the need for Russian consent: "The theory, apparently, is that Russia's reward for losing the Cold War should have been a veto over alliance decisions."[48] However, this position did not have a strong diplomatic consensus within the Western establishment itself. Burns (2019), then U.S. ambassador to Moscow and later CIA director under President Biden, expressed significant reservations, "it seemed to me that NATO expansion was at best premature and at worst unnecessarily provocative."[49] From the Russian perspective, General Dvorkin (2008) anticipated the divisive consequences of this policy: "The NATO accession process is a democratization process that will lead to a civilizational schism between Russia and its neighbors, if they join the Atlantic bloc"[50].

The absence of adequate military-technical analysis was especially evident in the subsequent attempts to incorporate Georgia and Ukraine. Gates (2014), former U.S. Secretary of Defense, called these initiatives strategic recklessness:

> "Trying to bring Georgia and Ukraine into NATO was truly overkill. (...) Were Europeans, much less Americans, willing to send their sons and daughters to defend Ukraine or Georgia? Hardly. Therefore, NATO expansion was a political act, not a carefully considered military commitment, which undermines the purpose of the alliance and recklessly ignores what the Russians considered their own vital national interests."[51].

Another factor contributing to the deterioration of relations between Russia and the West was the deployment of the missile shield in Europe. Although the U.S. initially considered it necessary to defend the Alliance against Iranian and Syrian threats, former Warsaw Pact members, such as Poland, justified the deployment on purely domestic grounds, arguing that it provided supplementary defense guarantees against a possible Russian threat, not Iranian or Syrian, beyond the generic commitment of Article V of the Washington Treaty. To avoid further U.S.-Russian antagonism, Minister Gates made the deployment of the missiles in Europe conditional on the progress of the Iranian ballistic project, perhaps hoping that Moscow could mediate with Tehran, its ally. Unfortunately, the objective was not achieved, and Iran continues to advance its ballistic capabilities, while U.S. systems such as the Aegis Ashore remain operational despite Russian objections.[52]

48 Albright, M. (2020). Op.cit.

49 Burns (2019). Op.cit.

50 Dvorkin, V. (2008). Pochemu rasshirenie NATO dolzhno trevozhit' voennych professionalov. https://www.ej.ru/?a=note&id=7969

51 GATES, R.M. (2014). Duty : memoirs of a Secretary at war. Alfred Knopf.

52 Aegis Ashore uses advanced radar to detect and track incoming missiles and launch interceptor missiles before they can reach their targets. Based on technology originally for ships, it has been

> All these geopolitical dynamics are those that would have contributed to consolidate Russian revisionism as a postmodern neo-imperialist expression. This growing Russian assertiveness, manifested in the invasion of Ukraine, seems to ratify, moreover, Bouthoul's (1967) classic postulate that "war is the luxury of rich and powerful nations", since it is only after becoming socio-economically entrenched that Moscow has felt strong enough to initiate a conflagration[53]. This traditional view is in turn subscribed to by some contemporary Russian intellectuals such as Karaganov (2025): "Russia has turned in on itself, has returned –out of necessity, but also as a result of having finally mustered the necessary will– to its traditional state of war against external invaders. Thus, it has finally begun to grow economically and technologically through import substitution. This is the road to sovereign development and to the freedom of the nation to choose its own course."[54].

However, there is a crucial limiting factor for these Russian neo-imperial ambitions: the demographic crisis. Indeed, the war in Ukraine will foreseeably hurt a population already badly affected by high mortality and aging. Despite the increase in the birth rate from 1.16 children per woman in 1999 to 1.8 in 2016, thanks to the economic boom, Russia has been losing inhabitants since 2018, a trend aggravated by the pandemic and the war, which would force it to adopt a military strategy based on minimizing human losses and not so much on maximizing its territorial power, a "*stratégie de l'homme rare*", according to Todd (2024), which would confirm the probability of a tactical use of nuclear weapons in case of threat, and would draw a war scenario of about five years maximum, when the effects of the ephemeral demographic hatching would dissipate and it would be even more difficult to recruit soldiers (Druyan Feldman and Mil-Man, 2023).[55]

As Balzer (2024) notes, perhaps "Putin understood that Russia's economic and demographic challenges mean that the country will not be in a more favorable condition at any time in the coming decades."[56] If this hypothesis holds true, Russian

adapted for use on land. The two main European sites are in Deveselu, Romania, and Redzikowo, Poland. Both work in coordination with radars in Turkey to provide early warning and tracking information.

53 BOUTHOUL, G. (1967). Sociologie de la politique. Presses Universitaires de France.

54 KARAGANOV, S.A. (2025). To Eurasia with Intellectual Freedom. Russia in Global Affairs. https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/eurasia-karaganov/

55 DRUYAN FELDMAN, B. C.; MIL-MAN, A. (2023). The War in Ukraine: Exacerbating Russia's Demographic Crisis. INSS Insight, No. 1754. https://www.inss.org.il/publication/russia-demographic/. TODD, E. (2024). La Défaite de l'Occident. Gallimard.

56 BALZER, H. (2024). A Russia without Russians? Putin's disastrous demographics. Atlantic Council. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/russia-tomorrow/a-russia-without-russians-putins-disastrous-demographics/

neo-imperialism, fueled by a postmodern imperial nostalgia, may have an approaching expiration date, determined not by ideology but by stark demographic reality.[57]

5 NATO in the face of multipolarity as a post-modern vision of the geopolitical scenario

Today's multipolarity contrasts with the bipolar structure of the Cold War, with three nuclear powers –the US, China and Russia– dominating the UN Security Council (US Congress, 2023)[58]. This *Weltanschauung*, promoted, among others, by Primakov (2004) when he was Russian Prime Minister, can be understood as a postmodern conceptual construct that interprets the international order in transition to a fragmented system where these three powers seek to balance global power.

Since the end of the 20th century, this multipolar narrative has gained strength in both Moscow and Beijing, constituting a strategic response to the US policy of global democratic promotion and its interventions in internal conflicts in third countries (Rwanda, ex-Yugoslavia), which, according to this perspective, undermine fundamental principles such as international stability and national sovereignty. The war in Ukraine has reinforced this view by revealing the European military imbalance and the decisive importance of conventional means such as missiles and low-cost munitions. As Kashin and Sushentsov (2024) point out, this conflict has demonstrated the crucial importance of mass production of unguided munitions and missiles in contemporary conventional wars[59].

In this context, the productive structure of the European powers, with more than three quarters of their GDP concentrated in the service sector, reveals a strategic vulnerability that feeds the multipolar discourse. These economies, although statistically robust, are configured to prosper in an environment of peaceful globalization, not in a scenario of military confrontation. This reality considerably limits their ability, especially in the short term, to translate their economic might into

57 However, according to Admiral Stavridis (2014), former Allied High Command, Russian resentment towards the West would have structural overtones because of its leaders' perception of playing a "bad hand" on the geopolitical chessboard: demographic crisis, Islamic terrorist threats, Chinese demographic pressure, and the need to maintain a vast nuclear arsenal with a highly oil-dependent economy. Consequently, the Russian-Western antagonism could persist for decades.

58 U.S. CONGRESS (2023). AMERICA'S STRATEGIC POSTURE The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States. October 2023.

https://armedservices.house.gov/sites/republicans.armedservices.house.gov/files/Strategic-Posture-Committee-Report-Final.pdf?gsid=7cec988b-5a55-4e46-a5e8-70aa9de3255c

59 "The Ukrainian conflict has once again demonstrated the wisdom of Friedrich Engels' words that `war has become a branch of big industry` (1968). But the West seems to have forgotten this truism, having moved its production to countries with cheaper labor. This, in turn, led to a paradox when a coalition of 50 countries supplying Ukraine could not match Russia in terms of supply of artillery shells for the front. " KASHIN, V.B. and SUSHENTSOV, A.A. (2024).

effective military force, particularly in conflicts that do not pose existential threats. This European structural weakness reinforces the narrative promoted by Moscow and Beijing of a world where power is distributed among powers with different strengths, moving away from the model of Western hegemony that prevailed after the Cold War. However, as Aznar warns, this emerging multipolarity "is not per se a necessarily more peaceful order nor [...] a stable product" but would accentuate global conflict (Aznar Fernández-Montesinos, 2025).[60]

This condition, on the other hand, does not apply in the case of the United States, since, despite being an economy clearly specialized in services, it is home to the five largest global defense companies[61]. Moreover, as Figure 4 reveals, there appears to be an overwhelming U.S. leadership in global military spending, with $916 billion in 2023, equivalent to the combined budget of the following eight countries in the ranking: China (296), Russia (109), India (83), Saudi Arabia (76), United Kingdom (75), Germany (66), Ukraine (64) and France (61). (SIPRI, 2024).[62]

Moreover, the United States maintains an undisputed superiority in global naval power projection thanks to its 11 nuclear-powered aircraft carriers in active service (10 of the Nimitz class and 1 of the Gerald R. Ford class), a capability that no other power matches: China has only three conventional aircraft carriers (Liaoning, Shandong and Fujian) and Russia just one, currently out of service for repairs (Admiral Kuznetsov) (IISS, 2024),[63]. This difference is fundamental, since U.S. nuclear aircraft carriers can operate in any ocean for long periods without frequent logistical support, giving them an unattainable autonomy and global reach for their rivals. [64]

Similarly, the network of military bases abroad would further reinforce this unipolar hegemony. The United States maintains more than 750 bases in more than 80 countries, a figure unmatched by the 21 Russian bases and only 2 Chinese facilities abroad (Djibouti and Cambodia). This infrastructure allows for rapid intervention capacity, robust logistics and permanent deterrence, which is unparalleled in the rest of the international system.[65]

60 Aznar Fernández-Montesinos, F. (2025). The great geopolitical challenge of the 21st century: Unbalanced multipolarity. IEEE Analysis Paper 06/2025. Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies.

61 Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon Technologies and General Dynamics. SIPRI (2023).

62 SIPRI (2024). Trends In World Military Expenditure, 2023.

63 International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) (2025). The Military Balance 2025 (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003630760

64 As Dugin (1997) recognized, "The Russian Navy should become the starting point for a gigantic system of strategic ports in both the south and the west...Aircraft carriers and nuclear-powered submarines are of paramount importance in this."

65 CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE (2024). U.S. Overseas Basing: Background and Issues for Congress. https://crsreports.congress.gov

Rogozińska, A.; Ksawery Olech, A. (2020).THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S MILITARY BASES ABROAD. Institute of New Europe.

Consequently, this overwhelming differential would point to a U.S. structural hegemony that would contravene a supposed multipolarity, revealing it as a postmodern construct that would blur real power hierarchies. In any case, the current system would be closer to a diffuse bipolarity, comparable to that of the Cold War, where Chinese economic power could be eclipsing a real Russian resurgence, as would confirm the war in Ukraine (Castelltort Claramunt, 2023). In this context, NATO would act as an extension of U.S. military power and as a containment mechanism against Russia and China.

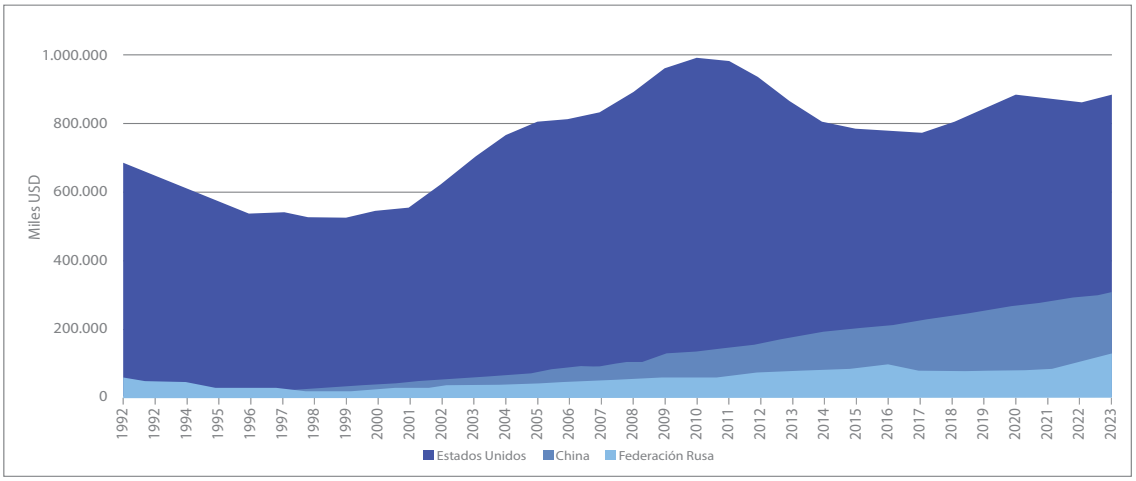


Figure 4. Annual military spending. U.S., China and Russia.Source: SIPRI (2024)

From the theoretical level, this dispute over multipolarity has strategic implications: In Kaplan's (1957) classic physics-based view, the balance of power would be stable and peaceful, so that the invasion of Ukraine would be a disruption that should be compensated by an international response, including sanctions and military support; it is thus a rationalist view of the conflict and its agents. In contrast, for Bouthoul (1951), founder of polemology, because of his sociological training, multipolarity would be inherently unstable, with a complex tangle of rivalries, a perspective recently also defended by Moreno Vílchez (2024).

The war in Ukraine, as analyzed above, seems to be the result of these postmodern tensions, with Moscow's aggressiveness motivated by NATO's eastern expansion and other historical grievances; this more emotional view of the conflict would be more pessimistic about the outcome due to the risks of escalation and systemic instability inherent in a multipolar world (Robles, 2024). In fact, this European conflict seems to ratify another classic postulate of Bouthoul (1967), that of the survival of conventional wars in a nuclear world. It is precisely this interpretation that motivated NATO's Flexible Response doctrine, which staggered the type of response to an aggression –conventional, tactical nuclear or strategic nuclear– but was repealed after the Cold War. This lack of foresight is what Everard (2022), former Allied High Command, denounced, accusing member-states of having cut back on capabilities needed for collective defense during the unipolar Pax Americana.[66]

66 Everard, J. (2022). Appearance in defense committee. House of Commons. 24 May. https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/10334/html/.

> "In this context, embracing multipolarity as an operational paradigm could weaken NATO because it would mean accepting a strategic fiction that defuses the principle of collective defense and weakens Atlantic cohesion. As McMaster (2024) recalls, certain European powers have exploited this narrative to justify their low defense effort under the pretext of a "strategic autonomy" that, in practice, is unjustified: "By presenting Trump as abandoning Europe, Macron advocated the EU's 'strategic autonomy' in trade and economic policies that would circumvent geopolitical tensions with Russia and China, benefiting the French economy. Since the U.S. was not really leaving Europe, France, like Germany, could continue to save on defense spending.""[67].

In this view, multipolarity would not describe a balanced order, but would serve as a strategic narrative to erode Western leadership and disarticulate collective defense. As McMaster (2024) also warned, "Putin believes he can convince Trump to withdraw from Europe, South Asia, and the Middle East, thus filling the vacuum."

In short, the current international panorama seems to reveal an unbridgeable gap between the postmodern theory of multipolarity and the material reality of global power. Despite the rhetoric of balance between great powers, only the United States appears today to possess an effective capacity for strategic leadership on a global scale, while China and Russia operate in an unequal competition, with structural limitations that prevent them from exerting an equivalent influence, even in their periphery.

In the face of this real asymmetry of power, NATO should not adapt to a non-existent multipolar order, nor should it sustain the fiction of a European strategic autonomy that does not seem to translate into effective military capability. On the contrary, a lucid recognition of U.S. military supremacy would be a necessary condition for guaranteeing real international stability. Also for Washington to assume that the Alliance is the main protector of its largest export market, since "trade in goods between the United States and the European Union reached a record $976 billion in 2024, 60% more than trade between the United States and China ($583 billion) and 20% more than trade between the European Union and China ($786 billion)".[68] This interdependence means that European stability directly benefits the U.S. economy and employment. Thus, according to Coffey (2024) "NATO is not only the main security guarantor of this market, but also a condition for shared prosperity."[69]

67 Mcmaster, H. R. (2024). At War With Ourselves. HarperCollins.

68 Hamilton, D. S.; Quinlan, J. P., The Transatlantic Economy 2025. Foreign Policy Institute, Johns Hopkins University SAIS/ Transatlantic Leadership Network, 2025.

69 Coffey, L. (2024). Testimony before the Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Europe and Regional Security Cooperation, United States Senate.

Ultimately, NATO should resist the temptation to accommodate multipolar narratives that do not reflect the reality of global power and instead strengthen its collective security architecture based on pragmatic recognition of both U.S. leadership and mutually beneficial transatlantic economic interdependence; that is, maintain its "Trumanist" essence as a defender of the democratic-capitalist system.

6 Conclusions

NATO's 75th anniversary offers a privileged juncture to rethink its role in a profoundly transformed world. Throughout this article, it has been argued that the Atlantic Alliance can no longer be understood solely as a collective defense organization conceived in a bipolar key, but as an institution in transition that must adapt to the structural, identity and strategic conditions of the postmodern international order.

A fundamental aspect of this new landscape is the erosion of the great meta-narratives, characteristic of postmodernity, which has generated a crisis of legitimacy that has hit Western democracies hard. NATO, built on democratic values and liberal norms, now faces the challenge of operating in an environment where such principles no longer enjoy the unquestionable consensus of the past. Citizen disaffection, normative fragmentation and divergence in democratic standards among its members erode the Alliance's internal cohesion and undermine its legitimacy as a community of values.

Parallel to these challenges, the strategic withdrawal of the United States, conceptualized as postmodern "neo-isolationism", responds to structural transformations: energy self-sufficiency has reduced its strategic exposure, while growing domestic social demands have reoriented budgetary priorities towards welfare. This tension between defense and social spending, increasingly pronounced in advanced democracies, has redefined NATO's role. In this new context, the Alliance should not only be seen as a military instrument, but also as an indirect guarantor of the Western welfare state, insofar as it allows sharing defensive responsibilities and freeing resources for essential social policies such as health, education or pensions.

Compounding this complex situation, Russian revisionism, understood as a postmodern "neo-imperialism," has revealed the inability of the liberal international order to fully integrate actors operating with traditional geopolitical logics wrapped in narratives of identity recovery. This threat is not only military, but also symbolic and normative, and challenges the very credibility of the Western model. NATO must face this challenge not only with conventional means of deterrence, but also by recovering its centrality as a community of principles.

In addition to the above challenges, multipolarity emerges as a strategic narrative that, despite its appearance of equity, hides a profound structural asymmetry. Only the United States today possesses a comprehensive global leadership capacity, while China and Russia operate with geographic, logistical and normative limitations.

Uncritically accepting this postmodern fiction can lead to strategic miscalculations, especially in Europe, and weaken Atlantic cohesion. Instead of accommodating equivocal narratives, NATO must reaffirm the alliance's role as an extension of Western structural power, without relinquishing the principle of collective defense as the cornerstone of its existence.

Overall, NATO is facing an ontological and functional redefinition. It is no longer enough to ensure the physical security of its members against external aggressors. It must also become a normative shield, a framework for shared governance and a strategic infrastructure supporting the sustainability of the welfare state in the Atlantic democracies. This reinterpretation does not weaken its military dimension but complements it with a comprehensive vision of security: a security that not only deters conventional threats, but also protects the social achievements that define the Western way of life.

In short, reaffirming the commitment to the founding values of the Alliance, recognizing the structural role of the United States without falling into passive dependence, and updating the Atlantic architecture with criteria of co-responsibility and efficiency are essential tasks to ensure NATO's viability in the 21st century. Only in this way can it continue to be not only an effective military alliance, but also an indispensable pillar of the democratic-capitalist order and the welfare state that has defined the West since the post-war period.

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The end of surprise? A study on the mutation of the element of surprise in the century of (dis)information

Abstract

The revolution in information gathering and analysis has transformed the role of surprise in modern warfare. Surveillance technologies, Big Data analytics and artificial intelligence have drastically reduced strategic uncertainty, limiting the ability of actors to execute surprise attacks. However, this apparent end of surprise faces a growing challenge: disinformation. The proliferation of false information, data manipulation, and information poisoning have generated a new type of "digital fog of war," in which information overload and strategic noise can generate false certainties. This paper explores how surprise has been transformed in the information age and how the struggle between transparency and deception continues to define the modern battlefield. Finally, it discusses the role of intelligence analysis in converting data into useful knowledge, highlighting the importance of distinguishing between truthful information and strategic manipulation to avoid critical vulnerabilities.

Keywords

Surprise, misinformation, uncertainty, cognitive biases.

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1 The element of surprise and its historical importance

1.1 to surprise

What do the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 (Operation Barbarossa), the invasion of Norway in 1940 and the Egyptian and Syrian attack on Israel in 1973 (Yom Kippur War) have in common? All these key operations of the 20th century were made possible by one determining factor: surprise.

In the intricate tapestry of military strategy, surprise has been an essential principle in military strategy, a resource that can drastically alter the balance of power in a conflict. Surprise not only affects tactics and strategy, but also influences the psychology of the adversary, generating disorientation and chaos (Betts, 1982: 87-105). Its effectiveness lies in the ability to disarticulate the enemy's plans, sow uncertainty and exploit the tactical advantage with a force that, in other circumstances, might otherwise seem insufficient. It is not only a matter of attacking without warning, but of manipulating the adversary's perception in order to reduce his capacity to respond.

Surprise, in its purest essence, seeks to generate an asymmetry in the opponent's position, disarticulating his plans and sowing confusion and discouragement in his ranks. This destabilizing effect not only translates into a tactical advantage, but also amplifies the impact of military actions, allowing a smaller force to overcome a larger one. For this reason, surprise has been considered the ideal means of achieving relative numerical superiority at the decision point, even in the absence of absolute superiority.

Throughout history, commanders and strategists have resorted to surprise to compensate for numerical or technological inferiorities. Surprise is not limited to mere concealment of intentions, but can also be achieved through speed, flexibility and boldness in execution (Handel, 1984: 220-281). Frederick the Great, for example, based his 1760 campaign on unexpected maneuvers that destabilized the Austrian army, demonstrating that surprise is not only an act of stealth, but also of strategic innovation.

The achievement of surprise, far from being a fortuitous act, requires a conjunction of factors that include secrecy in preparation, celerity in execution and the determination of both the government and the commanding general (Clausewitz, 1832: 198-204). However, despite its importance, success in the realization of surprise is never guaranteed, and on multiple occasions, the friction inherent in warfare hinders its materialization. Despite the challenges it poses, the principle of surprise remains a fundamental pillar of strategy, influencing decision making and the conduct of military operations throughout history.

It is essential to note that surprise is not limited to offensive actions but is also a valuable resource in defense. The ability to anticipate enemy movements and prepare defenses unexpectedly can confer a significant advantage. For example, the

Spanish resistance against Napoleon demonstrated that surprise could also arise from mobilization and determination, which through guerrilla warfare, unforeseen attacks and tenacious resistance managed to destabilize the invading army.

1.2 Taxonomy of surprise

The systematic study of strategic surprise requires transcending the traditional dichotomy between success and failure by means of a functional categorization that allows a structured analysis of the phenomenon. Following a taxonomic approach, it is possible to identify four main modalities: "capability surprises", manifested when the adversary deploys unknown technologies or methods, as evidenced by the Soviet Typhoon class submarines, whose stealthy properties severely compromised Western detection systems (Paredes and Oliveira, 2023:4-6). The "surprises of intent", paradigmatically exemplified by the attack on Pearl Harbor, where despite knowledge of Japanese capabilities, their strategic objectives were misinterpreted. The "surprises of execution", illustrated by Operation Barbarossa, where the surprise factor was not in the what but in the how of the tactical implementation. Finally, the "temporality surprises", characterized by the unexpected materialization of anticipated threats, as occurred with the Tet Offensive during the Vietnam War.

This taxonomy, far from being a mere academic exercise, enables the development of specific preventive strategies of differentiated anticipation (Zwitter, 2015: 9-11). Thus, to counter capability surprises, sustained investment in technological intelligence and counterintelligence is imperative. In the face of intent surprises, a rigorous psychological and contextual analysis is required, implementing hostile actor profiling techniques such as those proposed by Borum[1] (2004: 22-25). In the case of execution surprises, simulation and modeling of unconventional scenarios are essential. Finally, temporality surprises require early warning systems based on the detection and interpretation of weak indicators and signals.

The historical evolution of strategic surprise, from the classic Trojan horse to contemporary hybrid threats, reveals recognizable patterns through the lens of this categorization, allowing parallels to be drawn and lessons to be learned that are applicable to today's environment. However, the changing nature of conflict demands a continuous review and updating of this taxonomy, avoiding the risk of preparing exclusively for already experienced modes of surprise. Recognition of these categories not only facilitates retrospective analysis but, crucially, guides the development of adaptive defensive capabilities in the face of a phenomenon that, despite its longevity,

1 Borum proposes a multifactorial analysis framework for understanding the motivations of hostile actors that integrates four dimensions: the evaluation of the ideological-doctrinal context, the analysis of radicalization processes, the study of situational precipitating factors and the identification of predictive behavioral indicators. Its "Four-Stage Pathway to Terrorism" methodology allows the sequential decomposition of the decisional process leading to hostile action.

continues to represent one of the most formidable challenges to contemporary strategic security.

This multidimensional approach to strategic surprise is a significant advance over traditional explanatory models, which are overly focused on intelligence failures or individual cognitive biases. The proposed taxonomy integrates technological, psychological, operational and temporal factors, offering a comprehensive analytical framework that transcends the limitations of previous monolithic approaches.

1.3 Surprise in the 21st century

From Clausewitz (1832) to Van Creveld (1991), war has been described as a phenomenon dominated by uncertainty. The concept of the "fog of war", a term coined by Clausewitz, alludes to the difficulty of obtaining clear and precise information on the battlefield. Throughout history, this fog has been an ally of surprise: chaos, misinformation and friction have allowed strategists to exploit gaps in enemy perception. In the 21st century, however, the proliferation of surveillance technologies appears to be dissipating that fog, reducing the scope for surprise.

The revolution in military intelligence has been marked by the development of technologies such as observation satellites, massive data analysis and artificial intelligence applied to pattern detection (Allen and Chan, 2017: 45-62). In the Cold War, the launch of CORONA, the first U.S. surveillance satellite program, already made it possible to accurately monitor Soviet military activity, hindering the possibility of large-scale surprise attacks (Perry and Carter, 1999: 114-120). Today, the surveillance capability is exponentially greater: by 2022, more than 10,000 satellites were orbiting the Earth, many of them equipped with high-resolution sensors, SAR (Synthetic Aperture Radar) technology and artificial intelligence for real-time analysis of geospatial imagery (Weeden and Samson, 2022: 32-47).

This unprecedented access to detailed information directly affects the dynamics of modern conflict. For example, during the war in Ukraine, Western intelligence detected months in advance Russian preparations for the 2022 invasion. Intelligence reports based on satellite imagery and telecommunications traffic data made it possible to anticipate Russian military movements, leading Ukraine and its allies to better prepare for the offensive (Freedman, 2022: 178-196).

Added to this satellite surveillance is the impact of Big Data in predicting war scenarios. Machine learning algorithms analyze patterns in social networks, economic transactions and logistical movements to foresee military actions before they occur (Taddeo and Floridi, 2018: 723-735). This type of predictive intelligence was used, for example, in the fight against the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, where U.S. drone strikes were guided by data analytics that revealed patterns of fighter behavior (Schmidt, 2020: 56-73).

The key question is: is surprise still possible in the age of total surveillance and massive data analysis? History shows us that, even as intelligence tools evolve, surprise

remains a compelling factor. The question, therefore, is not whether surprise has disappeared, but how it has been transformed to adapt to a new battlefield.

1.4 Objectives

This paper aims to analyze, from a multidisciplinary perspective that integrates security studies, strategic communication and cognitive psychology, the transformation of the element of surprise as a decisive factor in contemporary confrontations. To this end, five fundamental questions are posed, the answers to which will allow us to understand the evolution, current state and future projection of this phenomenon:

1. How has the element of surprise in modern conflicts mutated in the face of the proliferation of surveillance and mass data collection technologies?
2. To what extent have technological tools such as satellites, Big Data and psychological profiling changed the ability of state actors to execute or prevent surprise attacks?
3. What role does disinformation play as a counterweight to information transparency and as a new vector for generating strategic surprise?
4. Why do anticipation failures continue to occur despite advanced surveillance and information analysis systems?
5. What is the future of the element of surprise in a world where the abundance of information can paradoxically increase strategic uncertainty?

These questions, approached from both a historical and contemporary perspective, form the analytical framework through which this paper aims to offer a vision of how the element of surprise has evolved without disappearing, adapting and transforming itself to remain a decisive factor in the conflicts of the 21st century.

2 Massive data collection tools

2.1 Satellites: an end to the fog of war

The 21st century has witnessed an explosion in the military use of space. Observation satellites have transformed the way states access strategic information, significantly eroding the capacity for surprise in warfare (Weeden and Samson, 2022: 18-40).

In 2022, more than 2,000 satellite launches were recorded, and in 2023 the total number of objects in orbit exceeded 10,900 (Union of Concerned Scientists, 2023: 3-7). This growth is not merely technological but reflects the increasing militarization of space. Satellites that were once limited to weather observation and communications tasks now play a key role in military intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR).

The effectiveness of these systems is evident in recent conflicts. During the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, satellite imagery from Maxar Technologies and

intelligence analysis from Starlink X enabled Ukraine to detect and anticipate Russian troop movements (Freedman, 2022: 215-233). For the first time in history, access to satellite imagery was not restricted to major powers, but became a tool available to smaller governments and even private actors and NGOs.

The importance of satellites in dispelling the fog of war lies in their ability to obtain detailed and accurate information, which is achieved through different observation technologies.

The satellites use active remote sensing, based on synthetic aperture radars (SAR) that emit radio waves and analyze the time they take to return. This technology makes it possible to detect objects and measure distances with high precision, even in adverse conditions such as clouds or darkness. SAR systems are capable of measuring the time of flight of the pulse from the time it leaves the satellite until it reaches the Earth and returns, allowing to know how far away an element is, in addition, they analyze the degree of absorption and penetration of the wave on the surface, which allows to obtain information not only geometrically, but also on the composition of the surface.

Passive remote sensing captures sunlight reflected by the Earth, similar to a camera. This technology provides high spatial resolution images, but their quality is affected by cloud cover and time of day. Passive remote sensing satellites, such as Sentinel-2, offer a spatial resolution of 10 meters. Military satellites also use infrared sensors that enable heat detection, which is useful for identifying activities in the dark, as well as tracking changes in the temperature of certain areas and groups of people. During the war in Syria, these sensors were used to identify the transport of chemical weapons in areas controlled by the Assad regime (Futter, 2018: 135-140). In addition, they employ multispectral and hyperspectral loading, capable of detecting light in multiple bands of the electromagnetic spectrum. This has been key in detecting clandestine nuclear facilities, as was the case with the Iranian program at Natanz (Kemp, 2014: 39-78).

A recent trend is the use of nanosatellite swarms. Unlike traditional satellites, these low-cost devices can work in a network, providing real-time imagery and reducing the risk of a single unit being destroyed or disabled (Pelton, 2020: 1-20). For example, the PlanetScope program operates with hundreds of small satellites in low orbit, allowing continuous monitoring of the planet with daily updates.

In Spain we have the Spanish satellite PAZ that materializes some of these technological advances. This is an active remote sensing platform that sends 33 images daily, with the ability to detect surface changes of up to 2-3 mm by means of interferometry, which makes it possible to identify areas where land has been disturbed or where mines have been buried, monitor the position and course of 170,000-200,000 vessels at all times thanks to its AIS (Automatic Identification System) technology, track moving targets, such as military vehicles and convoys according to data from the International Maritime Organization.[2]

2 International Maritime Organization (2022) 'Annual Shipping Report 2022', London: IMO: 85-93.

The current level of surveillance poses challenges to any military seeking to conduct a surprise operation. The accumulation of real-time data, combined with artificial intelligence algorithms, makes it possible to identify patterns and anticipate moves before they are executed. A prime example is the Pentagon's Project Maven system, established as a multifunctional algorithmic warfare team, which uses AI to analyze tactical surveillance imagery and detect up to 38 classes of critical objects, including attack preparations or insurgent movements in conflict zones (Work, 2017: 1-2; Pellerin, 2017: 2-3). The system employs biologically inspired neural networks and deep learning techniques to automatically process drone images and videos, accurately identifying military vehicles, weaponry, fortifications, and troop movements without direct human intervention. This allows a single analyst to process up to three times more information than before, working symbiotically with algorithms to transform the massive volume of surveillance data into actionable intelligence (Pellerin, 2017: 3-4).

Satellite technology is not only capable of detecting physical activity, but also operations in the electromagnetic spectrum. Satellites equipped with synthetic aperture radar (SAR) such as Sentinel-1 have demonstrated the ability to detect electronic jamming directed against GPS systems. In a study documented by the European Space Agency (2020: 34-42), jamming patterns detected over conflict zones in Syria and eastern Ukraine were analyzed, where SAR systems picked up anomalies consistent with electronic warfare activities. These electromagnetic signatures make it possible to identify positions from which jamming operations are being conducted, even when physical equipment is concealed or camouflaged. These capabilities represent a significant change in the transparency of the electromagnetic battlefield, traditionally invisible to direct observation (Papathanasiou, 2019: 125-137). This type of surveillance drastically reduces the possibility of tactical surprise in the cyber and electromagnetic domain, providing early warnings of hostile activities before they can materialize into conventional attacks.

2.2 Mind and digital: Big Data and profiling

If satellite surveillance has reduced the margin for physical surprise, the development of advanced psychological profiling tools combined with Big Data analysis has taken military pre-emption to a new level. Through the massive analysis of data, behavioral patterns and psychological predictions, states can foresee strategic decisions of their adversaries with unprecedented accuracy (Taddeo and Floridi, 2018: 723-735).

The concept of psychological profiling applied to warfare is not new. Sun Tzu already warned that knowing the enemy was as important as knowing one's own army. However, in the 21st century, this idea has materialized in artificial intelligence systems that analyze the behavior of political leaders, military and hostile organizations to predict their actions (Kahneman and Renshon, 2007: 34-48).

A clear example of this trend was the intelligence operation prior to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. U.S. intelligence agencies used personality analysis to assess Saddam

Hussein's likely responses to various military and diplomatic pressures (Post, 2003: 175-190). Today, tools such as computational leadership profiling make it possible to predict with a high degree of certainty the likelihood that a leader will opt for war, diplomatic engagement, or nuclear deterrence (Renshon, 2021: 53-71).

Modern psychological profiling is based on the analysis of several variables to predict behavior and reduce surprise in strategic decisions. One of the key aspects is the study of an individual's personal history and ideological beliefs. A recent example is the analysis of Vladimir Putin's behavior, whose past as a KGB agent and his view of Russian nationalism have been instrumental in anticipating his strategic moves (Hill and Gaddy, 2015: 98-112). In addition, decision-making patterns are another important factor, as recurrent cognitive biases have been identified in political and military leaders. For example, the overconfidence bias was observed in both Hitler in 1941 and Israel before the Yom Kippur War in 1973, and has been incorporated in models to predict strategic decisions (Levy, 1994: 279-312).

In the construction of psychological profiling, the analysis of language and non-verbal behavior also plays a crucial role. Artificial intelligence algorithms have been trained to detect signs of aggression or conciliation in public speeches. Intelligence agencies regularly employ behavioral analysis techniques to evaluate foreign leaders (Fingar, 2011: 112-129).

On the other hand, Big Data has revolutionized military intelligence by enabling the analysis of massive amounts of information in real time. Whereas in the past military analysts relied on fragmented reports and human sources, today algorithms can detect hidden patterns in data ranging from banking transactions to social network interactions (Allen and Chan, 2017: 63-85).

One example of its impact is the fight against terrorism. Advanced data analytics systems developed by security agencies can monitor digital communications and detect patterns of radicalization. Case studies show that these systems can identify specific indicators of radicalization in online environments, such as changes in language patterns, consumption of extremist material and increased participation in radical forums (Behr *et al.*, 2013: 42-47). This digital surveillance is complemented by social network analysis methods that allow the identification of recruitment patterns used by organizations such as the Islamic State, facilitating the neutralization of terrorist cells before they execute attacks (Berger and Morgan, 2015: 4-20).

In the realm of conventional warfare, predictive analytics based on Big Data has been key in recent conflicts. During the war in Ukraine, Western intelligence used predictive models based on analyses of economic, logistical, and military movement data to anticipate the Russian invasion weeks before it occurred (Freedman, 2022: 250-267).

Despite their advantages, these tools are not infallible. Information overload and the proliferation of false data can generate analytical paralysis, a phenomenon in which decision makers are overwhelmed by an excess of data without being able to draw clear conclusions (Tetlock and Gardner, 2015: 25-40).

In addition, strategic deception remains a key factor in warfare. Actors such as Russia and China have perfected the use of disinformation to manipulate the perception of their adversaries. During the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia used a combination of disinformation and covert operations to conceal its intentions until the occupation was a fait accompli (Galeotti, 2017: 85-103).

Technological advances have reduced the margin for uncertainty, but surprise has not disappeared. Information, however abundant it may be, is only useful if it is analyzed accurately and without falling into false certainties. History has shown that it is not the lack of data that generates vulnerability, but the way it is interpreted and integrated into decision making (Fingar, 2011: 112-129).

3 Disinformation: the great obstacle in the Information Age

3.1 From analog to digital disinformation

Although massive access to information and new technologies have enabled unprecedented data collection, these advances do not guarantee better decision making if the information collected is erroneous or manipulated. Predictive intelligence and strategic analysis depend not only on the amount of data available, but also on its veracity and the ability to correctly interpret the patterns that emerge from it. However, in an information-saturated environment, where misinformation and information manipulation have become key strategic tools, differentiating between reliable data and intentional deception is an increasing challenge.

The manipulation of information for strategic purposes is a practice as old as war itself. Since time immemorial, armies and governments have used disinformation to confuse the enemy, weaken his morale or influence the perception of the population. Sun Tzu already warned that all warfare is based on deception, highlighting the importance of making the adversary believe that one is weak when one is strong, or that one will attack from one flank when one will attack from another. Throughout history, deception has played a crucial role in numerous conflicts, demonstrating that the perception of reality can be as decisive as reality itself.

A classic example of this is Operation Fortitude during World War II, in which the Allies carried out an elaborate hoax to make the Nazis believe that the landing in France would occur in Pas-de-Calais instead of Normandy (Holt, 1978: 53-68). Fake troop movements, deceptive radio transmissions, and even the creation of a dummy army with inflatables and decorations were used to reinforce the illusion of an imminent invasion at the wrong point. This deception was so effective that even after June 6, 1944, when Allied troops had already landed in Normandy, the Nazis continued to believe that it was a diversion and that the real offensive would be at Pas-de-Calais, delaying their response.

Today, disinformation has become a global phenomenon, enhanced by the massive access to social networks and the growth of digital platforms that allow

the instantaneous dissemination of content without rigorous verification. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 is a clear example of the contemporary use of these strategies. Russia employed a combination of covert military action and an intense disinformation campaign to justify the intervention to domestic and external public opinion (Galeotti, 2017: 42-58). False narratives were created depicting Russian forces as local "self-defense groups," while state media propagated the idea that the Ukrainian government was controlled by extremists, hindering Western response and generating uncertainty.

In the 21st century, the proliferation of digital information has changed the rules of the game. False information is no longer spread exclusively through pamphlets or radio but goes viral in a matter of minutes via social networks. During the 2016 US presidential election, research revealed that thousands of automated accounts, many linked to Russia, were involved in the dissemination of misleading information with the aim of polarizing public opinion and eroding trust in democratic institutions (Benkler *et al.*, 2018: 225-260). Through bots, conspiracy theories and fake news designed to influence the electorate were promoted, exacerbating pre-existing divisions in American society.

From a strategic point of view, disinformation is no longer simply a propaganda tool; it has become a political and military weapon with the potential to destabilize governments and manipulate perceptions of reality. The speed with which these false narratives spread, combined with the difficulty of effectively disproving them, makes disinformation operations more dangerous than ever. Unlike traditional wars, where armies clash on the battlefield, the information war is fought in the minds of the population, where truth and lies compete for dominance.

History has shown that control of information is as important as control of territory. In a world where information flows without restriction, the ability to distinguish between truth and manipulation is an increasingly complex challenge for governments and citizens alike.

3.2 New disinformation methods

The impact of misinformation on intelligence analysis is particularly serious, as it undermines the credibility of sources and makes it difficult to make decisions based on verifiable facts. Analysts must already contend with their own cognitive biases in interpreting data, but when information is deliberately manipulated, the risk of erroneous conclusions increases exponentially (Heuer, 1999: 111-126). This situation is driven by the proliferation of technological tools designed to amplify information manipulation.

Bots and trolls operate as digital armies designed to flood the information space with specific narratives, making it difficult to identify legitimate sources and generating confusion in public opinion. In recent conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine, these methods have been used to fabricate a distorted perception of the

confrontation, destabilizing society and reducing the ability of intelligence analysts to get a clear picture of the unfolding events. Also, deepfakes, for their part, represent a breakthrough in audiovisual manipulation, allowing the creation of fake videos that can attribute statements or actions to political and military actors without them having carried them out. This technology has enormous disruptive potential in the military field, where trust in the authenticity of information is key. The possibility of disseminating falsified videos with speeches by military or political leaders can generate chaos, confusion and erroneous decisions based on manipulated information.

At the same time, the falsification of documents continues to be one of the most widely used strategies in military disinformation. Leaked and modified documents can influence diplomatic negotiations, demoralize troops or provoke crises among allies. The manipulation of intelligence records, strategic reports and military orders has been used throughout history to induce errors in the operational planning of adversaries.

An aggravating factor in the problem of disinformation is the speed with which it spreads. In previous decades, information manipulation operations required months or even years to take effect, whereas today, with the presence of social networks and digital platforms, a fake news story can reach millions of people in a matter of hours. This phenomenon was reflected in the disinformation crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic, where conspiracy theories and manipulated data went viral, generating distrust in science and public health measures (Lewandowsky *et al.*, 2021: 80-127). The lack of effective regulation on the propagation of false content has allowed certain actors to exploit this situation for political or economic ends, eroding trust in institutions and polarizing entire societies.

Combating disinformation requires a multidimensional approach combining technology, education and regulation. The implementation of pattern detection algorithms is a promising strategy to identify disinformation networks in real time (Ferrara *et al.*, 2016: 96-104). However, there is also a risk that these algorithms may be biased and end up censoring valid information. Therefore, it is crucial that the development of these technologies is complemented by human oversight and transparency in their application mechanisms.

Another essential element in the fight against misinformation is media education. Studies have shown that critical thinking and the ability to evaluate information sources can significantly reduce the spread of fake news (McGrew *et al.*, 2018: 165-193). In this sense, some countries have implemented educational programs focused on teaching citizens how to identify manipulated content and how to verify the credibility of a source before sharing it. While these programs are a step in the right direction, their large-scale impact has yet to be demonstrated.

At the governmental level, international bodies such as the European Union have developed joint strategies to track and remove fake content from digital platforms (European Commission, 2020: 8-15). However, this type of measures raises a dilemma about freedom of expression, as the regulation of content on the Internet could be used by certain governments to censor legitimate criticism or silence dissent. The

solution lies in finding a balance between the protection of truthful information and respect for fundamental rights.

In the military and security domain, intelligence agencies have begun to adopt "intensive cross-checking" strategies to ensure the reliability of information before incorporating it into their analysis (Rid, 2020: 412-435). This involves contrasting sources of different provenance, analyzing patterns of disinformation, and tracing the origin of particular false narratives. However, the challenge remains monumental due to the overwhelming amount of information circulating daily in digital environments.

Combating misinformation also depends to a large extent on the responsibility of the traditional media. While the proliferation of social networks has decentralized the production and distribution of news, the media continue to play a crucial role in fact-checking and educating the public about the importance of cross-checking information. However, has also been responsible at times for spreading misinformation in their eagerness to be the first to report a story. This highlights the importance of journalistic ethics and the need for self-control mechanisms in information practices.

Thus, the phenomenon of disinformation not only affects the perception of reality, but also represents a tangible threat to global security, intelligence analysis and the stability of democracies. Tackling it requires a joint commitment between governments, technology companies, media and citizens to build a more resilient and critical society in the face of information manipulation.

4 The importance of analysis

We return to the initial question, beyond the surprise in their execution, what do the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the German invasion of the Soviet Union also in 1941 (Operation Barbarossa), the German invasion of Norway in 1940 and the Egyptian and Syrian attack on Israel in 1973 (Yom Kippur War) have in common?

In all these cases, the victims made erroneous assumptions about the attacker's intentions and capabilities (Betts, 1982: 32-54). For example, the United States underestimated Japan's ability to carry out an attack on Pearl Harbor, while the Soviet Union did not believe that Germany would attack, despite signs of mobilization. In the case of the Yom Kippur War, Israel did not consider the possibility of a joint attack by Egypt and Syria, despite signs that they were preparing. Germany's invasion of Norway came as a surprise because Norway did not consider itself a priority target and believed in its neutrality.

Despite the fact that in all these cases there were signs that an attack was imminent, these signals were either not interpreted correctly or were ignored. The study of military surprise has shown that cognitive biases play a crucial role in these failures. Leaders tend to cling to their prior perceptions even when the evidence suggests the opposite, a phenomenon that is accentuated in environments of high uncertainty (Jervis, 1976: 58-84). In the case of Pearl Harbor, there was intelligence information indicating the possibility of an attack, but it was not given the necessary importance

(Wohlstetter, 1962: 382-401). Similarly, Stalin received warnings of the impending German invasion but chose to ignore them in the belief that Hitler would not open a second front in 1941 (Gorodetsky, 1999: 238-265). Similarly, in the Yom Kippur War, Israel did not consider the possibility of a full-scale Egyptian and Syrian attack, despite multiple warnings. The belief that Egypt would not risk war without air superiority led to ignoring troop movements on the border (Bar-Joseph, 2013: 145-162).

In most cases there were deception operations by the attackers to conceal their true intentions. Germany carried out disinformation operations to conceal its plans to attack the Soviet Union, and also in the case of Norway. Japan took steps to make it appear that it was negotiating with the United States when it was really preparing for attack.

These examples illustrate how a combination of erroneous assumptions, inattention to warnings, and inadequate preparedness make surprise attacks a phenomenon that palliates, not with better information, but with constant alertness and proper attention to elicitation analysis.

A failure to prevent surprise attacks often lies in an organization's inability to manage information properly, failing to distinguish between important signals and noise (Barnea and Meshulach, 2021: 43-59). Data overload can be as dangerous as data scarcity, as it can lead to analytical paralysis or incorrect prioritization of threats (Fingar, 2011: 75-91). During the invasion of Norway, Allied authorities received reports of unusual movements in the Kriegsmarine, but these were interpreted as routine maneuvers (Gannon, 2021: 35-48). A recurring problem in military intelligence is that warning signals are often ambiguous and require not only objective information, but also strategic intuition to be correctly interpreted (Heuer and Pherson, 2010: 132-148).

Effective analysis depends not only on the information available, but also on the organizational structure and the ability to challenge assumptions. As Handel (1984) mentions, intelligence must not only identify threats but also challenge pre-existing narratives within strategic decision making. This implies fostering critical thinking within intelligence agencies and avoiding the tendency to analytical conformism. A clear example of this problem was the over-reliance on nuclear deterrence during the Cold War, which led to dismissing the possibility of large-scale conventional conflicts (Luttwak, 1987: 189-205).

Thus, the primary mission of intelligence analysis is to provide timely information and insights that help decision-makers understand events with far-reaching implications for national interests (Fingar, 2011: 117-132). It is not just about presenting "facts," but about providing insights into trends, the political logic of foreign leaders, or how issues are perceived outside the country. In other words, analysis is what transforms raw data into useful intelligence.

The importance of the analysis is manifested in the assessment of enemy capabilities and intentions. The wartime capabilities of weapon systems cannot be automatically deduced from their technical characteristics, but depend on the operational concepts, strategy and tactics that would direct their use (Kam, 2004: 163-178). This implies that analysis is not limited to the collection of technical information but also requires an understanding of the context in which such technology is employed.

Analysis is also critical for the identification of "weak signals" that could indicate a surprise attack. A surprise attack is a game of wits between an "attacker" seeking to launch a surprise attack and a "victim" attempting to gather information about the attacker's intentions (Barnea and Meshulach, 2021: 60-75). In this game, the ability to discern "weak signals," often fragmented and ambiguous, is crucial to anticipate enemy moves. This analytical skill requires creativity, original thinking and initiative to construct pre-emptive scenarios, and often involves the study of new and unfamiliar environments. As an NRC study mentions[3] , a good analyst can help his or her clients identify the questions they should have asked, implying an active role in shaping the intelligence agenda.

Cognitive biases and organizational constraints can hinder effective analysis. Analysts often face ambiguous information and must deal with their own biases and assumptions (Kam, 2004: 189-207). Analysis is affected by the need for rapid decision making in groups that may be influenced by leaders or other dominant members. In addition, decision makers may simplify intelligence assessments, which can lead to overlooking important details. The tendency of analysts to be cautious in their predictions and to seek consensus can lead to ambiguities that dilute the strength of their conclusions. The need to give a clear conclusion can lead to the loss of important nuances and an unwillingness to take risks in their assessments.

History shows that military surprise is not only a tactical phenomenon, but also a failure of perception. The real prevention of surprise attack lies not in the infinite accumulation of data, but in the ability to analyze it flexibly and critically (Tetlock and Gardner, 2015: 75-89). The key, therefore, is not only to obtain information, but to understand it before it is too late.

This "too late" materializes with tragic regularity. Fifty years after the trauma of Yom Kippur, Israel has once again suffered its own strategic phantom: the inability to convert available information into decisive action. As Israeli soldiers watched, transfixed, the mass infiltration of Hamas militiamen on October 7, 2023, we witnessed not a failure of intelligence gathering, but the contemporary manifestation of what Bar-Joseph called "the trap of observation without action" (Bar-Joseph, 2005:142-144). The real surprise did not lie in the absence of information, but in the incomprehensible disconnect between ultramodern surveillance systems and decision-making mechanisms anchored in bureaucracies of the last century. This dissociation between knowledge and action demonstrates that technological sophistication, far from guaranteeing security, can generate dangerous complacency when the chain of command lacks protocols that turn analysis into an immediate operational imperative.

Analysis must be transmuted into a mandate. Intelligence that does not catalyze action is mere academic contemplation of disaster. Advanced warning systems lacking automatic triggering mechanisms are vulnerable to institutional paralysis

3 National Research Council (2011). Intelligence Analysis: Behavioral and Social Scientific Foundations. B. Fischhoff & C. Chauvin (Eds.). Committee on Behavioral and Social Science Research to Improve Intelligence Analysis for National Security. The National Academies Press.

(Wirtz, 2004:12-15), a lesson that in 1973 failed to impress itself on Israeli strategic consciousness. To break this inertia, it is necessary to revolutionize the decision-making architecture by creating predetermined thresholds of action where certain critical indicators trigger immediate response protocols, circumventing traditional hierarchies. The October tragedy is evidence that the democratization of decision-making capacity at tactical levels, particularly when information is available in real time, is not an academic luxury but a strategic imperative. Ultimately, intelligence analysis only serves its true purpose when it transcends the informational sphere to become an inescapable catalyst for defensive action.

5 The real tragedy: the loss of the ability to be surprised

In the labyrinth of warfare, where strategy and technology are intertwined, the illusion of controlling the future through information can become a trap. The notion of the "end of surprise" in the military realm should not be interpreted as the eradication of the unexpected, but as the urgent need to cultivate a vigilant mindset. For, despite the apparent omnipresence of information and technological advances, history teaches us that complacency and the loss of the ability to surprise us are the perfect breeding ground for vulnerability.

The root of surprise is nurtured by our own inattention. Often, the abundance of data blinds us, leading us to ignore the signs that warn us of impending danger. Victims of surprise attacks lacked not information, but the ability to interpret it correctly (Kam, 2004: 215-230). Familiarity with routines, complacency and our tendency to reject what we consider improbable make us vulnerable. In a world where information is constantly flowing, the real threat lies in our own inability to pay attention to warning signs.

This interpretative incapacity reveals a deeper and more problematic dimension: the blurring of responsibilities in the analytical-decisional chain. When everyone observes the anomaly, but no one acts, we face not merely a technical failure, but a moral collapse of the security system. "Ambiguity in the attribution of responsibility is itself a lethal vulnerability that adversaries can deliberately exploit" (Bar-Joseph, 2005: 187-189). Decision-making in environments of high uncertainty requires a rigorous distinction between the responsibility of the analyst (to alert with forcefulness proportional to the seriousness of the indications, even if these are fragmentary) and that of the decision-maker (to act decisively with incomplete information when the risks of inaction outweigh those of an excessive response). The complicit silence in the face of this confusion of roles has allowed entire organizations to come to a standstill at critical moments, with each actor taking refuge in the bureaucratic comfort zone of non-responsibility.

The supposed neutrality of inaction is perhaps the most dangerous fallacy in the field of strategic security: the decision not to decide is, paradoxically, the most definitive decision, since it hands the initiative completely to the adversary (Fischhoff and Chauvin, 2011:118-120). This perspective requires revolutionizing our institutional

frameworks, establishing protocols where the responsibility to act in the face of critical indications is not merely an option. Without this catalyzing element that transforms analysis into decisive action, our sophisticated surveillance systems will be no more than passive witnesses, documenting with technical precision but without operational consequence, the next disaster that could have been avoided.

On the attacker's side, the enemy's secrecy sometimes persists as a difficult obstacle to overcome. Despite the transparency of the information age, there are gray areas where adversaries can operate with stealth. A modern example of this is the design of submarine propellers, which have evolved to reduce their acoustic signature and avoid detection. In a world where information seems to be available to all, the reality is that there are operations and capabilities that still elude our knowledge.

History shows that technological evolution is cyclical: at certain moments, systems designed to avoid surprise outperform those that seek to generate it, but later, the situation is reversed (Kam, 2004: 231-246). Military progress does not follow a straight line, but a process of constant adaptation between offensive and defensive (Luttwak, 1987: 212-229). This was the case with the development of radar in World War II. It initially gave the Allies an advantage in detecting enemy bombers but later prompted the creation of stealth aircraft to evade detection. Thus, technological innovation, in its quest for advantage, can also generate new sources of surprise.

In this context, the assumption of an "end of surprise" is, at best, a dangerous fallacy. It is not a question of the eradication of surprise, but of the need to maintain an attitude of continuous vigilance. It is therefore vital to make a critical analysis of available information, to pay attention to subtle signals and to be aware of our own cognitive limitations. The false sense of security, the enemy's ability to conceal his plans and the technological evolution that generates new surprises are factors that ensure that surprise remains an unavoidable element in modern warfare. The real challenge lies in our ability to prepare for the unexpected while maintaining our capacity for wonder and humility in the face of the unknown.

6 Conclusion: end of surprise or evolution of uncertainty?

History shows that surprise has never depended exclusively on a lack of information, but on the human inability to correctly interpret the environment. Over time, technological innovations have reduced the scope for traditional surprise attacks but have not eliminated the uncertainty factor in warfare. Surprise does not disappear with information, but is transformed, exploiting failures of perception, overconfidence and errors in strategic analysis (Betts, 1982: 250-268).

Today, global surveillance and massive data analysis have changed the dynamics of military surprise but have not eradicated it. Warfare remains an environment of high uncertainty, where human ingenuity and adaptability continue to play a crucial role (Freedman, 2022: 398-415). Surprise is no longer based solely on physical stealth, but on the manipulation of perception, strategic deception, and the exploitation of cognitive vulnerabilities.

When information sources are deliberately contaminated with false or manipulated elements, analysts face the challenge of filtering the surrounding noise and distinguishing the truthful from the misleading. In this context, massive information gathering ceases to be a guarantee of knowledge and can instead become a weapon of mass disorientation. History has shown that misinterpreted intelligence or intelligence based on false premises can lead to catastrophic military and geopolitical decisions. Therefore, the key to avoiding surprise in the contemporary world lies not only in the amount of information available, but in the ability to evaluate it in a critical and structured manner.

As Tetlock and Gardner (2015) point out, information overload without rigorous analysis can be as dangerous as the absence of data. Without an adequate analytical methodology, information saturation can generate strategic paralysis or, worse, decisions based on incorrect premises. In this sense, intelligence analysis becomes the true pillar on which strategic security must be built, allowing to convert the chaotic flow of data into actionable and useful information for decision making.

Therefore, we are not facing the end of surprise, but rather its transformation. The question is not whether surprise will disappear, but how it will continue to adapt to a world where information is more accessible than ever, but the interpretation of that information remains the weakest link. As Liddell Hart (1954: 165) stated, "the best surprise is not that which the enemy does not see coming, but that which he sees coming too late to react".

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About Russia's attempts to fit into Europe

Abstract

Since the end of the Cold War, there have been attempts to fit Russia into a European security architecture and its integration into the West. The extension of NATO and the EU has been frustrating Russian pretensions in a scenario of redistribution of power. The US and its NATO allies have played a leading role in the security sphere, while the EU has played a leading role in the commercial and economic spheres. The result has been a failure; it has gone from cooperation to rupture and confrontation.

The various stages in Russian-Western relations from 1989 to 2022 are presented here. It is interesting to examine Russian attitudes and the nature of their initiatives alongside Western decisions and proposals in order to better understand the current situation.

Russia is striving to regain its great power status; its perception of insecurity interacts with an exclusionary and awkward Western posture. It has overcome mutual lack of trust and Western incomprehension. The West has adjusted to its interests within international norms, and a recovered Russia has not been able to escape its strategic culture.

Keywords

Cooperation, Integration, European Security, Enlargement, Rupture.

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1 From 1989 to 1994: The window of opportunity

The deep crisis within the communist bloc –the political changes in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria– and the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, led Gorbachev to renounce forcible intervention in the face of the political crises in the Warsaw Pact countries[1] in the context of the reforms undertaken since 1986[2].

The events of 1989[3] in East Germany determined the possibility of a united Germany (Sarotte, 2021: 33). When the first contacts between the occupying powers and West Germany began, Gorbachev put forward his conditions to Köhl for German reunification: the exit from NATO –neutrality– and from the European Communities (CCEE) (Sarotte, 2021: 35-36). Conditions proposed at the time by Stalin[4] to the Western powers, a united and neutral Germany that "would have its own national armed forces" for the defense of the country (Kershaw, 2017: 97) and free elections, afterwards.

A "German question" arose again because of Franco-British reluctance and fear of the weight of a united Germany, and the solution of anchoring Germany in Western Europe, i.e. integrating it politically and economically[5] into the CCEE and militarily into NATO, emerged. The issue was resolved between H.W. Bush and Gorbachev[6] at their meeting in Malta and was clarified at the Strasbourg European Council (EU, 1989), which promoted the unity of the German people in the context of East-West cooperation.

In Malta, Soviet conditions for German reunification, denuclearization, neutrality and exit from NATO were discussed. Bush's idea of keeping Germany united in NATO and extending Article 5 to its eastern part (Sarotte, 2021: 44) under conditions that would be acceptable to the USSR prevailed. With a Warsaw Pact practically disarticulated, Gorbachev did not have the capacity to oppose and proposed at some point that "both alliances should be part of the common European security structure" (Sarotte, 2021: 51), respecting the right to free choice of alliance according to the Helsinki principles (1975).

1 In the cases of Poland and East Germany, Gorbachev communicated in June 1989 to Jaruzelski that he would not support a military crackdown against the new non-Communist Solidarity government; and later to Honecker in October 1989. (Kershaw, 2017: 491-497).

2 New Political Thought, Glasnost and Perestroika (Milosevich, 2024: 68-73).

3 The flood of East German refugees, the opening of borders between Hungary and Austria (March 1989) and the fall of the Berlin Wall (November 9, 1989), among others.

4 March 10, 1952.

5 Mitterrand wanted to tie Germany to the European monetary union and Kohl was willing to sacrifice the Deutsche Mark (Kershaw, 2017: 513).

6 December 2-3, 1989.

The success of the multilateral negotiations of the "Two plus Four" Treaty[7] for reunification had two different key elements. One was US Secretary of State Baker's comment to Soviet Foreign Minister Schevardnadze offering as a preferable alternative a united Germany linked to NATO along with the guarantee that NATO "would not move an inch eastward from its position"[8] (Sarotte, 2021: 55) *Not One Inch*. The other key was the German commitment to remain in NATO and to accept the permanence of U.S. troops. It is possible that Bush had earlier conveyed to Köhl[9] his refusal to German neutrality and the alternative of linking German reunification and allied expansion –for Germany's security–, adding his adhesion to a future NATO extended beyond the dividing line of the two Germanys (Sarotte, 2021: 71-75).

Not One Inch is considered by the Russian side as an unwritten agreement that has been breached and a first demonstration of deceit and Western duplicity in the context of subsequent NATO enlargements to the East. The U.S. side argues that, if *Not One Inch* was raised, it was as an option, one more, but it is a point that Russian leaders continue to condemn as deception. According to their approach, the negotiations guaranteed the Soviet government that NATO would not take in any former Eastern Bloc , except for the Democratic Republic of Germany (GDR).

The economic incentive strategy of the USA and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) to alleviate the disastrous Soviet economic circumstances[10] and Allied statements on the future of the Atlantic Alliance at the London Summit succeeded in making German reunification more acceptable to Russia (NATO, 1990); all this took place a few months before the dissolution of the USSR.

The signing of the "Two plus Four" Treaty (USA, 1990) on September 12, 1990, signified the USSR's renunciation of its rights in Germany as the victorious power and the beginning of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the GDR with the subsequent entry, at the discretion of the German government, of German NATO military forces[11].

The USSR interpreted the treaty (Sarotte, 2021: 252)[12] as greatly simplifying the issue by extending the conditions agreed for the territory of East Germany to the entire space of Central and Eastern Europe: The Atlantic Alliance would not occupy empty spaces when the Soviet army withdrew from the Warsaw Pact

7 German reunification necessarily required some kind of agreement between the four great occupying and victorious powers in World War II.

8 Both quotations are a translation of the author.

9 At the Bush-Köhl meeting at Camp David, February 24-25, 1990.

10 The USSR needed the Western lines of credit to solve its serious economic crisis and avoid disaster; "bribes" according to Robert Gates. The FRG committed itself at that time to pay DM 12 billion in "stationing costs" for Soviet troops, plus DM 3 billion in interest-free credits.

11 Final addendum to the treaty.

12 The U.S. countered that the treaty referred exclusively to Germany.

countries[13]. This was a point that, while it may have emerged from high-level talks, was not reflected in writing in a treaty that was really limited to Germany. In any case, this misinterpretation justified Gorbachev internally.

Shortly afterwards, in December 1991, NATO's first gesture of rapprochement, the result of the 1990 London summit, was accepted by the USSR and consisted in the establishment of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NATO, 2022) as a forum for dialogue and cooperation with all the former adversaries of the Warsaw Pact, which had just been dissolved in March 1991. Interestingly, the first session, on December 20, served for the surprising announcement of the dissolution of the USSR by its ambassador who went on to represent Russia. Such was the pace and scope of change in Europe at that time.

After Gorbachev's resignation, Yeltsin, elected president of Russia in June, maintained a good and very open relationship with H.W. Bush (Sarotte, 2021: 130-131)and strove to consolidate an equal treatment between the two powers. In his confidence –and naivety–, Yeltsin went so far as to show himself willing to share the procedures for the use of nuclear weapons, besides suggesting Russia's entry into NATO (Sarotte, 2021: 132-133). The meeting of the two leaders at Camp David (February 1, 1992) sealed the end of the Cold War and 1992 can be considered as the year of the opportunity for fruitful cooperation between the two powers. In fact, Russia needed all the Western support to get out of a very bad economic situation (Sarotte, 2021: 140).[14]

Clinton and Yeltsin also developed a good personal rapport in their first presidencies; Clinton sought to push for control of the former USSR's nuclear weapons, to calm the security anxieties of the Visegrad Group countries[15] and their rush to join NATO, and of course, to secure Russia's cooperation (Sarotte, 2021: 154)[16].

Between 1993 and 1994, Russia was in a multiform crisis; it was simultaneously facing three transitions, a political one from communist authoritarianism to democracy, an economic one from a command economy to a market economy, and a structural one from a multi-ethnic empire to "something" much smaller. Russia was also beginning to feel disappointed with the economic and social results[17] after

13 The withdrawal affected some 590,000 troops and their families; 388,000 in the GDR alone, according to estimates.

14 Russia received in 1992 substantial bilateral economic aid from Germany and the US (US$ 1 billion) and from the IMF (US$ 12 billion from the IMF).

15 Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland (1991).

16 Yeltsin had by then stressed that the "Two Plus Four Treaty " was a ban on NATO extension.

17 The policy imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the US, a brutal and disorderly shock therapy, led to economic collapse and social catastrophe (Teurtrie, 2024: 193).

implementing radical reforms (Gonzalez Marquez *et al.*, 2023: 44) following the advice of American experts (USA, 2009). [18]

In this context, Yeltsin dissolved a contested Duma and staged a *coup d'état* (the "Black October" of 1993) in a conflictive and complex scenario: the withdrawal of ex-Soviet forces from Western Europe, tensions with Ukraine over nuclear weapons and over control of the ex-Soviet fleet in the Black Sea[19] , and the conflict in the former Yugoslavia.

In the US, the idea of replacing the doctrine of containment with a strategy of enlargement (Lake, 1993) is beginning to be considered in the face of some contrary opinions such as that of Kennan (1997), who stated that it would be a fatal mistake because of its costs for the relationship with Russia, since it would trigger its nationalist and anti-Western sentiment by affecting its prestige and its security interests[20]. American policy circles had been appreciating that NATO enlargement would prevent the emergence of new regional security instruments detrimental to the transatlantic link and that it would consolidate European stability and the credibility of the Alliance. Despite its geopolitical costs, enlargement was a tool of influence, indispensable to further economic globalization[21] in Europe and the development of the American economy (Horowitz and Götz, 2020). The opinion of some analysts[22] linked the US political and economic aims in Europe, security and prosperity.

Meanwhile, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) were looking for their place in the European security architecture and advanced their own initiatives (Sarotte, 2021: 164)[23]. It is then that NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP), presented on October 22 to Yeltsin, was arbitrated as a temporary and flexible solution (Sarotte, 2021: 178). The PfP sought to create habits of interoperability and military cooperation for all the countries of the former Soviet sphere, on equal terms and without the intention for the moment of adding new members. Yeltsin accepted

18 In September 1990, an American economic mission traveled to Moscow, and in July 1993, the G7 agreed to set up a *Support Implementation Group*.

19 Issues resolved later: the surrender of nuclear weapons in the *Trilateral Process* (January 14, 1994) and the Budapest Memorandum (December 5, 1994), and the sharing of the Black Sea Fleet and the use of the Sevastopol base by a bilateral treaty (May 31, 1997).

20 In Sarotte's opinion, the US had two possibilities at that time, either to facilitate the countries of the former Soviet orbit to freely decide their future or to promote cooperation with the new and recent Russian democracy, and the former was chosen, when the correct answer would have been to develop both. The geopolitical dilemma was to choose between the former satellites of the USSR and Russia.

21 Economic globalization understood as the integration of national markets through increased trade, investment and capital movements.

22 Shifrinson, Horowitz and Götz.

23 Lech Walesa convinced Yeltsin to accept Poland's NATO membership on September 1, 1993.

and then considered it a great idea[24] , defined by being slow and by the equality of conditions for the candidates.

The PfP, launched at the Brussels summit in 1994 (Yaniz, 2009), revitalized NATO, avoided the confrontation with Russia and calmed the concerns and fears of the CCEE with sufficient ambiguity. It represented a waiting room to join NATO in the perspective of a possible enlargement, through an incremental and gradual security partnership strategy to be negotiated with Russia and of course assumed by it.

But PfP did not take off as a solution for European security, nor as a formula for a NATO-based security architecture in Europe, nor as a way to calm membership aspirations without angering some or arousing the suspicions of others. For some it brought little to the table and for others the solution was too much and misguided.

Although the presence of Russian troops ended in Germany and the Baltic countries[25] , Ukraine was denuclearized and Yeltsin and Clinton made progress in nuclear arms control and reduction with the signing of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START), the bonanza of relations with Russia was spoiled at the end of 1994. Thus, the great opportunity began to be lost.

2 From 1994 to 1999: From the window of opportunity to stagnation of relations

The cooling of relations began with Yeltsin's *coup d'état* in August 1993 and continued with the first Chechen war[26]. For the West,[27] they were proof of Russia's persistence in the use of force and its relapse into violent and anti-democratic actions[28]. On the other hand, Russian suspicions towards NATO[29] awoke with the tensions produced by the allied air interventions in support of the UN against the Bosnian Serbs in Bosnia.[30]

24 Conditions presented to him on the ApP: no admission of new members to NATO, no set criteria, no calendar dates.

25 Milestones of the end of the Soviet troop presence: 21 June 1991 (Czechoslovakia), 1 December 1991 (Hungary), 16 September 1993 (Poland), 31 September 1993 (Lithuania), 31 April 1994 (Latvia), 26 July 1994 (Estonia), 31 July 1994 (Germany),

26 The war lasted from December 11, 1994 to August 31, 1996.

27 The generic term "West" in this paper encompasses the bloc of Atlantic Alliance allies and partners with liberal democratic regimes.

28 Yeltsin transferred to the West the image of a dangerous, unreliable and unpredictable character.

29 NATO's character changes from a defensive alliance to an offensive organization (Teurtrie, 2024: 195).

30 Operation NATO *Deny Flight* (1993-1995).

The final trigger will be the communiqué of the NATO ministerial meeting[31] of December 1, 1994, on the future expansion of NATO. A clear statement of intent in favor of enlargement, despite the three "noes" pronounced by Clinton at the US-Russia summit on 27 September: no surprises, no haste, no exclusion of any state in an enlarged Alliance[32]. Yeltsin angrily accused Clinton of deceiving him and of starting a "cold peace" (Sarotte, 2021: 204).[33]

The mode of NATO enlargement changed from being a gradual and progressive process for many to the rapid entry of a small bloc of states (Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary): a border between NATO and non-NATO Europe, a dividing line and a gray zone where the rest remained (Sarotte, 2021: 4). In this context, the atmosphere of cooperation disappeared.

Yeltsin's decision to intervene in Chechnya in December 1994 was a new obstacle to Russia's possible accession to NATO with particular conditions[34]. In the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the fear of the Russian threat reappeared because of the sharp turnaround in the Russian attitude.

In the 1995-1999 period, Russian mistrust grew, reaping the results of the previous stage and adding various contradictions that increased frictions between Russia and the West, always with the US as the main interlocutor. Clinton decided to promote the enlargement of NATO, focusing it on Central and Eastern Europe, without renouncing to rebuild a relationship with Russia, but without taking it into account too much, as in the Bosnian conflict.

Russia was not in a position to prevent the extension of NATO, protested loudly and continuously and stopped advancing initiatives for rapprochement; it confined itself to solving its internal political and economic problems and the war in Chechnya, and reiterated the feeling of having been deceived and rejected, disregarded and underestimated, forced to finally accept the conditions of the West. A European space contrary to its interests was being reconfigured. This period corresponded to a "cold peace" or rather to a process of sedimentation of the previous (negative) vicissitudes.

Yeltsin's arguments, redundant since then on the Russian side, will be that a common vision of pan-European security and the role of NATO is inescapable and necessary: a security system of Europe as a whole and the existence of NATO are antonymous realities. It made no sense for one defensive bloc to continue when the

31 It was no longer a question of "how" but of "how far": "[...] *We expect and would welcome NATO enlargement that would reach to democratic states to our East,* [...]" (NATO, 1994).

32 Testimony of Andrei Kozyrev, in his memoir, Kozyrev, Andrei. *The Firebird, a Memoir* 2019, p.269. (Sarotte, 2021).

33 At the Budapest summit of the Conference on Security in Europe (CSCE) on December 5, 1994, Clinton stated in his speech that NATO remained the basis for security in Europe and that no non-allied country could veto its expansion. In response, Yeltsin accused him of risking a "cold peace".

34 According to testimonies of those times, Russia would have wanted particular integration conditions similar to those of France, Spain or Norway, then (Sarotte, 2021: 154).

other, the Warsaw Pact, had already been dissolved[35]. Clinton would respond that the US needed its own security relationship with Europe in addition to the political and economic relationship and that the question posed was how to maintain it and expand the Alliance in such a way that Russia would be integrated into Europe to develop its role as a European power[36]. In return, Clinton pledged to support Russia's entry into various international organizations. A process that took place over time.[37]

It is evident that the Allied and Russian visions were radically opposed and that the guarantees and the alternative offered to Russia for its relationship with NATO in the Founding Act (NATO, 1997)[38] were not entirely satisfactory (Laurent, 2023: 12-13); they implied only coordination, i.e. subordination to Western leadership. Russia demanded from the USA –and from the West– to be subordinated to the Western leadership –and from the West– to be treated as an equal and to have a voice in discussions on security in Europe; in short, to be recognized as a great power. It should be reiterated here that all negotiations and contacts were –and are– between Russia and the US and always linked to security; both NATO and the EU were frameworks, and some European members were secondary actors (France, Germany or the UK) but not main interlocutors in these developments.

Russia's participation in allied military operations in Bosnia and Kosovo within the ApP framework was an arena for contradictions and a source of friction. While Russia contributed to the *Implementation Force* (IFOR) and *Stabilisation Force* (SFOR) operations from late 1995 to late 2004, and to the *Kosovo Force* (KFOR) from 1999 to 2003, under particular command and control arrangements (NATO, 2001), it was never involved in the strategic political level decision-making process in such a way, for example, that allied interventions such as the air campaign on Bosnian Serb targets in August 1995 were regularly communicated to the Russian side, but never in advance.

Between the summer of 1998 and the end of 1999, a time of rapid change took shape in the European context. Several relevant developments combined and had a direct impact on the future of Russian-Western relations. There was the financial collapse of Russia in 1998 and the internal struggle for Yeltsin's succession, the dismissal of President Clinton (December 19, 1998), the accession of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to NATO (March 1999), the Kosovo conflict (March-June 1999), the outbreak of the second Chechen war (October 1999), the arrival of Putin

35 Yeltsin laid it out in a bilateral meeting with Clinton on the 5th anniversary of the end of WWII, May 10, 1995 (Sarotte, 2021: 231).

36 Clinton's approach was to enlarge NATO and develop in parallel a security relationship between the Alliance and Russia. A very difficult issue to achieve.

37 Russia joined the G7 in 1998 and joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2012.

38 Two important statements in the NATO-Russia Founding Act 1997) were; "*NATO and Russia do not consider each other as adversaries*" and "*The member States of NATO reiterate that they have no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members*".

in the Kremlin after Yeltsin's decision to resign and to appoint him as his successor (December 31, 1999). This concatenation of events and complex developments reduced the chances of reaching a new "post-Cold War order" and favored the stagnation of relations.

The Kosovo crisis confirmed to Russia the American will to intervene militarily with NATO or alone[39] , without counting on it and without the approval of the United Nations Security Council to avoid a veto. The American determination induced dangerous actions such as the Russian intervention in the middle of the crisis to occupy by surprise from Bosnia the airport of Pristina in June 1999. Russian irritation led to its temporary abandonment[40] of the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC) until the end of the air campaign against Serbia on June 11, settled directly between Clinton and Yeltsin in a telephone conversation (Sarotte, 2021: 122). If Russia's weakness was evident in Kosovo, the Pristina incident generated serious doubts about its reliability, as well as further proof of its assertiveness and tendency to use force, corroborated by the outbreak of the second Chechen war in October 1999.

Negotiations on arms control and arms limitation, an area where great progress had been made, began to be stalled by the Russian side and ended in the current lack of guarantees and controls, something that can be considered a consequence of Russia's reactivated insecurity due to NATO expansion and its mistrust. In general, it can be concluded that the system of arms control and limitation began to be seriously damaged by the poor state of relations.

In this period the EU continued to develop its relationship with Russia in a completely different sphere, focused on economic, social, financial and cultural cooperation for mutual benefit, based on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) of June 1994, which was renewed year after year until 2014. Russia benefited since 1991 from the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) program that made the EU the largest provider of economic and technical assistance to Russia for its economic reform.

And if NATO's eastward expansion was rapid, EU enlargement followed more slowly; the EU ruled out, first privately (Laurent, 2023: 11)[41] , the entry of Russia and prioritized in the 1990s the entry of the "rich " countries (Austria, Finland and Sweden) over the poorer candidates from the former Soviet bloc (Sarotte, 2021: 346) with a delay based on its own political and economic criteria[42].

39 As background, the air strikes in Sudan and Afghanistan in August 1998 in response to the attacks on their embassies, and with the United Kingdom, the air strikes in Operation *Desert Fox* (December 1998) in Iraq.

40 Russia's difficult economic situation at the time made it temporary in need of International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans and US support for their granting.

41 Chirac and Rifkind in August 1995.

42 The Copenhagen accession criteria (1993).

3 Results at the end of the 20th century

One conclusion from the period between 1989 and 1999 is that a series of cumulative interactions and respective decisions, mainly by the US and Russia, were establishing in Europe a "post-Cold War order" very similar to the previous one, full of tensions, with a dividing line much further to the East and closer to Russia than tolerable. The other conclusion is that NATO reasserted itself as the dominant regional security organization to consolidate US presence and influence in Europe.

Russia was very willing to cooperate between 1991 and 1992 out of necessity, but this window of opportunity was not seized[43]. NATO confirmed its willingness to enlarge at the end of 1994 in the belief that this would stabilize Europe and calm security anxieties in Central and Eastern Europe, which had been heightened by Russia's relapse into the use of force. Russia felt that the ApP was a ruse, another ploy, and its spirit of cooperation weakened despite its collaboration in the Yugoslav conflict; its intention to integrate into Western Europe was fading.

This led to a cooling-off period (1995-1999); the rift was accentuated in Kosovo when the firmness of the respective positions and reactions reduced mutual trust and the spirit of cooperation between the West and Russia.

Gorbachev wanted to recover the USSR, Yeltsin wanted to democratize Russia and both, in different ways, wanted to associate on an equal footing with the West. Bush spoke of Europe as a whole, free and at peace, Clinton wanted to avoid a dividing line (Sarotte, 2021: 343). Gorbachev and Yeltsin suffered three strong impositions that closed alternatives and left them defenseless in the face of internal opposition: German reunification (1990), the decision to enlarge NATO (1994) and the opening to the Baltic countries (1999). Here we should note the lack of sensitivity and respect for the Russian feeling of insecurity together with the ignorance of the Russian character and its strategic culture, i.e. the Western refusal to accept Russia as it is.

4 Putin's first stage (2000-2010). The rise of discord

The 9/11 terrorist attack occurred at the time of the stagnation of Russian-Western relations at the end of the last century and Putin's rise to power. 9/11 triggered a geopolitical shift as Russia aligned itself with the US in the war against terrorism, while the second Chechen war (1999-2009) was somewhat justified. Russia regained some international prominence. The improvement of bilateral relations was reflected in a joint communiqué (US, 2001) for "a new US-Russia relationship"[44].

43 Russia was in a situation of ruin and great internal uncertainty and needed all Western support. An important sign of Western goodwill would have been, for example, to forgive its debt. But this did not happen.

44 Russia allowed the establishment of US military bases in Uzbekistan (Manas) and Kyrgyzstan (K2) in support of the deployment in Afghanistan and closed its bases in Cuba and Vietnam in 2002.

In the framework of the Alliance, the Rome declaration of May 28, 2002, on NATO-Russia relations and the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) may have been an important step –the peer-to-peer relationship– for cooperation as a mechanism for consultations, consensus-building, cooperation, joint decisions and actions, although it had its artifice[45]. It is also the time when Washington and Moscow signed the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) on May 24, although the unilateral US withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty on June 13 was a setback (Acton, 2021)[46]. Mistrust and suspicions were reaffirmed; Russia felt more vulnerable and began an arms race that would later culminate in the new hypersonic weapons.

From 2002 onwards, Russia started to show a more contentious attitude towards NATO and its close neighbors: it does not finish withdrawing its military forces from Georgia and Moldova, continuously interferes in Moldova and does not comply with the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty; it also established the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)[47] on the basis of the 1992 Collective Security Treaty, a Eurasian NATO and a counterweight to the Atlantic Alliance.

Undoubtedly, subsequent NATO enlargements (1999, 2004 and 2009) continued to provoke strong protests from Russia, which always interpreted them as a threat to its national security. Successive expansions to the East and to the Baltics, as well as EU enlargement, have challenged the status quo in Europe, supposedly agreed according to Russia, and further undermined Russian confidence in any Western guarantees. Russia was far from being recognized as a great power and as a major strategic player. In the Russian view, it was being encircled and isolated. In the Western view, Russia, a strategic actor, was unreliable and not a good partner for the Western liberal system.

In addition to the unilateralism demonstrated in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the Western attitude (González Márquez *et al.*, 2023: 105-106)[48] to the color revolutions, Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005), caused Russian sensibilities to interpret it as a joint conspiracy between foreign forces and local anti-Russian opponents to establish pro-Western governments and marginalize Russia.

Although the West had tried to mitigate frustration and Russian sensitivities at the various bilateral summits between the US and the USSR, with the Founding Act for NATO-Russia Relations (1997), the adaptation of the CFE Treaty (1999), and the Rome declaration (2002), Russia continued to regard NATO's eastward enlargement as a defeat and entailed a withdrawal and a significant loss of influence. The

45 Allied representatives met beforehand to agree on a common position (Laurent, 2023: 13-14).

46 The US was ending a Cold War agreement citing the need for defense against terrorist and "rogue" states (North Korea), but Russia and China (a non-signatory) felt more vulnerable. The US deployed initial missile defenses in Alaska and California.

47 Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Russia, currently.

48 The support expressed (especially by the U.S.) through non-governmental organizations for democratic transitions.

enlargement of the EU in 2004 and 2007, under the auspices of NATO, confirmed the complete loss of its former sphere of influence.

In February 2007, when the US sought to deploy anti-ballistic missile system elements in the Czech Republic and Poland (Arteaga, 2007)[49] in prevention of actions by "rogue" states, Putin's initial reaction will be to demonstrate that they are unnecessary. He will advance a proposal on June 17, which will not be accepted, for the joint use of radar facilities in Gabala (Azerbaijan) and Armavir (Russia) and to intensify information exchange. The deployment placed Russia before a new security dilemma and the following response was the –temporary– suspension of compliance with the CFE Treaty (July 15). Russia will continuously invoke and reiterate the Istanbul commitment (OSCE, 2000)[50] , unfulfilled in its view by the planned anti-missile deployment. The American initiative to deploy an ABM system in Poland and the Czech Republic would also highlight the difference in strategic perceptions among European governments (Arteaga, 2007).

The Russian attitude turned 180° in the period 2007-2009 with two important warnings, Putin's forceful speech at the 2007 Munich security conference (March 10) and the rapid Russian intervention in Georgia (August 2008) which induced the suspension of the NATO-Russia Council[51] as the only weak allied reaction.

The breaking point for Putin (Sarotte, 2021: 348) and which prompted this radical change, with the background of the invasion of Iraq (2003), the color revolutions[52] and the attempted US ABM deployment, probably came about as a consequence of the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008 (the *Open Door Policy*), where Ukraine and Georgia were promised NATO membership, although without specifying either date or plans[53] , and which was preceded by the recognition of Kosovo's independence (February 17).

The offer to Ukraine and Georgia of NATO accession, a red line for Russia (Zargckyj, 2018)[54] , roundly clarified the allied position to Putin. Of course, the Allied decision did not take into account the nature of Ukraine's and Georgia's geographical, historical, cultural, political and economic ties with Russia, nothing

49 According to official US statements, the ABM deployment in Eastern Europe would prevent missile attacks from "rogue states" such as Iran and North Korea and was not directed against the Russian Federation. The real US reason may be related to the anticipation of Russian development in hypersonic means.

50 Charter on European Security adopted at the Istanbul Summit (1999).

51 It took place between August 2008 and April 2009. For its part, the EU showed total passivity and did not even impose economic sanctions, for example.

52 Georgia, Rose Revolution (November 2003), Ukraine, Orange Revolution (November 2004 to January 2005) and Kyrgyzstan, Tulip Revolution (March 2005).

53 Germany, the UK and France, among other European allies, were against further engagement, such as a partnership action plan (MAP), to avoid a more serious confrontation with Russia.

54 Putin's words about Ukraine were: "*Ukraine was not even a real nation-state*".

to do with the character of Russia's relationship with Poland –a state recreated after World War I–, with the countries of Central Europe –once part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire– or with the Baltic countries –much closer historically to the German sphere than to the Russian one (Rumer and Sokolsky, 2019: 16). It is very likely that Putin then made the decision to "show muscle" as he effectively did in Georgia and then in Ukraine.

On June 5, 2008, prior to the invasion of Georgia, Russian President Medvedev proposed the development of a new pan-European security treaty, as a necessity –in Russia's view– to end the Cold War legacy[55] and to create a distinct European security system into which Russia could fit. The initiative, which could respond to the Bucharest summit (2008), was based on two very similar speeches of Medvedev delivered during his visit to Berlin in June 2008 (Medvedev, 2008a) and his participation in the Evian World Policy Conference in October 2008 (Medvedev, 2008b) where he formulated four conditions[56] for security in Europe. The development of the Russian proposal led to a series of meetings within the OSCE framework known as the Corfu process (OSCE, 2010) which took place between June 2009 and December 2010 in an attempt by Russia to strengthen the OSCE itself as a security organization after the Georgian crisis and to restore confidence.

To general surprise, two days before a planned OSCE meeting and four days before a ministerial meeting of the NATO-Russia Council (on 29 November 2009), Russia went ahead and made public (Russian Federation, 2009)[57] its final proposal for a Treaty on Security in Europe (TSE) together with an Agreement for relations between Russia and NATO members.

The Russian proposal posited, as a legal obligation, that no nation or international organization in the Euro-Atlantic region would be entitled or empowered to bolster its own security at the expense of that of other nations or organizations. The TSE treaty can be interpreted along two lines of thought (Hull, 2019: 5-6), as an attempt to create a legal basis subject only to UN Security Council arbitration and whereby Russia, with a say in the Euro-Atlantic area, would regain its role as a great power and a sphere of influence, or as an effort by Russia to return to a legality, in a time of transition to some multipolarity, that would safeguard sovereignty against outside interventions and to create a bloc-free collective security space in place of the existing collective defense alliances (NATO and CSTO).

55 Russia felt the need to take stock of the post-Cold War security arrangements and called for a new European security dialogue to arrive at a legally binding treaty.

56 "No to guaranteeing one's own security at the expense of others; No to actions (of military alliances or coalitions) that undermine the unity of the common security space; No to the development of military alliances that threaten the security of other parties to the Treaty; No that any State or international organization can have exclusive rights to maintain peace and stability in Europe."

57 It was posted on the Kremlin's website and sent days later to members of the NATO-Russia Council.

In any case, the documents, clearly contrary to Allied security interests, were rejected. It was certainly a clear revisionist endeavor directly opposed to Allied open-door policy and would have continually blocked the NATO decision-making process.

The Russian view insisted that the OSCE principle of indivisible security in Europe and from Vancouver to Vladivostok was not in line with the presence of a collective security organization in the same space, NATO, which offers security guarantees exclusively to its members (Kühn, 2010: 3-7). The very existence of NATO was, in the oft-repeated Russian view, a contradiction in terms, leading inevitably to a collision between a pan-European (Russian) and a bloc (allied) approach, and thus to a fragmentation of the common European space.

After the Russian intervention in Georgia, there was a time of readjustment of Russian-Western relations brought about by President Obama (USA, 2010a). The NATO summit in Lisbon in November 2010 favored again some détente; Obama spoke of Russia as "a partner, not an adversary" (USA, 2010b) and Medvedev agreed to engage with the Alliance "on an equal footing" (Goebel, 2010) and in a genuine strategic partnership[58] ; Moscow was not vetoed the establishment of an anti-ballistic missile system and joined in the study of the project (NATO, 2010: 38). It was perhaps time to work out with Russia its fit with NATO according to its strong particularities (Kupchan, 2010: 112).

This willingness to readjust or restart Russia-West relations that was framed by the Corfu process in the OSCE and the development of the 2010 Lisbon NATO summit began to dissipate in 2011 following NATO's intervention in Libya[59] and Putin's various actions after his return to the presidency in 2012.[60]

5 How to arrive at the 2022 breakup

This whole process of actions on both sides, of progress and setbacks in relations between Russia and the West from 2007 to 2010, continued to seek security cooperation in Europe and to find an accommodation between the Russian and allied visions. With Putin's return to the presidency in 2012, the dynamic of actions for an improvement was significantly slowed and coincided with another, very different and unprecedented Russian effort in the previous two decades, that of an active expansion of influence beyond its immediate neighborhood (Stronski and Sokolsky, 2017). Russia intervened in Syria, Libya, and the Sahel, occupying empty spaces.

58 Collaborations were agreed on specific areas, missile defense, counter-terrorism and counter-piracy, and rescue exercises.

59 Allowed by the Russian abstention, the intervention will be heavily criticized, Libya constitutes an argument to justify more aggressive Russian positions.

60 The Kremlin's rapprochement with Iran and the Syrian regime intensified the unease of the U.S. The limit was overstepped when Putin decided to grant political asylum in 2013 to Edward Snowden.

Russia's return as a major global power materialized not only its recovery[61] , but it also expressed its approach to a multipolar world where to play a prominent role.

Another turning point was reached in 2013 with the Maidan revolution and Ukraine's turn to the West. Russian rejection of the Western stance and its opposition started to become more evident and active. They will be sustained by Western criticism of Russia, alleged support for anti-regime demonstrations[62] and of course by the announced expansion of NATO and the EU in its immediate neighborhood (Moldova-Ukraine-Georgia). Ukraine in NATO means allied infrastructures on the Russian border and the loss of the Sevastopol naval base.

From 2014 and onwards, relations will clearly worsen, and without going into details, this was reflected in the respective "offensive" and "counter-offensive" actions: continuous Western condemnations and economic sanctions against Russian interference in the cyber sphere and disinformation campaigns (Stronski and Sokolsky, 2017). New concepts, such as gray zone or hybrid conflict, will explain the clearly offensive Russian pattern of action. The justifying narrative is that the West seeks to weaken and eliminate the Russian regime, which endorses a dynamic of retaliation and tit-for-tat. The US will later identify Russia as a major geopolitical threat in its 2017 National Security Strategy.

Since the annexation of Crimea in 2014[63] , the whole process of cooperation was interrupted along with most contacts[64] which will be confirmed after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 where the relationship has become confrontational.

Earlier, in December 2021, Russia again proposed a security treaty with the USA and an agreement on relations with NATO, unacceptable from the Western point of view[65] , with conditions identical to those of the documents (TSE) proposed in 2009 (Alberque, 2022). It was a question of creating a different security architecture with the guarantees Russia needed; the feeling of insecurity of Russia vis-à-vis NATO and its geopolitical need to protect itself with an exclusive sphere of interest was confirmed.

61 The strengthening of political power with the neutralization of the oligarchs and the economic recovery thanks to the rise in the price of hydrocarbons.

62 Between 2011 and 2013, a protest movement and demonstrations developed in Russia, which some analysts called the white or snow revolution. Some of the protagonists -the opposition to Putin-, were Alexei Navalny, Boris Nemtsov and Sergei Udaltsov.

63 On April 1, 2014, NATO decided to suspend all cooperation with Russia. At the Warsaw summit (08-09 July 2016), it stated that it remained open to political dialogue but that relations would not improve until it saw a clear and constructive change in Russia's actions and attitudes.

64 The possibilities of contacts between governments (representatives and diplomats) are maintained. Communications have never been completely cut off and there is some very unique collaboration as in the International Space Station.

65 NATO's expansion was halted, its deployment and military activities in Eastern Europe and in the territories of the new allies since 1997 were limited.

Putin and Biden spoke in April, in June and twice in December 2021 about the future of Europe, and Biden maintained several lines of communication with major capitals (González Márquez *et al.*, 2023: 262). In January 2022 the failure of diplomacy was confirmed after several summits: Russia-US in Geneva[66] , Russia-NATO in Brussels, OSCE meeting in Vienna[67] and Foreign Affairs meeting, Lavrov-Blinken, in Geneva again[68]. The Russian invasion also confirmed the failure of deterrence.

The scenario from February 2022 is one of confrontation with a war on the eastern border of the EU. The EU is using its economic power as a weapon through sanctions and supports Ukraine economically and by providing equipment and weaponry. Although there have been no direct armed attacks against European allied countries, Russia is developing disinformation campaigns and other forms of aggression of hybrid character especially in the information and cyber domains[69] and is fomenting xenophobic and nationalist movements for the internal division of the EU and to erode the liberal political system. The Alliance has condemned Russian aggression, supports the integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine without intervening directly and considers Russia to be the most important and direct threat to the security of the Euro-Atlantic area; it does not rule out the possibility of an attack against allied interests or territory (Ministry of Defense, 2022: 6).

There has been no effort between 2014 and 2022 to spark reflection on a new security architecture in Europe. With the priority on resolving the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the proposals[70] (Vimont, 2024) at the EU level to reach some kind of engagement with Russia have not reached the necessary consensus between those who believe that a dialogue is impossible without giving the impression of weakness and those who favor some openness and overcoming mistrust, views that reflect national interests and different historical and geographical realities (Warsaw-Tallinn axis versus Madrid-Dublin axis). However, the Strategic Compass commits to a united EU against Russian aggression.

Putin's narrative to justify confrontation with the West consists of the story of a Russia that feels deceived first and threatened later by the possible deployment of NATO military infrastructures on its borders with the lack of depth for its defense (Putin, 2022).

66 June 16, 2021.

67 July 8, 2021.

68 January 10 and 21, 2022.

69 As examples over time, the cyber attack on Estonia in 2007 or the interference in the American presidential election in 2016 and the French presidential election in 2017, the Salisbury incident in 2018...

70 A roadmap by Mogherini in 2016, reiterated by Borrell in 2021 and Merkel's summit attempt in 2021.

6 Conclusion. Rise and fall of a cooperative relationship

Between 1989 and 2022, there has been the rise and fall of a possible cooperative relationship, that of Russia with the West, with contacts and negotiations that sought collaboration and coexistence and perhaps the integration of Russia into the West. Today the narratives are at odds when it comes to determining responsibilities for this failure, responsibilities that could be shared.

In the whole dynamics of Russia's relations with the West[71] , much has to do with Western triumphalism since the dissolution of the USSR translated in terms of victory over the Soviet bloc, Fukuyama's end of history and the triumph of liberal democracy. This continuous display of vain optimism will justify Moscow's denunciations of the two faces of the West and criticisms of its hypocrisy. The West's behavior ultimately amounts to humiliation for Russia and that it feels cheated. Certainly, the narrative has never emphasized that the USSR did not suffer a military defeat, nor did its disintegration entail a capitulation that granted rights to the Western bloc.

Western Europe and the USA have managed to impose their version of European security, NATO and the American umbrella, and their political and economic solution, liberal democracy and market economy. It has taken shape through the successive enlargements of NATO and the EU in a process that has not had Russian consent, which has been very costly. Since Russia has not been satisfactorily accommodated in the new European concert, the revanchism of the "loser" or of the power that did not prevail, and Russian revisionism has been violently awakened.

The EU has developed neighborhood policies without geopolitical sensitivity that have been seen by Russia as policies of influence imposed for its isolation. Moreover, some of its members[72] have maintained bilateral positions directly related to their national interests generating an evident lack of cohesion and contradictions that have weakened the potential capabilities of the EU in its relationship with Russia.

For the USSR and later for Russia, the survival of NATO after the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact and the inexorable process of its extension towards the East represents a serious setback involving a serious imbalance and a tremendous contradiction in terms, since it was recognized that Russia was no longer an enemy. All Russia's positions and reasoning in its contacts with the West will be focused on this direction until the time comes when Russia will cease to collaborate. The persistence of NATO ensures the American presence in the subcontinent and is a sufficient reason for dissatisfaction and a potential source of problems posing a security dilemma for Russia.

What Russia has interpreted since the end of the Cold War –and has seen embodied in the color revolutions–, has been that the West has been repeating a

71 On the Western side, the leading role has been played by the United States, either directly or through NATO, since security is the preferred area.

72 France and Germany, mainly.

procedure of reorientation of the post-Soviet space towards the Euro-Atlantic sphere, financing and supporting movements for the change to pro-Western democratic regimes and the promotion of the liberal model, under the protection of NATO as a security organization. Its former satellites have been asking for EU membership, as a gateway to progress and economic development, and prior entry into NATO for the protection of its deterrence. With all this, Russia has irretrievably lost its sphere of influence in Europe and is turning towards Asia.

As described above, it is evident that there have been attempts and efforts on both sides to reach some compromise solution –always without renouncing the respective interests–, but the reality has not even led to a stable cooperative relationship. The consequences of the interaction of the respective actions, linked to internal policies, accumulated over time, as well as misunderstandings, to the point of a total loss of mutual trust.

The lack of understanding and intelligence of the West has been evident together with the unfeasibility, with difficult to accept proposals, of a certain integration of Russia in the European political and economic structures and its fitting into the security architecture of Europe. Also, the firmness and lack of flexibility of the positions together with the force of events in Europe and beyond, have been making it difficult to reach a satisfactory solution.

Russia's strategic objectives vis-à-vis Western Europe continue to be to foster internal division in the EU, to subvert NATO's cohesion and its collective defense capabilities, to weaken the transatlantic link, to gain veto power for Moscow in the European security architecture and to regain its sphere of interest by dominating its immediate neighborhood. In short, the aim is to return as far as possible to the positions of the end of the Cold War, to restore Russia's lost prestige and its status as a great power.

And finally, a confrontational relationship has been precipitated whose responsibility is shared. The common thread could be the process of NATO expansion since German reunification. What is certain is that Russia has gone from being a potential partner to a serious threat to the European Union. It is impossible to find a solution to the war in Ukraine without taking into account Russian security interests and the reality of a Russia ready to use force, disengaged and blockaded, which is a nuclear power and a permanent member of the Security Council. Also, it is necessary to prevent the war in Ukraine from becoming a point of no return in relations between Russia and the USA and the EU.

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International Relations in Russia: development of the discipline and foreign policy

Abstract

International Relations (IR) was consolidated as an academic discipline at the end of World War II, closely linked to the newly acquired American hegemony, which facilitated the consolidation of the realist paradigm during the following decades. At the same time, the development of IR in the Soviet Union was conditioned by the official Marxist ideology, which reduced analytical approaches to the strategic interests of the state. Finally, when Soviet IR specialists gained access to Western literature, they realized that their approaches could be equated with those of the structural realism of capitalist thought. This paper studies the state of the art of the discipline in Russia, from the Soviet period to the present day, and points to a correspondence between theory and foreign policy. It concludes that the absolute predominance of the realist approach in Russia is due to the fact that it is the only one capable of offering an appropriate theoretical framework for dealing with the practical issues of its foreign policy, among which, above all, that of national interest.

Keywords

Structure, power, foreign policy, international relations, international system.

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1 Introduction

Russia maintains its character as a global international actor despite the loss of status in the international order following the disappearance of the Soviet Union. The hierarchical structure of the system replicates the degree of influence of each actor in which the cultural factor is a determining factor, so that international relations offer a good reflection of both.

The concept of culture can be explained as a dynamic project of national integration which, once it succeeds over other competing projects and becomes institutionalized in a society, acquires a normative background whose centrifugal tendencies tend to impose it from the center to the periphery (Pietersen, 2020: 13-14). In the words of Julio Cortázar (1914-1984), "culture is basically nothing other than the presence and exercise of our identity in all its strength" (1984: 45).

From this point of view, international relations can be considered a cultural product both in terms of the interactions of all kinds between the different actors in the international system and as a scientific discipline, which, in order to distinguish it from the first meaning, is labeled with initial capital letters. Likewise, the global scope of the discipline's object of study, which is international society as a whole implies a substantial difference with other social science disciplines (Arenal, 1981: 853).

The confusion induced by both terms has much to do with the dominance of the realist paradigm of the discipline in the West since 1945, whose theses are still largely identified with state policies at the international level (Vargas-Alzate, 2010: 76). In this regard, it is appropriate to introduce the concept of *foreign policy*, which can be understood as the non-algebraic sum of the external relations of an actor, whose main referent continues to be the state, in its international relations. As an object of study, it is characterized by its link with the IR discipline (Lisboa & Bombón, 2021: 76).

In 1939, shortly after the outbreak of World War II (WWII), the British historian E. H. Carr published in Great Britain the book The Twenty Years Crisis (1919-1939). This work lays down the political principles of realism a decade before Hans Morgenthau developed them in his classic Politics Among Nations[1] (Gold, 2006: 236). What is relevant is that realism emerged and consolidated during the convulsive decade of the 1940s as a reaction to the ineffectiveness of idealism, which was unable to prevent the rise of totalitarianism in Europe and the outbreak of World War II (WWII) (Díaz, 2024: 357).

1 Carr wrote his book with the intention of warning about the dangers of the political ideas of idealism and refuting them from a scientific perspective, since he was horrified to see how those utopian ideas were bringing the world to the brink of another war two decades after the end of the First World War. Carr contemplates three fundamental principles of realism, which are: 1.- History is a sequence of causes and effects that can be analyzed by an intellectual analysis, but not from voluntarism (idealism position); 2.- Theory is not the origin of practice (idealism position), but on the contrary; and 3.- Men act honestly because there is a coercive and punitive power, not because of their good nature. Therefore, politics is not a function of ethics (idealism's position), but the latter is a function of the former. There can be no morality without authority. See: Carr E. H. (2004). The crisis of the twenty years (1919-1939); An introduction to the study of international relations. Catarata, p. 110.

On the contrary, Stanley Hoffmann states that IR emerged as a science in the United States (Hoffmann, 1977: 44), despite the fact that Carr was the first to approach international affairs from a scientific point of view. All this conveys an ethnocentric bias, characteristic of the discipline during the second half of the 20th century due to the imposing force of U.S. policies. In turn, these have been intellectually and academically legitimized by the works of Anglo-Saxon realist authors, mainly American. In this sense, Celestino del Arenal has come to state that:

> "The discipline has developed 'in an exclusivist, closed and provincial context, although with pretensions of universal validity', conditioned both 'by the ignorance, if not express undervaluation, that those [American] specialists have of other languages and of other scientific and intellectual worlds', and by their dependence on the foreign policy interests of the United States" (Arenal, 2015: 44).

It is for these reasons that the origin of IR as a discipline is usually associated with the influence of the United States after 1945. However, other positions consider that such origin took place in 1919 within the framework of the League of Nations at the end of World War I (WWI) and that it was from 1945 onwards that it was consolidated as such (Flores, 2024: 15-16). This eclectic point of view seems to be an appropriate time frame in which to locate the origin of IR.

Simultaneously in Russia, the Revolution of 1917 meant the end of the tsarist regime and the establishment in 1922 of the Bolshevik state, after the victory of the Red side over the White side in the Russian Civil War (1917-1922). The revolutionary profile of the still unborn Bolshevik state raised concerns among the victorious powers, which is why it was left out of the Paris Conference (1919-1920) and the League of Nations, which emerged from it. In fact, the USSR was not admitted to the latter until 1934. [2]

Consequently, during most of the second half of the 20th century, the development of the discipline of IR in the Soviet Union (USSR) will be linked to the ideological factor. However, as will be discussed below, the peculiarities of the Soviet state will condition the approach of its academics in a generic way towards what in the West will be the realist paradigm of IR.

Before Gorbachev introduced his reform program known as perestroika, the official Marxist-Leninist doctrine of the state conditioned any line of research in IR, which was subordinated to the geostrategic interests of the state. In that sense, the approaches of Soviet internationalists focused their studies on the systemic level, which in practice placed them at the third level of analysis, or image, of Kenneth Waltz's structural theory (Morales, 2019: 141-142 and 152). Thus, although they were still unaware of it, the approach of Soviet IR specialists corresponded to a large extent with Waltz's neorealist or structural theory.

2 A few years later, it was expelled from the Society in response to the invasion of Finland in December 1939. The attack on the Nordic country by the USSR provoked what is known as the Winter War (November 30, 1939 to March 13, 1940).

On the other hand, from the 1960s onwards, the West began to question the incontestable validity of the realist paradigm from the postulates of other currents, which in fact implicitly amended the hegemonic power of the United States. On the contrary, in Russia the germ of a proper school of IR (in Russian; *mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia*) did not appear until the 1980s.[3]

As already hinted, this delay was mainly due to the restrictions imposed by the official ideology, but also to the further regression of the social sciences at specific stages of the period. One of these was that of Leonid Brezhnev, which became known as "stagnation" (*zastoi*).

However, later on, Gorbachev's perestroika encouraged in researchers the "new thinking" (*novoie myshlenie*) open-mindedness in foreign policy (Morales, 2019: 144-145). This is a significant indicator that points to a long-standing and close correlation in the Russian case between IR theory and its transposition into state policies.

Therefore, it can be argued that the contributions of Soviet specialists did not make a great contribution to the development of a theory of International Relations in Russia. Current researchers have determined that the reason was largely due to the conflict represented by the duality between the interests of the state and the class internationalism of the Marxist-Leninist discourse (Lebedeva, 2018: 95).

Finally, the demise of Soviet structures meant that the new state found itself beset by numerous practical issues that required immediate attention. Consequently, as Professor Morales states, "the theoretical study of IR in Russia in the early 1990s took a back seat to applied studies, more useful for foreign policy formulation (2019: 152).

2 International Relations and Foreign Policy in the 1990s: In Search of Identity

There is no doubt that the 1990s was, in all respects, a critical period for Russia, which was manifested in its international relations by the dichotomy between two antagonistic positions: Westernism or Atlanticism and neo-Eurasianism. At the head of the former were President Boris Yeltsein himself and his foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev[4], supporters of adherence to the structures of Western civilization[5] with which they felt they shared their Christian origins (Jovani, 2014: 192).

3 However, there had already been a certain openness during the Kruchev era, when Soviet academics had access to the texts of authors such as Hans Morgenthau or Raymond Aron, which reaffirmed their theoretical orientation towards realist currents. One of the effects of this access to Western texts was that during the 1960s the term "internationalist" (*mezhdunarodnik)* appeared to refer to the specialist in international relations (labeled in lower case).

4 Kozyrev was responsible for the foreign policy of the Russian Federation between October 9, 1991 and January 10, 1996, when he was relieved of the post by Yevgeny Primakov. Kozyrev had succeeded Eduard Shevardnadze, the last foreign minister of the USSR.

5 EU, NATO, IMF, G-7, etc.

On the contrary, driven by the failure of the Yeltsein government's policies, the neo-Eurasianists appeared among the Russian intelligentsia as a serious alternative to Westernism (Sergunin, 2004: 20-21). Neo-Eurasianism is expressed on the basis of civilizational and ideological assumptions that are wary of a Western orientation of foreign policy, because of the renunciation of traditional Russian values and identity that this would imply.

Neo-Eurasianism asserts Russian identity uniqueness vis-à-vis the West, and its ideological assumptions drink from the oldest Slavophile traditions of Russian political thought. Broadly speaking, this considered that the foundation of Russian uniqueness vis-à-vis the West was to be found in both Christian Orthodoxy and Slavic ethnicity (Nugraha, 2018: 98). In this regard, today's neo-Eurasianism retrieves from its sources the messianic idea of the role of the Russian Orthodox Church as the Third Rome.

Closely related to this, the position of neo-Eurasianism holds that the West considers that only its civilization can be associated with progress, while those located in its periphery that do not wish to emulate it would be barbaric (Korovin, 2019: 249-251). Therefore, in the framework of this work and without aiming to be exhaustive, the rejection of neo-Eurasianism to the ethnocentric perception of the world assumed as an argument of authority by the West is of interest.

Neo-Eurasianism remains a controversial term that still arouses debate among academics, political scientists and geopoliticians. Thus, conceptually it has been approached as: a specific Russian school of geopolitics; a Fourth Political Theory[6]; a Multipolar World Theory; a philosophical current and even as a totalitarian political program (Morgado, 2021: 40-41).

In any case, according to Tsygankov, in the mid-1990s three main currents of foreign policy thinking could be distinguished in Russia: Westernists, social democrats, statists and civilizationists (2006: 65). The neo-Eurasianists fell into the last category and among them two clear currents could be distinguished: the reformists or democrats and the Slavophiles.

The latter argued that, thanks to its unique geopolitical position straddling Europe and Asia, but independent of both, Russia could exercise a natural balance of power between the two civilizations and between great powers (Sergunin, 2004: 21). For

6 Duguin,A. (2009). Четвёртая политическая теория. Amfora. There are several editions in Spanish. For example, among others: Duguin, A. (2013). La Cuarta Teoría Política. Eds. Nueva República. The Spanish editions include prologues elaborated by the author himself in that language. Duguin postulates that the three ideologies that have ruled the world during the 20th century, fascism, Marxism and liberalism, have already been overcome and that the reason for Politics has become the very existence of being. This leads to a Fourth Political Theory. Duguin argues that each ideology rests on a historical subject, which in the case of the first three were, respectively: individual, class and state/race. To explain the subject of the Fourth Theory, Duguin turns to Heidegger's philosophy, from which he draws the concept of Dassein (Being) and operates as the subject of that Duguin. In Duguin, A. (2013) The Fourth Political Theory. New Republic. Pp. 51-54.

their part, the reformists, due to their political inferiority, became a sort of adaptive democrats around the concept of Eurasia (Sergunin, 2004: 21-23).

Consequently, the different currents were torn between antagonistic worldviews. On the one hand, there was the vassalage to the West that for many Russians meant the Yeltsein era, and on the other, the recrimination that already at the end of the 1880s the historian Nicolai Danilevsky made of the Russian interest in Western culture, which he called Europeanism.

Danilevsky's work had a decisive influence on the germinal ideas of Eurasianism, in connection with which he wrote that: "for Europe, Russia is not meat of its flesh... and even for Europeanist Russians, Russia can only aspire to be an adopted child of Europe (Danilevskii, 2013 [1888]: 55). From another point of view, the great philosopher Pyotr Chaadaev (1794-1856) lamented that the four great ideas that defined European man: duty, justice, right and order; seemed alien to the Russian mentality (Chaadaev, 2009 [1836]: 21-22)[7]

The tension between Russian or Asian identity that has permeated Russian perceptions since ancient times may partially explain the chaos of post-communist Russia, where the absence of democratic traditions led to a sudden ideological vacuum. The response of Russian leaders was to force an accelerated Westernization which, as had happened other times in Russian history, ended in political, social and economic disaster before coming to the conclusion that it is not a good idea to replace traditional Russian customs with Western values (Chugrov, 1992: 80-81).

Simultaneously, the main political forces of the country (*derzhavniki*)[8] found a way to consolidate their status through a strong state that would be able to maintain order and stability, thus promoting the convergence of their interests. The term *derzhavniki* denotes precisely the defense of this type of strong state, which, on the other hand, responds to the traditional Russian idea of state structure (Sergunin, 2007: 57).

The influence of the Derzhavniki on Russian political thought at the time provided a valid framework for overcoming partisan differences and developing the concept of

7 The reference corresponds to the text "First philosophical letter to a lady", dated by the author in Moscow on December 1, 1829, although it was not published until 1836 in the magazine *Teleskop* (Moscow). A superficial reading of Chaadaev's letters could create the impression that the author expresses his hostility against Russia, when in fact he is expressing the pain he felt at the state of his homeland. Chaadaev was a contemporary of the tsars who succeeded Catherine the Great (r. 1762-1796), succeeded by her son Paul I of whom even his own mother harbored serious doubts about his ability to reign. In the end he turned out to be an authoritarian and messianic tsar instead of the enlightened reformer he was brought up to be. He was assassinated in 1801 in a plot hatched by former officials. He was followed by his son Alexander I (r. 1801-1825) who, without showing a clear liberal or conservative profile was, in the words of one of his mentors; "too weak to reign and too proud to be led". During his tsarate the Napoleonic invasion took place. Chaadaev died the year the Crimean War ended (1856), but he knew all the wars of imperial expansion waged by Russia during the first half of the 19th century.

8 The collective known as the *derzhavniki* consisted of the industrial lobby, state bureaucracies (civil and military) and moderate democrats.

national security in a broad sense, not only military, on the basis of all the capabilities of the state (Sergunin, 2007: 61-62). Therefore, a very real sense, it can be considered that it is largely due to the *derzhavniki* the restoration of the realist school in Russian political thought in the 1990s.

In those years, a strategy was beginning to take shape that recovered the idea of Russia as a preponderant international actor, which augured its decisive role in the post-bipolar international order. Likewise, the newly recovered realism served as an explanatory framework for conceptualizing the different threats that Russia would face in this new international order.

Among them, those affecting the near abroad were perceived as particularly serious because of the emergence of regimes not favorable to Moscow. This coincided with the Eurasianists, for whom these spaces formed a geopolitical, economic, cultural and civilizational unity with Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan at its core (Duleba, 1998). All this helps to explain Moscow's interventionist policies in the Region from 2008 to the present.

Similarly, although there was agreement between both foreign policy currents on the importance of Russia's geopolitical position, the realists prioritized pragmatic interests over ideology (Sergunin, 2007: 65-66). However, in that 1990s post-Soviet Russia was desperately searching for its (new) identity in a changing world and the realists were faced with the dilemma of considering the near abroad as a bridge between Europe and Asia or as a buffer space.

An analysis based on economic factors prescribed the first option, but, paradoxically, things changed when the security variable was introduced (Sergunin, 2007: 20-21)[9]. In this regard, analysts at the Institute for National Security and Strategic Studies in Moscow[10] concluded in 1997 that, from a political and military point of view, the regions of Central and Eastern Europe should remain a geopolitical gray zone that could serve as a bargaining chip in the event of a serious deterioration of Russia-West relations[11].

9

10 Росссийский институт стратегических иссследований (РИСИИ). In English; *Russian Institute for Strategic Studies* (RISS, RISI or RISY). It is a research and strategic analysis center created by decree of President Boris Yeltsein in 1992 as part of the *Foreign Intelligence Service* of *the FedRus Government* (the former First Directorate of the KGB). In 2009 it came directly under the Presidential Administration, which appoints its staff, composed mainly of retired senior officers from the intelligence branch. The RISS reports directly to President Putin.

11 Evolyutsiya struktur voyennoy bezopasnosti: rol' i mesto Rossiyi (geopoliticheskiy aspekt). Institut natsional'no bezopasnosti i strategicheskikh issledovaniy. moskva 1997; Problema obespecheniya voyennoy bezopasnosti Rossii s severoatlanticheskogo napravleniya, p. 5. [Evolution of military security structures: the role and place of Russia (geopolitical aspect). National Institute for Strategic and Security Studies. Moscow 1997. The problem of ensuring Russia's military security from the North Atlantic direction, P. 5]. In: Duleva, A. (1998). From Domination to Partnership: The Perspectives of Russian-Central-East European Relations. Final Report to the NATO Research Fellowship Program, 1996-1998. P. 21

3 21st Century: The State of International Relations in Russia

The place of IR in the landscape of social sciences in Russia can be understood by the classification of IR by the Higher Commission on Accreditation (VKA)[12]. This is the body of the Ministry of Education that accredits the degree of Doctor of Political Science (plural) to both internationalist and political science doctoral students. However, Russian academia considers International Relations as its own discipline (Morales, 2019: 149-150).

The current state of the discipline in Russia mostly inherits the statist approaches of the Soviet era, in which great importance was given to the historical method[13] as a working tool. However, in 2013 already existed in the Russian Federation, the socio-political heir of the USSR, departments of IR in more than 70 universities, which facilitated the expansion of IR as a scientific discipline.

Also, a real milestone was the emergence of academic institutions of RR II not subordinated to the state, such as the Russian Policy Research Center or PIR (*Центр политических иссследований Росссии*); which is a non-governmental body focused on the analysis of international security issues. Something unthinkable in Soviet times (Lebedeva, 2013: 10).

In any case, since the beginning of the 2000s, the theoretical debate of International Relations in Russia would be fundamentally configured around two approaches: the nationalist or statist, equivalent to realism in the West, and the liberal or westernist, with an indisputable predominance of the former (Morales, 2019: 152). Other currents such as constructivism or poststructuralism, although they occupy their space in the interdisciplinary debate, are in the minority, as is their influence on foreign policy.

Social-constructivism emerged in the 1980s as an alternative theoretical approach to the rationalist currents (neo-realism and neo-liberalism), which did not seem to explain the current changes in the international system. Because they can be instrumentalized by the actors, constructivists reject the concept of structure as a causal variable of a systemic theory of international politics[14] and, therefore, the validity of the principle of anarchy (Wendt, 1992: 394-395).

12 The Higher Certification Commission under the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation was established to ensure state scientific certification. ВЫСШАЯ АТТЕСТАЦИОННАЯ КОМИССИЯ. Available: https://vak-minobrnauki-gov-ru.translate.goog/main?_x_tr_sl=ru&_x_tr_tl=es&_x_tr_hl=es&_x_tr_pto=sc Accessed 18/12/24

13 The methodology explains the historical method as that process of indirect experimental knowledge (in time or space) by which one comes to know a fact through an intermediate agent. This method owes its name to the fact that, since past events are not reproducible, it is the only one applicable to the study of history. See: Simiad, F. (2003). Historical method and social science. EMPIRIA, Journal of Social Science Methodology. N.° 6. Pp. 163-202. Pg. 165. Available: https://revistas.uned.es/index.php/empiria/article/download/939/860/2987. Accessed: 19/12/24.

NdA: since mankind invented writing, the intermediate agent par excellence is the document (in any of the formats in which it can be found today).

14 Instead, it gives causal status to ideas, culture, (international) norms and identities.

Identities are configured on the basis of shared ideas and values and build structures that turn out to be determinant in the behavior of the international actor State (Ibáñez, 2015: 195-196). In this regard, identity, international norms and values are the pillars of the constructivist theory of IR, which raises the possibility of change of the former in international actors.

However, such a change would require two conditions that would be necessary and sufficient: that there are rational reasons for the change in the role of an international actor and that the cost/benefit ratio of such a change is favorable to it. That was the case with Gorbachev's New Way of Thinking which, according to Wendt, was one of the most important political phenomena of the contemporary era (Wendt, 1992: 419-420).

Specialists in the discipline of International Relations resort to classifications as artifices, which facilitate the analysis of the object of study by grouping similar elements together. However, since Russian scholars did not develop their own theory until the 2000s, there is no homonymous Western school of Russian postmodernism (Sergunin, 2016: 125).

In any case, this appears in Russia as a response of a minority part of *academia* to the conviction that, in the 1990s, the country had entered the postmodern era with its profound changes at the individual and social level (Sergunin, 2016: 126).

Russian postmodernists deconstruct the concept of national interest which they considered lethal to Russia's interests, which, at the turn of the 2000s, referred to democratic consolidation and its significance for Russia in terms of relations with the West. In this regard, they argue that the concept of national interest is intentionally artificial to cover up that, actually, the real interest is not that of the nation, or even of the state, but of the ruling elites (Sergunin, 2016: 128). Consequently, Russian postmodernists concluded that Moscow should base its international relations on the concept identity and not on the concept of national interest.

The contribution of postmodernist theorists to the interdisciplinary debate in Russia was to enrich the approach with the discourse of other social scientists, especially psychologists, by assuming that maintaining one's own identity, the "we", implies a narrative that may conflict with that of the "others". For this reason, postmodernist theory holds that each actor must think of his or her own identity as a permanent process of construction-reconstruction, or adjustment, in order to maintain balance with that of the "others" (Kratochvíl, 2004: 4-5).

In short, postmodernists argue in favor of dialogue as the backbone of Moscow's international relations. But the reality is that Russian foreign policy specialists have not attached great importance to peripheral currents of political thought.

About them, most were of the opinion that they do not provide an appropriate theoretical framework for developing geopolitical concepts of their own, which, like "national interest", are presented as factors of continuity (Sergunin, 2007: 96). Somehow, Russian scholars tend to think of the aforementioned post-rationalist approaches as little more than academic extravagances, with little or no influence on foreign policy.

After 1991, foreign policy scholars in Russia were given unrestricted access to the publications of their Western peers, which led to the emergence of a Russian school of thought in the field. Quite a few of its researchers enjoy notable international prestige, among whom some, such as Pavel Tsygankov and Marina Lebedeva, are incorporated into the liberal paradigm according to the Western model.

At the same time, the current led by Alexsey Bogaturov is characterized by adopting an autonomous approach to the Western model in the form of a national school of thought, more consistent with the realist tradition (Bordachev, 2014).

The aforementioned school seeks in the postulates of realism answers to questions which, from the Russian worldview, liberalism cannot satisfy. The most relevant ones have to do, of course, with the concept of national interest and the use of force. For this reason, Russian scholars have overwhelmingly fallen back on the domains of structural realism and neoclassical realism, derived from the former. However, as Professor Bordachev[15] writes, this has been a dangerous intellectual shortcut that omits the previous indispensable contributions of classical realism (2014).

4 Concordance between foreign policy and academia for the benefit of the interests of the state.

The geopolitical theories briefly discussed above were widely spread in the 1990s, promoted by the most nationalistic sectors. Coinciding with the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, these positions have been revitalized by a deterministic neo-Eurasianism that encourages in Moscow the Asian turn of its foreign policy and the disconnection with the West.

In this order of things can be inscribed the speech delivered by President Putin at the XI meeting of the Valdai Club on October 24, 2014, held in the city of Sochi[16] , when he stated that:

> "The Cold War ended, but not with the signing of a peace treaty with clear and transparent agreements on the respect of existing rules or the creation of new rules and standards. This created the impression that the so-called "victors" of the Cold War had decided to push events and reshape the world to suit their own needs and interests. If the existing system of international relations, international law and existing checks and balances stood in the way of these objectives, this system was declared

15 Doctor of Science (Political Science), Program Director at the Valdai Discussion Club; Senior Academician at the Center for Integrated European and International Studies of the Higher School of Economics (HSE University). This School has university campuses in Nizhny Novgorod, St. Petersburg and Perm. He is also a member of RIAC (Russian International Affairs Council).

16 The central theme of the meeting was: "The world order: new rules or a game without rules".

useless, obsolete and in need of immediate demolition." (Author's trans.) (Putin, October 2014).

This discourse was conveniently adopted by Putin when he returned to the presidency in 2012 after the Medvedev interregnum[17]. In this way, he provided ideological support for his foreign policy and informed the domestic and international audience that, under his leadership, the priority of his foreign policy would be Russia's national interest.

In this regard, it should be pointed out that national interests are not permanent, since they can change according to the needs of the state at each historical moment. To this effect, the Russian case is paradigmatic if one compares, for example, the interests of the state after World War II or during the Cold War with those of the primitive and weak Bolshevik state in 1917-1920, when everything revolved around its survival in a hostile international system.

In any case, President Putin's frequent reference to Russia's national interest is made from his own perception of the world, of Russia and the role it should play in world affairs. It is from this perspective that the Russian president has considered the construction of the Federation's foreign policy since his coming to power (Aguilar, 2023: 96).

Likewise, Putin has also promoted the idea of a culturally different Russia through the successive foreign policy concepts of the Federation since 2008, in which the gradual distancing from the West is manifested (Tsygankov, 2016: 237-238).

On the other hand, although the liberal paradigm of International Relations has found a place in the Russian academy, the state linkage of its academic institutions of reference is reflected in its documentary production, which moves away from that paradigm. To this effect, academic publications echo the Kremlin's foreign policy doctrine, which shows its instrumental aspect by synchronizing with its objectives.

In this regard, for example, the MGIMO Journal of International Relations specifies that; "[S]pecial attention is devoted to the analysis of Russia's role in the international system and its impact on Russia"[18]. The aforementioned alignment of academia with foreign policy guidelines is materialized in the themes, approaches and conclusions of its publications, which tend to endorse the official doctrine or narrative of the political leadership.

17 Due to the legislation in force at the time, Putin had exhausted the time that the law allowed him to occupy the presidential chair. Therefore, he orchestrated for Dmitry Medvedev to run as his party's (United Russia) candidate in the 2008 elections. Unsurprisingly, Medvedev won the elections and served as president of the Russian Federation from 2008 to 2012. He is currently the deputy chairman of the Federation Security Council; a position that provides high visibility, but little influence.

18 MGIMO Review of International Relations. Vestnik MGIMO-universiteta. Journal's description. Available at: https://www.vestnik.mgimo.ru/jour Accessed on 10/011/24

Thus, for example, it can be seen that MGIMO's publications justify President Putin's postulates on such central issues as the Ukrainian question[19]. Similarly, this institution analyzes the role of the BRICs in an evolving international order, which from Moscow's point of view can only move towards multipolarity (Apanovich & Netswera, 2024).

Similarly, the approach of Russian IR research centers to the recurrent and central problem of national interest is continuist and conditioned, though not determined, by Russia's geopolitical specificity. Consequently, national interest has been the cornerstone of security and foreign policies, but elusive for the Russian leadership (Nazarov, n.d.: 15-16).

While academic and university institutions had woven a fruitful network of cooperation since 1991 with their Western counterparts, as a result of growing geopolitical hostility with the West the Russian government began to question Western higher education models and academic exchanges, which were suspended as of 2022[20]. Moreover, in the summer of 2021, the Russian government had already enacted a law (Федеральный закон от 05.04.2021 № 85-ФЗ)[21] prohibiting any academic activity not authorized by the state. It was argued that: "it was necessary to prevent foreign pernicious influence on the educational process"[22].

In the context of the emergence of the Russian Federation as an independent state, International Relations focused on applied studies in order to elaborate a new theory of foreign policy. In what was an exchange of roles between academic centers, the IMEMO[23] was oriented towards practical aspects, becoming de facto a think tank,

19 Artizov A.N. Historical Origins of the Current Ukrainian Crisis. MGIMO Review of International Relations. 2022;15(6):7-25. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2022-6-87-7-25 Accessed 11/05/24

20 Burakovsky, A. (2022, April 1). The war in Ukraine ruins Russia's academic ties with the West. The Conversation. Available at: https://theconversation.com/the-war-in-ukraine-ruins-russias-academic-ties-with-the-west-180006 Accessed 11/10/24.

21 Federal Law of 05/04/2021 No. 85-FZ "On Amendments to the Federal Law "On Education in the Russian Federation". Publication number: 0001202104050036. Date of publication: 05/04/2021. Available at: http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202104050036?index=4&rangeSize=1. Accessed on 11/05/24.

22 The Moscow Times (2021, June 1). Russia Bans Unauthorized 'Foreign Influence' Educational Activities. https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/06/01/russia-bans-unauthorized-foreign-influence-educational-activities-a74065 Accessed 11/05/24

23 IMEMO was founded in 1956 and renamed in 2016 as; "Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences" in honor of Yevgeny Primakov; former director of the Institute, Federation Foreign Minister (1996-1998) and Prime Minister (1998-1999). Primakov drafted and promoted the Federation's 1996 foreign policy doctrine, known as the Primakov Doctrine; in which Moscow recognizes that the West is its geopolitical adversary and will never allow it to regain the status of a major international power. Furthermore, it presents the need for an Asian turn of its foreign policy in connection with a future Multipolar World Order; in which Russia would occupy a preeminent position.

while the MGIMO, together with other university centers, specialized in theoretical developments (Morales, 2019: 152).

As a result of this division of roles among academic institutions, throughout the 2000s scholars distinguished four main streams of strategic thinking, linked to as many visions of foreign policy. Professor A. Fedorov of MGIMO offered the following taxonomy (2006):

- Hard-line traditionalists or statists: they sought to reinstate Soviet approaches, but from different theoretical principles. They considered the confrontation with the West, and therefore with NATO, inevitable, and selectively adopted elements of Slavophile and Eurasianist thought.
- Realists or Pragmatists: they were in favor of Russia's integration into the group of advanced democracies leading the technological, economic and military development of the global era. They warned that remaining on the sidelines of these processes could condemn Russia to isolation, as had happened in the past. Like the statists, they supported the preemptive use of military force. However, neither of these two currents was particularly attractive to the new Russian political and economic elites of the time.
- Supporters of the Multipolar concept: they argued that Russia should follow its own rules, based on its exceptionality as a great power inherited from the USSR. They distrusted the West, especially the United States, which they perceived as their main threat. In response, they proposed selective partnerships with some European states (Germany, France, Great Britain) and with China. Another possibility they envisaged to curb US hegemony was the geopolitical construct known as the Great Triangle: a strategic partnership between Russia, India and China which, to this day, continues to be a reference for Moscow. The concept of a "multipolar world" had already been developed in the second half of the 1990s by Minister Yevgeny Primakov and his collaborators[24] (Shabbir, 2023). Primakov rejected a unipolar organization of international power around American hegemony, so he proposed that Russia should balance the great superpower by partnering with other great powers (China and India). The object was to place Russia in its rightful position as an indispensable player in international affairs (Rumer, 2019: 4).
- Neo-imperialists: the foreign policy goals promoted by this current are all too familiar: to ensure Russia's sovereignty and autonomy in international affairs and restore its status as a major international power (Fedorov, 2006). In practice, its supporters seek to update the multipolar project on the basis of Russia's economic take-off since 2000.

24 Along with a multipolar World Order, the other bases of the Primakov doctrine were: Russia's strategic autonomy; regional integration; pragmatism in foreign policy (Russia would act together with partners or allies or unilaterally according to its interests) and non-intervention, although it also admits that Russia must be ready to defend its national interests and to defend its citizens abroad. References to the near abroad are obvious.

Despite their differences, all these currents agreed that Russia should secure and maintain its influence in the areas of the former ex-Soviet republics. From the academic point of view, cooperation with the West was still considered viable as long as the West refrained from interfering in Moscow's internal affairs.

The profound influence of the thinking of Yevgeny Primakov, possibly the most relevant figure in Russian foreign policy since his appointment as Foreign Minister in 1996 by President Yeltsin, is also evident. Paradoxically, the doctrine bearing his name was not embodied in an official text until 1998, by the hand of his successor, Igor Ivanov (Bogaturov, 2022).

The minister understood that a turn to the East in the foreign policy of the Russian Federation was necessary, due to the unacceptable for Moscow decompensation in the relationship with the United States, the rejection of American unipolarity and Washington's unwillingness to count on Russia in international affairs. In short, the United States considered Russia the losing side of the Cold War, which, therefore, in its view, did not justify a deal between equals (Novikov, 2017). All this proved to be a revulsive for Moscow.

Primakov's strategic proposal was to place Russia in its rightful position as an indispensable actor in international affairs (Rumer, 2019 p. 4). For this he proposed Russia should balance the great superpower by partnering with other great powers (China and India).

Russia's foreign policy thinking has evolved as a function of changes in the international framework but presents as a distinctive feature a remarkable continuity in the perception of threats to its security. In connection with this, in a more recent analysis A. Tsygankov identifies three main currents of Russian foreign policy thinking: westernist, statist and civilizationist (Tsyngankov, 2016: 4-8).

International dynamics have de facto left the former out of the game, as evidenced by the 2023 update of the Russian Federation's foreign policy doctrine[25]. The document was approved by President Putin on March 31 of that year against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine and increased Russia-West tension.

The scenario that analysts of post-Soviet Russia considered the most dangerous has thus become a reality: the eastward enlargement of Western political and security organizations (EU and NATO) (Timofeev, 2027: 18-19). Moscow opposes these

25 It is significant to underline that, despite bluntly naming the US, its Anglo-Saxon allies and the EU countries as the instigators of threats to Russia's security and interests; the document encourages in several articles the establishment of mutually beneficial relations with the EU and, moreover, takes up President Putin's idea prior to the final deterioration of relations with Washington of achieving strategic parity and balance of interests with the US. It can be deduced that Russia's European inclination is still alive, albeit chained to a pragmatic approach to foreign policy. In this regard, see: Concept of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation. 2023, 31 Mar. Министерство иностранных делРосссийской Федедерациии. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation]. Art,s 61 to 64 (a.i.). Available: https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/1860586/?lang=es&utm_source=telegram&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=obzornye-razbory-ned Accessed 03/01/24

moves of the West head-on, considering that the loss of control over its near abroad is unacceptable.

The result has been a new fragmentation of the European space along geopolitical fault lines which, unlike in the period 1945-1991, have moved to the borders of the Russian Federation (Stent, 2007: 433-434). From Moscow's perspective, this situation directly threatens the socio-political core of historical Russia.

All this helps to understand why the realist approach dominates the Kremlin's political practice, while other perspectives, such as neo-Marxism, social-constructivism or postmodernism, remain in a clearly marginal or even residual position[26]. Only the former enjoys a certain institutional visibility thanks to the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), led by Gennady Zyuganov.

5 Conclusions

First of all, the main conclusion that can be drawn from this work is that the Russian Federation's foreign policy follows realist principles, which stem from a political culture conditioned by its conception of national interest. After the anomaly of the liberal period of the 1990s, once Vladimir Putin came to power, the Kremlin has returned to a realist approach in its foreign policy. Moreover, this stance is consistent with the tradition of Russian international policy and its perception of the systemic level as hostile.

When Primakov stated in 1996 that Russia had no permanent enemies, but permanent interests, he was communicating to the world that Russia's foreign policy was again oriented toward realistic approaches. Vladimir Putin's leadership has ratified beyond doubt that approach, which was evident in the Russian president's famous speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference.

This speech expressed the symbiosis between doctrinal continuity and accommodation of foreign policy to the secular objectives of the Russian state, which it has traditionally contemplated from the point of view of security. To this end, two closely linked aspects are emphasized: the concept of sovereignty and influence over its near abroad.

On the other hand, the clear predominance of realism in Russian academic thought inherits Soviet-era approaches that, to some extent, give continuity to a perception of the world that is often considered in zero-sum terms. Consequently, despite the fact that Russian academia has been able to access theoretical frameworks other than realism, its academic output is characterized by maintaining a firm alignment with the Kremlin's strategy and its resistance to the entry of alternative paradigms.

26 About them, a majority of Russian internationalists were of the opinion that they do not provide an appropriate theoretical framework for developing one's own geopolitical concepts which, like "national interest, appear as factors of continuity in foreign policy.

Likewise, this paper has pointed out the existence of a structural connection between culture, national interest and foreign policy. Consequently, under this premise it can be deduced that the foreign policy of the Russian Federation will remain substantially unchanged as long as the current circumstances of the international system persist.

However, it cannot be categorically ruled out that, in the future, major exogenous changes may force a change in the national interests of the Russian state. On the other hand, a downward rectification of its current interests, among which the centrality of the near abroad in the Kremlin's foreign policy seems less likely.

Finally, and despite exceeding the scope of this paper, it is suggested that Russia's behavior as an international actor can be explained from the postulates of neoclassical realism. This theoretical framework allows to understand not only the behavior of the state from the structural point of view but also due to the influence of the internal conditions of the state and its domestic policies.

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Multi-stable deterrence. The equalizing power of precision and salvo warfare in the third nuclear age

Abstract

The proliferation of long-range precision-guided munitions creates an operational environment that generates hitherto unprecedented strategic effects involving a disruption in the classic concepts of deterrence and strategic stability. In the first place, the equalizing effect of precision is generated, in which the proliferation of guided weapons means that contenders of very unequal size and potential can cause massive mutual damage. Secondly, the trend towards the proliferation of precision weapons leads to the creation of a new type of military conflict that we refer to as salvo warfare. Thirdly, the massive damage caused by conventional precision munitions gives rise to the strategic phenomenon of multi-stable deterrence. The combination of all of the above creates a nuclear third era strategic environment in which nuclear weapons foster instability, as opposed to the stability of the first nuclear era of the Cold War, and escalation.

Keywords

Deterrence, Precision, Nuclear, Salvas, Warfare.

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1 Introduction

The proliferation of long-range precision munitions in massive quantities is altering classical conceptions of strategic stability, adding an unprecedented level of complexity, especially in the operational environment and at the strategic level. This proliferation of long-range precision munitions is intertwined with the nuclear deterrence debates of the second and third eras, now adding a new third whose main feature is the effects on strategic stability caused by this class of projectiles.

New military technologies are creating hitherto unheard-of strategic phenomena. In addition, they are also altering the operational environment and changing the character of warfare with the emergence of new forms of armed conflict. The academic literature on the second and third nuclear eras, although it has already made important contributions to the debate on deterrence and strategic stability, has so far overlooked a number of phenomena that will be discussed in this research paper.

The first two parts of the article will present the state of the art regarding the first and second nuclear eras (Gray, 1999; Koblentz, 2012; Yoshihara and Holmes, 2012; Bracken, 2012; Payne, 2021), which will serve as an introduction to the third era (Futter and Zala 2021; Futter *et al*, 2025; Panda, 2025) and several original contributions we make to the discipline. These concepts are those of "precision equalizing power," "salvo warfare," and especially that of "multi-stable deterrence."

2 The first nuclear era

The Cold War was the framework in which the first nuclear era took place, a period in which military technologies and a specific political context converged to form an environment characterized by a solid strategic stability combined with high pre-war hostility and the terror of full-scale nuclear war.

The key lies in the fact that nuclear weapons formed a stable framework, a strategic straitjacket, which set very specific rules of behavior for the actors, leaving little room for freedom of action. This state of affairs was referred to as the nuclear stalemate (Krepon, 1984).

The specific Cold War norms were shaped, according to the nuclear revolution school (Mandelbaum, 1981; Jervis, 1989; Sagan, 1989; Glaser, 1990) by the characteristics of the military technology of that historical moment.

According to this school, nuclear weapons have the effect of revolutionizing the nature of international relations if two requirements are met. The first requirement is that the nuclear arsenal must have the capacity to destroy an adversary by eliminating a large portion of its population centers and poles of economic activity. The second requirement is that the arsenal must be a second-strike arsenal, which means that it must be able to survive a surprise first strike while retaining the capability to destroy the enemy. The combination of both elements formed the strategic situation of mutually assured destruction or MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction).

The quantitative criterion of what exactly is destruction is not a closed question. One example is that of Secretary of Defense McNamara, who stated that destruction (of the USSR) implied eliminating 25-30% of the Soviet population and 50% of its industry. This would require that the U.S. second-strike arsenal against a surprise attack by the Soviet Union have a minimum of 400 megaton equivalents (i.e., destroy an area equivalent to that of 400 one-megaton warheads with any given final warhead configuration). Naturally, destroying smaller states such as Israel, 30% of its population and 50% of its industry requires far fewer megaton equivalent warheads. There are other criteria for defining in strategic studies the term destruction of a country (Kaku, 1987; Kaplan, 2020), but the essential aspect is that it must go beyond the response assured to cause unacceptable damage. The degree of destruction must be that of national destruction for nuclear deterrence to be truly effective.

From the criterion of assured destruction and the success rate that an enemy surprise attack could achieve against the adversary arsenal, the nuclear force structure to be deployed and the specific type of strategy to be adopted were deduced, according to this quasi-technological determinism account (Freedman, 1981; Kaplan, 1983). For example, if in a Soviet surprise attack scenario they were capable of eliminating 90% of the U.S. nuclear force, if the criterion for the destruction of the Soviet Union was 400 megatonnes equivalent, it followed that the total U.S. force structure had to be at least 4000 megatonnes equivalent. Moreover, since the scenario was that of a surprise attack, the nuclear force posture had to be ready for second-strike counterattack immediately. This high level of alert required not only the buildup of at least 4,000 one-megaton warheads, but the launchers or delivery vehicles for the warheads had to be capable of executing the second-strike attack, necessitating the deployment of a complex arsenal of intercontinental land-based missiles (ICBMs), Intercontinental Ballistic Missile), ballistic submarines SSBN (Ballistic Missile Submarine) with SLBM (Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile) and a force of long-range strategic bombers, forming the nuclear triad and a complex command and control network.

This strategy was called by the U.S. Secretary of Defense McNamara himself as one of assured destruction. Emphasize that it was only a strategy for the United States, it was not mutual with the Soviet Union. It was when the Soviets developed their own second-strike arsenal that MAD was finally arrived at. The strategy of assured destruction that the United States and the Soviet Union ended up adopting was inevitable given the military technology of that historical period. At first both superpowers pursued a strategy of nuclear superiority (Kroenig, 2018; Pulido, 2019), but after a process of trial and error, they assessed that it was an arms race whose goal was impossible to achieve since both contenders had sufficient resources to deploy a second strike force with the capability to destroy the adversary. The technology of the time did not allow for sufficiently accurate nuclear strikes with ballistic missiles, so executing counterforce strikes with them was probabilistically almost impossible. The same was true of submarine-launched ballistic missiles. Strategic bombers did have adequate accuracy, but they were very slow attack vectors that made it impossible to execute a surprise attack, so it was possible that by the time they reached their counterforce targets many of the enemy shells and bombers would have already taken off. Nuclear superiority ultimately did not matter.

This technological straitjacket formed a political framework functional to this context, which moderated military risk-taking behavior and strategies that were too risky, since they ultimately resulted in the destruction of the country's infrastructure.

mutual. It was Gaddis (1987) who best identified the rules that kept the Cold War in check and shaped what he called the "long peace". Comparing the foreign relations of the Soviet Union and the United States before and after World War II, he found that there was a change in the nature of behavior between the two powers. The new moderation and avoidance of direct conflict stemmed from the advent of nuclear weapons in international politics.

Therefore, the first rule or condition for maintaining the long peace was the existence of nuclear weapons in a MAD condition, since it ensured strategic stability by rendering arms races in search of primacy futile and the feasibility of launching a first surprise attack. The second rule was to clearly demarcate the spheres of influence to avoid clashes in an attempt to control undefined spaces. This rule derived in the policy of blocs that prevented changes of alliance, this being another safeguard for strategic stability. The third rule derived from the two previous rules was to avoid direct confrontations, either by trying to win allies from the adversary or by attacking the adversary superpower for fear that a nuclear escalation might be unleashed.

The fourth rule for sustaining the long peace was that of bipolarity and balance of power. In international relations theory there is a long debate as to which type of structure of international systems is the most stable: multipolar (Kratochwil, 1978; Bull 2005), bipolar (Waltz, 1979) or unipolar (Organski, 1958; Gilpin, 1987). According to Gaddis (1997), bipolar is the most stable system, since, following a line of argument very similar to that of Waltz (although giving it historical context), equilibrium is reached automatically and not after complex negotiations that may not be successful. Bipolarity, moreover, leaves no room for miscalculations and power games, in which four great powers could coalition against two. As a culmination and consequence of the above (and according to the supporters of the thesis that bipolar systems tend to be more stable) the system has less uncertainty than if there were multipolarity, making it easier to resolve the security dilemma present in all systems of international politics and security. The dilemma would be easier to solve since the power of both states is similar, so any attempt to take advantage of one state over another would be easily countered, returning to a situation of equilibrium. In contrast, coalitions and power imbalances can occur much more frequently in multipolar systems since, by definition, they are not systems with two poles of similar power and, therefore, balanced.

Therefore, and as a conclusion to this epigraph, the first nuclear era shaped a bipolar international system in which atomic weapons generated solid strategic stability.

3 Second nuclear era

In the second nuclear era, the technological and political variables that generated stability were altered to generate a more strategically unstable environment. From

bipolarity to multipolarity, arsenals reduced in size, the accuracy of offensive weapons improved, strategic defenses became more effective, the normative and cultural environment was no longer shared by decision-makers, and the global balance of power gave way to multiple regional balances.

3.1 Multipolarity

If the first nuclear age and the Cold War were characterized by the bipolarity of the strategic environment, the second nuclear age will already be a multipolar world composed of at least three major powers with atomic arsenals of comparable size.

Multipolarity emerges as a result of two main trends. On the one hand, the arms reduction treaties between Russia and the United States had considerable success in reducing strategic nuclear arsenals very appreciably. The New START treaty, signed in 2010, imposed a limit of only 1,550 warheads and 800 launchers (ICBMs, SLBMs, and bombers) as per the particular count stipulated between the United States and Russia (Rogers, Korda, and Kristensen, 2022). This was a considerable reduction from the SALT (first strategic nuclear arms limitation treaty) limits, which allowed the US to deploy 1,054 ICBMs and 710 SLBMs and the USSR to have 1,618 ICBMs, 950 SLBMs, but imposed no limits on either the number of bombers or the number of warheads. Although the New START treaty did not usher in the second nuclear age, it did mean that the ceiling that a nuclear power has to reach to be considered a major power was lowered considerably, making the emergence of new nuclear great powers much more attainable.

On the other hand, the second trend comes from the increase in the size of the arsenals of the smaller nuclear powers to face the growing threats to their security. The paradigmatic case is that of the deterrent triangle between China, India and Pakistan, leading to a dynamic of constant nuclear race and expansion, more difficult to control than that of the bipolarity between the United States and the Soviet Union. As will be explained below, China perceived a growing threat to the credibility of its second-strike arsenal from technological improvements in the U.S. first-strike arsenal (Heginbotham *et al.*, 2015), which made it feasible to execute a first strike that would destroy all to the vast majority of the Chinese retaliatory arsenal. For that reason, China had to start expanding the number of nuclear weapons and delivery vehicles (Hiim, Fravel, and Troan, 2023), to raise the probability of survival against a U.S. first-strike scenario. The increase in the number of Chinese nuclear weapons has an impact not only on its strategic interaction with the United States, but also induces the need for India to in turn increase its own nuclear arsenal to respond to the Chinese threat (Clary and Narang, 2018). In turn, the increase in the Indian arsenal induces Pakistan to have to expand its own as well (Sankara, 2015). Consequently, the above induces India to have to increase its number of warheads and delivery vehicles to respond to the threat coming from China and Pakistan, which forces Chinese deterrence to also have to increase to confront both Americans and Indians. This arms race dynamic means that powers with very small arsenals during the first nuclear

era will have to gradually increase them, approaching the levels of the great powers. It should be noted that, for now, the hypothesis of an arms race due to the instability of a triangular arms race is only clearly being fulfilled in the case of China, which has already added 600 nuclear warheads (FAS, 2025) from just over 300 four years ago, while India is still in the initial phase of expanding its submarine force, while Pakistan has not yet shown any signs of substantial increases in its arsenal.

The difficulty of having to balance several poles, generates instability in the arms race (Koblenz, 2014; Miller and Arbatov, 2021) and the tendency to expand arsenals. The mutually beneficial concessions and trade-offs that could be achieved in a situation of bipolarity, such as during the Cold War, are much more difficult to achieve in a situation of multipolarity because the reduction and trade-off in one dyad (China and the United States) may harm what happens in other dyads (China and India).

This instability does not only occur in arms races but can also affect possible crisis and war scenarios. That is, there could be a circumstance in which two nuclear powers coalition against a third. Thus, in a situation where three nuclear powers have agreed to have arsenals of similar size (as is currently the case between Russia and the United States), it could come to pass that by aligning two against the third power, it could actually have a two-to-one advantage in the nuclear balance. This hypothesis is being taken very seriously by U.S. decision makers and was raised in the Strategic Posture Commission (Creedon *et al* 2023). The conclusions of that commission were that should China continue to increase the size of its nuclear force, at some point in the next few years, the United States would have to make a decision to increase its arsenal to meet a possible joint Russian-Chinese threat. Although a joint strike is an unlikely scenario, it could conceivably undermine the credibility of U.S. nuclear retaliation. The expansion of the U.S. nuclear arsenal could have the consequence of inducing Russia and China to increase their weapons levels, leading to a possible spiral similar to that described between the Chinese, Indians and Pakistanis.

3.2 Reduced size and precision arsenals

The reduction of retaliatory arsenals not only has the effect of facilitating nuclear multipolarity and generating the incipient nuclear arms race s e underway (SIPRI, 2024; Wilson, 2024), but also has the consequence of undermining the strategic stability of the first strike, inducing possible counterforce and surprise attacks.

This strategic context in which a counterforce first strike can become strategically rational has been termed new-era counterforce (Lieber and Press, 2006, 2017) and is driven by improvements in the precision of strike vectors. The combination of reduced arsenals and precision nuclear weapons alters the strategic probability calculations that have maintained strategic stability since the Cold War.

It should be borne in mind that arms control treaties such as START and New START were designed following very meticulous calculations so that arms reductions

would not generate a hypothetical possibility of being able to launch a surprise attack. The essence of these calculations lies in the probability that each attacking weapon can destroy an adversary's retaliatory vector. For example, if in a dyad each contender has 1,500 nuclear warheads carried on 1,500 missiles, with an accuracy that provides a 30% probability of destroying an adversary missile, it would take 5,000 warheads and missiles to destroy the entire enemy arsenal, with no surviving warheads to execute a retaliatory strike. Therefore, if the two states in the dyad limit their arsenals to only 1,500 warheads and missiles, the resulting strategic situation would be very stable and there would be no incentive to strike first.

But the strategic situation would become very unstable in the event that the 1,500 warheads were deployed on 750 missiles (two warheads per missile) and the accuracy increased the probability of destruction to 90%. In that case, only 422 attacking missiles with two warheads each would be needed to destroy all 750 adversary missiles. That is why New START limits both the number of warheads and the number of launchers (attack vectors such as bombers, land and submarine-based missiles) and establishes a regime of inspections (with very little notice) that makes it impossible to execute any kind of surprise attack that would destroy the enemy's second strike arsenal (Gottemoeller, 2021).

Technological advances have meant that in recent decades accuracy has improved considerably, making, for example, the probability of destruction of a Russian ICBM silo by a U.S. Trident D5 warhead over 90% by having an accuracy of less than 90 meters and a variable yield of between 100 and 450 kilotons (Kristensen, McKinzie, & Postol, 2017). High-accuracy strategic strike capability with intercontinental missiles is not limited to underwater Trident but is common to all U.S. missiles because of a deliberate technology policy that bore fruit at the end of the Cold War (MacKenzie, 1990). The evolution and proliferation of precision strike capabilities across all types of munitions and platforms is a long-term tenure (Watts, 2013a). This technological trend not only affects strategic weapons such as ballistic missiles or superpower bombers, but is already accessible to states of lesser potential and on platforms that previously could not be converted into long-range precision strike platforms (Watts, 2011; Krepinevich, 2015; Guzinger and Clark, 2015). A paradigmatic example is the Ukrainian A22 Foxbat drones, based on an ultralight aircraft and converted to long-range munitions attacking factories inside Russia (Sutton, 2024).

Moreover, historical research has revealed that during the Cold War, Soviet ballistic submarines were trackable by U.S. hunter-killer submarines and could have been destroyed in the lead-up to a superpower confrontation (Cote, 2003; Long and Rittenhouse, 2014). The proliferation of sensors, cyber instruments and artificial intelligence adds more and more transparency to the battlefield and strategic operations. However, this is a topic still under discussion, as there are authors (Geist, 2023), who argue that, at the strategic level, the growing capability in surveillance and reconnaissance will not come to have implications of fundamental change (that transparency will not be reached at the strategic level), although at the tactical and operational level there have been significant changes. In this regard, the exchange of ballistic missile and drone fire between Iran and Israel in 2024 showed that U.S.

and Israeli surveillance was able to provide early warning of attacks, which seems to support those who maintain that nuclear operations and deterrence will be much less opaque than during the first nuclear era.

Hypersonic missiles (Speier *et al*, 2017), quasi-ballistic missiles (IISS, 2022) and ballistic missiles specifically designed to follow depressed trajectories by carrying high ballistic coefficient reentry vehicles (Wright and Tracy 2023, 2024), add strategic instability by facilitating the execution of surprise attacks. The common feature of the aforementioned missiles is that they can follow trajectories at much lower altitudes than ballistic missiles, which have to follow a highly arcing parabola, being much easier to detect. In addition, by following a much more direct trajectory, they take less time to reach the target. During the Cold War it was taken for granted that from detection of enemy missiles to impact would take at least 25 to 30 minutes, which allowed time to ensure that the attack was not a false positive and, in the event of a real attack, to organize and order a retaliatory strike (avoiding decapitation), as well as to execute the retaliation before the first impacts destroyed the missiles and bombers in situ. The combination of much greater stealth in the execution of the attack (as the projectiles can only be detected a few minutes after impact), greater information available in the tracking of the launchers and the greater speed in reaching the designated target by flying at hypersonic speeds generates more strategic instability by giving much less time to assess the true magnitude of the threat, inducing decision-makers to put themselves in the worst-case scenario, promoting more escalatory responses.

Therefore, in the age of precision, reduced nuclear arsenals, the proliferation of sensors, hypersonic missiles, advances in artificial intelligence that facilitate the location and tracking of delivery vehicles and launchers, etc., make up a new era of counterforce in which it is strategically increasingly rational to execute strikes against enemy strategic forces, as discussed in the book The Myth of the Nuclear Revolution: Power Politics in the Atomic Age (Lieber and Press, 2020). In that work, the scenario is modeled in which a U.S. surprise first strike would destroy the vast majority of the Russian second-strike arsenal.

3.3 Strategic defenses

Missile defenses and defenses against projectiles that can achieve strategic effects (drones attacking critical infrastructure) are much more important in the second nuclear age than during the first (Rehberg and Kemp, 2024).

After the end of the Cold War, anti-missile technologies achieved a very remarkable development compared to what was technically feasible in the first nuclear era. Suffice it to compare the poor performance of Patriots against Iraq's Al Hussein missiles in the 1991 Gulf War with the far superior performance of Patriots in the Ukraine war or of Israeli defenses in the two Iranian missile attacks in 2024 (Hoffmann, 2024). If in the 1991 war almost no Scud could be effectively shot down, in Israel in 2024 only slightly more than 20% of Iranian ballistic missiles made it through Israeli defenses.

Another reason why missile defenses are now more relevant than during the Cold War is also related to the reduced size of strategic arsenals. Since the economics of defense always requires more resources (Wilkening, 2004) than offense (needing two or more interceptor projectiles per attacker), when thousands of intercontinental missiles and many thousands of warheads were deployed in the Cold War, the deployment of strategic defenses did not meet the Nitze cost-benefit criterion (Vaughn, 2002). Nitze stated that strategic missile defenses should meet three criteria for deployment: they should be effective, they should survive an enemy counterforce attack, and the cost of shooting down enemy projectiles should not be prohibitive.

However, since the strategic arsenals of the major powers have now been so greatly reduced and effectiveness has increased, there is strategic rationality in deploying missile defenses against relatively limited threats. Especially when enemy arsenals can be greatly reduced by highly effective counterforce attacks facilitated by the new precision and information technologies mentioned above.

Anti-missile defenses could knock down the small surviving remnant of the enemy second-strike arsenal, rendering mutual destruction unattainable and undermining strategic stability. Moreover, missile defenses have additional advantages in controlling escalation and making coercive limited strikes more difficult (Costlow, 2022a, 2022b). For confronting regional powers missile defenses have even greater utility precisely because the size of their nuclear forces is also smaller.

3.4 Regional powers and geography

Another difference between the first and second nuclear eras is that smaller regional nuclear powers are of greater importance than in the Cold War. This is mainly due to the increase in the ranges of strategic weapons available to regional powers.

Paradigmatic examples are North Korea and India, which are developing missiles with intercontinental range. In the Cold War, France and the United Kingdom focused on regional threats, deploying medium and intermediate range weapons to deter the Soviet Union. The same was true of Israel, which during the first nuclear age deployed short- and medium-range delivery vehicles sufficient to sustain deterrence with the hostile neighboring states of Egypt and Syria. But once the second nuclear era advanced in time, Israel had to develop a nuclear arsenal of much greater range with which to maintain deterrence with Iran (Pulido, 2019), since in turn the Iranian state initiated a very ambitious long-range missile program (Pulido, 2020) that together with the nuclear program implied an existential threat to Israel.

Consequently, the technological trend towards the increasing accessibility of long-range weapons to lesser powers adds complexity to the simple and predictable strategic calculations of the Cold War, which basically limited the bipolarity between the Western and Soviet bloc, while at today a complicated skein of local conflicts is interwoven that could potentially trigger attacks of intercontinental scope.

3.5 Culture and deterrence

Another distinctive feature of the second nuclear era is the cultural differences and asymmetry of interests between the states confronting each other, which contrasts with what we discussed earlier about the predictable rationality of decision-makers during the Cold War.

The Cold War was fought in a rigid context in which a series of unwritten rules prevailed, which were nevertheless known and respected by all the actors. These rules emerged after a process of initial strategic interaction until they were institutionalized, which eliminated uncertainty and allowed cooperation (Jervis, 1976). From this perspective, the stability of the Cold War was not so much due to a material issue because of the mass destruction capacity of nuclear weapons, but above all to very specific cultural and psychological aspects that need not be repeated at other historical junctures (Payne, 2001). This could be the case of a nuclear power with expansionist, messianic ideals or a greater tolerance for punishment. Such would be the case of radical religious leaders of nuclear weapon states (such as Iran and Pakistan) or if Hitler's Germany had developed atomic weapons.

To top it all, the importance of asymmetry of interests in strategic calculations demonstrated by behavioral economics and prospect theory (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979) shows that actors do not value gains or losses symmetrically in the face of the same event. Therefore, the necessary balance of costs and benefits between aggression and retaliation could break down more easily than strategic studies assumed during the Cold War.

This asymmetry provided by prospect theory can be illustrated with the following example. The perceived benefit of executing an aggression could be evaluated by the aggressor with a value of 10, while the defender would perceive a loss of 30. The aggressor could deduce that he executes a limited aggression that would not exceed the nuclear threshold, making a miscalculation and triggering a retaliation that he would interpret as disproportionate.

4 Third nuclear era

In recent years, a stream of research has emerged that argues that we are at the dawn of a third nuclear era that overlaps with elements of the previous two, generating a strategically very unstable mix.

As it is a recent research stream and not yet established in the academic literature, the concrete definition of the characteristics of the concept of the third nuclear era is still emerging. However, the central aspect, on which the different definitions coincide, is the importance of Strategic Non-Nuclear Weapons (SNNW).

Fetter's (2021) definition of the third nuclear age is that it is composed of four essential characteristics. First, a growing perception that strategic forces and population centers could be protected against nuclear attack with missile defenses. Second, the

maturation and spread of non-nuclear weapons that could be used to threaten an adversary's nuclear and associated systems. Third, the emergence of unconventional capabilities that provide new means to defend against or attack an adversary's nuclear systems. These include various types of computer network operations, or what are often loosely referred to as cyber attacks. These cyber attacks could disable the use of enemy missiles and attack vectors, temporarily sabotaging them until they could be repaired. This was the case of Israel's attack against a nuclear reactor under construction in Syria, employing a system similar to Suter that disabled Syrian radars (Gasparre, 2008). In a crisis situation or during an exchange of strikes and counter-strikes, disabling a fraction of the enemy's arsenal, without actually destroying them, would be very useful both to facilitate a first strike that undermines the arsenal of second strike and to discourage the use of nuclear weapons by the adversary. The fourth feature is that of a highly transparent, real-time, digitized operating environment, taking advantage of the revolution in *sensorization* to locate and track the adversary's attack vectors.

As the first, third and fourth characteristics actually dovetail with aspects already present in the second nuclear era, in reality what is truly characteristic of the third nuclear era is the proliferation of strategic non-nuclear weapons. The proliferation of SNNWs in massive numbers and with precision links to the concept of precision-equalizing power developed below, which in turn links to multi-stable deterrence.

An additional feature of the third nuclear era, a consequence of the four already noted, is that the firewall or dividing line between nuclear and conventional weapons is blurring (Bowers and Hiim, 2021; Horschig and Aamopoulos, 2023). As conventional weapons can achieve strategic effects, such as destroying nuclear delivery vehicles or damaging critical infrastructure, the lines of separation between the use of nuclear and conventional weapons begin to blur.

During the Cold War, in the event of a conflict between the U.S. and the Soviets, the use of weapons with strategic effects was almost exclusively assumed to involve the use of nuclear weapons, whereas today, precision-guided munitions salvoes could be launched that could cause significant damage without the use of atomic weapons.

It should be mentioned that this feature of conventional weapons blurring the nuclear firewall was already described by authors of the second nuclear era (Watts, 2013b). As mentioned above, the specific characteristics of the second and third eras have many points in common, but as the proliferation of long-range precision weapons, or SNNW, is a recent phenomenon (approximately the last 10 years), and perhaps the most distinctive feature of the third era, the consequence they generate from the blurring of the boundaries between the nuclear and the conventional we have ascribed it to it.

4.1 The equalizing power of precision and its strategic effects

There are highly relevant contributions on the strategic and military effects of the proliferation of precision long-range munitions and the information technologies that facilitate them (Schneider, 2019; Futter and Zala, 2021; Plichta and Rossiter, 2024; Hoffman, 2024).

However, there are strategic phenomena not yet investigated in the literature. The first of these is what we refer to as the "equalizing power of precision", previously outlined by Pulido (2021).

Long-range precision munitions produce what is called the "precision equalization effect," altering the traditional distribution of military power, which was derived from the size and potential of its economy and demographic size. In the industrial era this meant that the side with more factories and resources with which to produce more war platforms and munitions prevailed. In the first nuclear era there was already an alteration in the distribution of power derived from material power, since the capacity for mass destruction provided by atomic weapons made, for example, two contenders capable of deploying 500 battle tanks and 200 bombers equal to another that could deploy 5,000 battle tanks and 2,000 bombers. Both states could be completely destroyed if they possessed a sufficient number of nuclear warheads. This strategic phenomenon was called the "equalizing power of the atom" (Kartchner, 2004). Before nuclear weapons, the 2,000 strategic bombers could destroy the smaller rival state's factories and population centers, while the smaller contender's 200 bombers would find it more difficult to destroy its much larger enemy with many more targets to attack in an attempt to meet the McNamara criterion.

In order to understand the equalizing effect of the proliferation of inexpensive, long-range precision munitions, let's take the following example. Assume two countries consisting of 200 strategic targets to destroy each other (cities, critical infrastructure, etc.). In the case of a battle with industrial-age military technology, assuming that each munition launched had an accuracy of 1%, the side that could manufacture and fire 20,000 munitions to destroy those 200 targets first would prevail. Therefore, if the economy of one of the warring states could only produce 5,000 munitions and the other 40,000, the latter would prevail.

In the age of precision, where precision munitions are cheap and plentiful, assuming a contest between two rivals of 200 targets of strategic interest each and that improvements in precision have increased the probability of destruction of the attacked target from 1% to 50%, if the weaker side can only deploy 400 munitions, while its adversary has an arsenal of 4,000, they are actually strategically equal in that both can destroy the other's infrastructure and economy.

A practical example of this precision-equalizing effect was the missile war between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis in Yemen between 2015 and 2024. When the Houthis were able to employ long-range precision-guided munitions provided by Iran, they began a campaign of attacks against Saudi oil and critical infrastructure that forced the government in Riyadh to initiate talks to stall the war, as the economic damage could become massive if the attacks continued to escalate (Heistein, 2024).

However, while long-range precision weapons have an equalizing effect, they do not have the same equalizing effect as nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons are capable of wiping out very large areas and eliminating not only critical infrastructure but entire cities. In other words, nuclear weapons can meet the McNamara criterion (eliminating a certain percentage of the population and industry) while conventional

precision munitions, if they are very numerous, could damage a certain percentage of the enemy economy by attacking its critical infrastructure (power plants, sewage treatment plants, ports, airports, etc.). In this sense, the proliferation of conventional precision long-range munitions can be defined as "weapons of mass damage" (since they can damage or destroy the critical infrastructure of a state) rather than weapons of mass destruction such as nuclear weapons.

In addition to the equalizing effect that, each in its own way, nuclear weapons and conventional precision weapons share, both also have in common the emboldening effect. That is, nuclear weapons can produce the effect of emboldening conflicts (Kapur, 2005; Bell, 2015), rather than moderating them as argued by the nuclear revolution school (Glaser, 1990). Continuing with the polarity debates and adding to it the always unfinished debate on offensive theory, historically periods in which military power is more evenly distributed and military technology favors the offensive, the international system tends to be much more unstable and war-prone (Van Evera, 1999). This would support the hypothesis that multipolar systems are more unstable, especially when offensive weapons predominate (Mearsheimer, 2001), as it exacerbates the cooperation problems presented by the security dilemma, pushing powers to behave more aggressively or offensively to increase their security by maximizing their relative power.

When power is more equally distributed, the tendency is for the order maintained by verticality and hierarchy to give way to conflict by making it economical for the previously subordinate strategic actor to opt for resistance or armed attack. The new military technologies that proliferate and democratize access to precision fuel armed conflicts simply because they now provide the opportunity to attack and fight with capabilities previously only accessible to great powers (Vickers and Martinage, 2004; Mahnken, 2006; Singer, 2009; Boyle, 2013). In that sense, Van Evera's (1999) version of offensive-defensive theory also predicts a greater propensity for conflict as long-range precision munitions are clearly an offensive technology. In contrast to nuclear weapons, which were defensive weapons because of the deterrent effect generated by mass destruction, by increasing the costs of aggression through nuclear retaliation.

4.2 Schelling's point and the debate on strategy and deterrence

Although the nuclear revolution perspective has been by some way the most popular conception of the nature of the strategy within certain academic sectors, it has been far from unanimous and competes with other schools of deterrence. This is a very lengthy and technical debate that is not relevant to detail here. The essential point that interests us in the present research is that the nuclear weapon was never a magic solution to all threats and potential aggressions with which deterrence could be maintained.

In the United States, during Eisenhower's presidency and his New Look nuclear policy of massive nuclear retaliation against even limited aggression by the then Sino-Soviet bloc came to a rapid dead end when the Soviet Union developed its

own nuclear arsenal with ICBMs and bombers. Authors of the stature of Kauffman (1956), Kissinger (1957) and Osgood (1957) pointed out the absurdity of the deterrent policy of massive retaliation to the neglect of the conventional capabilities of the U.S. armed forces. It could be the case that the Soviets, with great conventional superiority decided to invade a part of Central Europe, stopping the war at that point and not advancing to take all of Western Europe. The New Look response would have been that of an atomic apocalypse given the great contamination that would have occurred. The criticisms of the three authors mentioned above pointed out that along with a powerful nuclear force, conventional capabilities symmetrical to adversary conventional threats should also be deployed, in the event that the enemy was equipped with a retaliatory atomic force.

Not every aggression that a nuclear-armed power may receive crosses the nuclear threshold. This threshold is the calculation of the possible costs and benefits of a course of action. This threshold is what is now called the Schelling point (1960, 1966). The school of nuclear strategy, which some manuals refer to as the difficulty school (Buzan, 1991), implies a total amendment to the theoretical foundations of the nuclear revolution. In recent years there is a growing literature that criticizes the view of the Cold War as a first nuclear era in which MAD prevailed, providing contrasts and clarifying nuances (Gavin, 2019; Lieber and Press, 2020). For example, Rittenhouse (2020) explains in detail how U.S. nuclear policy and strategy during the 1970s did not agree with what the school of the nuclear revolution said states would behave once they were equipped with atomic weapons (deterrence strategy limited to guaranteeing the second strike, little importance to conventional forces, etc.), but rather maintained a strategy of counterforce, control of escalation and with powerful conventional forces, in order to escape nuclear stalemate and regain strategic freedom of action. In this sense, authors defending the nuclear revolution thesis, such as Jervis (1984), spoke of the illogic of the U.S. nuclear strategy. The Soviet case did not fit either with what the nuclear revolution school claimed to be strategically rational behavior (Kolkowicz and Mickiewicz, 1984).

That is, the asymmetry between interests, military capabilities, benefits and costs actually broke the nuclear stalemate. This even happened in the field of the arms race (Rittenhouse, op cit) where the revolution school said that deploying certain nuclear capabilities was strategically absurd in a strategic MAD situation. However, what the nuclear revolution school did not take into account was that, while an all-out confrontation was absurd, the maneuvers and strategies that take place under Schelling's point do have strategic rationality.

Some historical examples of conventional military conflicts with nuclear powers that did not trigger nuclear retaliation are the Korean War and the Yom Kippur War. However, it cannot be deduced from these cases that nuclear weapons have no strategic utility, since in fact they forced that, although they were fought with a great deployment of means, the objectives of offensives and counter-offensives were constricted, entering into the realm of limited warfare that were inaugurated with the appearance of nuclear weapons. In the Korean War, the Americans chose not to escalate the conflict, attacking with nuclear weapons the Chinese bases in Chinese

territory because of fear that this would lead to a general war with the USSR (which had nuclear weapons since 1949). The strategy then was not at a stalemate, but simply induced to execute maneuvers below Schelling's point through escalation control strategies and calibrated aggressions.

4.3 Multistability

It is here that the question of whether strategic nuclear weapons have a pacifying or destabilizing effect is resolved. As we have seen, some authors support the nuclear revolution theory and others the emboldening theory, without ever resolving the debate. The key to solving the problem was provided by Hermann Kahn in his posthumous work Thinking about the Unthinkable in the 1980s (1984) with the concept of "multistable symmetric deterrence".

One must start from the theoretical assumption that MAD situations could actually become very unstable strategically as it would be absurd to respond with a full nuclear retaliation (which would be mutually destructive) to contain limited aggression. In cases where there is an asymmetry of interests and one of the contenders values a bidding object much more highly than the other contender, the cost of executing a limited aggression would be below the Schelling point of his adversary, who is not compensated to risk a full nuclear retaliation since the probability of such a retaliation would be 100% in case the opponent decided to execute it (safe second-strike force).

Kahn's (1984) concept of multistability describes the strategic situation in which the probability that the second strike force survives a first surprise attack is not 100% but 50%. Or, in other words, the probability of success of a first surprise counterforce attack is 50%. Thus, Kahn reintroduces chance and uncertainty into the strategic design to maintain stability, just the opposite of the nuclear revolution or nuclear supremacy schools, in which certainty, either of failure (revolution school) or success (supremacy school) in the first strike was the pillar of strategic stability.

Having a 50% probability of destroying the adversary's second-strike arsenal implies that in times of peace and no security crisis (absence of an imminent threat of attack), launching a pre-emptive first strike is absurd because there is a 50% chance of being annihilated in the retaliatory strike. However, having a 50% probability of destroying the enemy's second strike arsenal makes a nuclear strike rational in the event that, for example, a full-scale conventional war has been launched involving an existential risk of suffering a military defeat.

That is, in the case of a state facing an existential military threat, if it had a 0% chance of success in a counterforce first strike, such a nuclear employment would be strategically irrational since the consequence would be suicide (worse than invasion). But if in such a scenario of an unstoppable large-scale invasion, if the probability of destroying the enemy's second strike arsenal were 50%, the consequence might not be suicide but rather the achievement of nuclear supremacy. That is, in a hypothetical situation of multi-stability, in which the probability of success in a first strike was

only 50%, even if there was a strong conventional military imbalance in favor of one of the states of the dyad, there would be no incentive to initiate a large-scale attack under any circumstances, resolving the dilemma between surrender or suicide of the school of the nuclear revolution.

Therefore, according to Kahn (1984), the nuclear policies that should be negotiated by the nuclear powers should not be like those agreed to under treaties such as New START, which are based on strategic conceptions of securing 100% second-strike strength against a surprise attack, but rather should mutually establish arsenals that have a probable capability of destroying the retaliatory force by 50%.

4.4 Multi-stability and salvo warfare

The strategic consequence of the proliferation of long-range precision weapons, and their equalizing power, in the third nuclear age is that deterrence becomes multi-stable.

Recall that Schelling's point is the concept that allows strategies that do not trigger nuclear retaliation, being the key to deterrence and escalation control strategies. Long-range precision weapons not only make it possible to execute massive damage attacks, but also give the possibility to do so in a very calibrated manner. For example, by launching just one salvo of precision munitions so that they destroy a portion of critical enemy infrastructure. As long as it does not escalate to above a certain limit, the calibrated attack would fall below the Schelling point of the nuclear threshold. The optimal way to respond would be similar to what Kissinger or Kauffman recommended when they criticized the New Look. That is, with long-range precision weapons strikes that destroy critical enemy infrastructure without crossing the Schelling point.

We then enter a war of precision munitions salvoes, in which missile defenses play a key role in limiting the damage that enemy munitions can cause. The strategic risk of the proliferation of long-range precision munitions is that they allow limited wars to be fought, below the Schelling point. By falling below the Schelling point, it would be disproportionate to trigger a major conventional military conflict, let alone a nuclear confrontation, in response. In other words, armed conflicts will be more likely to be triggered because they reduce the cost of initiating them (by bringing them below Schelling's point).

Blast warfare takes the form of combat and duels of rockets, missiles, kamikaze drones, air-launched munitions and defense systems (anti-missile, etc.). Since the objective of this new and emerging class of warfare is duels aimed at destroying enemy munitions launchers, damaging adversary infrastructure and shooting down the projectiles launched by the adversary, rather than surrounding and destroying the enemy's conventional force to take territory, salvo wars have a very limited participation of conventional armies. This is not to say that the wars of the future will be only salvo warfare, but rather that, like air or naval warfare, it is a particular

type of warfare that has emerged because of the massive proliferation of long-range precision-guided munitions. A recent example of this new type of warfare was the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah between 2023 and 2024, with Iran in 2024 and the Houthis between 2023 and 2025.

But multi-stability is not exhausted by exchanging salvos to destroy critical infrastructure to coerce below the Schelling point. Multiinestability is the confluence of the most unstable aspects of both nuclear and conventional strategy.

As Futter and Zala wrote, long-range precision munitions can destroy at least a portion of the adversary nuclear and strategic arsenal. In the Ukrainian war that began in 2022, Ukrainian drones were able to knock out Russian early warning radars that monitor the approach trajectories of nuclear ballistic missile strikes. Ukrainian drones have also successfully attacked Russian strategic bombers. Although this has not yet been the case, they could go on to destroy in-port ballistic submarines and some of the mobile ballistic missiles.

Although in the future evolution of the proliferation of long-range precision munitions it is unlikely that they will completely destroy the enemy's nuclear arsenal, they could erode the effectiveness of the adversary's nuclear arsenal. For example, the degradation of effectiveness in the enemy arsenal (destroying part of its surveillance systems, its command and control structure, disabling nuclear-capable air bases) could, for example, increase the probability of launching a strike that would destroy the adversary's second strike force from 50% to 80%, moving from a situation of multi-stable deterrence to one of multi-stable deterrence. On the other hand, the rationality of nuclear use would not only be for the side with relative superiority, but the side in inferiority faces a dilemma of using or losing its nuclear arsenal following a damage limitation strategy. From in fact, that is the strategic context on the Korean peninsula (Bowers and Hiim, 2021). Finally, by progressively damaging radar and other command, control, and information infrastructure, salvo warfare could lead to nuclear weapon employment through inadvertent escalation (Posen, 1991; Acton, 2018).

5 Conclusion

The proliferation of precision weapons that characterizes the third nuclear era generates an operating environment and strategic context in which strategic stability faces unprecedented challenges.

- First, the equalizing power of precision causes the military structure to equalize offensive capabilities, thus moving from a bipolar and then unipolar system to one in which the different states are more equal, and thus similar, in some respects, to a multipolar one. The recent U.S. campaign against the Houthis, in which the Yemeni militia was able to hold a duel with the U.S. Navy, is a possible foretaste of this growing trend.
- Secondly, salvo warfare and nuclear weapons combine the most negative aspects (more instability) of nuclear and conventional strategy, generating the

phenomenon of multi-stable deterrence. The salvo war, on the other hand, facilitates calibrated and limited military offensive actions, entering into a growing spiral of attacks and counterattacks. The March 2025 military conflict between India and Pakistan (Newdick, 2025) is another example of how the proliferation of long-range precision-guided munitions makes direct clashes between powers more likely, even when they are nuclear states.

– On the other hand, nuclear weapons, combined with the proliferation of long-range conventional precision weapons, as the very example of the March 2025 conflict between India and Pakistan demonstrated, can quickly lead to inadvertent escalation. In this regard, the U.S. government was forced to intervene in that conflict given alarming intelligence indicating "a high probability of dramatic escalation" (Treene, 2025) between Pakistan and India, this being another foretaste of the growing trend noted toward a multi-stable deterrence environment.

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Tunisia at the geopolitical crossroads of the Mediterranean: Migration, security and the European Union's border externalization

Abstract

This article examines how migration flows from Tunisia to Europe in the aftermath of the Arab Spring have posed a security dilemma for the foreign policy of the European Union and its southern border states in the multipolar context following the decade of the uprisings. The research analyzes how the multipolar context and the anarchic structure of the international system influence European migration policy and its border externalization process. In the case of North Africa, and Tunisia in particular, it studies how the chaos generated after the events of 2011 has altered migration routes, transforming the country into a key point of both departure and transit for migration routes in the Central Mediterranean. The research offers a new academic reading to the migration phenomenon in the Central Mediterranean, overcoming the Eurocentrism predominant in current debates on European migration policy. It highlights the asymmetry of power between the traditional European powers and their southern neighborhood, proposing a critical reflection on how to address this security dilemma in a context of growing regional uncertainty.

Keywords

Central Mediterranean; European foreign policy; security dilemma; Arab Spring; multipolarity.

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1 Introduction

Since the decade of the independences, the southern Mediterranean countries represent the origin of the main risks and threats to the European southern border, making it a fundamental strategic environment for the elaboration of the foreign policy of the European Union and its Member States (Guinea, 2015). Later on, and starting in 2011 with the Arab Springs stadia, irregular migratory flows from North Africa to the European borders by sea have increased considerably (Gozzi, 2018). This event represented a turning point for migration trends from Tunisia, the main country of origin of migration flows to the northern shore of the Mediterranean.

Tunisia was traditionally a country of departure for migrants to Europe especially to Italy (Natter, 2016), as Sicily is 145 km from the Tunisian coast (Choate, 2010). The alteration of power caused by the situation in Libya after the fall of Gaddafi and the foreign intervention of NATO, during 2011, generated an unexpected migratory chaos (Bisiaux, 2020: 28) and made possible a modification of both entry and exit routes. As a result, Tunisia became both a country of exit and transit of migratory routes to Europe (Colombo, 2022: 191).

In the decade following the uprisings, from 2011 to 2021 the number of irregular arrivals from the southern Mediterranean shore to the northern shore ranged between 690,000-720,000 (Frontex, 2022; International Organization for Migration, 2021). Between 2015 and 2016 the *Mare Nostrum* experienced the so-called, migration crisis, the main consequence of the Arab Springs (Pastore & Roman, 2020). Which manifested itself with the European concern of the arrival of large waves of migrants, which has led European countries to **strengthen their** border control **strategies** to address the risks of illegal migration (Bani Salameh and Alkatatsheh, 2019: 106), as a security dilemma of its southern members.

Therefore, the research is part of a framework of analysis of the security dimension of migrations in the Central Mediterranean, being Italy the main receiving State of migratory flows coming from Libya and Tunisia. Our theoretical interpretation of the migration phenomenon is based on a multipolar reading of the international and regional scenario in Tunisia since the Arab Spring. Indeed, we analyze from the theoretical framework of political realism how migration flows represent a regional security dilemma and how the European Union's foreign policy towards Tunisia has been formulated to protect its interests.

Thus, we will analyze through a review of the literature the limits of the European tools to face this security dilemma. **Consequently, the research is circumscribed to the phenomenon of the externalization of European migration policy, focusing critically on the securitarian aspect that such policy implemented**, subsequent to the Arab Springs (Oliveira Martins and Strange, 2019b: 196).

Therefore, firstly, we dedicate the research to contextualize the phenomenon of migration flows in the Central Mediterranean; what repercussions the Arab Springs have had on the formulation and implementation of its migration policy in the

regional multipolar context. The second section focuses on reviewing the literature critical of the externalization of European migration policy, described by many authors and scholars as a form of delegation by Member States of their duty to protect their borders to their southern neighbors. We explore the limits of this policy and its current results.

In the last section we reflect on the role Tunisia is taking since its political relations with its traditional European partners are experiencing an unprecedented diplomatic crisis. In essence, the ultimate aim of this research is to offer a new academic and theoretical reading of the phenomenon of migration in the Central Mediterranean.

It seems fundamental to us to review the transformations of the regimes from within and to **transcend Eurocentric analytical frameworks that** have **historically** conditioned the academic literature on North African migration policies (Natter, 2022; Gozzi, 2018). Above all, in the face of a situation of power asymmetry (Strange and Oliveira Martins, 2019a: 236) between the European Union and its North African neighbors (De Castro and Del Rio, 2023) in dealing with migration as a security dilemma.

1.1 Theoretical framework and methodology

The present research is part of an analysis of the security dimension of irregular migratory flows (Bigo, 2002) in the Central Mediterranean. Applying realist theory (Mearsheimer, 2001), the migration phenomenon in the Central Mediterranean is understood as a manifestation of power and security dynamics in a multipolar international system and as a consequence of the instability generated by the Arab Spring in the region (Natter, 2015).

We thus examine how migratory flows following the uprisings in 2011 have constituted a regional security dilemma in the Mediterranean basin. We assess the measures taken by European countries and the European Union to deal with this threat in the Tunisian case.

"I argue that multipolar systems are more war-prone than are bipolar systems, and the multipolar systems that cointain especially powerful states are the most dangerous systems of all" (Mearsheimer, 2001: 5). Within this framework, migratory flows are not merely movements of people but represent a security challenge that can destabilize the region and affect national interests, since the objective of any great power is to survive in the international system, ensuring its security objectives and thus its national unification (Walt, 1991).

The realist paradigm focuses on competition between states and the primacy of national security (Morgenthau, 1949) and interprets the multipolar scenario as a context in which multiple actors seek to maximize their security and influence, giving rise to fluctuating rivalries and alliances (Waltz, 1979). In this sense, we gather the following definition of the securitization of migration: "the securitization of migration is, thus, a transversal political technology, used as a mode of governmentality by

diverse institutions to play with the unease, or to encourage it if it does not yet exist, so as to affirm their role as providers of protection and security and to mask some of their failures" (Bigo, 2002: 65).

From this conceptual framework, Italy and other European states, in their manifestation as rational actors (Mearsheimer, 2001: 31), consider immigration as a potential threat that must be managed in order to maintain the balance of power and internal stability (Bigo, 2002). It is within this framework that we will understand the response of European states to Tunisia after the Arab Springs in the field of migration governance, manifested in the externalization of European concerns about immigration, delegating to Tunisia the management of this security challenge.

Methodologically, this article follows a qualitative approach focusing on the critical review of the existing literature on the externalization of European migration policy and its evolution after the Arab Springs. It also analyzes the limits of European tools to address the migration-related security dilemma in the Central Mediterranean. Through a comprehensive literature review, the research uses both academic sources and policy reports and analysis from international (IOM) and intergovernmental (Frontex) agencies to assess how migration dynamics in Tunisia have become a central axis of European strategies.

First, an analysis of key texts exploring the concept of securitization in the field of migration is conducted in order to identify how Europe has prioritized a border control and security approach over other considerations. The analysis also includes a study of the agreements and policies implemented after the Arab Spring, focusing on how these events transformed relations between Europe and North African countries, particularly Tunisia.

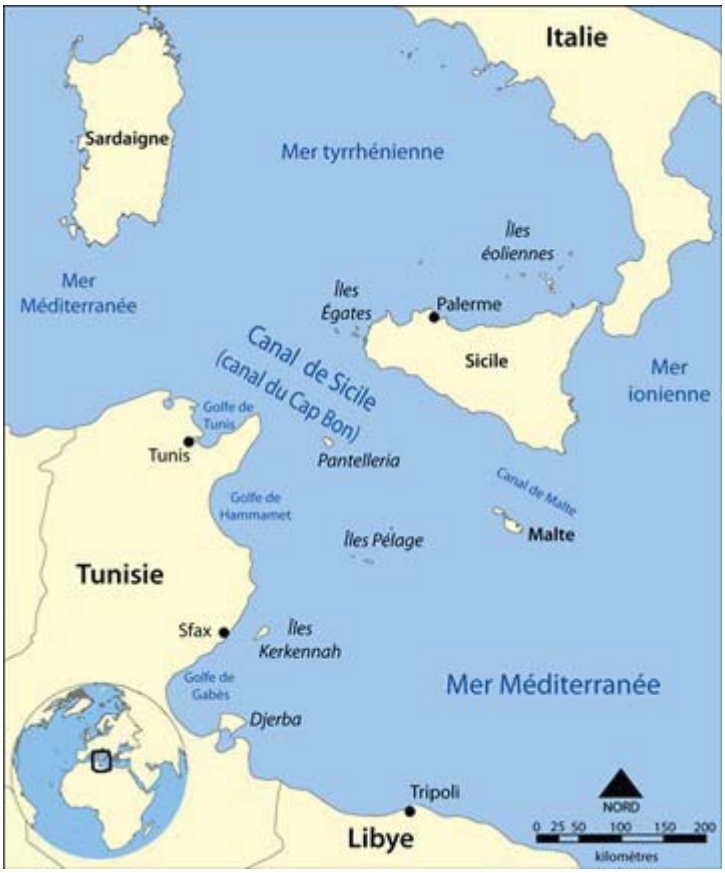
For this purpose, specific case studies are considered, such as bilateral agreements on migration and border security cooperation, for example within the European Neighborhood Policy. The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) is a framework for bilateral and regional cooperation established by the European Union in 2004, aimed at the countries bordering the East and South of the European space. Its objective is to deepen political, economic and social relations between the EU and its neighbors, promoting stability, security and mutual prosperity through instruments such as tailored action plans, regulatory integration, financial support (through the European Neighborhood Instrument) and dialogue in areas such as human rights, trade and mobility. The ENP operates under the principle of "differentiation", recognizing the specific priorities of each partner, and is based on reciprocal commitments to reform (conditionality) (European Commission, 2023; European Neighbourhood Policy, 2023).

This methodological design articulates a critical examination of the securitarian mechanisms deployed by Europe and its Member States in migration management, deconstructing their epistemological foundations and confronting them with the alternative frameworks outlined by contemporary critical theory (De Castro, 2023). "There is a case, contradictory as many phenomena occurring in current times in which critical theory is called hegemonic and hegemonic is called realism, which has become (...) the true critical theory" (De Castro *et al.*, 2025: 12).

2 Migratory flows security dilemma in the changing multipolar context

2.1 Context and key figures

Our research is concerned with the migratory route of the Central Mediterranean: from the Tunisian and Libyan coasts to the nearest point in Italian waters: Lampedusa and Sicily, map (1).



Map 1. Sicilian Canal separating Tunisia from Italy, 143.7 kilometers

Italy's colonial legacy over Tunisia dates back to the 19th century since before being colonized by France in 1881, Italian settlers had settled there (Choate, 2010). Since the 1970s, the centrality of irregular routes between Sicily and Tunisia gave rise to a new stage in the history and transnational relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean (Fleri, 2022: 624).

Tunisia was identified by Italian diplomacy as a strategic point for its ties with North African countries (Natter, 2015). Indeed, Tunisian immigration to western Sicily became a key piece of the complex web of relations between Italy and the Maghreb (Fleri, 2022: 630). Italy's geographical location at the center of the Mediterranean basin provided its successive governments with the opportunity to exercise regional geopolitical leadership and promote strategic policies, at least in theory (Schumacher *et al.*, 2016: 264).

The end of the Cold War led to the *Mare Nostrum* being seen as a new Rio Grande, as one of the major divisions between North and South in the world. After the fall of the Wall, we witnessed the configuration in the Mediterranean of a migratory space of the first order, which represented, at that time, a historical novelty (Arango, 1993). During the nineteen nineties, the migratory route from North Africa was the main source of irregular labor in Italy (Ibid.: 34). This was a key moment for Italy, as it understood that the end of the colonial era and the European integration could turn the country into a key geopolitical actor in a reorganized Mediterranean, with regularized and controlled migratory flows (Fleri, 2022: 630).

Thus, Italy's intentions to lead the migration dilemma were made possible by its efforts to incorporate its southern neighbors into its outsourced border control mission. Its migration cooperation objectives were achieved, at first, with the agreements signed with Tunisia in 2003 and 2009, for migration governance (Cusumano and Riddervold, 2023: 3030). Later, with Libya, through the agreement signed in 2010, which significantly limited the migratory flow (D'Angelo, 2018: 34).

In 2011, the context of the Arab Spring marked a before and after in terms of migration flows and south-north immigration (Oliveira Martins and Strange, 2019a, 2019b). This generated a disastrous situation for immigrants, both in their own countries and in the host countries. The increase in the number of migrants and the negative effects of their displacement are particularly highlighted (Amnesty International, 2017). Katherine Natter (2015) defined that one of the immediate effects that the Arab Springs have had on the migration phenomenon was a temporary increase in irregular immigration to Europe and placed trans-Mediterranean immigration at the top of the European political agenda (Campesi, 2011).

Indeed from 2011, immigration became a challenge for both sending and receiving countries, creating a chaotic and disastrous situation for both immigrants and both authorities (Bani Salameh and Alkatatsheh, 2019: 106). Oraza Busutil and Puente Marquez (2017) stated that this increase in the numbers of irregular immigration are consequences of the wars and military conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, the proxy environment in Libya, encouraged and financed by the West.

Although, in reality, irregular immigration from Libya did not immediately skyrocket after the 2011 uprisings. Until 2013 migrants were mainly trying to reach Italy from Tunisia. The number of departures from Libya only gained exponential relevance in late 2013 and early 2014, see figure (1). Due to the power vacuum created after the NATO-backed foreign intervention and the civil war (Cusumano and Riddervold, 2023: 3031), a mass exodus of migrant workers from Libya to southern Tunisia was caused (Bisiaux, 2020; Boubakri, 2013).

Undoubtedly, the power vacuum following the NATO intervention in Libya altered, in a considerable way, the migration governance of the European Union (Cusumano & Riddervold, 2023: 3039). Indeed, after the Arab Springs and the fall of the Qaddafi regime in 2011, there was an unprecedented increase in irregular migration through the central Mediterranean (D'Angelo, 2018: 34). We note that

between January and June 2013, more than 40 000 migrants crossed the central Mediterranean towards the Italian islands of Sicily and Lampedusa.

In 2015, inflows through the central Mediterranean increased by more than 40% (Oraza Busutil and Puente Márquez, 2017). Between 2014 and 2018, Sicily became the main arrival point for migration by sea in the Mediterranean (Migration Data Portal, 2020), highlighting at this time, the so-called "refugee crisis of 2015", –when the number of migrants on the central Mediterranean route reached 153,900 people– (International Organization for Migration, 2016). In 2016, the historical high was recorded since Libya 181,436 (Amnesty International, 2017). It is only from 2018 and 2019, that migration flows started to decrease dramatically after the Agreements between Libya and the EU, reaching in 2019 the figure of 14,500 (Frontex, 2020).

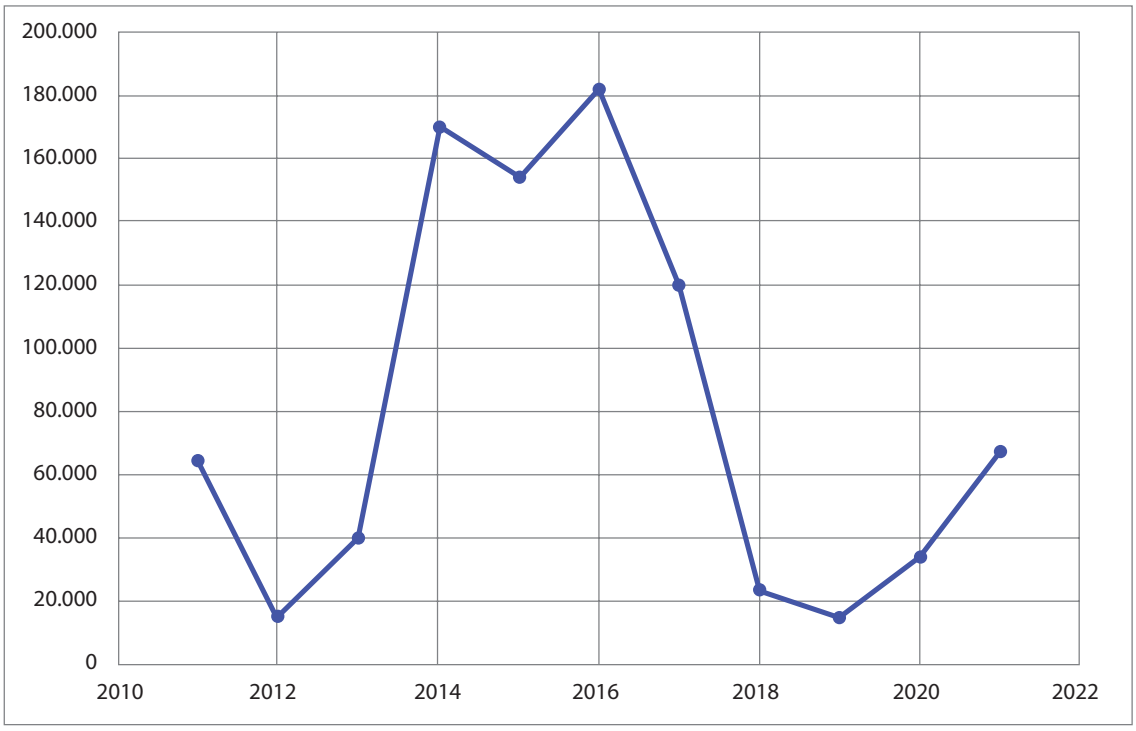


Figure (1) Irregular arrivals in the Central Mediterranean from North Africa (2011-2021)

2.2 Migratory flows: why it is a security dilemma

We mentioned previously that, from a realist perspective, immigration can be seen as a security dilemma for European powers (Walt, 1991). Indeed, irregular migration flows affect the balance of power and may lead to increased competition between states (Rudolph, 2006). As states seek to maximize their security, the flow of immigrants could be perceived as a threat to national identity and social cohesion, potentially destabilizing the internal order (Huntington, 1993; Weiner, 1995). This, in turn, can lead to increased tensions and competition as states react to perceived threats, reflecting the anarchic nature of international politics where power and security are paramount (Mearsheimer, 2001; Walt, 1991).

Much of the academy has emphasized the securitization dimension (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, 1998) of immigration in the European Union (Bigo, 2002). Which has

been a dominant paradigm for understanding the externalization of Union policies and has attracted numerous contributions, encompassing many of the debates that took place in recent years (Strange and Oliveira Martins, 2019a: 237).

The momentum offered by the context of the Arab Springs made the externalization of European migration policies the cornerstone of the European Union's migration strategy to address migration as a threat to its security. We argue that the post-2011 process of securitization of migration policies transforms immigration from a social policy issue to a security issue (Strange and Oliveira Martins, 2019a), so that extraordinary measures are first requested, then implemented and finally normalized (Buzan Wæver and de Wilde, 1998).

As immigration ceased to be a purely domestic issue and became a central element of EU foreign policy (Pacciardi and Berndtsson, 2022: 4013). This process of over-securitization was mainly framed by the strong emphasis placed on radicalization and migration as two contiguous challenges in the discourse of the EU and its leaders (Colombo, 2022), extending to categories such as transnational terrorism, organized crime and perceptions of cultural insecurity linked to ethno-religious diversity (European Commission, 2020). Certainly, the ambiguity in distinguishing between real threats –based on empirical data– and perceived threats –amplified by political or media narratives– has generated criticism about the rhetorical instrumentalization of migration (Guild *et al.*, 2019: 23).

Externalization was therefore consolidated as the default instrument of European governance of irregular mobility (Cusumano and Riddervold, 2023: 3026) and is part of the European Union's overall approach to migration, being complementary to the Union's foreign policy and development cooperation (Atassanov *et al.*, 2018, cited in Strange and Oliveira Martins, 2019a).

Long before the so-called refugee crisis of 2015, the European Union had intensified its pressure on migration control as a central demand in its negotiations with African states and regional organizations (Rudolph, 2006; Strange and Oliveira Martins, 2019a). Although actually, Italy, as the main country affected by the crisis, faced inaction and lack of support from Member States, since as Bingo explained: "Securitization of the immigrant as a risk is based on our conception of the state as a body or a container for the polity. It is anchored in the fears of politicians about losing their symbolic control over the territorial boundaries" (2002 : 65).

In short, Italy became more concerned with containing flows and externalizing borders than with carrying out migrant rescue and reception operations (D'Angelo, 2018: 40). Bearing in mind that the "Search and Rescue" actions, the so-called SAR, was not achieved by Frontex's "Hermes" operation but by the Italian authorities (Cusumano and Riddervold, 2023: 3031). In contrast, France has always maintained a unilateral and authoritative *modus operandi* to maintain its influence and interest (Schumacher *et al.*, 2016: 262).

In this context, it is rational and understandable to analyze the reasons why Italy opted for an action of a bilateral nature (Pastore & Roman, 2020), materialized in the agreement reached in 2017 with the Libyan authorities, which contributed

significantly to a drastic decrease in irregular arrivals to its shores (D'Angelo, 2018: 35). These tactics, inscribed in a realist logic on the part of the Italian government, reflect a renewed assertion of its national sovereignty.

The analysis shows that the bilateral mechanism was the predominant strategy to address the security dilemma, achieving more tangible effects than other European alternatives. This phenomenon reveals that the European Union acts fundamentally as a public policy agent, a reactive intergovernmental actor, whose primary function lies in articulating consensus among the divergent wills of its Member States (De Castro, 2025), without the capacity to impose binding frameworks in migration policies (Guinea, 2015: 254). This institutional limitation derives, to a large extent, from the heterogeneity of geopolitical interests and the **asymmetry of priorities** towards the Mediterranean among community partners, where some privilege border security and others regional cooperation (Olmedo Alberca, Fonts Picas and El-Khatib, 2024).

In this regard, Tunisian authorities are aware that, within the European Union, there is no single homogeneous perception regarding its role and relevance to the migration dossier, nor is there a clear consensus among Member States as to their strategic interests, whether individual or community, in the region (Parks and Gülöz Bakır, 2019: 40). In parallel, Oliveira Martins and Strange (2019b: 196) warn that, since 2015, the EU faces a multilevel governance crisis, characterized by the inability of its members to transcend unilateral logics and build a cohesive migration response, due to a simple lack of political will.

In the following section, we will analyze in greater depth how the security dimension of European migration policy has led to the transfer of this security challenge to southern Mediterranean countries. This subregion constitutes the southern shore of Europe, what Arango called the –famous– "South" from which the entire migratory system originates (Arango, 1993: 7).

3 European Foreign Migration Policy

3.1 Regional context: the construction of Mediterranean hegemony

After the end of the Second World War, during the era of decolonization, Europe assumed the role of a civil *power* with the intention of maintaining its influence over the states on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, territories that historically constituted one of its most important colonial spaces.

North-South dynamics have been sustained by the establishment of asymmetric relations, based on political and economic dependence. In particular, the conditionality of economic and financial assistance linked to the adoption of liberal-democratic governance models and the implementation of institutions inspired by Western models (Gozzi, 2018: 20). Which reflects an instrumental approach that seeks to consolidate structures akin to their interests.

What in the European Neighborhood Policy was defined as Europeanization: An assimilation of the neighboring country to the principles of the European Union, basically democracy, respect for human rights and development of a rule of law (European Neighbourhood Policy, 2023). However, reality has evidenced a clear contradiction between the EU's migratory interests and its stated policy objectives (Gobantes 2018: 149). A paradigmatic example of this tension is observed in Tunisia.

Historically considered as the logical and natural extension of the extension of the French colonial empire in North Africa (Hussey, 2015: 126), the EU –through the conditionality clause– demanded democratization as a requirement for granting financial aid, while, simultaneously supporting anti-democratic elites (Natter, 2015: 16). This was the case of the Ben Ali regime, which used migration policy to consolidate its international credibility (Gozzi, 2018: 25).

This duality reflects a continuity in the traditional practices of European politics, in which strategic interests prevail over democratic principles (Luengos Fernández, 2015: 7), what Huntington called the "double standard of the West" (1993: 81). This dynamic underlines the hierarchical (Gozzi, 2018: 27) and hegemonic (Mearsheimer, 2001) relationship that the EU maintains with its southern Mediterranean partners, particularly in the migratory and securitarian spheres, where its priorities often take precedence over formal commitments to democratization and regional development.

Ultimately, since the 19th century, this dynamic has allowed the consolidation of European interests in their sphere of influence over the Mediterranean, which helps to understand why Italy and France have emerged as the main Western powers in the southern Mediterranean (Choate, 2010, Schumacher *et al.*, 2016). In this way, in addition to consolidating a notable influence in the formulation of European migration policies, the strategic relevance of the region for both States is highlighted, and how essential it is for them to maintain the *status quo* in their favor on their southern shores: a key geopolitical space for the maintenance of their hegemony and power projection.

The Arab Springs represented a turning point that offered the EU the opportunity to redefine its strategies and break with outdated policy approaches, thus fostering long-term development on its southern shore (Carrera, Den Hertog and Parkin, 2012: 22). Despite this, post-2011 European migration policies towards the southern Mediterranean region have not undergone significant transformations. We understand below the central axis of the European migration policy that is based on the externalization of its borders, which not only seeks to shift migration management to third countries, but also perpetuates a dynamic of asymmetrical interdependence, where the strategic interests of the European Union take precedence over the democratic principles formally promoted in its southern neighborhood.

3.2 Externalization of borders: the basis for migration governance

The externalization of migration governance has dominated much of the academic literature. In this context, Pacciardi and Berndtsson (2022) argue that migration management was formerly the formulation of a set of rules and practices historically

and originally developed by a state. However, the end of the Cold War marked the recontextualization of the securitarian and migration issue in an unprecedented development of institutionalism and the promotion of Mediterranean multilateralism (Gozzi, 2018: 24). At that time the management of migration as a security dilemma took another dimension transcending the state with the relocation of the border outside the state territory (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, 1998), "*externalisation*" and the delegation of border control functions to third states and even non-state actors "*outsourcing*" (Pacciardi and Berndtsson, 2022: 4010).

This externalization process includes a multi-stakeholder approach, in which European states have traditionally looked to third countries to solve their migration problems (Strange and Oliveira Martins, 2019a: 236). The objective of externalizing European migration policy is aligned with a strategic imperative to neutralize without concessions the massive arrivals of migrants to European shores and delegate their management to countries on the southern shore, such as Tunisia, for example (Bisiaux, 2020: 27). Oliveira Martins and Strange underline the importance of delocalized migration policies that have grown exponentially, as the most relevant measures of the European Union's migration management are implemented outside its territory (2019b: 196).

Pastore and Roman (2020) add confirming that throughout the 2000s, the externalization of the European Union's European migration policy was gradually reinforced and had been integrated into the broader EU foreign policy framework, especially after the launch of the Global Approach to Migration (GAM) in 2005 and its renewal as GAMM (with a second M for Mobility). Although the authors specify that the GAMM, surprisingly, significantly reduced the proactive partnership-oriented approach that characterized the first European reaction to the Arab Springs and revealed a renewed focus on security aspects and a conditionality-based approach (Ibid.,).

From a realist approach, it is fundamental to remember that the EU's joint design and conceptualization with its southern neighbors for migration governance is not understood in terms of equal balance of power as the distribution of power itself is considerably asymmetric (Gozzi, 2018: 25). In this sense, policy formulation remains essentially unilateral and top-down, often excluding from planning and negotiation their so-called "partners" on the southern shore (Roman, 2019). Pastore and Roman (2020) confirm that "an analysis of EU policy documents clearly shows that the EU's and European countries' approach to cooperation with third countries has always been driven by Euro-centric security concerns and economic interests, while it has overlooked the partner countries' perspectives, needs and priorities."

Therefore, the present research understands the externalization process as a process that frames and articulates a particular narrative that legitimizes the political process (Strange and Oliveira Martins, 2019a: 239). Cusumano & Riddervold define it as a politics of *heading foward*, which is based on liberal intergovernmentalism and neo-functionalism. The processes of such a policy describe the tendency of the European

Union to integrate progressively in response to crises (2023: 3028). Indeed, the first joint initiatives developed by the European Union on its southern maritime borders reflect a limiting orientation to migratory flows. One example that stands out is Frontex's "Hermes" operation. Designed as a support mechanism towards the EU Member States most affected by migratory flows (Frontex, 2020). However, "Hermes" only focused on coordinated maritime border control activities to manage illegal migration flows from Tunisia to southern Italy (Cusumano and Riddervold, 2023: 3031).

3.3 European migration management

The previous analysis evidences how migration flows across the Mediterranean have exacerbated Europe's political inability to articulate supranational, coherent and effective responses to contemporary challenges (Heisbourg, 2015; D'Angelo, 2018: 33), revealing a gap between declared ambitions and actual institutional capacities.

In short, the discriminatory approach characterized the measures designed by both European governments and the supranational entity, in total ignorance of their historical responsibility (Oraza Busutil and Puente Márquez, 2017). Therefore, we can note that European migration policies were limited to sectoral and security-oriented approaches (e.g., bilateral and European readmission agreements), or have been diluted in broader but formalistic instruments with little influence, such as, mobility programs (Pastore and Roman, 2020).

At the macro level, it is evident that migration foreign policy reflects the overall failure of the European Neighborhood Policy (Guinea, 2015). Based on bilateralism and political conditionality (Govantes 2018: 148) it is the manifestation of the Europeanization project, "with neocolonial features", at dealing with the institutions of the Mediterranean, Arab and Muslim neighborhood (Gozzi, 2018: 25, 26). The 2011 revisions of the ENP have been criticized for adopting migration policies that primarily serve the interests of the Union, which has led to the prevalence of securitization over democratization initiatives in the region (Parks and Gülöz Bakır, 2019: 43). Likewise, the securitization approach adopted for the sake of stability has been questioned, as it is argued that, instead of focusing exclusively on stabilization, it is a priority to first address the root causes of instability, both in the economic and political spheres (Guinea, 2015; Govantes 2018).

As for, the militarization of the Mediterranean as a response to the ongoing migration crises (Bigo, 2002), the use of military force was mainly aimed at mitigating the effects, and not the causes, of the increased irregular flow (Oraza Busutil and Puente Márquez, 2017). Ultimately, we note that the European Union has failed to manage the migration crisis in the Central Mediterranean (Cusumano and Riddervold, 2023), shifting the consequences of this humanitarian catastrophe to the borders of its southwestern Member States (Oliveira Martins and Strange, 2019b).

4 Tunisia as a key actor for European migration policies: what role in the current context?

4.1 The border externalization dilemma for Tunisia after 2011

Tunisia became a priority for the European Union in terms of migration since the fall of the Ben Ali regime and the outbreak of the civil war in Libya, both in 2011. In such a way that, the migratory issue resumed its fundamentally securitarian character (Bisiaux, 2020: 28). In its historical-symbolic dimension, the Arab Springs offered a *momentum* in the framework of relations between the European Union and Tunisia, which could have potentially changed (Pastore and Roman, 2020). However, the chaos generated after the migration crisis of 2015 allowed reframing the issue of cooperation at migration control and readmission, placing Tunisia again at a high priority level on the European agenda and in the interests of Member States (Ibid.,).

This geopolitical casuistry is due to Tunisia's strategic position as a central migratory actor on the Central Mediterranean route. And, it is explained through the analysis of interconnected regional factors, which reflect a structural interdependence with dynamics of instability and insecurity that cut across North Africa and the Sahel (Hussey, 2015). African regional interconnectedness not only underscores the country's role as a critical node in migration flows, but also evidences its insertion in a regional context marked by protracted conflicts, fragile governance and transnational phenomena (Colombo, 2022: 188).

The post-2011 Tunisian governments, for their part, were divided in the face of the European Union's ambiguous stance and rhetoric between its discourse and the real support it could demonstrate to Tunisia (Parks and Gülöz Bakır, 2019: 44). They were hesitant to accept the dominant European view of migration as a mere security issue, showing increasing reluctance to implement decisions pushed by their European partner (Pastore and Roman, 2020: 7). In the first months of 2017, reaffirming the European securitized framework of migration cooperation in the "Renewed Action Plan on Return", the European Commission identified Tunisia as one of the priority countries to conclude an EU Readmission Agreement (Ibid.: 8), underlining its relevance in the Euro-African migration fabric.

However, and despite the revisions that the European Neighborhood Policy underwent after the Arab Springs (Guinea, 2015) and with which it managed to sign an action plan for 2013-2017 to grant Tunisia the status of "Privileged Partnership", migration cooperation between Tunisia and the European Union faced a series of several obstacles (Colombo, 2022: 199). By way of example, the Union's insistence on signing a readmission agreement with Tunisia met with opposition from the Tunisian authorities, who refused to sign the readmission agreement proposed by the European Union and, sometimes, even to start negotiations, considering both instruments as mere means for the EU to externalize migration controls (Pastore and Roman, 2020). The Tunisian refusal to the readmission agreement based its criticism by emphasizing the securitarian approach of the Union and its leadership towards Tunisia and its constant search for stability in its favor in the region (Parks and Gülöz Bakır, 2019: 28).

Pressure from Italy and Germany for Tunisia to accept the readmission of third-country nationals, also suggesting the possibility of replicating the mechanism established by the Declaration with Turkey of March 2016, would allow European countries to return to Tunisia not only non-Tunisian irregular migrants, but also potential asylum seekers. Which reflected, even more extremely, the security-driven Eurocentric approach to migration management (Pastore and Roman, 2020: 8). In the words of Oliveira Martins & Strange (2019b: 197) "a neocolonialist behavior towards the states of the southern shore of the Mediterranean", as the readmission conditionality aimed at making Tunisia the future *hostpsot* of European migration policy in Africa (Bisiaux, 2020: 29).

As is evident a readmission agreement is both irresponsible (Oraza Busutil and Puente Márquez, 2017) and unrealistic. The political authorities and European community bodies were fully aware of the weaknesses of the Tunisian institutional and legal framework for managing readmitted persons and the lack of an official regularization policy or voluntary return programs (Colombo, 2022: 200). This situation makes it impossible for Tunisia to take on even the readmission of its nationals deported from Europe, let alone that of third-country nationals in transit through its territory (Bisiaux, 2020: 28). Undoubtedly, it is an agreement that would expose the fragile socio-economic and political context of Tunisia to contrary reactions from its population[1] , for having to take in a large number of migrants.

However, and under the realist premise, "The 'security dilemma' reflects the basic logic of offensive realism. The essence of the dilemma is that the measures a state takes to increase its own security usually decrease the security of other states" (Mearsheimer, 2001: 36). Thus, we can understand that the readmission agreement is a constellation of migrations as a security dilemma in European foreign policy, in its attempt to maintain its survival in the current insecure multipolar context.

4.2 What future for Tunisian-European relations in the current multipolar context?

From 2021, the new Tunisian head of state does not hide his rejection of European and foreign aid conditioned by the implementation of democracy and liberal values (Kahlaoui, 2024), even interpreting it as interference in national affairs (Bobin, 2024).

1 For a complementary reading on Tunisia's migration situation since 2023 and the sub-Saharan migrant crisis between challenges to national security and fostering hate speech and xenophobia, see also:

Presidency of the Tunisian Republic. *Declaration of President Kaïs Saied on "exceptional measures to protect the national identity.* 2023. Available at: https://www.carthage.tn

UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). *Report on human mobility in Tunisia: Forced displacement and protection risks*. 2024. Available at: https://reporting.unhcr.org/tunisia.

Amnesty International. *Tunisia: Systematic violations of sub-Saharan migrants under the pretext of "national security"*. 2024. Available at: https://www.amnesty.org/es.

IOM (International Organization for Migration). *Report on migration flows in the Central Mediterranean: Tunisia as a critical node*. 2023. Available at: https://www.iom.int/es.

By virtue of the above, after a series of diplomatic and political crises between Tunisia and the international financial institutions, mainly the International Monetary Fund (Kahlaoui, 2024: 255), the European Union and its Member States became aware of the progressive deterioration of their monopoly of influence over their North African neighbor (Memmi, 2025: 161).

This scenario is framed by the loss of effectiveness of the traditional European *laissez-passer* (Cusumano and Riddervold, 2023), an approach based on conditional permissiveness towards its Mediterranean partners. This model has faced a critical challenge under the new Tunisian head of state, who has adopted an openly anti-Western and anti-liberal rhetoric (Rejichi, 2023), distancing himself from cooperation on migration issues (Colombo, 2022).

This stance, contrary to EU-driven governance schemes, reinforces the decline of the previously noted European monopoly of influence, evidencing how Tunisia's resistance to align with external demands not only challenges the Union's political hegemony, but also redefines power dynamics in a region where strategic balances are in constant reconfiguration (Memmi, 2025).

Concurrently, migration flows continue to increase steadily, following an upward trend, and recorded in 2023 a 51% increase compared to 2021[2]. Italy, adopting a unilateral stance –without the backing of its European partners– as in previous contexts (Nascimbene and Di Pascale, 2011), perceives the arrival of migrants as a constant threat to its security (Nese, 2023).

In this same temporal context, Georgia Meloni activated a bilateral mechanism with the Tunisian president, assuming a one-man leadership of the management of the issue to put pressure on its European partners (Latif, 2024). This bore fruit as the European Commission in July 2023 proposed a protocol agreement ranging from economic cooperation to migration. An agreement that materialized in an official visit to Tunisia by Ursula Von Der Leyen, accompanied by Georgia Meloni and the Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte. [3]

It has become clear that the Italian *modus operandi*, based on an externalized but bilateral migration policy, showed positive results (Carrera, Den Hertog & Parkin, 2012: 8). In light of the increase in migratory arrivals from Tunisia in the summer of 2021, Italian authorities requested their Tunisian counterparts to intensify their commitment to control and curb migratory flows. These requests were set out in a

2 EuroNews. *Tunisia and the EU seek a "strategic partnership" on immigration.* 16. 07. 2023. Available at: https://fr.euronews.com/2023/07/16/la-tunisie-et-lue-scellent-un-partenariat-strategique-sur-limmigration.

3 ABC. *Von der Leyen to travel with Rutte and Meloni to Tunisia to discuss migration cooperation.* 08. 06. 2023. Available at: https://www.abc.es/internacional/von-der-leyen-viajara-rutte-meloni-tunez-20230608131543-nt.html?ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.abc.es%2Finternacional%2Fvon-der-leyen-viajara-rutte-meloni-tunez-20230608131543-nt.html

series of visits to Tunisia made by several Italian political figures during those months, which continued until 2023[4].

These meetings provided an opportunity to address migration relations in the framework of broader cooperation initiatives, leading, among other things, to an increase in bilateral economic support to Tunisia in exchange for more rigorous efforts to stop the arrival of migrants in Europe and the announcement in May 2021 of a hotline to improve the exchange of information on irregular departures from Tunisia (Colombo, 2022: 200). During 2024, Georgia Meloni visited Tunisia four times, official visits that aspired to underline the strategic relevance of Tunisia for Italy in achieving the objectives of its migration management project (Gaseteli and Kaval, 2024).

On September 22, 2023, the European Commission announced that a 150 million euro aid to Tunisia is foreseen in order to conclude an agreement to fight against irregular immigration (European Commission, 2023). However, despite the migration agreement that the European Union, under pressure from Italy, had proposed to Tunisia and the activated funds, the Tunisian president, Kais Saeid, continues his diplomacy that belittles the European side (InfoMigrants, 2024). In addition to the hostile attitude of the Tunisian authorities, Tunisia and its European partners are experiencing, for the first time, a *frozen conflict.*

In this context, Europe seems to be realizing that the new Tunisia, led by Kais Saeid, is looking for new allies, outside the Western orbit or models of liberal democracies, former or current rivals of the West. In addition to refusing the invitation of the G-7 held in Italy, in June 2024 (Ben Hamadi, 2024), the signing of the strategic partners agreement with China, in May 2024 during an official visit of the Presidency of the Tunisian Republic to Beijing[5] , marks a precedent in the international relations of Tunisia and its traditional pro-Western positioning. Undoubtedly, these tactical moves can be interpreted as incentives paving the way for improbable scenarios in the current changing context and a reformulation of Tunisia's international position after the Arab Springs.

Following a press round of the European Union Foreign Ministers' Council meeting, Josep Borrell demonstrated their concern about Tunisia's rapprochement with Russia, China and Iran, and that Tunisia remains a key partner for security in the Mediterranean and North Africa[6]. One interpretation of Mr. Borrell's statement

4 Europa Press. *Meloni praises Italy's "strategic relationship" with Tunisia after signing three agreements.* 17. 04. 2024. Available at : https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-meloni-ensalza-relacion-estrategica-italia-tunez-firma-tres-acuerdos-20240417173235.html.

5 La Presse. *Tunisia and China establish strategic partnership: Kaïs Saïed honored in Beijing.* 31. 05. 2024. Available at: https://lapresse.tn/2024/05/31/la-tunisie-et-la-chine-etablissent-un-partenariat-strategique-kais-saied-honore-a-pekin/

6 El País. *Press conference by Josep Borrell after the meeting of EU foreign ministers.* 24. 06. 2024. YouTube: Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkCHT-UCItQ.

underlines the inescapable need to consider Tunisia as a key player in addressing migration as a security dilemma. By virtue of which, European leaders should take more into consideration that no viable solution to migration can be achieved without Tunisia's cooperation.

Rather than adopting a defensive posture in the face of security threats in the region, there is a need to cooperate in addressing the underlying causes of these regional challenges (Parks and Gülöz Bakır, 2019: 28). This situation reflects the duality that characterizes the current distribution of power in Tunisia, highlighting the uniqueness of the historical moment, in which Europe must recognize that its influence and monopoly of power in the country are no longer guaranteed and, to some extent, it has lost part of it (De Castro, 2025; Memmi, 2025).

Finally, it is of utmost relevance to take into account the regional, febrile and mutlipolar context of Tunisia's southern neighborhood. As described by realist theory, in a multipolar system, the likelihood of security threats increases due to the complexity and number of possible sources of conflict, which generates more opportunities for war and miscalculation, making deterrence more difficult to manage (Mearsheimer, 2001: 166).

The possible influences of the Sahel domino effect (Mora Tebas, 2024; Gogny, 2025), together with the insecurity *continuum* in Libya (Parks and Gülöz Bakır, 2019), no better scenarios for migration flows from Sub-Saharan Africa to Tunisia, and the unexpected consequences they will have on security in the entire southern Mediterranean rim region.

5 Conclusions

The present research presents an innovative theoretical-analytical framework, which has not been proposed before, to examine migration flows from Tunisia to Europe after the Arab Springs, from the paradigm of the security dilemmas inherent to a multipolar international order.

Using the postulates of the theory of political realism, the study has analyzed how migration flows from Tunisia represent a security dilemma for European foreign policy, particularly Italian foreign policy, in an international environment characterized by instability and competition between states.

The theoretical approach has made it possible to examine how the anarchic structure of the international system-altered by regional disorder in North Africa following the 2011 upheavals-has altered migration dynamics in the Central Mediterranean. The research has highlighted Tunisia's transformation into a key transit and departure point for migrants and a critical geostrategic node for European migration policies and border regimes.

The results of the analysis reveal the structural ineffectiveness of the European strategy of externalization of migration governance, based on the delegation of responsibilities to the southern neighboring countries. Such a model, articulated as

a peripheral containment mechanism without addressing the structural causes of human mobility, has exacerbated diplomatic tensions between Tunisia and the EU, while revealing the ontological contradictions of securitizing approaches.

At the bilateral level, we note that migration policy has catalyzed a progressive deterioration of relations between Tunisia and the Union's institutions and its leaders. This tension reached its turning point with the consolidation of a Tunisian political leadership that has led to a break with the traditional patterns of the historical relationship between Tunisia and the Union. In this sense, the episodes of punctual and recurrent crises not only reflect Europe's loss of influence in the region, but also the unresolved tensions between the EU's strategic interests and the endogenous dynamics of Tunisian political reconfiguration.

In short, the gradual breakdown of Euro-Tunisian relations is part of a changing, volatile and considerably multipolar spatiotemporal context that plunges future scenarios into acute uncertainty and systematic instability. Our research corroborated the ineffectiveness of the current European mechanisms to face and manage the challenges of immigration, including the impossibility to stop the exponential growth in the number of people leaving, detained, and even lost in the middle of the Mare Nostrum.

Through both idealistic multilateral and even personal bilateral channels, Europe is losing its power of influence in Tunisia and its traditional status of regional *hegemon* in North Africa. This is undoubtedly a historic moment for Tunisia, a traditional ally of the West.

Based on these findings, it would be pertinent to deepen academic work on the analysis of how emerging multipolar dynamics could redefine relations between Tunisia, Europe and other actors on the international scene, which would influence future migration and security scenarios in the region.

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The Force Design 2030 of the U.S. Marine Corps as a product of strategic planning, a reference for the processes of change of the Spanish military tool?

Abstract

The confirmed "era of competition", with the irruption of war in Europe and the disruptive way in which current conflicts are fought, is pushing the surrounding nations to update their security strategies with new approaches. Spain is no stranger to these influences. The U.S. Marine Corps *Force Design 2030* case study seems to offer a good comparative framework for any force design process. The appreciated continuity in its planning process, guided by the assertive political will of the pivot to Asia, has led its Defense to act accordingly to answer Chinese competitiveness in the Indo-Pacific. The Marines, a service with a markedly expeditionary character, have been the protagonists of one of the most accentuated and audacious processes of change in recent times with the aim of recovering their eroded deterrence capacity. This article analyzes the vertical coherence and definition of its planning process as a sample of its degree of validity as a strategic product, in order to subsequently extract potential references applicable to the Spanish case.

Keywords

Geopolitics, military problem, adaptation, military capabilities, deterrence

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> "There has always been a temptation for armies to be "all-purpose" (...) However, like the Swiss Army knife, neither its screwdriver, its scissors nor its blade can compete with "professional" tools specialized in a single function. At the extreme end is the possibility that what is intended to serve for everything, ends up serving for nothing".
>
> Carlos Javier Frías Sánchez in "¿Por qué es importante la doctrina militar?" (article dated May 14, 2014, in *defensa.com*).

1 Introduction

"I am convinced that the attributes of our current force are no longer what the nation requires of the Marine Corps (USMC)." So bluntly stated its commandant, General Berger, in "The Case for Change"[1] (2020). Assuming, and declaring, that his force is "not organized, trained, equipped or oriented" to meet the demands of the operational environment requires a clear strategic orientation, as well as a sharp critical eye. And the context is at the height of what the RAND *think tank*[2] considers to be the moment of greatest strategic need since the end of the Cold War (Ochmanek *et al.*, 2023). On its success in aligning *ends, ways and means*[3] depends on minimizing the risk in the most relevant theater for its national security (Lykke, 1997 pp. 183-186), that of the Indo-Pacific in competition with China.

Precisely, the effort of adaptation to the new environment being undertaken by the USMC to compete in a contested maritime environment is the focus of this article's analysis. Its "Force Design 2030 [FD2030]" is the result of defense planning that, guided by the "*pivot to Asia*" policy, seems to meet the characteristics that all force design must fulfil. That is, it has emerged from a process of adequate strategic definition and vertical coherence. Thus, it starts with the expression of the political will that identifies national interests together with the description of the strategic environment (section 3.1), the development of the defense strategy (3.2), the formulation of the "operational problem" to be solved (3.3), the response in the form of an "operational concept" and the military capabilities derived from it (3.4), and the consequent force design (3.5) (Arteaga, Fojón, 2007). Finally, two tables are offered, one summarizing this process, together with another on the Spanish case, providing qualitative and quantitative data to better justify the conclusions obtained.

If proven consistent as a product of strategic planning, it will be offered as a valid comparative framework that can support other force designs.

1 David H. Berger, "The Case for Change. Meeting the Principal Challenges Facing the Corps," *Marine Corps Gazette* (June 2020), pp 8-12.

2 It is an influential *think tank* that has guided US foreign policies since the beginning of the Cold War.

3 Aims, ways and means.

2 Theoretical framework: strategic planning in the era of competition and its vertical coherence

We find ourselves in a world undergoing a Great Transformation (Lamo de Espinosa, 2021, chap. 3) "dominated by States" (Baqués, 2021b) in which, as Colin S. Gray predicted in "Another Bloody Century", rivalry and unilateralism predominate. The mode of action of international actors is confirmed through the language of geopolitical competition [*security competition*] where[4] all relationship mechanisms are "instrumentalized" and individual interests prevail (Leonard, 2021; Mahbubani, 2018). That rivalry manifests itself in all shades of gray from peace to war including "economic or media competitions (...) that will be subordinated to grand, even maximalist, political objectives"[5]. Baqués (2021b) stresses realistically that a world like today's, with many centers of power is, "in practice, the most unstable –because it is volatile and unpredictable– of all imaginable worlds".

In an era where increasing rivalry leads to "hypercompetition", it seems that one can only prepare for it or, "fall into irrelevance" (Borrell, 2021). The revival of war in Europe, another symptom of the "world coming to an end" (Pardo de Santayana, 2019), has brought back large-scale conflict as a political tool and signals the erosion of Western deterrence power. The nations of our environment are pushed to review their strategies and adapt the design of their military tools, "poorly prepared" for the current scenario where deterrence has failed (Calvo Albero, 2024a: 9; Nagl, Crombe, 2024). Of the range of assessments of such a war capability, the RAND Corporation in its monograph *Inflection Point, How to Reverse the Erosion of U.S. and Allied Military Power and Influence* is one of the most pessimistic. The "superiority has disappeared, certainly vis-à-vis China, but also in some ways vis-à-vis other less powerful adversaries", and "is not coming back"[6]. And they prescribe, in return, new approaches that make it possible to compete and, if necessary, to fight (Ochmanek *et al.*, 2023; pp. vii-xii). It is the rivalry with the Asian giant[7] that gives context to this article from the prism of military tool design.

4 In the English-speaking world, we speak of *weaponization*, i.e. the "instrumentalization" of relationships for competitive purposes.

5 Such as "eroding the credibility of antagonists, provoking the breakup of rival alliances, fomenting separatist causes among competitors" (p. 5).

6 "*That superiority is gone, surely with respect to China but in significant ways with respect to the forces of other, less powerful adversaries as well, and it is not coming back*" (Ochmanek *et al*, 2023; p. viii).

7 The academic literature on the probabilities of a large-scale conflict between the two powers is abundant, with two general positions. On one side of the scale, the obvious war power of the US, the inherent disincentive to a confrontation between two nuclear players, and the traditional prudence and strategic patience of Beijing; and on the other side: the military option of annexation of Taiwan (given its non-"peaceful rise"), or Washington being drawn into the Thucydides trap. If we keep this in mind, everything currently points to a low probability of open war (Luttwak, 2024; Calvo Albero, 2023, min.65-68; Castelltort, 2021). Nevertheless, the aforementioned RAND monograph warns of the dangerous moment in which international relations find themselves.

In order to adapt to this competition, the States considered "actors" apply a sincere, realistic vision, far from clichés, offering an "accurate" strategic panorama (Jordán in Baqués and Fojón, 2023: 67; Arteaga, Fojón, 2007: 124). Based on this recognition, they express their political will by incorporating their "national interests, their geographical realities and territorial security, framing their grand strategy, their alliance structure (...) and potential challenges" (Hoffman in Hooker *et al.*, 2016: 18). This process is doctrinally collected by authors such as Murdock (2004) in "Improving the Practice of National Security Strategy", Hooker *et al.*, (2016) in "Charting a Course, Strategic Choices for a New Administration", or at the national level, by Arteaga and Fojón (2007), with "El planeamiento de la política de defensa y seguridad en España". A process that, if followed without discontinuities, makes it possible to formulate a coherent strategy.

This strategic *continuum* is what Castilla Barea,[8] , considers to be the basis for "consistency" to "ensure effective capability planning". Specifically, the necessary "vertical coherence" is expressed as the "traceability" of "strategic concepts, operational concepts, key missions and tasks, as well as their capability requirements" (Castilla Barea, 2024: 16). It is this *top-down and bottom-up* "coherence" that is the dependent variable established to analyze the planning leading to FD2030.

2.1 From homeland security strategies to force designs

In this field, political will is usually expressed explicitly in the form of security strategies (such as the National Security Strategy [NSS] of the case study, or the Spanish National Security Strategy [ESN]). Or, implicitly, it can be deduced from their actions vis-à-vis interests or in the formation of alliances and pacts. In one way or another, the political guide must be sufficiently clear for the *departments* [ministries] to draft their subordinate directives. It starts from the premise that "a government must establish what position its state should occupy in the international system". This is followed by the identification of its "main problems, interests, priorities, allies and values in external action", as well as "what degree of force it is prepared to use [and] what level of military effort it is prepared to undertake". Or in other words, establishing "political priority, determining objectives, setting needs and enabling possible resources" to align means and ways with ends (Fojón, 2019: 17; in other words, Colom, 2021a: 16 and 2020: 7; Arteaga, 2022 and 2021; Calvo Albero, 2020a: 10; Hooker *et al.*, 2016: 38).

8 The author describes "vertical coherence" based on the works of Colin Gray and Tagarev on the link between strategy and defense planning in the theoretical framework of his doctoral thesis "From defense policy to defense planning". Also from the etymological point of view, "coherent" being considered any planning whose "parts fit well together", "vertical" being specified when programs and projects, and their implementation, are consistent "upwards" with the strategic and defense planning orientations (p. 44).

> "The determination of a country's national interest is neither self-evident nor easy to specify (...) [,] it can be conceived as the coherent and organized set of established ends (...). In turn, the general purposes are configured as a series of general effects that are intended to be achieved, maintained or improved to ensure the continuity of the country (...) and for which both society and the State that represents it are willing to mobilize their main resources, ultimately risking their own existence and sovereignty" (Baqués and Fojón, 2023: 203).

The preparation of thematic strategies follows. In the defense framework, the National Defense Strategies (NDS) or National Defense Directives (DDN), products of strategic planning (Figure 1) that must set the strategic-military objectives subordinated to the "grand strategy" (Arteaga and Fojón, 2007: 30, 151-159). Thus, once the goals have been established and prioritized, the best alignment of ways and means will depend directly on the degree of assertiveness of the political guide and the accuracy of the description of the geopolitical panorama. This sequence is the one that should give way to formulate the "problem to be solved by Defense" or, in short, the "military problem" (Fojón, 2019: 5).

Figure 1. The strategic pyramid. Source: Arteaga and Fojón, 2007

In public policy, since a simplification of an extremely complex world is required, problems are posed through their conceptualization. A "military problem" should be understood as the enunciation of a "functional or operational" scenario that requires a systemic response that "identifies the needs, capabilities and responsibilities" to be integrated (Arteaga, Fojón, 2007: 206). In parallel, Krepinevich calls "operational challenges" those "imperative problems posed by adversaries at the operational level"[9]. He considers that correctly identifying them allows focusing the efforts of the military apparatus since "the more precise and defined they are, the greater the probability of successfully facing them" (Krepinevich, 2023, ch. 11).[10]

9 "*Compelling real-world problems posed by adversaries at the operational (or campaign) level of war*".

10 The American author uses *challenge* as a synonym for problem.

From this approach, a solution must then be developed and implemented in the form of an operational concept, or "line of action designed to achieve the military objective" (Lykke, 1997: 184; or, Sabatier, 2007: 3). This is the basis for the choice of capabilities to be assembled by the military tool of a State, and which will be organized by a force design as the ultimate product of the process. This "template" is the one that will be superimposed on the path followed by the US administration through its 2022 security strategy (the most recent) and defense strategy (2022, the most recent) in which the FD2030 is framed.

Next, the definition and vertical coherence of the selected case study is analyzed.

3 The Road to the U.S. Marine Corps *FD2030*

3.1 The political will of the "pivot to Asia" through the National Security Strategies.

The last three editions of the NSS (Trump, Biden and Biden legislatures)[11] embody a vision of the global security environment in which the "free and open order" is being challenged. The reason is made explicit: the revisionism of China and Russia framed in the *security competition* or *great power competition*[12]. But it is the former who, despite shared interests[13] , represents the "greatest and most serious geopolitical challenge" to U.S. security by pursuing a reshaping of the established order contrary to its liberal values (NSS, 2022: 23-24). The *pivot to Asia* initially announced by Obama in a "subtle" approach to the Chinese rise[14], has been assertively evolving to rise to the challenge. Now, the first global priority is to "dominate the competition with China [*Out-Competing China*]," especially where it is "most pronounced," in the Indo-Pacific (NSS, 2022: 23-24). And it shields its level of ambition:

> "American military power is the most powerful fighting force the world has ever known. The United States will not hesitate to use force when necessary to defend our national interests. But we will do so as a last resort and only when the objectives and mission are clear and achievable" (p. 20)[15].

11 2017-21-22 editions. The 2015 edition, which still prioritized efforts to maintain the international rules-based order less assertively than in the current context, is not considered.

12 Competition between powers.

13 The interdependent factors are climate, economics and public health.

14 In fact, the term *pivot* was avoided by Obama himself, employing instead the more friendly term *re-balancing*, as a "balanced economic, diplomatic and security approach" (Lieberthal, 2011).

15 *"The American military is the strongest fighting force the world has ever known. America will not hesitate to use force when necessary to defend our national interests. But we will do so as the last resort and only when the objectives and mission are clear and achievable".*

Despite this, this *grand strategy* "does not pursue a new Cold War" (p. 9)[16]. Although this does not prevent it from denouncing Beijing's progressive aggressiveness following its own Asian "Monroe Doctrine" (Mearsheimer, 2010: 389). It is recognized that, given the amount of people, resources and economic activity in Eurasia, the existence of a "regional hegemon would concentrate so much power that it would threaten vital US interests", as the Congressional Research Service report warns (O'Rourke, 2024). Consequently, to prevent China from consolidating itself as such, it channels the main objectives, proposing Integrated Deterrence as a means.

It should be mentioned that it is precisely in the Taiwan Strait, the focus of China's territorial ambitions, where Washington's economic and technological survival and its global credibility intersect. This island produces 37% of the world's computer *chips*, as well as being at the forefront of the technological innovation that makes Moore's Law possible[17] , on which the transatlantic power bases its economy and technological supremacy. If this flow were to be interrupted, the world would enter into crisis, and Silicon Valley's telecommunications industry would go bankrupt because these semiconductors are its physical livelihood[18]. This concentration of companies on the disputed island is in turn the *silicon shield* that guarantees Taiwanese autonomy and a transcendental vulnerability for U.S. national interests (Miller, 2022).

3.2 The National Defense Strategy, bringing definition to objectives in the Indo-Pacific

This is the basis for the subordinate strategy, the NDS of 2022[19]. This strategy assumes that maintaining "peace and stability" in that region is the objective on which the "security" of the American people depends. Also, "expanding the prosperity and opportunities of its economy, and defending the democratic values of the *American way of life*" (NDS, 2022: 1, 7)[20]. And, at the same time, it provides definition from the defense point of view to the description of the threat made by the NSS: the greatest risk to such national interest is represented by an actor that has "embarked on an ambitious expansion, modernization and diversification of its atomic forces,

16 "We also want to avoid a world in which competition escalates into a world of rigid blocs. We do not seek conflict or a new Cold War" (p. 9).

17 Prediction so far fulfilled in which, every two years, the chip's power doubles and its size shrinks.

18 For example, a partial disruption, such as that caused by COVID, affected the production of washing machines, computers and cars, among others. *Chips* are the ubiquitous component of our era. Also in the military industry. A single *Javelin* anti-tank missile requires 200 of them (Miller, 2022: 377).

19 Last published, it contains the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) and the Missile Defense Review (MRD) as complementary strategies.

20 *"The Department will focus on safeguarding and advancing vital U.S. national interests. We wil work (...) to: Protect the security of the American People; Expand economic prosperity and opportunity; and realize and defend the values at the heart of American way of life"* (p. 1).

establishing an incipient nuclear triad [21] " (p. 4), in addition to having powerful conventional forces and modes of action from the gray zone.

The NDS defines three general lines of action (LA) to protect the national interests set out in the overarching strategy. "Investment", to improve the positioning of national companies; "alignment", with the efforts of allies and *security partners*; and "competitiveness", in the defense of their security. All this framed by Integrated Deterrence, especially through *campaing*, or advanced deployment of "credible forces to ensure deterrence" and capable of counteracting the confirmed "erosion" of its military power (p.7). Degradation that is a reality according to Hoffman's assessment: "improvements in Chinese military capabilities have completely transformed the strategic environment and weakened the military tool", specifically in its function of "trans-narrow deterrence [of Taiwan]" (in Ochmanek *et al.*, 2023).

Indeed, Beijing is recognized as an actor that has methodically and patiently studied American *warfare*[22] identifying that it has "a beginning, a development and an end" (McFate, 2019). In the face of its exquisite and highly demanding platforms in crews and maintenance, it presents a *Systems Destruction Warfare* [Warfare Against Systems][23]. Thus, the NDS recognizes that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) can impede or hinder the concentration of U.S. forces at its forward bases in the Pacific. Most especially, the closer they get to the demarcation of the first island chain, where the effects of their denial systems overlap. As direct consequence, the necessary *decisive expeditionary force*[24] as an enabling feature of the *American Way of War* (Cepeda, 2015: 128-131; NDS, 2022: 4), is deemed impracticable in the current environment. The "development of new operational concepts" is therefore needed as a prescription for a solution to the problem (NDS, 2022: 8)[25]. New ways of operating across the contested spectrum, with the ability to frustrate competitors' activities, and to deter (Mazarr, 2023: 7-12).

21 Referring to the nuclear package consisting of air-, ground- and submarine-launched weapons.

22 Its strategists propose an alternative way of competing: not to confront the US game. Following the objective already set by their last but one president, Jiang Zemin (1989-2002), to be able to "win local wars through high technology", they intend to deny the projection of their power, to operate under their ways, and to achieve their objectives. To this end, they acknowledge that they have a new set of rules covering a wider range of activities than the merely kinetic ones preponderant in the U.S. catalog (Liang and Xiangsui, 1999).

23 It is based on gaining information superiority, employing long-range networked systems, and striking first in the exchange of salvos. In short, an asymmetric strategy in the manner of a "killer's mace" (Pulido, 2021: 13; or Work, 2018) comprising two simultaneous performances (Krepinevitz, 2023, min.32-36; Brose, 2020): against "the nervous system" of the war machine in the intangible domains (cyber and electromagnetic) by preventing the functioning of its command and control and logistics; against the capital systems in the tangible ones (on land, its bases; at sea, its aircraft carriers; in aerospace, its communications satellites and GPS).

24 Consisting of projecting a massive force that offensively imposes a decisive victory (prior concentration on the operations board). An example is the First Gulf War, where for months logistical and preparation activities were carried out in a space close to and bordering Iraq, in an uncontested manner.

25 The NDS specifies this in its "*How we will deter*" section.

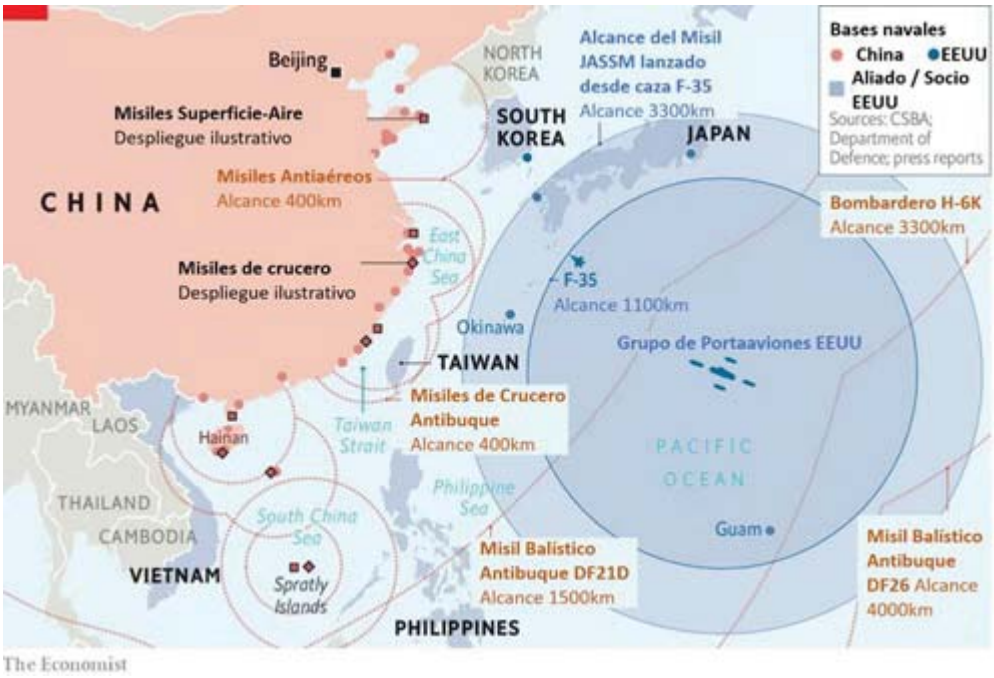

Figure 2. Translated comparison of Chinese and U.S. offensive ranges and depiction of the effects of denial on projection capability in the Indo-Pacific. Source: *The Economist*

In a defensive approach to the challenge, the defense strategy articulates Integrated Deterrence as the main tool. Its intended competitiveness requires it to be applicable *cross-strait* with the practical constraints that come with the revisionist power so close to the threatened asset. And the strategy makes it explicit: "The *Department will support Taiwan's asymmetric self-defense*" (NDS, 2022: 15). This mode of achieving ends, comprising cost imposition and denial tactics, seems to make sense when one has gone from assuming the difficulty of "fighting two wars that would break out simultaneously" (Colom, 2015: 74) to believing that a victory cannot be achieved in the current context (Detsch, 2024). And to ensure it, the NDS reorients its services. Armies such as the *Army*, or the Marines themselves, which have been protagonists of the "counterinsurgency" of the last two decades, accustomed to operate in and from permissive contexts, must now adapt to the competition between powers (*peer-to-peer*)"[26] where there are no longer peripheral sanctuaries to amass forces, and where the SLOC[27] are threatened from their very origin in national territory. It is here that the Department of Defense [DoD] proceeds to pose its "military problem" to be solved.

3.3 The U.S. operational problem in the Indo-Pacific Theater

Based on the definition of the strategic objectives and the description of the operational environment set forth in the NSS and specified in the NDS, the task faces two challenges. One, to come to terms with the "sea change in the way *warfare*

26 Department of the Navy [DoN], 2020.

27 *Sea Lines of Communication* [Líneas de *Comunicación*].

is conducted" that rivals are exploiting (Brose, 2020; McFate, 2019); the other, to recognize that what the nation expects of its Armed Forces "far exceeds the means available to deliver it" (Ochmanek *et al*., 2023: vii). It is accepted that, trying to exercise the "same deterrence", with notably "less military dominance" implies "increased risk" (Hoffman in Hooker *et al*, 2016: 37). Therefore, continuist practices are discouraged, warning that the monopoly of capabilities –which enabled primacy in previous campaigns– has disappeared.

However, the formulation of the operational problem is not known to the public, or not available at all, as Krepinevich criticizes in the *Operational Challenges* section (chapter 11) of the recent The Origins of Victory: "when it comes to operational challenges, the U.S. Armed Forces operate at a disadvantage. Recent administrations have been silent on the operational problems their force must prepare for, hampering the operational concept development effort." And he elaborates: the NDS (from 2018, in effect when he produced his work) "doesn't even define the term [operational problem]"[28]. He argues that for a strategic development to be considered "coherent" it must formulate such problems, bearing in mind that they must involve "no more than five or six" *core operational challenges*. And they must be prioritized. To mitigate this shortcoming, he proposes the following statement:

> "Deterring and, if necessary, defending U.S. allies and security partners in the Indo-Pacific region, especially those along the first island chain, from Chinese aggression and coercion (i.e., against a technologically advanced and locally superior enemy in strength) without resorting to the use of nuclear weapons. [*Deterring and, if necessary, defending U.S. allies and security partners in the Indo-Pacific region, especially those along the first island chain, from Chinese aggression and coercion (i.e., against a technically advanced, locally numerically superior enemy) without resorting to the use of nuclear weapons*]" (Krepinevich, 2023, ch. 11).

This statement seems to coincide broadly with the official line expressed by the USMC Commander himself (Berger, 2020). Especially, if a deductive effort is made from the three factors that he wields to justify the implementation of FD2030:

– The first, assuming the "maturity of precision weapons" (conceptualized as the *Mature Precision Strike Regime* [MPSR]). It is seen in the form of *reconnaissance and strike* (RUK) *complexes* already consolidated both by the PLA's available arsenal and its area denial and anti-access (A2/AD) effects[29] on the first island chain and beyond (Figure 2). The great profusion of AI-powered sensors

28 Unlike the definition he argues was provided in Cold War times with respect to the Soviet threat allowing the development of coherent concepts: "*defending NATO's Central European frontiers against a numerically superior foe (Soviet Russia and its Warsaw Pact allies) in a high-intensity conflict environment while avoiding employing nuclear weapons*. This clear statement of the problem enabled the U.S. military, over the course of the forty-year standoff between the two superpowers, to develop a series of operational concepts that informed the crafting of military doctrine" (chap. 11).

29 Ivorra describes in detail the systems underpinning the Chinese A2/AD.

and vectors, including hypervelocity vectors, cause the boundaries between physical domains to blur and can be threatened from the lowest levels of the conflict. [30]

– The second, from the perspective that one must operate and be competitive in the gray zone (GZ). In particular, in the face of actions subject to a *casus belli* being able to counter *salami* and *fait accompli* tactics[31]. Actions that would require a response of such a military and logistical magnitude that would lead to a "not worth it" (2020: 10). More so when at the extreme end of an escalation would be nuclear confrontation.

– And the third, from the imperative of operating in a maritime environment. The successive chains of islands, sometimes made up of mere islets, limit land maneuvering while imposing the need for naval platforms for the projection of forces and their supply.

With all this, Berger considers that as it naturally corresponds to a corps belonging to a Navy that looks to the Indo-Pacific, "it needs to reorient itself to support it" (2020)[32]. Thus, the contribution of the USMC –as a service directly involved in this strategic environment– is synthesized in the need to contribute to the containment and deterrence effect as a "valuable land complement to the fleet", in a context of "maritime campaign", "primacy of precision weapons (MPSR)" and necessary competitiveness in the "gray zone" (Berger, 2019, 2020).

3.4 Defense Without Dominance and the Marine Corps' contribution with its FD2030 concept

The answer to the "operational problem" points to a "defensive" concept. Framed in Integrated Deterrence, it pursues the invariable principles of unbalancing the cost-benefit ratio of the target at stake. To this end, it develops the same two actions of "asymmetric deterrence" (NDS, 2022: 8): by *denial* and by *resilience*. The first, sustained by preventing territorial conquest or the use of spaces that enable it; and the second, by reinforcing the ability of partners and allies in the defense role to recover quickly, recompose, and fight, even when the adversary has achieved its initial objectives (especially referring to Taiwan) (Mazarr and Ke, 2024).

30 Examples of their success are, with less evolved versions, the Ukrainian denial of the Black Sea, or the SLOC Houthi contestation just below the threshold of conflict (in both cases, carried out by mobile, suitably equipped and motivated forces).

31 The "Senkaku paradox" is made explicit, where rival targets are apparently of much lower value than a response in force would imply.

32 He defends this prioritized reorientation considering that, while other potential scenarios against Russia or North Korea would be eminently land-based, playing a supporting role, in the Chinese case they should contribute significantly to the naval campaign against an adversary that fights from inland lines and holds local superiority (Berger, 2020).

However, as noted, the lack of an official statement of the problem and its consequent Joint response can misalign (losing effectiveness) or cause unnecessary overlap (losing efficiency) of services[33]. Here Hoffman considers that the main weakness of the Marines' FD2030 is precisely its lack of fit in a Joint plan (2020: 7) beyond offering itself as a complement in "perfect symbiosis" with its *Navy*.

Its new *concept of employment* provides long-range distributed lethality with survivability based on wide dispersion, a versatility of employment from naval or land-based platforms and enabled by agile projection (Department of the Navy [DoN], 2020 and 2023a). This is consistent with *Defense Without Dominance* (Mazarr, 2023): to defeat aggression (but not victory), "even from the most powerful adversaries, superiority is no longer required". It requires that the "attitude and *posture*" and the equipment of the force be commensurate. And the *think tank*, aligned with Berger, stresses the imperative of "learning to fight in a new way" to represent a "robust obstacle" to the opponent (Ochmanek *et al.*, 2023: viii; McFate, 2019).

This "attitude+ location" is materialized through the aforementioned *campaigning*. Joint-combined action[34] coordinated with the different instruments of power, across the spectrum, to obtain military advantage, sowing doubt in competitors and changing perceptions; something more than military maneuvers. This *mode*, specifically applied to the Western Pacific, is designed to generate the desired denial (Van Horrick, 2023)[35]. And for this *posture* to be really effective, it recommends its due synchronization with the only two annual "windows" of good weather for a potential maritime and air

Figure 3. Major exercises (campaigning) with Marine contributions alongside partners and allies over, and within, the First Island Chain in the spring of 2023 from the Chinese perspective. Source: *War on the Rocks*

33 Joint developments such as the Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons (JAM-GC) may be an acceptable doctrinal reference as a framework for FD2030, but it is not confined to the Indo-Pacific nor does it assign tasks and responsibilities to the services.

34 With other services and with other allied and partner armies.

35 Using a nod to war movies, "A Strait too Far" symbolizes the effect of enlarging the 180 kilometers that separate mainland China from what it considers its territory, as a target "too far away".

invasion[36]. This timing is intended to counteract the advantage of those who operate with local superiority and "from inland lines", limiting the problems of those who act "7,000 miles from their coast".

This approach is based on a Concept that posits "distributed operations"[37] through "*stand-in* [advanced] forces" acting on "forward operating bases"[38] in contested environments (within the MPSR area of influence), and enabled by active logistics in the "contact layer" (Berger, 2020: 12). This is to operate from within the Chinese A2/AD applying the same interdiction capability (Figure 2). "*Marines* will now sink ships" (Benitez, 2024) can colloquially summarize the detection-acquisition-attack process, which from an "asymmetric attrition" approach[39] , also extends over the air domain, and to a lesser extent, the land domain. This is an obvious and marked transition for an amphibious force oriented "to act in the full range of military operations", including the establishment of beachheads in force. Now, it is modeled according to an expeditionary concept of "archipelic defense"[40] on the first chain of islands, at the cost of losing shock capacity.

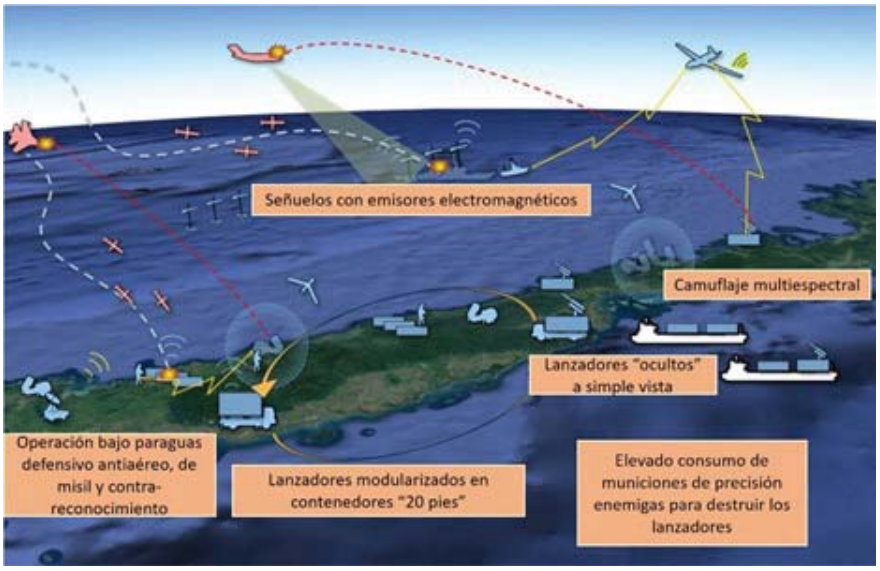

Figure 4. Author's translation of the representation of the USMC Operational Concept showing the dispersion of its offensive vectors (distributed lethality) offering targets that are difficult to detect and not very profitable.
Source: Center for International Maritime Security

The obvious need for survivability in the aforementioned *contact zone* will be obtained by reducing detectability and its cost-effectiveness as an objective through

36 One is in May and the other in September-October, followed by rainy weather, monsoons and prohibitive seas for landing actions.

37 It seeks to reduce vulnerability by dispersing in smaller groups, but being able to "amass" fires and effects.

38 *Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations* (EABO).

39 It embodies the ability to prevent adversary forces from reaching their primary objectives knowing that it may be an insufficient capability to force the cessation of hostilities (Ochmanek *et al*, 2023: x).

40 Coined by Krepinevich in 2017 in a *paper* of the same name.

the independent employment of units with "low footprint" (even a reinforced section entity is mentioned). These should be capable of being projected into a contested environment and be lethal with their missile systems in UGV formats[41] or modularized in *20-foot* containers. In addition, they will provide early warning to the fleet, and logistical support capability such as with expeditionary refueling of their own *stealth* aircraft (Figure 3). A transition is intended from manned to unmanned, from quantity to quality in human resource, from expensive to effective and, in short, from a general purpose *Corps* to "strategic context oriented" (Hoffman, 2020).

3.5 New force design to regain competitiveness

From a *concept* must be derived the military capabilities necessary for its enablement[42]. Those contemplated by *Force Design 2030* are linked to what Timothy Grayson, former director of the DARPA agency, postulates as the unpostponable migration from "dominance to lethality" in U.S. strategy. Thus, missile defense, ship and aircraft strike defense, advanced logistics and C4ISR are incorporated[43]. Its "distributed and networked" operation requires *mission command*[44] down to the lowest level. The only valid command modality for Berger in the face of a decentralized and atomized deployment of multi-domain units under the responsibility of *junior* officers. A leap (although not explicitly stated) towards the *mosaic* (Pulido, 2021)[45]. In parallel, this new concept discards, not without controversy, the inter-weapon combat capability, or that of "attacking or defending territories" at brigade or division level (Reese *et al.*, 2024; Macander and Hwang, 2022; Bruogard, and Qviller, 2020: 201)[46].

Looking at FD2030 from a methodological point of view, its development consisted of the following phases: the first, which began in 2019, of problem definition with a small advisory group directly dependent and meshed in all its steps with the USMC Commander himself; in the second, the integrated planning teams (IPTs) were formed[47] assessing the state of the "current force" and projection of the future;

41 *Unmanned Ground Vehicle.*

42 The *academy* usually reminds us how important it is to comply in that sense, and not the opposite: that the means define the ways.

43 *Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance.*

44 Or Mission-Oriented Command. A type of command that involves strong initiative by the performers, knowledge of the command's purpose, and mutual trust to enable decentralized action.

45 *Mosaic warfare* basically consists of disaggregating large, monolithic, multifunctional combat platforms into a multitude of small, monofunctional platforms" (p. 12).

46 Due to its relevance, it will be dealt with exclusively in section 3.5.

47 With the themes: (1) MEU reconfiguration; (2) the Marine Littoral Regiment construct; (3) Maritime Prepositioning Force reconfiguration; (4) aviation in support of the FMF; (5) logistics in support of the FMF; (6) anti-ship capabilities; (7) medium-range air defense capabilities; (8)

"iterative experimentation" followed, then rehearsals and *wargamming* [wargaming]; finally, after approval by the Secretaries of Defense, Navy, and Congress, refinement and implementation proceeded through the Programming, Budgeting, and Execution Process (PPBES) (Macander and Hwang, 2022; DoN, 2020: 5). A milestone that comprises one year within the four-year capability planning cycle, and guides force development and links it budgetarily (DoD, 2017).

Force design is still a choice between options, with their associated advantages, risks and costs. Thus, under the assumption that no additional funding would be received, it was decided to divest itself of what was "unnecessary" for the *Concept*, freeing up valuable resources:

– First of all, with regard to the organic structures: reducing the infantry battalions (-12.5%) and accordingly, their combat and logistic supports. It is accepted that the adversary will be located tens or hundreds of kilometers away, probably on other islands or islets, and in domains not necessarily terrestrial.

– Secondly, in terms of transversal capabilities: discarding armored[48] and *bridging* (-100%); and reducing amphibious (-33%), tube artillery (-76%), drones without the possibility of being armed and attack and medium transport helicopters (-25%)[49]. Mobility is prioritized in contested areas, but which are not defended by linear sets of obstacles in use (breaching is not required). The aim is to optimize the force's fire, increasing its range and precision.

The dismissed capabilities, while "prized for their [demonstrated] shock capability and firepower," reduce the "agility of the force, being of limited value in the emerging maritime operations environment where greater mobility and precision are necessary" (Hoffman, 2020: 3).

In return:

– Boosting its air weapon to 340 F-35B fighters (VTOL[50]) with the ability to operate from expeditionary or improvised take-off points, reinforced with a new in-flight refueling squadron. Refocusing the traditional mission of Marine fighter squadrons from force security and close air support to long-range target neutralization.

– Missile capacity is increased to 21 batteries (+300%). Assuming the new fire-producing backbone.

– Also light-armored reconnaissance (+33%), and unmanned aerial (+100% up to six companies). As a necessary capability for rapid initial entry and terrain information gathering to enable such decentralized deployments.

infantry battalion reorganization; (9) manned-unmanned capability balance; (10) objective network requirements; (11) training and education; and (12) the reserves.

48 With the delivery of its 450 battle tanks to the *Army*.

49 Assuming a release of $16 billion in systems and equipment (Macander and Hwang, 2022).

50 *Vertical Take-Off and Landing*.

– At the same time, the *Navy* is requested to incorporate 31 amphibious ships of a new "L class"[51] , smaller in size, footprint and cost than the current ones, together with their associated platforms for littoral projection and logistical support[52]. It assumes a weakening of the traditional ability to take a beach *in force,* and enhances the decentralized projection of forces of lesser size and logistical burden.

The new FD advocates experimentation and implementation of new structures. One of its protagonists is precisely the backbone of these new capabilities. Combining at battalion level the anti-aircraft (Littoral Anti-Air Battalion), anti-ship combat and multi-domain reconnaissance (Littoral Combat Team) and logistics (Combat Logistics Battalion) capabilities, the Marine Littoral Regiment (MLR)[53] was formed as the backbone of the aforementioned capabilities (Feickert, 2024). Its atomized mode of action leads, once again, to narrow the center of gravity in the *Marine*.

The high demands this new concept places on young leaders (section chiefs and NCOs) to operate autonomously while handling technically advanced equipment, gives crucial importance to human capital. This has led its commander to identify the tasks of talent management, training and modernization of the education system as priorities, with its own "2030" programs[54]. The aim is thus to retain "the most experienced personnel", without meaning "the most senior", in a multidisciplinary effort supported by civilian institutions that also extends to recruitment. It involves a shift from "recruiting to replace" to empowering the most talented, to invest in them and "accelerate their promotion" (DoN, 2023b).[55]

3.6 A brief overview of the criticisms and risks of FD2030

Changes are never without risk. In complex institutions with great "doctrinal inertia" such as armies, these are more easily felt (Frías, 2014). The innovative approach to the military problem described above is only possible after what its leader describes as an "arduous process" accompanied by a "forceful institutional change" (DoN, 2020). Before a contemporary *Syndicate of Discontent*[56] made up of politicians,

51 "L" referring to *Landing* or "disembarkation" in English.

52 This is not within the USMC's budgetary purview (being a vulnerable aspect of the program).

53 Also supported by historical references such as the Solomon Islands defense of the Pacific campaign, where battalions with such "multi-domain" capabilities supported *Navy* maneuver by controlling key points (Bruogard, and Qviller, 2020: 203).

54 *Talent Management-2030* and *Training & Education-2030*, respectively.

55 It also proposes to improve morale and quality of life, including "high quality dining rooms" and better coverage of family needs.

56 "Syndicate of Dissent," an analogy of the group facing Admiral Fisher's disruptive reforms in the *Royal Navy* in the technologically convulsive pre-WWI decades (Krepinevich, 2023, ch. 6).

journalists, senior officers (active and retired), and industry representatives, Berger justifies himself. Bureaucratic resistance to change is natural in a system "not designed to adapt to the speed that competition demands," but to "reward programmatic continuity" (in CSIS, 2022, min.6-10).

The generality of the criticisms can be summarized in the following four points (pointing out the replies, if any):

– The first, on what is "no longer able to do": mainly, the ability to face campaigns such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, or to fight in purely terrestrial scenarios on parity with the *Army* as in Central Europe (Macander and Hwang, 2022). Its excessive "optimization" toward denial leads to such strategic, as well as tactical and cultural, derivatives. Giving the *First to Fight* Corps a defensive focus, where it bases its performance on small units dispersed in islands where the protagonism (main effort) is of long-range fire units, with a role of its infantry merely of security to the deployment, implies a significant loss of maneuverability, entailing long-term effects on its *ethos* (Cancian in The Foundation, 2021).

  This criticism, common in official circles, "subjective" and "not validated by any study", is countered by assuming that the loss of polyvalence is due to strategic imperatives emanating from the NDS. Precisely in the scenario indicated as "more challenging and prioritized", competitiveness increases "mitigating risk" (Reese *et al.*, 2024)[57]. Moreover, the question about their poor maneuverability (once the force is deployed) is a simplistic criticism from the terrestrial point of view, since effects are now created on the air, maritime and electromagnetic domains. So is the one raised about their poor versatility, which they associate with equipment that is no longer available, and not after analyzing the new doctrinal approach (Hoffman, in The Foundation, 2021, min.55-57).

– The second, which delves into the significance of the transition to defensive. He believes the assumption that the "long range of modern precision weapons" is changing the tide of *warfare* is wrong (McGee, 2021). The same author points out that the *Integrated Deterrence* concept accepts, without sufficient basis, that we are in a "Battle of San Juan Hills" moment[58]. This engagement, which pitted the Spanish and U.S. forces in Cuba, was an obvious milestone (not for those fighting it, and only in retrospect) that demonstrated that a new inflection toward defense in ground combat had occurred[59].

57 *Think tanks* such as War on the Rocks compile opinion pieces on this shift. Opponents argue excessive strategic risk by focusing "too much on China."

58 Occurred on July 1, 1898, framed in the Spanish-American War, at the time resulting from the application of the Monroe Doctrine. 800 Spanish soldiers in inferiority of 10 to 1, used positions under cover and trenches, and weapons that already incorporated cordite (with its advantage of not generating smoke), instead of the black powder that the North Americans continued using. As a result, the assailants suffered more than a thousand casualties, obtaining a pyrrhic victory.

59 It would encompass World War I, prevailing for four decades until the advent of the (misnamed) *blitzkrieg*.

Despite this, FD2030, in addition to relying on Krepinevich's view of the defensive advantage afforded by the MPSR, justifies its change factually as well. It claims to be based on the results of iterative *war games* that have recreated the dispute against China. Also, on the already observable consequences of employing such technologies alongside those that *make* the battlefield *transparent*. Tangible cases cited by the advocates of change are the aforementioned Ukrainian and Houthi examples. The simple threat of SLOCs demonstrates that small forces equipped for this purpose[60] are an unbalancing factor in any conflict.

– Third, because of its excessive audacity. No solution is given to aspects such as the deployment of lethal capabilities in the territory of *security partners* (but not allies, such as Japan), pending future diplomatic actions. Or by placing excessive confidence in unproven technologies, discarding other *battle-proven* technologies such as battle tanks. But especially for not guaranteeing vital logistics in a highly contested environment (Reese *et al*, 2024).

  Although they are justified, the periodic reports published openly on the state of change (*Annual Updates*) indicate that they are identified and represent "a work in progress", subject to continuous testing and experimentation. In particular, the issue of forward force logistics, from projection to resupply, is announced as unresolved due to new concepts and means to be developed (DoN, 2023a: 1, 13).

– Last but not least, from a financial perspective. That this service, a component of a larger one such as the *Navy*, with its own priorities bent towards its natural demanding task of sea control, in combination with a reigning "budgetary uncertainty" (Berger, 2022), may disable its achievement. Although the DoN does endorse the FD2030, the lack of implementation of a superior one-set[61] , which distributes responsibilities in that scenario raises suspicions of duplicities or competences. Precisely, when studied in parallel to the *Army*'s concept for Multidomain combat (MDO) a more transcendent question appears: how much A2/AD and amphibious capability the US requires –and can afford– (Stubbs, 2023). To this must be added the ever-present possibility of a further shift in strategic priorities that leaves the USMC "exposed." The risk of substituting capabilities already scrapped for others in the procurement process is noted.

Be that as it may, evaluating the FD2030 approach in isolation may be considered an exercise lacking objectivity as it does not rest on a higher holistic concept. A true joint guide that overcomes the classic resistance of the services to "joint interdependence"

60 In the first example, with littoral craft or land-based anti-ship missiles, limited manned aviation, drones and maritime surface systems.

61 In the JAM-GC (Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons), as a codification of the previous AirSea Battle since 2015, the allocation of responsibilities between the services is not its object. Anyway, in its language, what is presented here by FD2030 can be understood as the "inner force" facilitating the operation to an "outer force", bases of action settled by such a concept for contested environments.

always motivated by the budgetary struggle is still pending (Hoffman, 2020: 7; Bruogard, and Qviller, 2020). In this sense, Krepinevich also underlines this error by offering in contrast a case in his view coherent, cooperative, and successful. That of the *AirLand Battle*, as a defensive response to the need to beat the Soviet second echelons (*Follow-on Forces Attack*) during the Cold War[62]. Now "we have nothing like that, our armies don't know how they are going to defend our position and that of our allies in the Western Pacific." And in "absence of decision, we find ourselves in *program momentum* [programmatic inertia]" where we "just continue to buy armaments whether we need them or not" (Krepinevich, 2023, ch. II, p. 439).

Recognition of the new operating environment, strategic precision and consistency has its effects[63]. General Berger, above all applicable principles, has prioritized "adaptability" to the higher purpose[64]. And so the line of *Evolution on Demand* (Siekiera, 2025)[65] , a work supported by the Marine Corps University, defends the "*barbell*" design[66] of the FD2030 in the constant dispute between *specialization* and *versatility*. It is argued that in the above criticisms, rooted in "traditional Marine thinking," there is a clear mismatch between "perceived utility and actual utility." The doctrinal imposition of constantly seeking conditions that enable the offensive "myopically retain focus at the tactical level," failing to recognize a "Marine Force that provides a defensive framework for the Navy and other joint forces to go on the offensive at the operational level." Thus, we get a range of capabilities derived from the prioritization of operations: "defensive, limited crisis response, offensive, and cooperative" in that order (pp. 10-11); and those discarded.

In short, "FD2030 is an ongoing operation". Or, in the words of Berger's successor and current USMC commander, General Smith: "FD is a process, not an event"; and thus, reaffirming that it marks the right path and "where we want to get to," he has removed the "2030" from its designation (War, 2023, min.1-2). And he stresses that it is precisely in its slowdown that the focus of the risk is located (DoN, 2020: 1; 2023a: 16; Berger, 2022).

62 The air and ground services would cooperate to thwart a potential invasion of Europe while, jointly, the *Navy* secured the Atlantic SLOCs.

63 "*The 2018 National Defense Strategy redirected the Marine Corps' mission focus from countering violent extremists in the Middle East to great power/peer-level competition, with special emphasis on the Indo-Pacific*" (Berger in DoN, 2020: 2).

64 This indeed, is one maxim for Colin S. Gray in strategic planning, another would be "prudence." Although this is mostly employed by critics of FD2030, this factor can also be seen in the degree of implementation of change itself, balancing the USMC structures that are transformed and those that remain in their original state.

65 From subtitle: "The Changing Roles of the U.S Marine Corps in Twenty-First Century Conflicts and Beyond".

66 The "dumbbell" strategy is a "risk management framework" in which moderate risks are omitted (center bar), but low and high risks are confronted with intensity (generating a graph in the form of such a sports element).

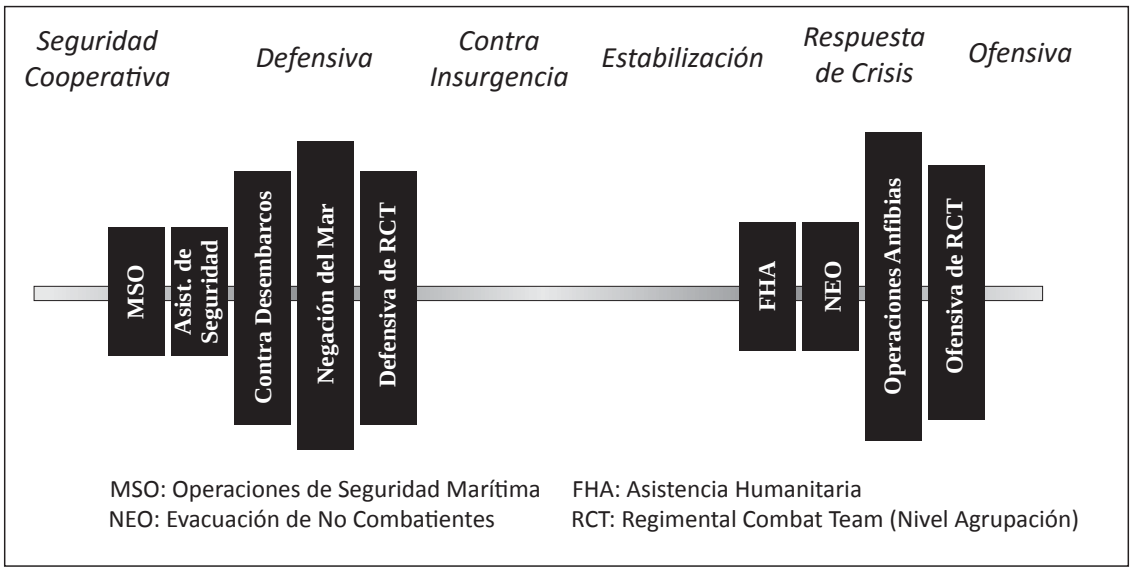

Figure 5. Translation of the graphic representation of the prioritization and weighting (according to the size and location of the "disk") of the missions covered by FD2030, and what is "left undone" according to the "dumbbell" strategy. Source: Marine Corps University Press

4 A good frame of reference for other defense planning?

In his assessments of organizational change in defense, the focus of his professional career, Krepinevich assiduously quotes British Admiral Fisher[67] when he dissects the importance of consistency in any strategic process. "We cannot decide what kind of fleet we need until we know how we are going to fight" (Krepinevich, 2023, ch. 11, p. 429). FD2030 is believed to do meet that logic in the chaining of directives, being a correct example for "other services on how to conduct force design." This assessment summarizes the common ground found in the referenced *papers* which, leaving aside the aspects still to be resolved, consider it a good case of how a clear political guideline modulates the priorities of action of its subordinate services.

In order to justify, in qualitative and quantitative terms[68] , the degree of coherence and definition of the process that makes it possible to offer the FD2030 as a comparative framework, Table I (appendix) has been drawn up. Its analysis allows us to affirm that, even in the absence of a joint concept, inevitably detracting from vertical coherence, the profound transformation of the USMC is enabled by the strategic framework of the public documents studied. That this change, far from "incrementalism" or "adaptive" processes (Reese *et al.*, 2024; Jordan, 2017: 205), also entails a paradigm reformulation of a force consolidated and tested as the *Marines* are, is believed to be sufficient proof of the effectiveness of its political and strategic guidance.

67 Head of the *Royal Navy* in two periods between 1904 and 1915. Technologically disruptive period with the continuous appearance of new ship designs and evolution of weapons, such as the *Dreadnought* and torpedoes.

68 Such as the demarcation of interests, prioritization of national objectives or the number of times a state actor or a geographic area considered key by the *academy* is identified.

4.1 Exploring references for the Spanish case

The fact that the object of the article was the study of the defense planning of an actor in the struggle for world hegemony, and now we are going to deal with that of an "aspiring strategic actor" (Baqués and Fojón, 2023)[69] , does not prevent us from proposing references in terms of process analysis and support for its strategic definition. By placing the Spanish case in the spotlight, some interesting comparisons can be made. Although we do not intend to be exhaustive, nor do we provide space for extensive justifications, their exploration will serve as a basis for future analyses that will indicate their greater or lesser success.

Its process has been extensively studied by professors such as Colom (2017, 2020, 2020, 2021a, 2021b). In particular, its codification, cycles[70] , and strengths and weaknesses of planning by capabilities in Spain. As a result, conclusions that point to the lack of political-strategic framework, and therefore among other reasons, a traditional reluctance to planning by threats and scenarios in long-term objectives, and as an undesired effect the reluctance to joint planning. Assuming the validity of his line of research, we do not delve here into its sequencing, but rather into the lack of a "strategic framework".

In a similarly top-down manner to the North American case study, we must begin by contrasting the degree of definition of both political-strategic guides (Table II is provided in the appendix). The autochthonous ESN of 2021, opens with an extensive description of the geopolitical context. It recognizes the established "dynamics of global security transformation" that are at work in the machinery of "geopolitical competition" (Presidency, 2021). As the reality of the 21st century shows, the list of challenges it presents is exhaustive. However, unlike its US counterpart, it seems to focus more on the "manifestations of the problems" (hybrid strategies, rivalry...) than "their causes" (Arteaga, 2022).

69 Or actor that should aspire to be a middle power in the lead.

70 According to OM 37/2005, "the Minister of Defense would promulgate the Defense Policy Directive. This document would outline -following the political precepts previously established in the National Defense Directive- the general lines of action and the guidelines that should guide the process. Upon receipt of this document (...), SEDEF and SUBDEF would start the resource planning by elaborating their forecasts on the planning scenarios in their technological, industrial, financial and personnel aspects. These forecasts would serve as a reference for JEMAD to initiate military planning. Based on the DPD, the forecasts on planning scenarios, the state of operational planning and his own analysis of the situation, he would formulate the Military Planning Directive, with which force planning would begin. This document would be used by the Armies and the Navy to make their estimates on specific requirements and their contribution to joint action. JEMAD would also prepare the Military Strategy Concept, which would present the contribution of the armed forces to the achievement of the objectives identified in the DPD and would serve as a reference for prioritizing military capabilities. Once the specific proposals of the Armies and the Navy were integrated, JEMAD would culminate the joint military planning with the issuance of the Draft Military Capabilities Objective (PROCAM)" (Colom, 2017: 43).

Their "number 1" lines of action are similar: "[a]ssure the military capabilities necessary to provide credible deterrence and effective response across the crisis spectrum" (Presidency, 2021: 74). Both being the same general *modes* of ensuring national defense, any relation of the Spanish case to a regional arc of reference must be made implicitly[71]. Indeed, in contrast to the NSS, there is no threat-vector linkage, subtracting a necessary "definition" for the lower levels of planning. Despite the "strategic inflation" of official Spain, (Arteaga, 2022)[72] , the low precision in the definition of threats, interests and objectives, or its lack of pragmatism is pointed out (also by Jordán and Fernández Sola in Baqués and Fojón, 2023; Del Pozo, 2022: 1[73] ; Del Valle, 2021: 8; Calvo Albero, 2020a). Although there seems to be a consensus on the ambiguity of the Spanish Strategy, it must be admitted that it does include regional risks to national security, although without indicating their origins:

> "An increase in the assertiveness of *certain actors* and an increase in strategic competition between States, the risk of tensions with a direct impact on national interests and *even on sovereignty itself*, constitutes a serious threat to National Security, the ultimate expression of which could take the form of armed conflict" (ESN, 2021: 56, author's italics).[74]

Even with the marked multilateralism of[75] (Presidency, 2021; 2020), national priorities should not be constrained to those of the organizations to which they belong (Fojón, 2022: 2; 2021c: 10) exchanging *ends* for *means* –or regarding geographical orientation (Sánchez Herráez, 2015). Even more, when there is a shift of European military power to the north[76] , as a sort of *pivot to Russia*, and the consequent loss of attention to the southern *front.* If the risks and opportunities derived from the

71 In its 114 pages there is scarcely any mention of neighboring countries: Morocco (three occasions) and Algeria (one), always from the *bona fide* standpoint of neighboring countries. Even less in the new ENSM-24, zero times, although it does prioritize the areas of maritime interest: firstly, those connecting Spanish territories; secondly, the Mediterranean and the Indo-Pacific, without further specification (2024: 33).

72 This is in addition to the National Maritime Security Strategy (ENSM) 2024.

73 Del Pozo (2022: 11) calls for "a clear, dispassionate and unbending language when pointing out possible threats, (...) which hardly makes it a document susceptible to publicity, unlike the Strategic Concepts that are periodically issued, both in Spain and in NATO or the European Union. It is said that there are states that do not make them public, thus implying that they either do not have them or are obscurantist (...), the issuance of an open one does not exempt from the need to have a classified and concrete one". From this, it could be inferred that strategic ambiguity should only be projected if that is the purpose of the communication.

74 He continues: "This situation is exacerbated by institutional fragility and gaps in some nearby regions."

75 That seems to confuse a means with an end (Jordán in Baqués and Fojón, 2023: 67; Calvo Albero, 2020a: 7-8).

76 Following Moscow's revisionist actions in the last decade and a half, countries such as Poland and Germany emerge as land-based military powers, and the Baltics strengthen sharply.

"great crossroads"[77] in which Spain is located are made explicit, the formulation of its "problem" could gain definition, especially when it may be a "non-shared" one.

Academic studies such as *La realidad geopolítica de España: Hacia el estatus de actor estratégico (*coordinated by Baqués and Fojón, 2023), and its recent complement *La ambición estratégica de España (*coordinated by García Blázquez, 2025) attempt to provide definition to the indigenous strategy:

– Understanding that Spain is an entity "open to the sea, due to geographical imperatives"[78] with as many advantages as responsibilities. Such as the control of one of the most relevant global *choke points* [79] framed in the Canary Islands-Estrecho-Balearic Islands (CEB) axis[80] , or the protection of the SLOCs that affect its flows (because it supplies itself "energetically" and "trades with the world" through this route) (Baqués and Fojón, 2023: 216).

– Defining neighboring territorial assertiveness. Of Rabat over the African territories and the Canary Islands EEZ, and of Algiers over the Balearic Islands, reinforced by the accelerated arms race between the two (Baqués and Fojón, 2023: 56, 98-99; also in Arteaga, 2022; Baqués *et al*, 2021; Colom, Pulido, Guillamó, 2021; Martínez Gimeno, 2020; Jordán, 2018, 2021; and Moral, 2017)[81]. Or the need for a guide for action in the face of the "coming perfect storm" as a metaphor for the "catastrophic" vectors of departure from the Sahel also fueled by the "Africanization of jihadism" (Calvo Albero, 2024b; Molina, Tamames, 2024: 29; Sánchez Herráez, 2021).

In short, contributions that seek to mitigate the lack of official definition, so necessary for the coherent development of subordinate strategies. Inevitably, these starting limitations lead to "the relative indefiniteness of the objectives raised in the political guidelines proposed in the National Defense Directives or –at least in the public summaries– the Defense Policy Directives and the vagueness of the approaches proposed for their achievement" (Colom, 2017: 47).

77 Qualified as *second best* according to Mahan's theory, implicitly a "geopolitical pivot" according to Brzezinski, or its potential as the western end of Spykman's *rimland*.

78 With its 8,000 kilometers of coastline, 1,040,000 square kilometers of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), its two archipelagos and African seats.

79 The ESN mentions the Strait only once, as a reference to organized crime, and four times in ENSM-24 (two descriptively and two in reference to the risk of accidents and the need for maritime traffic management. Instead, the exhaustive geopolitical description of what this *choke point* entails is proposed in *Cuadernos de Pensamiento Naval (*Fojón, 2024: 94-95).

80 Partially identified when mentioning SLOCs between Spanish territories, and without specifying their geostrategic effects, in ENSM-24, p. 33.

81 Qualified as a "threat" by López Díaz and Aláez (in *Cuadernos de Estrategia*, 2024: 67) and Del Pozo (2022: 10); that, at the same time, both are interconnected trading partners with Spain that represent the "last bastion of regional stability on the southern flank" in the face of African jihadism (Molina, Tamames, 2024: 29).

The risk of subordinate plans (ultimately force designs) being drafted in a "strategic vacuum lacking political endorsement" is underlined. To overcome them, implicit strategies, sometimes followed by "instinctive planning" of the Spanish services, must be implemented (Colom, 2020: 809; 2021b). As a consequence: unlike the FD2030 case study where threats and origins are related and geographical spaces are prioritized, the enunciation of the "problem"[82] becomes more difficult and may invalidate the operational concepts that try to solve it. In addition, the risk of misalignment of defense efforts with national interests increases. That central leadership is the one that should mitigate that the Spanish *aestrategia* [sic] leads to a response based on the tempting "multipurpose" force design (Del Pozo, 2022; Fojón, 2019: 6).

The origin of the lack of strategic clarity is not due to a loss of vertical coherence as a studied variable (table II of the annex shows positively its continuity). In fact, this "is fully coherent with the Spanish strategic culture that would rule out the use of military power in almost any circumstance" (Laborie in García Blazquez, 2025: 250). Its localization requires studying the case in a domestic key. To this end, the neoclassical realist school offers a good framework for future research. With the behavior of the State and its decision-making process as a dependent variable conditioned by the degree of strategic culture of the elites, social cohesion or the relative importance given to national defense issues[83]. All this is accentuated by "polarization" and "lack of consensus" (pp. 251-254). The latter coincides with the diagnosis of Lamo de Espinosa in "A Confused Spain" (epilogue of his latest work, 2021), an actor suffering from a "disoriented foreign policy" due to internal dissent.

Not all the references of the case study are applicable to the indigenous case (wide difference in strategic assertiveness, or simply that Spain has no declared adversaries). Among the potentially valid ones, two stand out:

– The first, on the strategic-political objectives that frame the generation of capabilities in a constrained financial environment. Even considering the "budgetary uncertainty" of the USMC to be less severe than the "chronic budgetary insufficiency" of the Spanish Armed Forces (Enseñat, 2024: 71-76), which in the former has led to a disengagement of the "non-useful", prior to the development of the force design, provides clarity on its degree of strategic definition. It also provides clarity on what it implies from the point of view of the trust placed in its industrial ecosystem (which must also guide the long-term defense strategy) and the procurement process. A mechanism that must incorporate, as soon as possible, new systems in the gap of others that are no longer there. A situation that leaves the door open to discuss whether it would be applicable in the indigenous case.

82 Although FD2030 does not start from an official statement of its operational problem, the strategic definition that serves as a framework is such that it allows for its coherent development and implementation.

83 Although they are not discussed in detail, they will be the subject of future research.

– The second, on the force design itself. Analogous to the positive assessments made about FD2030 (explicitly Hoffman, or implicitly Krepinevich), a good "conceptual effort" such as Force 35 of the Army (ET) can be interpreted as a mere budgetary justification in the traditional inter-service rivalry (Baqués and Fojón, 2023: 217-219; see Table II of the annex)[84]. The lack of "central leadership" that integrates "needs and solutions" hinders the development of coherent operational concepts, prevents doctrine from being the real driver of change and progress towards the whole.[85]

A better definition of Spain's role and risks would allow a response that is less oriented to the inertial "planning by capabilities", inflexible and inert to the "strategic culture of potential adversaries", and more oriented to the operating environment and "future conflicts", already present (Colom, 2017: 12). Indeed, a "good strategy is one from which the necessary force can be deduced" in addition to setting the strategic scope it should enable, and not the other way around (Pérez Ramírez, 2024: 99). Coordinated and complementary force requirements for joint action would be enabled. It would reduce friction in the budgetary competition between services, indicating which capabilities are really needed, and which have to be dispensed with. In short, it would allow to evolve from the multipurpose as a necessary systemic response to the lack of definition to a highly competitive military tool.

5 Conclusions

Military change processes (whether profound transformation or mere adaptation) must be supported by planning that starts from a clear political orientation. The USMC's FD2030, as a strategic product, proves to be such a case. Only strong strategic guidance, followed by coherent planning, can have enabled such a bold concept.

Changes are never without risks. Its emphasized orientation to the Indo-Pacific context accepts some as relevant as the loss of polyvalence or the renunciation of shock power. Without underestimating those inherent to any innovation that embraces an incipient technological revolution. This is only justified when, in the priority geographic demarcation for its national interests, it is believed to increase competitiveness.

Consequently, its new asymmetric approach migrates from dominance to lethality. And from the traditional pursuit of the offensive at the tactical level to the defensive in the key to multi-domain denial, now allowing the *Marines* to "sink ships", among other physical and immaterial effects, jointly exploited at the operational level. An

84 It could also have been culminated with the Armed Vision 2050.

85 The quotation marks belong to the Spanish authors, although the two American authors could have been almost reliably referenced because of their identical assessment in their case. Also, out of this context, in Frías, 2014.

innovative change whose driving force is doctrinal. Thus, the USMC of "2030" aims to become the most competitive military tool to contribute to the resolution of the main "operational problem" of its Defense: that of deterrence and containment of China.

The *vertical coherence* and *strategic definition* demonstrated throughout the FD2030 process allows it to be offered as a framework for other force designs.

In contrast, the lesser definition of interests-objectives, risks and their origins, together with the lack of geographic prioritization, as a result of the domestic conditioning of Spanish political-strategic thinking, seems to hinder an effective and efficient force design. That is, one whose capabilities are focused on the genuinely own operational environment, not necessarily multipurpose as a natural systemic response to the aforementioned ambiguity, and which have been jointly coordinated between services. These characteristics are even more essential when dealing with a reduced and underfunded Armed Forces.

Annex

Table I, The U.S. Strategic Process through FD2030[86].

Tabla I	Fines	Modos	Medios	Grado de definición
NSS 2022	- Garantizar el liderazgo internacional estadounidense como mejor servicio a la prosperidad y seguridad de su pueblo (p. 7). - Asegurar la fortaleza del proyecto estadounidense de un mundo libre, abierto, próspero y seguro (p. 7).	- Fortalecer a las democracias en su competición con las autocracias y reforzar las instituciones multilaterales (p. 7). - Superar a China en la competición promoviendo un libre y abierto Indo-Pacífico (pp. 23-25, 37). - Reforzar las fortalezas propias (pp. 14-16). - Construir coaliciones fuertes (pp. 16-19). - Modernizar y fortalecer la herramienta militar estadounidense (pp. 20-23). - Disuasión integrada (p. 22).	- Diplomacia como constructora de coaliciones (p. 37, 40). - Economía e inversión para mejorar fortalezas (p. 14-20). - Fuerzas Armadas como herramienta para competir y asegurar el proyecto estadounidense (pp. 20-23).	- Relaciona vectores y amenazas. - Establece demarcación geográfica de intereses. - Término «China» o «PRC» aparece 57 veces.
	Coherencia vertical: Recoge y desarrolla la voluntad presidencial del *pivot to Asia*. Ofrece un marco definido y priorizado para el desarrollo de estrategias subordinadas.			
NDS 2022	- Proteger el interés nacional «frente a la creciente amenaza multidominio que representa China» (p. III, 7). - «Disuadir de ataques estratégicos contra los EEUU, sus aliados y socios» (p. 7) - «Disuadir las agresiones, mientras n.os preparamos para prevalecer, si fuera necesario, en un conflicto – priorizando el desafío de China en la región del Indo-Pacífico (p. 7).	- «Desarrollar, combinar y coordinar las fortalezas propias» (p. IV) y «construir un ecosistema de defensa y una fuerza Conjunta resiliente» (p. 7). - Disuasión Integrada [*Integrated Deterrence*]» (p. 22). - «Campaigning [Proyección y Despliegues Adelantados] permanente» (p. IV). - «Reforzar la disuasión nuclear regional en el Indo-Pacífico» (p. 15). - Arraigar nuestra estrategia en aliados y socios, avanzando en los objetivos regionales (pp. 14-17).	- Fuerza Conjunta dimensionada y a través del «proceso de Planeamiento de Fuerza [*Force Planning Construct*]» y orientada a «áreas operacionales clave» (p. 17-18). - Una Fuerza que prioriza las cualidades de «letalidad, sostenibilidad, resiliencia, supervivencia y respuesta ágil» (p. 18). - Triada nuclear renovada y fortalecida (pp. 20-21).	- Relaciona vectores y amenazas. - Define entorno operativo. - Orienta esfuerzos a teatros operacionales. - Término «China» o «PRC» aparece 101 veces. - No define el problema operacional (Krepinevich, 2023, cap. 11).
	Coherencia vertical: Focaliza en la competición con China, concretando el modo para contenerla (Disuasión Integrada) y orienta a la Fuerza a las áreas operacionales clave.			
JOC	No se dispone de un Concepto Operativo Conjunto (JOC) de referencia para el problema operacional del Indo-Pacífico (Krepinevich, 2023, cap. 11; Hoffman, 2020).			
FD2030	- Ofrecer una fuerza en complemento a la Navy capaz de «facilitar operaciones conjuntas», en especial en el Indo-Pacífico (p. 4). - Ofrecer una fuerza capaz de «competir y ganar en la zona gris» (p. 4).	- Del «*inland*» al «*littoral*», de enfrentar extremistas a la competición entre potencias (p. 2). - «Transformar el modelo tradicional de organizar-entrenar-equipar a la fuerza» (p. 2). - Conceptos de *Stand-In Force* y *EABO*. - Aplicar los planes Training & Education y Talent Management 2030.	- Fuerza Objetivo: Una fuerza letal, proyectable y sostenible en áreas contestadas, y distribuida, deshaciéndose de capacidades no alineadas (pp. 7-10, y punto 3.5 de este trabajo).	- Detalla en cómo afecta el nuevo entorno operativo del Indo-Pacífico. - Prioriza campaña potencial. - Término «Indo-Pacífico» aparece 8 veces. - Ordena deshacerse de capacidades y medios.
	Coherencia vertical: Prioriza la campaña marítima, asumiendo riesgo de pérdida de polivalencia, ganando especialización, por ajustarse al propósito superior.			

86 As a quantitative contribution to the concreteness of the document, two key terms are established (those based on the presidential guide of the *pivot to Asia*): "China" - "PRC" and "Indo-Pacific". The "degree of definition" column indicates their occurrence.

Table II, The Spanish strategic process (studied up to Force 35)[87].

Tabla II	Fines	Modos	Medios	Grado de definición
ESN 2021	- Proteger libertad y bienestar de los ciudadanos, garantizar la defensa de España y valores constitucionales, y contribuir colectivamente a la seguridad internacional (p. 39). - Promover «seguridad y desarrollo en el Magreb y Oriente Próximo», y también de prevención en el Sahel (p. 41).	- Tres ejes: Proteger, Promover, Participar (p. 70). - Tres L.A (Proteger): «Asegurar capacidades militares» para disuadir y defensa autónoma; reforzar defensa con I+D+I; desarrollar sector industrial de defensa (p. 75). - Multilateralismo reforzado (p. 96). - Enfoque integral (p. 105).	- Sistema de Seguridad Nacional y Gestión de Crisis (p. 104). - Capacidad de disuadir creible (p. 56). - Capacidad de defensa autónoma (p. 56). - «Mayor protagonismo en OTAN», «enfatizar flanco Sur», «contribución a operaciones» (p 100).	- Extensa definición panorama y de riesgos. - No relaciona origen-amenaza. - Asertividad regional riesgo a soberanía España. - Términos «clave»: 1 vez (sin relación estratégica).
	Coherencia vertical: Desarrolla las misiones constitucionales y los transforma en ejes de actuación.			
DDN 2020	- Proteger al conjunto de la sociedad, su Constitución y valores (p. 5). - Garantizar la soberanía, independencia e integridad de España y ordenamiento constitucional.	- Credibilidad. Misiones permanentes de las FAS. - MKultilateralismo, socio responsable y solidario. - Seguridad según «modelo propio» (p. 2). - Contribuir al Sistema de Seguridad Nacional. - Mitigar consecuencias cambio climático (Agenda 2030) y fomento «seguridad humana».	- FAS, como «Instrumento especializado ante cualquier reto de naturaleza militar». - Centro Nacional Inteligencia. - Unidad Militar Emergencias.	- Extensa definición panorama y de riesgos. - No relaciona origen-vector-amenaza. - No menciona Estados. - Términos «clave»: 0 veces.
	Coherencia vertical: Continúa con las misiones constitucionales, pero no ahonda en la priorización geográfica (apuntada a grandes rasgos en la ESN).			
DPD 2020	- «1. Garantizar, bajo la dirección del Gobierno, la seguridad de sus ciudadanos». - «2. Aplicar un multilateralismo eficaz». - «3. Estabilidad del Mediterráneo, Norte África y Sahel».	- «Contribuir a la Seguridad Nacional como un todo», atendiendo a las misiones permanentes en los espacios de soberanía, y a las exteriores multilateralmente como socio parte de una defensa colectiva.	- FAS con capacidades autónomas. - FAS con capacidad de contribuir internacionalmente.	- Define regiones de interés, no Estados, y las acciones de contribución general a la seguridad. - Términos «clave»: 0 veces.
	Coherencia vertical: Recoge los marcos geográficos de interés (que no intereses y objetivos) de la ESN, pero no los pioriza. Recoge el multilateralismo como modo prioritario.			
CEFAS 2021	- Disuasión y Defensa ante amenazas compartidas y no compartidas. - Proyección y Estabilidad en torno a nuestras fronteras. - Aportar a la seguridad en su sentido más amplio.	- «Defensa autónoma» (p. 18). - «Defensa compartida»: Esfuerzo aliado. Multilateralismo y coaliciones *ad-hoc* (p. 18). - Contribución al Sistema de Seguridad Nacional. - Desarrollo Planes Estratégicos por Líneas.	- FAS que disuaden y pueden actuar en todo el espectro, incluido en la zona gris. - Fuerza Conjunta creible, equilibrada, integrada, versátil, capaz y sostenible, mediante un esfuerzo logístico acorde al nivel de ambición de la DPD (p. 30).	- Extensa definición del «escenario». - No prioriza zonas de actuación geográfica. - Términos «clave»: 0 veces.
	Coherencia vertical: Desarrolla actuación ante amenazas no compartidas (DPD) y la necesidad de defensa autónoma (ESN), sin concretar origen. Preferencia actuación aliada.			
FUERZA 35 (ET)	- Constituir al ET de 2035 como componente esencial de la Fuerza Conjunta.	- Aportando a la Fuerza Conjunta capacidades únicas y multidominio (p. 5, 7). - Interoperabilidad con aliados (p. 6). - «Transformando las fuerzas terrestres» (pp. 16-21).	- Fuerza terrestre tecnológicamente avanzada (p. 6) con elevada calidad de personal (p. 7). - Brigada «como sistema de combate integral», que aplica *Mission Comand*.	- Extensa definición del «panorama global y el espacio de batalla». - No prioriza escenarios. - Términos «clave»: 0 veces.
	Coherencia vertical: Como concepto coherente verticalmente, ante la indefinición, propone modernizar (más que transformar) de manera balanceada y equilibrada.			

87 As a quantitative contribution to the concreteness of the document, two *key terms* are established (those that every Spanish strategic guide should contain based on the work "Towards the status of strategic actor": "Strait" and "Canary Islands". In the column "degree of definition" their occurrences are indicated.

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Cognitive warfare as a strategic vanguard: a dialectical perspective on strategic thinking

Abstract

This article exposes the capacity to develop an integral understanding of reality through the dialectical materialism approach to knowledge. To this end, a critique is made from a dialectical perspective of modern forms of scientific knowledge, which tend towards a fragmented approach to knowledge, making it difficult to adapt to the current geostrategic context. At the same time, it is shown how cognitive warfare has taken a central role in national security strategies, presenting itself as a superior phase of strategic thinking in itself. In this vein, it points out how cognitive warfare, in its strategic form, extends beyond the military sphere, permeating various social and political spheres, integrating the nexus between warfare as the continuation of politics by other means and providing conscious state direction. Through this approach, the article examines the strategic approaches of China, Russia and the United States, concluding that the first two are in a position of strategic advantage due to the holistic vision provided by their approach to knowledge.

Keywords

Dialectical materialism, strategic thinking, cognitive warfare, gnoseology and national security.

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1 The method of dialectical materialism and the approach to knowledge

In this first section of the article, we will make an exposition on the method of dialectical materialism from the critical approaches to knowing and knowledge, which, later on, dialectical materialism makes transcend towards thought as an active way to understand and alter reality in a conscious way and in close relation to the material conditions that shape reality. For this, we will make use of various works of authors who developed and develop the method of dialectical materialism, from Marx and Engels. In addition, the approach of western gnoseology as a form of theorization of knowledge and its limitations will be exposed through the dialectical perspective.

Initially, we will begin with the approach of the dialectical method and the centrality of knowledge as an element that occupies the genesis of the development of the method. Later, through the definitions of Marx's *Grundrisse*, we will enter into the development of the abstract and the concrete as key elements in the process of the development of dialectical praxis. For this purpose, we will expose Marx's approaches, as well as those of other authors such as Lenin or Ilienkov, among others.

Knowledge and ways of knowing have been a repeated element throughout the historical development of human thought. In this sense, the development of history has presented different ways of knowing reality in relation to the different social formations, which are inseparable from the particular way of thinking of each era.

More recently, science has been configured as an empirical and systematic method capable of explaining the phenomena of the material-natural world, external to human mediation, with the aim of understanding them in order to be able to mediate with it. We must recognize that, although each of the aforementioned approaches uses different methods (means), they all have something in common (ends), namely: to approach reality.

Therefore, the centrality of human action as a transforming force of reality has been an element of constant study, in which historically can observe the various factors and reasons that have been attributed to the changes that have determined historical development. However, our position is that the reasons historically attributed to the movement of history have been dominated by insufficient approximations, that is to say, approximations that have diagnosed reality in an external and fragmented manner, causing the positions generated by modern sciences, particularly in Western development, to be limited.

This situation –scaled to the spheres of power of the states and within the framework of the rise of multipolarity in the international system– proposes a situation of asymmetry in the approach and development of knowledge of the western states in the face of rising states with diverse approaches to knowledge, dominated by completely opposite theories or philosophies of knowledge, some of which, such as dialectical materialism, present more integral or holistic approaches, which dissolve, to a greater extent, the inherent friction generated by the fragmentation of reality in

modern sciences, allowing for greater flexibility and increased responsiveness in an international environment immersed in the systemic contradictions generated by the mode of production.

1.1 Criticism of idealism and development of dialectical thought

The proposal of dialectical materialism encompasses diverse forms, such as the critique of scientific theory, and approaches the development of reality in a dynamic and constantly evolving manner. This means that, under the premise of the objective bases of knowledge provided by the method of dialectical materialism, we would arrive at the most general forms of our social metabolism and, therefore, of the specificity of historical social compositions. It would be, therefore, in Ilienkov's words, a "science of the general forms and laws of all development, common to thought and "'being'"; that is, a social-historical and natural development, and not of the "specifically subjective" forms and laws of thought" (Ilienkov, 2022).

From Engels' point of view in relation to dialectics, we find a strong criticism of the origin of the method of dialectical materialism, specifically against German idealism and Hegel. The latter was respected by Marx and Engels as the first philosopher who raised the possibility of demonstrating internal laws immanent to the development of reality. However, from dialectical materialism the final result of the Hegelian work is criticized because of the limitations of knowledge and the conceptions of the time in which they are produced (Engels, 2006).

However, the centrality of the critique of Hegel and its impossibility in the resolution of the problem posed about the laws immanent to the movement of the real is found in its initial approach to how we know and how knowledge is acquired. Hegelian idealism is the fundamental limitation, from the point of view of dialectical materialism, for the deepening and solution of the issue raised in relation to the internal laws of the real, because, as an idealist, Hegel understood that ideas were not more or less precise abstractions of reality, but rather an inversion of the terms of materialism, where ideas precede the world they represent (Engels, 2006), generating, therefore, an irreconcilable fracture in the way of acquiring knowledge.

This inversion generates the exteriority of the relationship between thought and material reality, where knowledge becomes a projection of abstract concepts that, not being a direct reflection of reality, cannot capture the contradictions and determinations inherent to reality itself (Carrera, 2013).

From the perspective of dialectical materialism, this separation between idea and reality constitutes an unbreakable wall for the comprehension of the totality of the real and its approximation, since ideas would arise prior to material and social dynamics, generating a dissociation of the process of knowledge from the objective conditions that give rise to it. In this sense, idealistic knowledge remains trapped in an abstract and idealistic sphere, incapable of reconciling itself with the internal contradictions of the real.

Therefore, knowledge from idealism reveals itself incapable of capturing the movement and development of the real in a dynamic way, remaining in an abstraction divorced from material praxis and showing itself, consequently, sterile for an effective and, when the time comes, transforming understanding of reality.

Engels' approach reveals that dialectics makes it possible to establish a strategic relationship with reality, seeing it as a constantly changing process. This not only helps to identify the general laws that explain this movement, but also provides the conscious subject with the ability to observe and understand objective reality in relation to specific forms of subjective reality. However, as Ezekiel (2013) points out, the dialectical method underscores the impossibility of achieving completely objective knowledge, although it does allow us to determine that the social relations of production shape the ideas that explain reality.

This final point, which suggests that ideas are a refraction of our social mode of production, is crucial to understanding the centrality of dialectical thinking. Ideas and social relations of production refract as they interact with different material conditions and historical contexts, which means that an idea or phenomenon does not manifest itself in the same way in different situations; its form and effects change according to the specific material conditions in which they are encountered.

As Marx puts it, our generic essence, what defines us as a species and distinguishes us from animals, is our ability to transform our activity into an object of will and consciousness, at the same time that such will aims to make the medium a means to itself (Carrera, 2017):

> "The animal is immediately linked to its vital activity. It does not differ from it. It is *it*. Man makes his activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness. He has a conscious vital activity. It is not a determination with which he immediately coincides. Conscious vital activity immediately differentiates man from animal vital activity. Precisely for this reason he is a generic being. Or he is only a conscious being, is say, his own life is, for him, object, precisely because he is a generic being. For this reason alone his activity is free activity" (Marx, 2010: 112-113).

In an article for the *Bolchevik* magazine in 1925, Lenin summarizes dialectics under the principles of "unfolding of unity" and "knowledge of its contradictory parts". He further points out that "the condition for knowing the processes of the world in their self-movement, in their spontaneous development, in their real life, is to know them as a unity of opposites." Lenin goes on to explain the way of understanding history, which can be divided into two, namely: "development in the sense of decrease and increase, as repetition, and development in the sense of the unity of opposites" (Lenin, 1925, p.). Under this conception we see that, in the first conception is hidden the reason why reality happens, its precursor, while in the second conception we can understand the reasons why this self-movement takes place (Lenin, 1925).

Under this conception, we can understand the approach under the dialectical method carried out by Marx in *Capital*, where he began with the simplest unit of society mediated by the capitalist mode of production: the commodity. Marx would

start from what is called, within dialectical materialism, the abstract. The term abstract, within this tradition, does not refer simply to a vague or unspecific form of idea, but a form of simplification of a complex phenomenon, in a certain way, a sort of generalization of the general aspects of a phenomenon.

Therefore, we understand that it is that in its simplest form, in its ordinary appearance that we can perceive sensorially and that is found as "appearance" insofar as certain characteristics are abstracted that configure its existence and limit key aspects for analysis. In contrast, the concrete would refer to the totality of reality, understood as a complex of elements, as the synthesis of multiple determinations (Marx, 1857-1858). Therefore, the concrete would encompass all the mediations that make a phenomenon what it is on the basis of the synthesis of its determinations.

In dialectical materialism, the concrete is an essential concept because it is the means through which the determinations that make the abstract what it is are discovered. In other words, the concrete is understood as the search for the material reasons that configure reality. This perspective poses a third way as opposed to traditional scientific approaches, which are usually based on the representation of reality through the definition of concepts and theoretical categorization (Carrera, 2013). To understand this distinction, it is useful to resort to the classification of the types of knowledge established by Carrera (2013), who distinguishes between "intuition, that is, immediate non-rational knowledge, and rational conception, that is, the representation that starts from concepts and relates them following a constructive necessity, a logic" (Carrera, 2013, p.).

In contrast to these two ways of knowledge, dialectical materialism, especially in Marx's work, introduces a third way whose aim is to transcend mere representation. Marx points out that:

> "The concrete is concrete because it is the synthesis of multiple determinations, hence unity of the diverse. It appears in thought as a process of synthesis, as a result, not as a starting point, although it is the true starting point, and, consequently, also the starting point of intuition and of representation [*Vorstellung*]. On the first path, full representation volatilizes into abstract determination; on the second, abstract determinations lead to the reproduction of the concrete by the path of thought" (Marx, 1858: 11).

This approach clearly reveals the limitations inherent in the method of representation. Representation, as applied here, consists of taking manifestations presented immediately, either through sensory perception or through analysis in a historical context, and assuming that these manifestations are intrinsic and constant. This process culminates in the representation of the manifestations "as if they were subject to relations of necessity that respond to the very constructive logic of the representation" (Carrera, 2013). However, this approach does not penetrate into the exteriority of the represented elements, which means that it does not allow thought to understand the underlying determinations that make possible that which is to be known.

Instead of remaining with representation, Marx introduces an alternative method of dealing with the concrete: reproduction. This method implies that reproducing the concrete through thought means that the process is determined by the real concrete, so that nothing beyond the real object can exist, "it cannot count on any constructive necessity that marks a starting point for it" (Carrera, 2013). In other words, the concrete cannot originate in ideas that are mere representations or concepts; knowledge must begin with the real object reflected in our consciousness, which initiates the process of knowledge, and not the other way around.

The dialectical method used in Marx's *Capital* clearly exemplifies how the process of moving from the abstract to the concrete is employed to unravel the underlying relationships behind the abstract appearance of the elements that make up reality. Marx describes this process as follows:

> "The economists of the seventeenth century, for example, always begin with the living whole, the population, the nation, the state, various states, etc.; but they always end by discovering, through analysis, a certain number of determining abstract general relations, such as the division of labor, money, value, etc. Once these elements were more or less fixed and abstracted, economic systems began to emerge which rose from the simple-labor, division of labor, necessity, exchange value-to the state, exchange between nations, and the world market. The latter is manifestly the correct scientific method" (Marx, 1858).

This method, which starts from the abstract and advances towards the concrete, is essential to avoid the attribution of *a priori* knowledge to the elements of knowledge and to avoid the naturalization of characteristics in a first moment, which would lead to their crystallization as immovable concepts. In his analysis, Marx starts from the abstract, that is, from what manifests itself immediately and, therefore, in its appearance, but which in that manifestation does not immediately reveal its determinations, that is, the concrete.

1.2 Criticism of modern science from dialectical materialism

The importance of the dialectical method presented here lies in the development of the capacity to know, which is central to military and strategic issues, since the positions taken by the actors in the international system are ultimately determined on the basis of their understanding of reality, their theory of knowledge. From our point of view, the more developed the model of knowledge, i.e. the capacity to know, the greater the possibility of mediating with reality and being able to anticipate it. For this, it is necessary to differentiate knowledge from thought.

To begin with, we want to make a historical approach to knowledge, to later apply the difference posed by dialectical materialism between knowledge and thought that exposes the fundamental differences to enter into the analysis of strategic thinking and cognitive warfare in its different forms.

In the development of the problems of scientific knowledge we find a central theme, which is of interest to us in this article, due to its dominance since the emancipation of the natural sciences from theology by means of Copernicus' *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (Engels, 1873-1886). Despite this split, the resulting product was the search for the domination of matter, of the natural environment for the "human spirit" (Engels, 1873-1886).

Under this process, there was a refinement of the different disciplines within the framework of the natural sciences throughout the eighteenth century, which developed a peculiar joint conception of reality, namely: the immutability of nature, pointing out to us that the split between theology and the natural sciences was not immediately completed (Engels,1873-1886).

Although the scientific method has reached a predominant position as a tool that allows the construction of knowledge, we must recognize that it is a method highly conditioned by *a priori* gnoseological assumptions, which influence from the beginning the identification of the problems to be solved, as well as the hypotheses to be proposed for this purpose. These hypotheses not only inherently contain the *a priori* assumptions that structure our knowledge, but also determine the direction and limit the perspective from which the research itself is approached.

In addition, the process of the scientific method continues with the collection and evaluation of evidence for the validation or refutation of the hypotheses initially proposed, which later culminates in generalization through theories, principles and laws. However, as Lenin (1973) points out in his critique of empiriocentrism, this approach tends to absolutize immediate experience and sensory perception, which leads to an epistemological reductionism that disregards the complexity of objective reality.

In the same vein, Lenin argues that the approach of empiriocentrism runs the risk of blurring the dialectical relationship between matter and consciousness, turning them into an externality, by giving priority to individual experience and sensations over the material structures that underlie and determine such experiences. This is why, in its attempt to eliminate and avoid metaphysical assumptions, empiriocentrism ends up falling into a form of idealism that detaches human perceptions from the objective conditions that produce them (Lenin, 1973).

1.3 From knowledge to thought: dialectical logic

As we have seen, dialectical materialism does not consist in itself in a set of general statements drawn from the method, but rather it is the logic behind the scientific worldview. A sort of recognition of the material forms that make up conscious life. In contrast to science, which is configured as a method of constriction of the real under general laws and principles in separate spheres of knowledge, dialectical materialism is proposed as a rational regulator of the natural material –this is the basis of objective knowledge– that provides the capacity for analysis of the general

forms of social metabolism, providing a greater increase of knowledge about the real than other approaches to knowledge. In this sense, dialectical materialism presents a key differentiation between knowledge and thought, a key differentiation with regard to strategic thinking from the dialectical point of view and which explains its limitations and potentialities. At the same time, we understand that strategic thinking is dominated by non-dialectical approaches, more related to idealism (Lenin *et al.* 2022).

Before exposing dialectical logic, it is necessary to distinguish it from formal logic. The latter focuses on the internal coherence of thoughts, validating arguments independently of the material content (Ilienkov, 2022). This abstraction, which makes it possible to apply operations universally, leads to a disconnection with concrete reality.

In contrast, dialectical logic overcomes the limits of content abstraction by integrating the contradictions and movement inherent in reality itself (Ilienkov, 2022). Unlike formal logic, which acts as a corrective guide to maintain coherence of thought in a static way, dialectical logic is the active and dynamic assimilation of the inherent elements of reality such as motion and contradiction.

It is especially in the contradiction where dialectical logic stands as such, since, for this approach, contradictions are not errors or problems to be solved, but are the engine of development of reality (Ilienkov, 2022) that, through the understanding and management of these, allows dialectical thinking to be not only a form of knowledge, but a tool for the active intervention of reality.

It is in this sense that logic, understood in its dialectical form, becomes the science of thought insofar as, in Ilienkov's words:

> "(...) is not only a general scheme of subjective activity, which creatively transforms nature, but also, simultaneously, a general scheme of change of any natural and social-historical material, in which this activity is executed and by objective needs it is always bound" (Ilienkov, 2022: 23).

According to Ilienkov, the logic he proposes is not a sort of formal tool or set of abstract rules, but becomes a science of thought because of its capacity to organize knowledge itself and its own active articulation, that is, its connection with the real contradictions and dynamics that shape the world.

In this sense, we identify a central element for dialectical logic, that is, the transition from knowledge to thought. This transition is not a simple change of state or an automated process, but a process in itself. Where knowledge, understood as the accumulation of data and events, must be reorganized and reinterpreted by dialectical logic to become thought, taking the form of a dynamic process. During reinterpretation, the laws of the dialectical method are followed, allowing thought to identify and mediate the contradictions inherent in reality (Ilienkov, 2022).

From this approach we can see the relevance of the dialectical approach to strategic thinking, which deals with rational direction, mediating with reality and giving it the required shape for the desired interests. However, we must not forget that both

the objectives and the means used to reach them are originated by our approach to knowledge and our worldview of reality.

It is here that dialectical materialism presents a methodology that allows for the understanding of the underlying processes and structures of reality. This approach not only explains phenomena in their present state, as we have explained throughout the article, but allows us to examine their historical becoming and potential change thanks to the incorporation of the movement of the real in its analysis, not leaving it as an external agent or collateral effect.

Therefore, the need to revise the approaches to knowledge and current gnoseology is evident.

2 The need for a dialectical perspective in strategic thinking

It is crucial to recognize that the complexity of the operating environment, motivated by the current state of transition from a unipolar to a multipolar order, where the countries with the greatest weight are the United States (USA from now on), China and, to a lesser extent, Russia, necessarily requires a revolution in strategic thinking. As has been pointed out, the increase in global conflicts poses a situation in which the contradictions inherent in the production model are transforming international relations and, in particular, war as a means of achieving political objectives of a strategic nature (Checa, 2023).

In this paper we will take the approach of the framework proposed by Merino *et al.*, (2022) of Hybrid and Fragmented World Warfare. In this line, war has taken a hybrid form, where an integrated mixture of elements of conventional, unconventional or irregular warfare can be observed (Merino *et al.*, 2022). This hybridization in methods has led to a scenario in which the Western differentiation between war and peace has been blurred, weakening the decision-making and response structure of Western countries, governed by the rules-based international order initiated after World War II and crystallized after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Checa, 2023). In turn, the rise in power of other powers, especially China and Russia, is generating frictions at all levels of state power globally. This contradiction between the unipolar order in a dynamic of loss of dominance and the emergence of multipolar forces is leading to an unrestricted confrontation, which encompasses all the fronts disputable by states (Merino *et al.*, 2022). This is why the strategic performance of states takes on a central role in this context given the complexity of the current operating environment.

The increase in complexity is motivated by "the advance of the current industrial revolution, which generates conditions for deepening interconnection, interdependence and the density and intensity of social relations of production" (Merino *et al.*, 2022). At the same time, we observe that complexity is represented in the opening of the multiple fields where war is developed for the achievement of the political objectives of each power. Thus, we can see how the doctrinal development of armies or Western *think tanks* enters into a dynamic of development and refinement of

types of warfare, namely: economic, cyber, legal, information and cognitive (Merino *et al.*, 2022). This last type is the one we pick up in the article given the predominant position it has in the current context, in which it is presented as a necessity inherent to the current forms of the composition of international security and the approaches established in the concepts of 5th generation warfare (Merino *et al.*, 2022).

Thus, we can observe that the contradictions in the international system are motivated by the strategies of countries such as China and Russia, which have strategic approaches largely influenced by dialectical materialism. In fact, both countries share in their strategies the asymmetric exploitation of the contradictions inherent in the current international order with the aim of obtaining advantages in the framework of strategic competition against the unipolar order. This advantage does not reside in the military sphere but extends to and interconnects with other spheres simultaneously (Checa, 2023).

In this line, our approach to cognitive warfare differs from the Western one and is closer to the holistic approaches of China and Russia, since, for these countries, cognitive warfare is not only a domain of the military realm, but takes the form of a strategic thinking deeply influenced by dialectical materialism, as part of its background related to the approach to knowledge.

Strategic thinking from a dialectical perspective stands as the ability to interpret reality in its fullness, with its movement and internal contradictions. In the case of Engels, his approach to military affairs was centered on the relationship between economics and military technique, the latter determined both in means and objectives by the former. In the same way, Clausewitz tried to develop a "philosophical elaboration of the art of war" based on the search for individualized general principles, that is, abstracted from the context in which they have been given and, therefore, turning them into universal laws explaining the nature of war (Lenin *et al.*, 2023). Here we can see Engels' dialectical approach confronted with Clausewitz' idealistic approach.

Clausewitz, however, confined the analysis of the nature of war to military history, which was the main source for the extraction of universal laws. This difference makes it necessary to accept the following idea of Mehring: "if one wants to recognize the superiority of historical (dialectical) materialism also in this field (the military) one must confront the exposition of Engels (in the *Antidühring)* with Clausewitz's compendium of military history: *Of War*" (Lenin *et al.*, 2023). This sentence explains the necessity of the analysis of the concrete sphere, such as the military, at the same time that there must be an awareness of the approach to knowledge that shapes the research methodology.

In this way, the atomized and fragmented sphere of the study of reality takes direction and context. This is why Engels' military studies evidenced the nexus between war and economy as a logical consequence, in dialectical terms, of Clausewitz's central thesis on the relationship between war and politics (Lenin *et al.*, 2023). This form of integral and dialectical understanding is the condition of possibility for the articulation of a strategic thinking that not only addresses war in its traditional

dimension, isolated from the dynamic and contradictory relations of reality, but also overcomes the separation of war as a particular technical sphere, as is military science, while extending war as a means to other spheres governed by dialectics.

This is why the dialectical conception allows us to analyze the evolution of the historical forms of the sphere of military science in motion, recognizing cognitive warfare as a higher stage of strategic thinking. Cognitive warfare is configured as an evolution of traditional strategies in response to the need posed by the inevitable complexification and interconnection of the different spheres of reality, motivated by the development of the capitalist production model and its inalienable process of accumulation and expansion, currently at a global level.

Similarly, the dialectical perspective is not only limited to the explanation of the emergence of cognitive warfare, but takes it as a tool capable of mediating in a conscious and directed, therefore strategic, way with reality. Moreover, it becomes a tool to mediate with the fragmentation of reality caused by the predominantly scientistic approach to knowledge. Therefore, cognitive warfare stands as the strategic vanguard of current strategic thinking due to its reflective and practical capabilities, a question we will address in the following section.

2.1 Cognitive warfare as strategic vanguard

As we have previously stated, the conception of thought as a tool for the transformation of reality, that is, for the mediation of the human with the natural material, is presented as a fundamental element of military science and, more specifically, with the foundational principles of strategic thinking. This ability to identify and study the conditions material in a given historical moment or situation generates the condition of possibility to raise an adaptation and strategic planning as in cognitive warfare.

In this section we will analyze how the three great powers of the international system today –the USA, China and Russia– have developed national security strategies influenced by the complexity posed by the conditions of the current geostrategic scenario, in which a holistic understanding of security (also of war as a means) is required, given the degree of interconnection at all levels (commercial, transportation, monetary, political, cultural, etc.). We will examine the three perspectives with the aim of showing how China and Russia as powers with an approach to knowledge closer to dialectical materialism have greater flexibility and adaptation of their strategies, as opposed to the US approach and its inherent limitations.

2.1.1 China's holistic national security and strategic cognition

In the case of China, we find the development of the holistic national security concept (总体国家安全). This concept has developed over the years, eventually becoming one of the core elements guiding China on its path to becoming a great

power and ultimately a socialist-oriented state. As early as 2017, the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP from now on) declared the full inclusion in the party's constitution of the holistic approach to national security (Yuan, 2021). Thus, the perceived threat to Chinese interests has increased for the CCP (Drinhausen and Legarda, 2022), which understood that the current composition of the correlation of forces in international relations required new measures that were capable of protecting and promoting the path to a security system that would secure the path of Chinese development (Yuan, 2021).

In 2020, there is a new development that crystallizes the importance of the new concept of national security, with the Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee being the space in which the decision is made to equate security and development, integrating the principle of "global development and security" in the XIV Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) (Yuan, 2021). For issues related to global security, he has put forward a proposal known as the Global Security Initiative (GSI) in 2022, which follows the line of the Global Development Initiative (GDI) of 2021 (Drinhausen and Legarda, 2022). Here we can see the need to intersect security and development, both internally and externally in a dialectical approach.

China's approach is centered on linking the country's development with security, while security is seen as an indispensable element for ensuring development. China sees this relationship as both internal and external at the same time, so that national security cannot be confined solely to the internal sphere of the State; rather, it is obliged to develop a theoretical-practical platform that allows, in a single movement, to ensure internal and external development, as well as internal and external security, issues that from the Chinese perspective are indivisible. Therefore, the lack or imbalance of any of the elements could lead to the aggravation of the contradictions immanent to them, thus eliminating the possibility of completing the path marked out by the state powers.

The aforementioned theoretical-practical platform is given by the framework of the holistic national security concept; however, it is in its cognitive warfare approach that it is endowed with both capabilities. In this sense, the transposition of the Western concept of cognitive warfare to the Chinese approach becomes the "Three Warfare" *"Sanzhan"* (三战) strategy. The fundamental objective lies in influencing public perception, maintaining the support of one's own population, eroding support in the opponent's population, and exerting influence on third parties (Cheng, 2012). While it is true that the origin of this strategy belongs to the military sphere, we can observe that it is expanding its use to spheres associated with the civilian, this being the key element for the flexible articulation of the strategic cognition of the Chinese state.

Therefore, strategic cognition is established as an essential means to articulate objectives within the framework of holistic national security. At the same time, it functions as a guide for reflecting on one's own actions, enabling an awareness of the fundamental elements of reality, which is crucial for a deep analysis and a solid intellectual construction. This approach exposes the dialectical character of Chinese strategic thinking, making it the actor in the international system closest to the knowledge approach of dialectical materialism.

2.1.2 Reflexive control of Russia

In the case of the Russian approach, we find that Reflexive Control (RC from now on) is presented as a strategy framed within Russian military thought. Its origins can be traced back to the Soviet Union, where we find that it is a strategy shaped by systems theory (cybernetics) and dialectical materialism (Martinez, 2020).

In the framework of military thinking we see that the CR is a sort of dynamic game theory in which the actions of the adversary can be parameterized, as if it were a system, in such a way that a twin model of the way of thinking and acting can be generated (Vasara, 2020). The modeling of the thinking and action system, which is summarized in command and control (C2), aims to create a framework for the experimentation of actions with strategic and reflective objectives.

In a certain sense, the aim is to insert actions that generate responses in the adversary that are beneficial to the controller, so it would be a matter of constantly parameterizing and modeling the rival actions with the objective of perfecting the model to obtain better and better results in the actions. These actions are related to the Soviet active measures, since they are the way to provoke reactions in the adversary in order to collect enough information for the creation and improvement of the system/model.

In the case of the RC, the dominance of cybernetics imbricated with dialectical materialism for its instrumentalization in the military sphere is evident, as we have mentioned above. However, we can observe that the RC presents itself as a platform for strategic action, given the capabilities of systems theory in relation to the modeling of the adversary's behavior, since it can be extrapolated beyond the battlefield.

Thus, we find that the RC becomes the main tool for the configuration of Russian national security, in that it can encompass surfaces related to the concept of holistic security, as in the Chinese case. Moreover, it can be observed that the current central element of the RC for the articulation of its system is cognitive warfare (Czech, 2023), insofar as it draws on the development of sciences such as neuroscience or neurotechnology to influence decision-making and the very shaping of the strategic influence operations it puts forward.

2.2 All elements of the U.S. National Power and Strategic Deterrence approach to Defense

This section dedicated to the USA, separated from the Chinese and Russian approaches, is motivated by the fact that we consider that the American approach is a paradigmatic case of the approaches to knowledge criticized from the perspective of dialectical materialism developed throughout the initial phases of this article.

From our point of view, the US faces the contradictions of its own empiricist approach to knowledge, generating the separation between fields of knowledge and fragmenting reality understood as a whole into irreconcilable spheres. This results

in the inability to assume an articulated holistic strategic position as in the cases of China and Russia. In addition, the state configuration of liberal democracies generates contradictions and limitations in the use of strategies such as cognitive warfare (Checa, 2022).

Given this situation, the U.S. is not impervious to the current geostrategic situation and is developing response strategies in response to the increased security footprint, which has extended into spheres that have traditionally been separated from the military sphere.

To analyze the U.S. position in this regard, we find that one of the most relevant *think tanks* in the U.S. defense sphere, the RAND Corporation, has developed the concept of integrated deterrence.

Integrated deterrence was introduced in the 2022 U.S. National Security Strategy and is framed by the commission on the Congressional National Defense Strategy called "All Elements of the National Power-Based Approach to Defense." The focus of the concept centers on the articulated combination of multiple U.S. deterrence capabilities, namely traditional (land, maritime, and air) and emerging (cyber and space) military domains, along with the tools of what Joseph Nye called soft power (political, diplomatic, and economic). The goal of this concept is to increase deterrence capabilities against adversaries such as China and Russia (Mazarr and Ke, 2024).

The concept proposal focuses on three core elements such as deniability, resilience and cost imposition. This requires addressing challenges within the Department of Defense and other parts of the U.S. administration such as full integration, understanding and communication and stability and adaptation (Mazarr and Ke, 2024).

While the concept has been developed in depth as a framework for articulating U.S. power capabilities in the face of an international environment characterized by intensified competition and increased security challenges, it can be inferred — although not explicitly mentioned in the article— that cognitive warfare is a central element in the operationalization of the integrated deterrence approach. For the U.S. perspective of cognitive warfare, this is presented as a tool focused on manipulating perceptions and influencing the adversary (Naidon *et al.*, 2022). It is this form of reduction to the military sphere and, in particular, to the sphere of fusion between information and psychological operations (Naidon *et al.*, 2022) as a kind of higher stage of the same. However, we believe that it is here that the limitations of the American and Western approach, dominated by the empiriocentrism of the modern sciences, manifest themselves.

From our point of view, the limitations of empiricism as a theory of knowledge lie in its ability to determine the concreteness of perceptions (sensible emotions) as abstract elements. It is not able to understand that even the simplest sensible impression is obtained by the individual as a sensation mediated by a whole social relation established within the social metabolism. Therefore, the cognitive realm, from the point of view of dialectical materialism, must focus on the mediation of the

social relation in individuals, groups and/or states, rather than on the manipulation and subversion of the perceptions and cognitive capacities of the targets.

This approach makes it necessary to incorporate it into the concept of integrated deterrence as a tool capable of articulating it effectively, at the same time as it must serve as a tool for analyzing and determining the current concrete historical form and the social metabolism developed in it. A way of understanding all the edges of the environment in order to be able to act strategically on it.

3 Conclusions

Finally, dialectical materialism as a way of approaching knowledge allows for a holistic and articulated vision of strategic thinking, conferring significant advantages in an international context of contradiction and interdependence. In this sense, the instrumentalization of cognitive warfare as a strategic platform and its application in national security is shown as the path for the integration and articulation of the state capabilities, while giving conscious direction to actions within the current context.

On the other hand, Western difficulties in adapting to the complexity of the current international reality are evident, to the detriment of the adaptation of China and Russia, which, under an approach of dialectical heritage and practice, manage to integrate in their strategic frameworks political, social and economic dimensions of modern warfare.

This situation highlights the importance of comprehensive and rationally coordinated approaches to face the current geopolitical challenges, where the strategic organization must overcome its current state and integrate all spheres.

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Quantum key distribution and its geopolitical impact

Abstract

Over the next few years, information security will face one of the most significant challenges in the history of modern cryptography, a profound change in the rules of the game: the advent of quantum computers. Positioning oneself before the problem of quantum key distribution will prove vital for the major global powers of our century. The United States and China represent the two prevailing positions: while the U.S. is cautiously skeptical, China has made a determined bid. The article explores the most relevant reasons behind one approach and the other, the challenges presented by the technology, the expectations for resolution and the main scientific advances. We then present the most important practical implementations to date, the strategy behind them and how the various players intend to project their vision of the future of secure communications. A future favorable to their interests.

Keywords

Quantum communications, quantum computing, supremacy, security, confidentiality, availability, resilience.

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1 Introduction

It is safe to say that, with the advancement of quantum computing, over the next few years we will witness a significant and profound paradigm shift in secure communication protocols. One that will require adaptation time, great effort and investment, and a clear vision of the future. The outcome for the major geopolitical powers in the decades to come will depend on how accurate their foresight is, how they build that vision, how much effort they foresee necessary, and how well the various players prepare themselves.

Compared to classical computers, quantum computers offer exponentially faster resolution of mathematically complex problems and will therefore mean the end of the currently predominant algorithms in asymmetric cryptography (e.g. Diffie-Hellman key exchange, RSA or elliptic curve algorithms). In other words, they will force a rethinking of the current protocols for key exchange and asymmetric digital signature. The academic consensus is that it is not a question of whether or not it will be possible, but when. In other words, we are facing a fundamentally engineering challenge.

In view of this situation, efforts seem to be focused on the development of post-quantum cryptography, or *quantum-resistant* cryptography, with NIST leading the way in proposing new standards [1]. Since these cryptographic algorithms are designed for execution on classical computers, the problems to be overcome have to do with the increase in the demand for computational capacity, time consumed in communications and adoption/adaptation times by the actors involved.

This article, however, focuses on a potentially complementary line, quantum key distribution (QKD). First proposed in the work of G. Brassard and Charles H. Bennett between 1979 [2] and 1984 [3], and implemented by DARPA in 2002, QKD uses the fundamental properties of quantum mechanics to generate truly random keys of variable length[1] , and what is more relevant, to guarantee security (mainly confidentiality and integrity) in the distribution of cryptographic keys. It is this anchoring in fundamental properties that allows us to aspire to overcome not only present problems, but also definitely future ones, redefining de facto how we understand information security.

Although technological and economic barriers currently limit its large-scale implementation, the continued development of specific *hardware* could significantly reduce costs in the future, positioning it as a reliable and widespread solution, at least in the *backbone* of critical networks. We are, as in the case of quantum computers, facing a surmountable engineering problem.

1 The importance of quantum key generation, truly random and of sufficient length to implement ciphers such as OTP or one-time passbook, is not the subject of this article, although it should be considered as a further advantage of adopting QKD.

This article aims to explore the importance of QKD, the development and implementation efforts of major geopolitical powers, its potential to address quantum threats, and how future innovations could generalize its adoption.

2 Context and protocols

2.1 Context

Cryptography has historically been the mainstay of information security. In the digital age, modern cryptography guarantees the fundamental principles of secure communication: confidentiality, integrity and authenticity of messages. And this, in turn, is essential to maintaining our way of life. From e-commerce and banking to the security of military command and control communications, everything is based on modern cryptographic techniques.

These protocols are mostly based on symmetric encryption, which requires a prior exchange of keys. This key distribution problem is at the heart of the article, and the best solution we can offer today is asymmetric or public key cryptography.

As mentioned in the introduction, asymmetric cryptography bases its strength on mathematically complex problems, such as the factorization of prime numbers or the calculation of discrete logarithms, considered intractable for classical computers. However, quantum computers, whose distinctive feature is that they base their computation on elementary properties of matter, represent more than a mere leap in processing capacity, they represent a paradigm shift in algorithmic and programming possibilities. New and more efficient ways of tackling problems. Algorithms such as Shor's [4], designed specifically for these architectures, will be able to solve these hitherto intractable problems in minutes, rendering all current key distribution systems instantly obsolete.

Compared to the widely cited post-quantum cryptographic schemes published by NIST in 2024 (one of them allows key distribution or KEM [1]), QKD is a more disruptive solution, risky, but with the potential to go further, to be definitive.

What makes QKD unique is that it does not rely on mathematical algorithms, but on fundamental physical principles, so that, a priori, its validity will be independent of advances in computer theory. By using quantum particles as photons, QKD guarantees that any attempt to intercept the key to be shared (which will later be used in the symmetric encryption), i.e. any attempt to obtain information about the key, will alter it and will consequently be detectable: in the quantum world it is not possible to observe without leaving a trace.

Although this approach has many advantages, the West did not seem, to date, to bet on it, and signals intelligence agencies highlighted the problems and challenges presented by QKD in various publications [5]. These limitations have been widely discussed, highlighting for relevance, in my opinion: (i) the problem of source authentication (ii) the high cost of the necessary *hardware* (iii) the technical limitations

of current quantum networks, and (iv) denial of service problems. Nevertheless, the state of the art is advancing daily, and the investments of large states, primarily China, are evidence of what is at stake. At the same time, little by little, the West seems to be joining the race.

The history of technology shows that what we have previously referred to as engineering problems tend to become trivial over time. When that fog dissipates, what we will have on the table is a possible final solution to the problem of key generation and distribution.

2.2 Protocols

The QKD family of protocols is now more than 40 years old since the first standardizations, so publications about them, their mode of operation and underlying principles are numerous [6].

Thus, we do not intend to go into technical details at this point, but it is worth noting that they all share many common points. We will start from the need for the sender and receiver (by convention, Alice and Bob) to share a secret key that they will later use to encrypt symmetrically. For all QKD protocols accepted as standard, two phases are required: (i) the quantum transmission phase, where the sender and receiver send and/or measure quantum states, and (ii) the post-processing phase, where the secure key is generated.

In addition, in QKD protocols two channels are necessary, a quantum channel and a classical channel where the message exchange process takes place once the secret key has been agreed upon.

Based on these common points, we will distinguish two families of QKD protocols:

2.2.1 Based on a quantum transmitter-receiver channel (commonly known as "prepare and measure")

Those channels in which the transmission of the key is initiated by a photon beam encoded by the polarization method. In the reading, crystalline filters will be applied at which, similar to sunglasses, will filter or not the photon depending on its polarization. Thus, we highlight the following protocols:

– BB84: In 1984 the aforementioned G. Brassard and Charles H. Bennett proposed the first Quantum Key Distribution protocol, known as BB84 after their surnames and the year of its publication. Besides being the first, the rest of the "prepare and measure" protocols are variations of BB84 and are therefore applied in the same circumstances, and are subject to the same advantages and limitations.

The quantum transmission phase consists basically in that, starting from two polarization bases, rectilinear[2] and diagonal[3] , Alice will send the coded bits of the secret key choosing, for each one of them, one of the bases randomly. Bob, in turn, will measure the photons received by applying, likewise, one of the two bases, also randomly.

In the post-processing phase, Alice and Bob publicly share the bases they have used. Thus, in those bits where they have used the same base, the reading will be correct and will become part of the key, while those bits where the base of the sender and receiver differ will be discarded. Any attempt to obtain information from the quantum channel by a third party will modify the polarization of the photons, generating measurement errors by Bob, and consequently errors in the secret key generated. In such a case, Alice and Bob abort the communication.

– B92: published by Charles Bennett in 1992, it is a variant of the previous one in which the emitter uses only two non-orthogonal polarization states.
– SARG04: another variant of BB84, very similar, but especially robust against *photon-number splitting* attacks, which especially affect BB84 and B92.

2.2.2 Based on quantum entanglement

They base their operation on a different principle than the family of protocols derived from BB84: quantum entanglement. In the QKD domain, quantum entanglement means that, in the case of two entangled particles, any measurement applied to one of them instantaneously affects the state of the other. Thus, the particles are perfectly correlated, and it is possible to achieve directional synchronization in observations. This is true regardless of the distance between the entangled particles. However, it is impossible to predict before the measurement which state will be observed, so it is not possible to communicate across entangled particles without discussing the observations through a classical channel. We highlight the protocols:

– BBM92 and E91: published respectively by Charles Bennett, Gilles Brassard and David Mermin in '92; and Artur Ekert in '91. In these cases, there must be a reliable source emitting the entangled photons to Alice and Bob, as part of the quantum channel.

As we will see later in the case of the most important quantum network deployed to date, the Chinese network, both types of protocols have practical application, with protocols of the BB84 family being the most common in metropolitan and intercity (terrestrial) *backbones*, and protocols of the BBM92 and E91 family being used for global satellite communication.

2 It corresponds to measure the vertical component of the spin, with states 0 and 1.

3 Corresponds to measuring the horizontal component of the spin, with + and - states.

3 Challenges and resolution expectations

Any emerging technology faces a number of challenges that hinder its large-scale implementation. These problems, in my opinion, are not insurmountable, but require a coordinated effort from the scientific community, industry and governments, something that sounds unfeasible in today's race dynamics.

3.1 Source authentication

This is pointed out because it appears, recurrently, as one of the major problems of QKD, but it is not, in fact, a problem as such, but an essential limitation. In this sense, it is a false debate. QKD is a solution, as its name suggests, to the problem of key distribution (and, collaterally, to the problem of random key generation), not an "integral" cryptographic solution. It will continue to require support for the source authentication process (i.e. preloaded keys, or future post-quantum asymmetric cryptography), just as it will continue to require classical channels for the transmission of the message itself, via traditional symmetric cryptography.

It should be noted, however, that we are talking about the initial authentication of the source in a point-to-point channel (with little probability of third party intervention), since, once the first secret key has been generated and distributed, it can replace the preloaded keys and serve to authenticate the parties (and continue to update the process with each new key generated and distributed).

3.2 Hardware dependence

This is where we can find more encouraging prospects in the near future.

Regarding the cost of the *hardware*, it is true that to implement QKD requires specialized *hardware*, such as single photon sources, advanced detectors and dedicated fiber optic networks. Such equipment, besides being expensive, is not yet produced on a large scale, which makes it inaccessible for private initiative. This is even more pressing in the case of quantum satellite-based networks.

However, the history of technology has taught us that, over time, costs tend to decrease as advances in manufacturing occur and demand increases. In the case of QKD, miniaturization of components and production of more affordable *hardware* will be key factors. Integrated photonics technologies, for example, promise to significantly reduce cost by enabling many essential QKD components to be manufactured in an integrated fashion.

As for the *hardware* binding of QKD, i.e., the impossibility of emulating fundamental physical principles through *software*, this is a problem that, although it will persist, much progress can be made in mitigating it. In this regard, for example, the advances in *Device-independent Quantum Key Distribution* (DI-QKD), which

promises some decoupling from concrete *hardware* specifications [7], relaxing the need to physically model specific parameters, are noteworthy. Based on the Ekert 91 protocol, and dependent on high quality entanglement, several proofs of concept have been offered over the last few years. If it continues to advance, it could be a solution, collaterally, to all attacks exploiting technical vulnerabilities associated with currently operational QKD equipment.

3.3 Technical limitations

Another major challenge is the limitation in the distance that QKD networks can cover. In optical fibers (the prevalent medium in inter-city networks) the photons carrying the information attenuate rapidly, causing the signal to lose strength after a few hundred kilometers. Although satellites have proven to be effective in overcoming this problem, their use is still experimental and extremely costly, so their mass adoption still faces significant barriers.

In this regard, one of the most promising solutions to overcome distance limitations are quantum repeaters. These devices, still under research, act like a regular signal repeater: they allow quantum signals to be retransmitted without losing their integrity. Although this technology is not yet ready for commercial deployment, the advances in this field are rapid and could have a major impact on the distribution distance.

Another technical limitation is the difficulty of integrating the QKD infrastructure into existing or *Legacy* infrastructures. As mentioned above, QKD requires completely new protocols and equipment, which complicates its adoption in an environment already stressed enough in the adaptation and implementation of post-quantum cryptography. This poses a dilemma for businesses and governments and is the likely cause of the prioritization of investments in post-quantum cryptography over QKD in the Western sphere.

In this regard, the focus is on the development of interoperability standards. QKD protocols, by definition, need to be interoperable with classical encryption protocols (they rely on classical symmetric encryption channels), but there is still a lot of work to be done on what is outside the QKD scope, such as channel authentication or digital signature protocols.

This is undoubtedly the area in which the third player in discord, Europe, can lead the way, as it continues to be a benchmark in any aspect related to standardization. The efforts of the European Committee for Standardization (CEN) and Electronic Standardization (CENELEC) in the field of quantum technology are particularly relevant. With regard to QKD, the role of the European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI) and its working group dedicated to QKD standardization (ETSI ISG-QKD), or the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), which published in 2020 the standard *Overview on networks supporting quantum key distribution.* However, due to the maturity of the field, QKD has not yet gone through a rigorous standardization process, such as the one already referenced and carried out by NIST for post-quantum cryptography. It is yet to be determined who will be the hegemonic player in this regard.

3.4 Denial of service problems

The road to a resilient QKD is not going to be a simple one. As we have pointed out, the security of QKD lies in the impossibility of obtaining information about the distributed key without modifying it, and consequently generating measurement errors between the original sender and receiver (Alice and Bob). For this reason, it is relatively easy to carry out attacks that do not seek to decrypt the key, but rather to disrupt or degrade the system, making it inoperable or extremely slow. In critical systems, these denial-of-service (DoS) attacks often have a critical impact, and availability is often as important (sometimes more so) as confidentiality.

DoS attacks on QKD systems can take different forms. By saturating the quantum channel, an attacker floods the channel with unwanted signals, e.g. additional photons. This causes an increase in the quantum error rate (QBER) and Alice and Bob to constantly discard the generated keys, delaying or interrupting the exchange. Detector overload consists of sending pulses of light of higher intensity than expected, physically damaging this particularly sensitive equipment [8]. Finally, we have already mentioned that a communication involving QKD ultimately depends on a classical channel, so it is still susceptible to any attack on it, although these vulnerabilities are obviously not attributable to QKD technologies.

As specific solutions, it is worth highlighting the implementation of advanced optical filters for blocking unwanted signals before they reach the detectors, configured with Alice's feature pattern (although this makes the channel even more specific to a particular transmitter and receiver). However, the default response of these optical filters is to disconnect the channel, which prevents damage to the detectors, but in no way solves the original DoS target.

Faced with these types of attacks, building resilience, increasing physical protection and providing duplicity (alternative routes) when necessary, is even more relevant than in classic infrastructures, where practically all routes, distribution elements and protocols are interoperable. In addition, these alternative routes must be managed in real time and by virtue of quantum observations and the constancy of a DoS attack on them. In that sense, one of the most promising lines of research is the one that aims to incorporate the traditional management of *software-defined* networking[4] (SDN) to QKD protocols [9]. By incorporating the QKD optical network components as part of the SDN abstraction and management layer, and by establishing constant monitoring of QBER and secret key generation rate (SKR), it is possible to detect service degradations and quickly identify alternative routes to avoid or mitigate the effect of the DoS attack. All this, in much shorter times than those obtained by direct management of the QKD infrastructure. Ultimately, however, we are only dealing

4 IBM describes *software-defined* networking as an approach in which *software* is used to create and operate a series of virtual overlay networks that work in conjunction with an underlying physical network. SDNs provide the potential to minimize the hands-on time required to manage the network.

with the efficient construction and management of alternative routes and operational resilience.

Consequently, and for the time being, we can conclude that QKD channels are more exposed to DoS attacks than classical channels, and none of the current mitigation measures seem to be able to solve this point. Supporting the physical properties of particles takes its toll; what we gain in confidentiality in the channel, we must be willing to give up in availability. Alternatively, invest more in building resilience into an already expensive infrastructure.

Distribución de claves mediante criptografía postcuántica frente a la distribución cuántica de claves

Característica	Criptografía postcuántica	Distribución cuántica de claves
Principio de funcionamiento	Algoritmos criptográficos basados en problemas matemáticos resistentes a ataques cuánticos	Propiedades fundamentales de la mecánica cuántica para garantizar la seguridad
Dependencia de *hardware* especializado	No presenta dependencias, y puede ejecutarse en infraestructuras digitales clásicas	Sí, requiere de equipos cuánticos especializados, aún no producidos a gran escala y de alto coste
Limitaciones técnicas	Moderadas, requiere análisis de interoperabilidad de protocolos dependientes de criptografía clásica	Relevantes, limitaciones asociadas a la distancia de distribución de claves por atenuación de la señal, y a la interoperabilidad con infraestructura clásica
Resiliencia	Ninguna debilidad intrínseca	Altamente vulnerable a ataques de denegación de servicio
Madurez tecnológica	Alta, con estándares publicados para el intercambio de claves (FIPS 203, ML-KEM) que han sido incluidos en paquetes de funciones criptográficas (OpenSSL 3.5, desde abril de 2025)	Baja, aún en desarrollo y con despliegues experimentales
Escalabilidad	Alta, fácilmente implementable en redes actuales	Baja a media, limitada por distancia, atenuación y necesidad de repetidores cuánticos
Complejidad y coste de implementación	Moderada, requiere de actualización de protocolos y *software/hardware,* pero no rediseño físico	Alta, requiere de nueva infraestructura física cuántica
Latencia y rendimiento	El proceso de intercambio de claves es rápido, a pesar de que las claves son del orden de 10 veces el tamaño de una clave clásica	Más lento que la criptografía postcuántica, depende del canal cuántico y el protocolo de intercambio
Detección de intrusión	No, protección basada en complejidad matemática	Sí, detección inherente

Figure 1. Source: own elaboration

4 Geopolitical positioning

4.1 Who is ahead in the quantum race?

With regard to the positioning of the major powers in quantum technology (QSI, which stands for *Quantum Information Science*, a concept that encompasses both quantum communications and quantum computing, among others), a superficial

analysis would force us to conclude that China is in the lead. By any quantitative metric, the distance is significant compared to its closest rival, the United States. However, as in quantum physics, the reading is not so trivial:

– Investment volume: if one thing can be said, it is that the major powers, particularly China an7d the United States, are devoting considerable efforts to QSI, although there are marked differences. For China, leadership in QSI is a far-reaching strategic issue, and this is reflected in its thirteenth (2016-2020) and fourteenth (2021-2025) five-year plans. Backing up its assertion with figures, it claims to have invested more than 15 trillion US dollars to date (2023), compared to the US estimate of 3.8 trillion [10] over the same period. However, it is difficult to pinpoint the true extent of China's investment due to the traditional opacity of its government spending. Some reports suggest that actual spending may be lower, reflecting a common pattern in which ambitious funding targets are not always fully met.

  Regardless of the details and based on empirical evidence, or, in other words, on the quantum infrastructures deployed on the ground, there is no doubt that Chinese investment is significantly higher than that of the United States, Europe, Japan, etc.

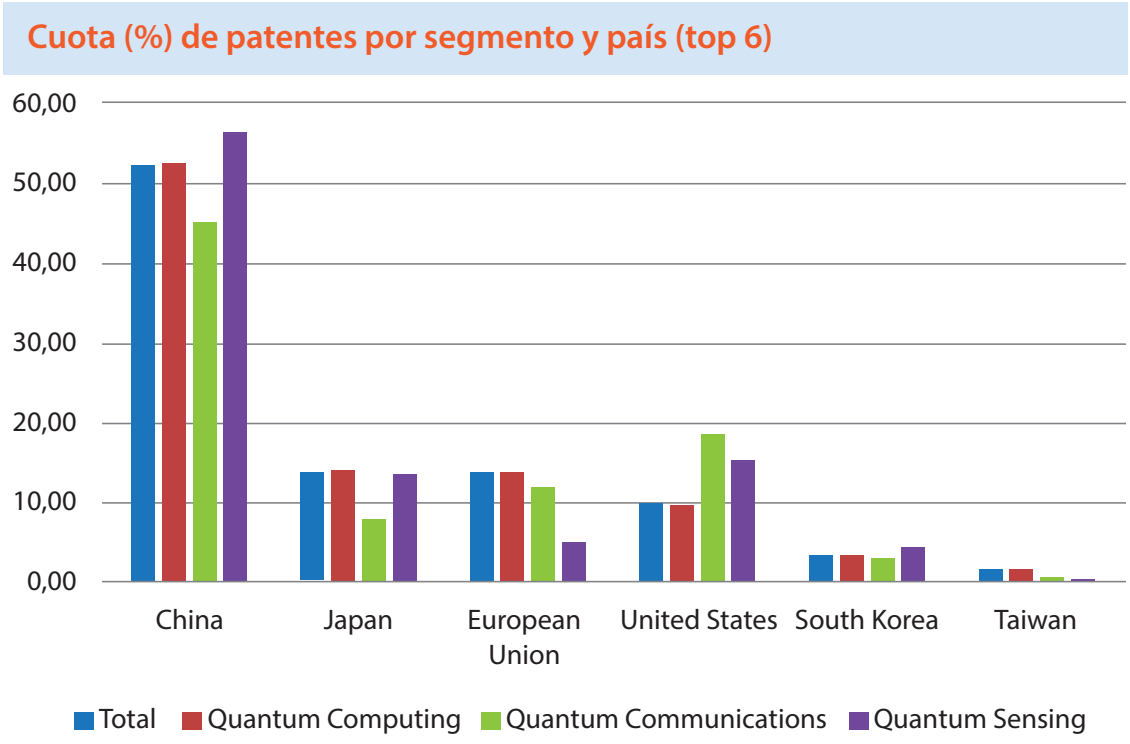

Figure 2. Source: McKinsey & Company Quantum Monitor 2023 [11]

– Nature of the investment: following the usual pattern, Chinese investment is fundamentally public, and the decision criterion is based on a single source, the party (which will prove to be relevant when determining the strategy). Of the entire Chinese business fabric, only 14 companies have contributed significantly, according to the criterion of patents and publications (Huawei,

Alibaba, QuantumCTek or Ruban Quantum Technology stand out, although the state participation in these companies casts doubt on the qualification of private investment). This contrasts sharply with the United States, where investment is mainly private in nature (driven by IBM, Google, Microsoft and Intel). In terms of *start-ups*, U.S. investment is 10 times higher than Chinese investment [10].

– Patents: if we look at the number of domestic patents, China stands out with a much higher volume than the United States [11]. The patent typology reflects the Chinese focus on communications, particularly QKD, as we will see in later sections. The United States, however, leads in the number of international patents [10], underscoring its vocation to set standards beyond its borders. In the case of China, the nature of research and knowledge sharing is asymmetric, closed to the outside.

– Publications: again, China significantly leads the ranking of publications [10]. It is usual, in other technological fields such as Artificial Intelligence, to mention that quantity is not quality, and in terms of quality (citations, references, *H-index*) and impact, the United States remains ahead. This is not the case for QSI, where the quality of Chinese publications is also (slightly) ahead of the US. Again, the distribution of QSI publications by type shows that the Chinese strategy is different from that of the US, which will be discussed below.

4.2 Different strategies for quantum supremacy

The truth is that, based on the criteria mentioned above (investment, nature of the investment, publications and patents), it can be seen that the strategy of the two major powers is markedly different.

Let us take as a starting point a taxonomy of the most promising QSI fields of study that differentiates between quantum computing, quantum communications and sensor/sensor technology. For all the above criteria, the Chinese leadership is overwhelming in quantum communications [10], [11] and [12], in sensing the situation is even, while in quantum computing, the United States leads by a wide margin.

As an illustrative example, in terms of publications associated with quantum communication (mainly QKD), China leads with 38% overall, compared to 12.5% for the United States, with an H-index of 48 vs. 43. In the case of quantum computing, the volume of publications is similar (23% Chinese share vs. 21% US), but the US H-index is much higher (52 Chinese vs. 92 US).

In terms of international patents, during the period 2016-2021, China published 3,601 patents in quantum communication compared to 551 for the United States, while in relation to quantum computing the situation is the opposite, with 1,408 patents by China and 2,509 by the United States [12].

China's determination to lead in quantum technology by 2035 is strong and a central part of Xi Jinping's plan to improve the country's competitiveness. What is an anomaly is that, unlike other players (not all), research and deployment of quantum communications infrastructure remains a priority within its medium- and long-term strategy. In this regard, no one has been as ambitious as the Chinese.

4.3 QKD, state of the art

China has established itself as the undisputed leader in QKD, both in terms of investment and practical implementation, in a bet that can already be considered long-standing: since 2008, long before the tangible reflection in the five-year plans, the statements of physicists such as Chen Zengbing [13] pointed in that direction. But, perhaps, the big boost at the investment level came in 2013, after the Snowden leaks, which generated a great impact and sense of insecurity in the politburo.

China's plan involves building a QKD network covering the major communication *backbones*, applying different technologies depending on capillarity [14]. Fundamentally:

- Quantum communication in metropolitan *backbones* using optical fiber and miniaturized receiver emitters.
- Quantum communication in intercity *backbones* where quantum repeaters would play a key role.
- Global quantum communication, between different inter-city *backbones* via satellite relay.

They reached the first milestone, urban quantum communication between 2011 and 2013, when the Hefei and Jinan metropolitan networks were fully operational. These were followed by the Beijing and Shanghai metropolitan networks, and finally, they reached the second milestone: since 2017, the world's largest terrestrial QKD network can be considered functional, with an extension of more than 2,000 kilometers on the main *backbone*, linking Beijing, Jinan, Hefei and Shanghai.

Regarding the third milestone, a global quantum communication, its most significant breakthrough was the launch of the first quantum satellite, "Micius", in 2016, which enabled the first QKD transmissions on a global scale: i.e. QKD transmissions capable of distributing keys between, for example, Asia and Europe. With this, China was showing that another global network, a quantum internet, was possible. A first step beyond local and inter-city networks. "Micius" was followed in 2022 by a second satellite, "Jinan-1", with a remarkable degree of miniaturization and two to three times faster in key generation. The period between 2025 and 2027 will be key, with the planned launch of several low- and medium-Earth orbit satellites, which will complement the functions of the previous ones [15].

In other words, the commitment to achieve a complete QKD (*satellite-to-ground*) network will be maintained over time. Currently, the combination of the 3 levels

mentioned above, i.e., from "Micius" to the nodes of the Beijing-Shanghai *backbone*, already allows the distribution of keys in communications over 4,600 km [16].

Clearly the network is not fully autonomous. To achieve point-to-point communication, it still requires access and distribution layers based on traditional technologies, and it was never intended to be otherwise. It is a matter of protecting sensitive communications between the most relevant nodes in the network. The remaining steps to achieve secure point-to-point communication will depend on the confidentiality of the communication: the first beneficiaries of the quantum communications network will be the military and government agencies, extending later to critical sectors of the economy, such as the financial sector, which is intensive in the use of highly sensitive communications.

China's leadership in QKD gives it a key strategic advantage in security and communications. This capability allows China to secure its critical networks (currently military, government and financial) against possible future quantum computing attacks, something that few other countries can claim. Moreover, its ability to export quantum infrastructure to other countries could consolidate its geopolitical influence, especially in the Digital Silk Road arena.

The state of the art is clear: China leads the advances in QKD and maintains a solid position in the rest of the fields; while the United States focuses its efforts on quantum computing and sensing, and in cryptography, mainly on post-quantum cryptography.

In QKD, most global players are a step ahead of the United States. Among the most noteworthy developments are:

– Europe (with the EuroQCI project [17]), has as its declared goal the construction of a secure quantum communication infrastructure that will cover the entire EU, including its overseas territories. Like many other countries, the starting point is also the construction of a *backbone* linking government institutions and critical infrastructures, complementing the traditional network (which will continue to provide the greatest capillarity and reach). This goal is ambitious, and the scheduled timelines show commitment and foresight, but also the usual EU slowness. 2019 was the program launch year and the initiatives related to the terrestrial segment kicked off in 2023 and those associated with the space segment will do so with the launch of the first satellite scheduled for 2025/2026.

  The infrastructure will have a set of main nodes (i.e. Madrid, Vienna, Berlin and Poznan) and, from these, branches to the other member countries. Although these links currently go no further than proofs of concept, the degree of progress within of the main nodes is remarkable. Particularly Madrid, whose metropolitan quantum network (MadQCI) is the largest in Europe, and in constant growth since 2009. It currently has 26 QKD modules in 9 nodes, connected by 110 kilometers of optical fiber. For its management, MadQCI uses SDN, a growing option due to, among other advantages, those already mentioned in this article regarding management, administration and resilience

building. Its development is the result of a public-private collaboration initiative, with contributions from the Polytechnic University of Madrid, Huawei and Toshiba, among others.

- The United Kingdom, for its part, has followed a path very similar to that of continental Europe. The London metropolitan network has been operational since 2022 [18]. In this case, although backed by the government, the initiative is fundamentally private, with BT and Toshiba leading the way, and unlike other quantum networks it could be considered the first "commercial" network, given that, since it went into production, it has been open to the integration of any paying customer, whether or not it is a critical infrastructure for the state. Since then, the metropolitan network has grown, integrating customers such as HSBC [19], with connections between data centers over distances of up to 62 kilometers.
- Japan is perhaps the country where the private initiative in QKD is the strongest. Toshiba and NEC are the first and third companies by number of international QKD patents, with NTT, Fujitsu and Hitachi also as relevant players. Tokyo has, since 2010 [20], its own metropolitan QKD network, and it is expected that, by 2035, the quantum network will have been extended to the rest of the country, constituting a nationwide network. Arguably, apart from China, they are the first to face practical implementation problems, which has led them to rethink and even "rebuild" their networks on several occasions. On the other hand, the influence of their companies at the international level is prevalent (for example, Toshiba's involvement in European networks).
- South Korea, with private companies such as Swiss ID Quantique[5] , SK Telecom, LG, and public initiatives such as ETRI at the forefront, has deployed the second largest quantum network in the world, after China. It is a nationwide QKD *backbone*, connecting 48 government departments over more than 800 kilometers of fiber [21]. In its sights is to convert the network, in the near future, into a commercial service (in the same sense as the United Kingdom), allowing the entry of private companies in "Quantum as a Service" mode, i.e., leasing the service. Likewise, and without decommissioning the current quantum network (based on quantum transmitter-receiver channels), 2025 should be the year in which the first 100 kilometers of network operated with entanglement-based protocols are added.
- India has metropolitan networks, such as Delhi, of approximately 200 kilometers. Over the past few years, it has taken a more aggressive and militaristic approach to its QKD deployment, channeling most projects through the *Innovations for Defence Excellence* (iDEX) initiative [22].

5 Founded in 2001 as a *spin-off* from the University of Geneva, it is considered the first company to commercialize QKD products (since 2007), and collaborated, together with the University of Geneva, in the first European deployments, proofs of concept and experimental QKD networks in the first decade of the 21st century.

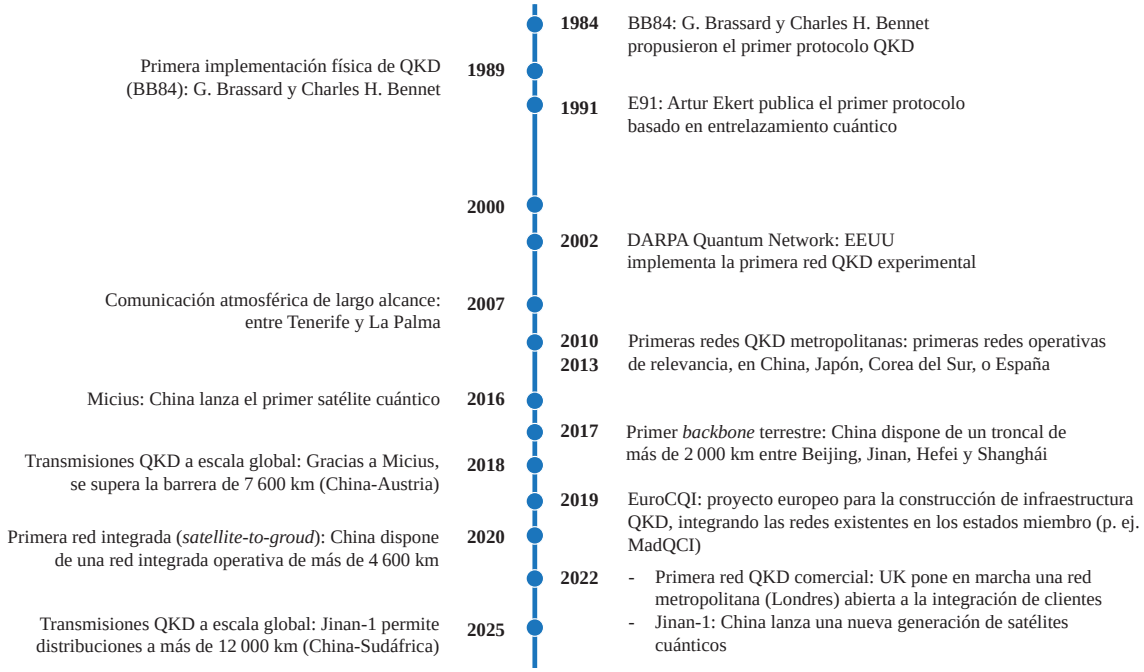

Figure 3. Most relevant milestones in the article. Source: own elaboration

4.4 QKD, two strikingly different approaches

Faced with this situation, as we have already mentioned, the position of the U.S. government is summarized in the official position of the NSA [5]:

> "In summary, NSA views quantum-resistant (or post-quantum) cryptography as a more cost effective and easily maintained solution than quantum key distribution. For all of these reasons, NSA does not support the usage of QKD or QC to protect communications (...)".

This contrasts sharply with what is happening in the field, in academia. Although the level of QKD infrastructure deployment in the United States is modest (comparatively speaking), and the same could be said of the volume of publications and patents, those advances that make it into the media are scientifically notorious and show that they have not lagged behind in terms of research. For example, in May 2024, a joint initiative of Harvard University and Amazon succeeded in transmitting interlaced photons in 35-kilometer networks [23] (in the same sense that South Korea intends to do in 2025). It remains to be resolved whether the apparent misalignment between the position of the US government and that of its academic and private sectors, which may not be interested in the present QKD (which would explain the volume of patents and publications), but are interested in its future possibilities, is real.

It could be argued, however, that the United States plays in a different light, being a strong advocate of NATO's favorable stance on QKD [24]. We therefore consider that the US position is best described as "cautious skepticism".

Notwithstanding the above nuances, this divergence in the analysis of the future of QKD has aroused the curiosity of many analysts. Why is China investing such

large amounts of money in the deployment of QKD infrastructure, while the United States, at least in its public statements, considers the technology a dead end? There are more than a few who point out that The U.S., in this case, has been overly prescriptive in its stance, and a similar approach to the Korean one would have been more prudent. They have bet big that QKD will have no future practical application, or even a relevant place in a future post-quantum communications infrastructure.

In certain areas, such as military communications, availability (remember the DoS problem in QKD) is as important as confidentiality. Perhaps this is why investments in military communications disruption are steadily increasing in the U.S. sphere. They are fully confident that the denial problem is insurmountable.

5 The future of QKD

The development of QKD is already transforming geopolitical dynamics, marking a new era in the competition for national sovereignty and the security of critical communications. If QKD becomes established as a standard, the powers that master this technology will not only secure their own communications, but will also have the ability to influence the global communications infrastructure, redefining alliances and the balance of power in the 21st century.

The future of QKD is also intrinsically linked to the possibilities of developing a "quantum internet", a network that uses the properties of quantum mechanics to transmit information in a way that is not only secure (an aspect in which QKD would be key), but also efficient and comparatively superior to the classical internet by orders of magnitude that are difficult to anticipate. This opens the door to new forms of distributed and ultra-fast computing and would have an evident reflection in those processes in which the intensive use of computing capacity is fundamental: the example that comes to mind is that of Artificial Intelligence.

Whether the scenario described above materializes will depend on multiple factors, which could be summarized in the capacity of the scientific community to overcome the challenges currently presented by the field.

On the one hand, what we have called engineering issues. On the one hand, the integration of the QKD infrastructure with the traditional infrastructure, which will ensure that quantum communication becomes more than just point-to-point communication on a set of relevant *backbones*, leaving the rest of the network vulnerable, will be critical. Day by day, researchers push the attenuation limit, increasing the distances over which QKD communication is possible. Another focus of progress is the development of more efficient protocols, such as MDI-QKD, which eliminates the need for so many reliable measurement elements.

On the other hand, problems that can only be mitigated, such as denial of service. The success of the practical implementation of QKD will depend, to a large extent, on how well it is mitigated.

The pace of scientific progress (measured, for example, in number of patents or publications), the quality of such progress, the evolution in the investment of the different States, or the commitment in the deployment of costly infrastructure by practically all relevant actors reveals the thinking of their decision-makers in this regard: QKD will be an important piece in the era of post-quantum computing, and for some actors, the fundamental piece.

6 Conclusion

There is a widespread sense of urgency in governments to push quantum initiatives, confident that quantum supremacy will provide a differential advantage in the fields of computing, sensing and communications. And this is as much as to say an essential strategic advantage.

What makes quantum communication particularly interesting is the fact that there is no consensus on the subject. In contrast to other research fields such as Artificial Intelligence or quantum computing itself, where there are no major differences of opinion regarding the need to master them, and the career dynamics are fully established, in the case of, for example, QKD, we find two differentiated positions between the two most significant global players, China and the United States.

Inevitably and depending on how the next few years/decades play out, these unhedged bets will mark a different future for both players and, consequently, deserve special attention and monitoring.

Regardless of the quality of the research centers, in the case of a technology such as QKD, which requires the deployment of massive, high-cost infrastructure, there is no such thing as a *fast-follower*. If QKD ultimately proves to be a critical piece of the post-quantum landscape, the United States will be at a distinct disadvantage, with a long way to go in terms of investment and time if it is to catch up. To give up on QKD's present is to tacitly give up on its future.

In this future scenario, the imbalance in its adoption will foreseeably generate ethical and geopolitical consequences. China, with years of monopoly ahead of it, will control a significant part of the global flow of secure information, while the rest of the players will be vulnerable to interception.

Beyond this first interpretation, this mismatch could redefine the global map in other, more subtle ways. China will be in a position to export quantum infrastructure to other countries, and more importantly, to offer its strategic allies access to its quantum network as an incentive, displacing traditional Western technological supremacy and allowing them to manipulate, de facto, whatever information their allies can process. Countries in the Global South, in search of digital sovereignty, could be strongly attracted by this possibility, provided it is offered at the right cost. From an ethical point of view, the monopoly of quantum communication could give rise to a new form of technological colonialism, where China could extend its authoritarian model beyond its borders, controlling and manipulating information according to its interests.

All these factors would have the potential to consolidate its geopolitical influence based on technology, its *sharp power*, and this influence would prove to be key to imposing performance and interoperability standards that would, in turn, cement more years of leadership in quantum communications. This virtuous circle is something that we in the West have experienced with classical computing and is extremely difficult to destabilize. A paradigm shift such as quantum communication offers that possibility, and it is vital to get the strategy right.

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Artificial Intelligence as a Geopolitical Asset: Chinese Strategy and its Global Impact

Abstract

Technological development has become a determining factor in the geopolitical competition of the 21st century, with China consolidating its position as one of the most influential players in its application to the fields of security and defense. Through initiatives such as *DeepSeek* and an ambitious national plan for 2030, the Asian country seeks to lead a strategic sector with profound implications for the international order. This article examines the impact of such a strategy on three key fronts: its role in cybersecurity and hybrid warfare, the deployment of autonomous systems in military operations, and the regulatory and strategic challenges arising from its global expansion. It also analyzes the responses of actors such as the United States and the European Union, the role of these technologies in contemporary deterrence and unconventional conflicts, as well as the need to establish international regulatory frameworks to contain the risks derived from their

proliferation. Based on the study of recent sources and strategic analysis, this paper argues that China's technological rise not only reshapes the global balance of power, but also poses crucial challenges in terms of security, digital governance and international stability.

Keywords

Emerging Technologies, Geopolitics, Defense Technology, China.

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1 Introduction

Artificial intelligence has become one of the most disruptive technologies of the 21st century, with an impact that transcends the scientific and economic spheres to insert itself fully into the field of international security (Hunter *et al.*, 2023). Its accelerated development and its capacity to transform power structures have generated an unprecedented geopolitical competition, in which the main global players seek to consolidate their leadership in this sector. China, in particular, has emerged as one of the most ambitious countries in the race for artificial intelligence, challenging the technological supremacy of the United States and Europe (Khalid, 2025). Its strategic plan to dominate this field by 2030, along with recent advances in advanced models such as *DeepSeek* (DeepSeek-AI *et al.*, 2025) , have set off alarm bells in the West, not only for their economic impact, but also for their implications in the field of security and global stability (Kanellopoulos, 2024).

From a strategic perspective, artificial intelligence not only represents a technological breakthrough, but also constitutes a factor of power with the potential to redefine the balance of power between major powers. Its application in military, cybersecurity and hybrid operations offers considerable advantages in terms of information processing capabilities, decision automation and development of autonomous weaponry (Carlo, 2021). In this context, the Chinese government has demonstrated a remarkable ability to integrate artificial intelligence into its national security strategy, largely due to the close linkage between the private technology sector and the state. Companies such as *Baidu*, *Alibaba*, *Tencent* and, more recently, *DeepSeek*, have developed technologies that, directly or indirectly, strengthen the country's defensive and offensive capabilities, raising concerns about their use in intelligence, surveillance and social control operations.

1.1 Artificial intelligence in the context of international security

The development of artificial intelligence is not taking place in an isolated context, but in an environment characterized by deep geopolitical tensions, strategic uncertainty and growing competition between powers for technological dominance. The United States and China have positioned themselves as the main players in this race, not only with regard to artificial intelligence, but also in other key sectors such as quantum computing, 5G telecommunications and the semiconductor industry (Araya and King, 2022). However, artificial intelligence stands out for its cross-cutting impact on multiple dimensions of international security, as it offers disruptive capabilities that transform conflict scenarios, deterrence strategies and the dynamics of social control.

One of the areas where artificial intelligence has become more relevant is cyber warfare and hybrid operations. The automation of cyber attacks and the ability to manipulate information through advanced algorithms have changed the nature of

threats in cyberspace (Jahankhani *et al.,* 2020: 93-101). China has been identified as one of the most active countries in this field, with a documented history of cyber espionage and intellectual property theft that has affected governments, companies and research centers in the West (Kanellopoulos, 2024). The combination of artificial intelligence with disinformation techniques has allowed the creation of highly sophisticated campaigns that seek to influence public opinion and destabilize democratic systems through the mass dissemination of false or manipulated content on social networks. This type of strategy, which combines cyber-attacks with information warfare, has been classified by various analysts as a new form of hybrid conflict, in which artificial intelligence plays a fundamental role by enhancing the speed, scope and effectiveness of operations.

In the military field, artificial intelligence is driving a profound transformation in the strategic capabilities of major powers. The development of autonomous combat systems has reduced the need for human intervention in war scenarios, facilitating the creation of drones and unmanned vehicles capable of operating in reconnaissance, attack and surveillance missions with a high degree of autonomy (Hunter *et al.*, 2023). China has made significant progress in this field, with research programs aimed at integrating artificial intelligence into advanced military platforms. The combination of deep learning algorithms with intelligent weapon systems poses an unprecedented challenge to global security, as it opens the door to a potential arms race based on the automation of warfare. Although Western powers have promoted initiatives to regulate the development of autonomous weapons, the lack of international consensus and the accelerated investment in this sector have made it difficult to implement effective control mechanisms.

Another area in which artificial intelligence has acquired a central role is surveillance and internal control. In China, technology has become a key tool for the supervision of the population through advanced facial recognition systems, behavioral analysis and online activity monitoring. The implementation of the Social Credit System, which evaluates and classifies citizens' behavior through artificial intelligence algorithms, represents a paradigmatic example of the use of these technologies to consolidate a governance model based on digital control. These practices have generated concern at the international level, as they could serve as a reference for other regimes with authoritarian tendencies that seek to replicate similar systems to reinforce their power. The combination of artificial intelligence with mass surveillance mechanisms raises questions about the balance between security and fundamental rights, as well as about the ethical limits of its application in the field of domestic politics.

These developments have led to a rethinking of security strategies in the West, where the urgency of establishing regulatory frameworks for the use of artificial intelligence in defense and security clashes with the geopolitical interests of the main technological players. The absence of an international consensus on the limits and rules for the application of artificial intelligence has generated a regulatory vacuum that facilitates its development without clear restrictions, which could lead to a scenario of uncontrolled competition and strategic use of these technologies in

conflicts of different kinds. Faced with this reality, the international community faces the challenge of balancing innovation with global security, preventing the advance of artificial intelligence from leading to a new phase of geopolitical instability marked by the strategic use of automation and massive data processing in security and defense operations.

1.2 China and AI: towards a new architecture of technological power

The development of artificial intelligence in China cannot be analyzed in isolation, but within an ecosystem that combines scientific advances, state policies and a military-civilian integration strategy. The Chinese government has made a firm commitment to artificial intelligence as a fundamental pillar of its national security and global competitiveness, establishing clear objectives in its *Next Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan*, published in 2017 (Araya and King, 2022). In this document, the need to make China the world leader in artificial intelligence by 2030 is put forward, a goal supported by massive investment in technological infrastructure, the promotion of research in neural networks and the harnessing of large volumes of data for training advanced algorithms. The centralization of information and almost unlimited access to citizen data has given China a comparative advantage over other countries, allowing it to advance rapidly in areas such as facial recognition, predictive security systems and the automation of surveillance processes.

In the area of defense, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has adopted an approach that combines civilian and military applications, facilitating technology transfer between the private sector and security institutions. This strategy, known as military-civilian fusion, has enabled China to accelerate the development of autonomous weapons, advanced detection systems and artificial intelligence platforms aimed at electronic warfare. In regions such as Xinjiang, the deployment of artificial intelligence-based surveillance technologies has been widely documented, evidencing the use of these tools for monitoring populations and strengthening social control (Khalid, 2025). This dynamic raises questions about the impact that artificial intelligence can have on authoritarian governance models and its possible export to other countries with similar regimes.

The recent *DeepSeek* breakthrough has intensified the perception that China is closing the technology gap with the West (Kanellopoulos, 2024). This artificial intelligence model has achieved performance levels comparable to *OpenAI* and *Google DeepMind* developments, but with less investment in computational infrastructure. Its emergence has generated an intense debate on the viability of artificial intelligence systems in China and on the risks associated with censorship, information manipulation and the strategic use of these models in disinformation campaigns. In a context where artificial intelligence is increasingly linked to global security, China's advancement in this field poses challenges both in terms of regulation and strategic stability.

1.3 Objective and focus of the study

This article analyzes the implications of China's development of artificial intelligence for international security, focusing on three key aspects. First, it examines the impact of artificial intelligence on Chinese military capabilities, including the development of autonomous systems and the integration of algorithms into intelligence operations and strategic deterrence. Second, it assesses technological competition with the West and its implications for the global governance of artificial intelligence, considering the responses adopted by the United States, the European Union, and other relevant actors. Finally, the ethical risks and challenges associated with the advancement of artificial intelligence are addressed, including the lack of clear regulations, the use of these technologies in hybrid conflicts and their implications for global stability.

Through the analysis of strategic documents, government reports and recent academic literature, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive view of China's role in artificial intelligence and its potential to redefine international security in the coming decades. As technology advances and new AI-based defense strategies take hold, it is essential to understand how these transformations are shaping a new world order in which artificial intelligence is not only a tool for innovation, but also a determining factor in the geopolitics of the future.

From a methodological perspective, this study adopts a qualitative approach of a descriptive-analytical nature, based on the documentary analysis of scientific literature, strategic reports and institutional sources from international organizations, *think tanks* and specialized publications (Bowen, 2009). The theoretical framework guiding this research is based on the postulates of offensive realism, which interprets technological development as a strategy for the accumulation of power by states in an anarchic international system (Mearsheimer, 2001: 154-170) ; on the theory of securitization, which allows us to understand how certain narratives –such as leadership in artificial intelligence– are constructed as existential threats that justify extraordinary responses in terms of defense and control (Buzan *et al.*, 1998: 25-57); and in algorithmic governance and technonationalism approaches, which analyze how states use advanced digital technologies to strengthen internal control, protect their strategic interests and project global influence (Zeng, 2022: 12-15, 45-48). This approach allows structuring the analysis around variables such as the degree of AI militarization, the capacity for geopolitical influence and international regulatory mechanisms, thus delimiting the limits and scope of the research.

2 China and AI: strategy and technological development

China has identified artificial intelligence as a key pillar for its economic development and geopolitical positioning (Zeng, 2022). Unlike other technological sectors in which the country has traditionally been dependent on foreign innovations, AI represents an area in which China aspires to become a global leader (Khan *et al.*, 2021) , not only in terms of scientific development, but also in its application in

security, defense and social control. This ambition has been embodied in a comprehensive state strategy that combines massive investment, government support and close collaboration between the public and private sectors.

2.1 China's national AI plan (2017-2030) and its impact on security 2.2

The turning point in China's AI strategy was the publication of the *Next Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan* in 2017 (Araya and King, 2022). This document sets out a framework for action to consolidate China as the world leader in AI by 2030, with a progressive approach that is divided into three stages: by 2020, to reach the level of the major powers in AI; by 2025, to lead in certain key application areas; and by 2030, to become the global reference in research, development and application of this technology.

The plan is not only limited to technological innovation objectives, but also stresses the importance of AI for national security. Artificial intelligence is seen as a strategic tool to strengthen the country's defensive and offensive capabilities, particularly in areas such as cybersecurity, mass surveillance and automation of military operations (Kanellopoulos, 2024). The ability to process large volumes of data and optimize decision making in real time represents a key advantage in conflict scenarios and hybrid threat management.

To support this strategy, China has implemented a funding model that combines state investment with private sector incentives (Hunter *et al.*, 2023). The central government, through programs such as the *National Guidance Fund for AI Industry Investment*, has channeled billions of dollars to research in machine learning, machine vision, and robotics. In addition, local governments have established technology parks and innovation centers in cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen, promoting a dynamic ecosystem that fosters collaboration between companies, universities and military institutions.

The development of technological infrastructures has been another key element in this strategy. China has built high-capacity data centers and supercomputers designed specifically for training advanced AI models. Companies such as *Huawei* have played a key role in the expansion of 5G networks, facilitating real-time data transmission and improving the efficiency of AI systems deployed in security and defense (Chu, 2024).

The growth of China's AI sector has also been driven by the leadership of key companies that have been designated as strategic players in the implementation of the national plan. Between 2017 and 2023, public and private investment in artificial intelligence in China exceeded $ 70 billion, placing the country among the top three global investors in the field (Stanford University, 2024). In 2022 alone, more than 20% of the world's total AI startups were founded in China, indicating a structural consolidation of its technology ecosystem. Companies such as *Baidu*, *Tencent* and *Alibaba* have invested heavily in artificial intelligence applied to data analytics,

facial recognition and natural language processing. *Huawei* has been a pillar in the development of technology infrastructures and cloud computing, while *DeepSeek* has recently emerged as a relevant player in the field of advanced language modeling. This convergence between private sector and government strategy has enabled China to accelerate its technological development and reduce dependence on foreign suppliers in key areas of AI.

2.2 DeepSeek and its impact on the geopolitics of AI

One of the most recent and significant developments within the Chinese AI ecosystem has been the emergence of *DeepSeek*, an advanced language model that has surprised the international community with its ability to compete with cutting-edge solutions from the West, such as *OpenAI*'s GPT or *Google DeepMind*'s *Gemini*. *DeepSeek* has proven to be able to operate at a high level of computational efficiency, achieving results comparable to those of its competitors with a fraction of the computational resources used by large Western technology companies.

The emergence of *DeepSeek* has generated debate around China's real ability to close the technology gap with the West in the field of AI. While the United States and Europe have historically led the way in the development of large-scale language models, *DeepSeek*'s efficiency suggests that China has found innovative ways to optimize the performance of these systems without relying on the massive computational infrastructure that characterizes its rivals. This breakthrough could have significant implications in terms of technological sovereignty, as it would allow China to reduce its reliance on key components manufactured by U.S. companies, such as the *NVIDIA* processors used in training AI models (Chu, 2024).

On a geopolitical level, the consolidation of *DeepSeek* as a competitive alternative to Western models poses a new scenario in the race for artificial intelligence. While *OpenAI* and *Google* have adopted a regulatory stance in their developments, with restrictions on access to their models based on government regulations and security concerns, *DeepSeek* represents an alternative that could be used by states and actors seeking to avoid oversight by the United States and its allies. This could facilitate the proliferation of artificial intelligence technologies in countries with authoritarian regimes or in contexts where information control and censorship are prioritized.

One of the aspects that most concerns the international community about *DeepSeek* is the possibility that the model incorporates censorship and information control mechanisms aligned with Chinese government policy. There are indications that certain sensitive issues for the Chinese Communist Party, such as the situation in Xinjiang, the conflict in Taiwan or the protests in Hong Kong, could be restricted within the *DeepSeek* model, limiting access to objective information on these issues. These types of restrictions not only have implications in terms of freedom of expression, but could also be used as a strategic tool in the realm of information warfare and manipulation of the global narrative.

The development of *DeepSeek* and its potential impact on international security reflect a broader trend in China's artificial intelligence strategy (Hunter *et al.*, 2023). Beyond technological competition with the West, AI has become a key instrument in the projection of power and the consolidation of a governance model based on information control. As advanced language models become an essential tool for knowledge management and decision making, China's ability to develop proprietary solutions without external constraints reinforces its strategic autonomy and amplifies its influence in global cyberspace.

In this context, the consolidation of China as a central player in artificial intelligence poses a significant challenge for the international community. The lack of agreements on ethical and strategic limits on the use of AI, coupled with the absence of effective global regulatory mechanisms, increases the risk of these technologies being used for purposes that compromise international stability and security. Competition in artificial intelligence is no longer just a question of technological innovation, but a determining factor in shaping the geopolitical order of the future.

3 AI and national security in China: applications in defense and cybersecurity

The development of artificial intelligence in China not only responds to economic and technological objectives, but has also acquired a central role in the country's national security and military strategy (Zeng, 2022: 29-33). In recent years, the PLA has increasingly adopted an approach based on automation, massive data collection, and artificial intelligence to improve its defense capabilities and strategic positioning on the international stage (Kania, 2022: 68-77) . This transformation has enabled China to advance the integration of autonomous weapons, enhance its surveillance systems, and strengthen its role in cyber warfare.

Unlike other powers that have debated ethical and regulatory limits on the use of artificial intelligence in warfare, China has promoted the development of these technologies with a pragmatic approach, prioritizing their implementation in the military and security domain (Taddeo *et al.*, 2024). Close collaboration between the government, the private sector and military institutions has enabled advances in artificial intelligence to be rapidly transferred to defense applications, accelerating the modernization of the PLA and consolidating China as a key player in the AI-based arms race.

3.1 Military applications of AI

The PLA has embraced artificial intelligence as a key element in the modernization of its military capabilities. One of the areas in which most progress has been made is the development of autonomous weapons and intelligent combat systems, including attack drones, unmanned ground vehicles, and machine learning-based defense

systems (Hunter *et al.*, 2023). These developments have led to increased operational efficiency and reduced the need for human intervention on the battlefield, representing a significant change in the way China conceives of modern warfare. According to estimates by the *Center for Security and Emerging Technology* (CSET), China has allocated between $ 1.6 billion and $ 2 billion annually to the development of military capabilities with artificial intelligence since 2019, including autonomous weapons systems, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) platforms, and tactical prediction algorithms (Konaev *et al.*,2023)

Autonomous drones have been one of the most prominent technologies in this field. Models such as the Wing Loong II and the GJ-11 have been designed for reconnaissance, attack and tactical support missions, with an increasing capacity to operate independently thanks to the incorporation of advanced artificial intelligence algorithms (Qiao-Franco and Bode, 2023). These systems not only enhance the PLA's response capability in conventional conflicts, but also represent a key instrument in its deterrence strategy against other actors in the Indo-Pacific region.

Another key aspect of China's military use of artificial intelligence is its application in ISR. Real-time data collection and analysis has enabled the PLA to improve its threat detection capabilities and optimize the planning of its operations. Through a combination of satellite imagery, facial recognition, and large-scale data processing, the PLA can accurately monitor strategic movements of rival actors and anticipate potential conflict scenarios (Araya and King, 2022).

Artificial intelligence has also been integrated into hybrid warfare and deterrence strategies, allowing China to deploy covert operations of influence and information manipulation. The automation of disinformation campaigns, the use of *deepfakes* in political propaganda and the manipulation of social networks have been tools used to generate confusion and destabilize adversaries without resorting to direct confrontation. These mechanisms, added to the PLA's ability to execute sophisticated cyberattacks, have turned artificial intelligence into a weapon of soft power with significant geopolitical effects.

3.2 AI and cybersecurity in the context of cyberwarfare

The use of artificial intelligence in cybersecurity has transformed China's role in cyberspace, consolidating it as a major player in cyberespionage and cyberattacks globally (Admass *et al.*, 2024). The ability to process and analyze large volumes of data in real time has enabled China to develop advanced techniques to infiltrate government, corporate and military networks of other countries, with the aim of obtaining strategic information and weakening the security of its adversaries.

Cyber espionage operations conducted by groups linked to the Chinese government have been widely documented (Cavelty and Wenger, 2022). According to the *Microsoft Digital Defense Report* (Microsoft, 2023) , 44% of cyberattacks attributed to state actors in 2022 originated in China, with targets primarily focused on strategic

sectors such as defense, energy, and telecommunications in the United States, Europe, and Southeast Asia.

These attacks have highlighted the high degree of sophistication of the tools used by Chinese actors to obtain sensitive information and compromise critical infrastructures. The incorporation of artificial intelligence in these operations has made it possible to automate the detection of vulnerabilities, coordinate large-scale attacks and optimize evasion techniques to circumvent the cyber defense systems of targeted countries. This technical evolution increases not only the frequency and precision of cyberattacks, but also their ability to destabilize essential networks with minimal human intervention, thus consolidating AI as a central resource in the Chinese state's digital power projection.

In addition to cyber espionage, China has resorted to artificial intelligence to develop strategies for manipulating and controlling data in cyberspace. The automation of disinformation campaigns has made it possible to influence political and electoral processes in different countries, using *botnets* and artificial intelligence algorithms to amplify narratives favorable to Chinese interests. These strategies have been especially visible on issues such as Taiwanese independence, the situation in Hong Kong and international perceptions of Chinese-driven infrastructure projects abroad.

The combination of artificial intelligence and cyber warfare has generated a response from the United States, the European Union and other powers seeking to contain Chinese influence in this area (Khalid, 2025). Washington has implemented technological restrictions and sanctions against Chinese companies linked to the development of cybersecurity and espionage tools, while the European Union has promoted initiatives to strengthen the digital resilience of its strategic infrastructures. However, the speed with which China is advancing in the development of artificial intelligence applied to cybersecurity poses a considerable challenge for Western democracies, which must balance the protection of their systems with respect for the fundamental rights and privacy of their citizens.

The impact of artificial intelligence on Chinese national security is undeniable. Its application in military, cybersecurity and information warfare has allowed the Chinese government to consolidate its position in the global strategic competition. However, the lack of clear regulations and the risk of escalation in the use of these technologies in international conflicts mean that artificial intelligence represents not only an opportunity, but also a challenge to global stability. As these technologies continue to evolve, the international community faces the challenge of defining the ethical and strategic limits on their application, preventing their development from leading to a new era of digital and military confrontation based on the automation of power.

4 AI and the global balance of power: geopolitical competition

Artificial intelligence has become a central element in global strategic competition, reshaping power relations between the major powers. While its development has generated technological advances with applications in multiple sectors, its impact

on security and defense has been the determining factor in the growing rivalry between the United States and China. In this context, artificial intelligence not only represents a tool for innovation, but has also become a multiplier of military power, a platform for geopolitical influence and a terrain of confrontation in the struggle for technological dominance in the 21st century (Kania, 2022: 68-71).

As China moves forward with its strategy to consolidate its position as a leader in artificial intelligence, the United States and its allies have implemented measures to curb its development and protect their own strategic interests. This dynamic has generated a series of initiatives aimed at restricting China's access to advanced technology, strengthening AI governance in the West, and strengthening international alliances to counter Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific and other key regions.

4.1 United States vs. China: technological race and militarization of AI

The competition between the United States and China in the field of artificial intelligence is not limited to the economic arena but has moved decisively into the military and strategic sphere. Both powers have identified AI as an essential component in the modernization of their armed forces, with the aim of expanding their defensive capabilities, optimizing decision-making and consolidating their technological superiority in conflict scenarios.

From a geo-economic perspective, the advance of artificial intelligence is also profoundly reshaping labor markets and production structures on a global scale. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), approximately 40 % of jobs globally could be significantly transformed by AI, with a particularly intense impact in advanced economies, where up to 60 % of existing jobs are potentially exposed to automation and task reallocation (Cazzaniga *et al.*, 2024). This technological transformation directly links leadership in artificial intelligence with social stability, economic security and the global projection capacity of states, making AI an integral strategic asset.

In the case of the United States, the Department of Defense has driven multiple projects to integrate artificial intelligence into military operations, highlighting initiatives such as *Project Maven* and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) programs. *Project Maven*, launched in 2017, represents one of the Pentagon's most ambitious efforts in applying artificial intelligence to military surveillance and reconnaissance (Taddeo *et al.*, 2024). Its main objective is to use advanced algorithms to analyze images captured by drones and automate the identification of threats on the battlefield. This initiative has optimized the responsiveness of U.S. forces, reducing reliance on human analysts and accelerating decision making in complex operational environments.

On the other hand, DARPA has led the development of emerging technologies for defense, with a particular focus on artificial intelligence applied to autonomous

systems, cybersecurity and information operations. Among its most prominent projects are programs aimed at creating autonomous weapons, explainable artificial intelligence algorithms and machine learning-based electronic warfare platforms.

In the face of these advances, China has intensified its investment in artificial intelligence with a similar approach, promoting the development of autonomous combat systems, AI-based surveillance platforms and hybrid warfare strategies (Qiao-Franco and Bode, 2023). This race has raised concerns in the international community about the possibility of an escalation in the militarization of AI, especially in a context where regulation of these technologies remains insufficient.

To contain China's advance in this field, the United States has implemented a series of technological restrictions and sanctions aimed at limiting the Asian country's access to key components in the development of artificial intelligence (Chu, 2024). Among the most significant measures are restrictions on the export of advanced semiconductors and high-performance processors, critical for training artificial intelligence models. Chinese companies such as *Huawei*, *SMIC* and *ByteDance* have been subject to sanctions and trade restrictions, with the aim of curbing their capacity for innovation and development in strategic sectors.

These measures have generated a reaction from China, which has intensified its efforts to achieve self-sufficiency in advanced technology. China's strategy has focused on investing in semiconductor manufacturing, expanding its cloud computing infrastructure, and strengthening its artificial intelligence research capabilities. Between 2017 and 2022, China registered more than 50 % of global patents related to advanced technologies, evidencing the weight of its industrial policy aimed at leadership in strategic sectors (Stanford University, 2024). In addition, it is estimated that more than 270 technology companies have received state financial support for the development of dual-use technologies, facilitating their application in both commercial sectors and national defense (Kania, 2022). These figures confirm the central role of the Chinese state in boosting its technological sovereignty as a tool for geopolitical projection.

4.2 Europe and the governance of AI: regulation and security

While the United States and China have focused their competition on the militarization and strategic development of artificial intelligence, Europe has adopted a more regulatory approach, prioritizing AI security and governance. The European Union has sought to position itself as a leader in the regulation of artificial intelligence, promoting initiatives aimed at establishing ethical and legal standards for its development and application (Araya and King, 2022).

One of the most significant efforts in this area has been the drafting of the *EU Artificial Intelligence Regulation*, which seeks to establish clear rules on the use of AI in different sectors, including its application in security and defense. This regulatory

framework establishes restrictions on the use of mass surveillance systems, decision-making algorithms in judicial processes and the automation of autonomous weapons.

However, AI governance in Europe faces significant challenges in terms of transatlantic cooperation and coordination with other powers (Calderaro and Blumfelde, 2022). The lack of a global consensus on AI regulation has hindered the implementation of international standards, while differences in AI policies between the EU and the United States have led to tensions in the area of security and technological innovation.

Despite these obstacles, the European Union has reinforced its efforts to strengthen its cybersecurity resilience and reduce its dependence on foreign technology (Cavelty and Wenger, 2022). Initiatives such as the *European Defense Fund* and the *European Cybersecurity Strategy* seek to increase the bloc's strategic autonomy and ensure the protection of critical infrastructure from external threats, including potential cyber attacks driven by artificial intelligence.

4.3 International alliances and the global response to Chinese AI

In the face of China's growth as a power in artificial intelligence, several countries have established strategic alliances to contain its influence and strengthen their security cooperation. In the Indo-Pacific region, India, Japan and Australia have played a key role in forming coalitions aimed at countering Chinese technological dominance and strengthening regional stability (Admass *et al.*,2024).

The partnership between India, Japan and Australia has been based on the development of joint technological capabilities, cooperation in cybersecurity and the creation of digital infrastructures independent of Chinese influence. In particular, India has strengthened its relationship with the United States in defense and technology, engaging in information sharing programs and cybersecurity initiatives to reduce the vulnerability of its critical infrastructures to artificial intelligence-driven attacks.

For its part, NATO has taken an increasingly active stance in the debate on artificial intelligence and its impact on collective defense (Hunter *et al.*, 2023). The organization has identified AI as one of the main emerging technologies that could affect global security, promoting the development of regulatory frameworks and cooperation among member countries in the integration of artificial intelligence in defense systems.

As artificial intelligence continues to evolve, the global balance of power will be influenced not only by technological development, but also by the ability of states to establish strategic alliances and effective regulations (Zeng, 2022: 94-96). Competition between the United States and China continues to set the global agenda, but the response of Europe and other emerging powers will play a key role in shaping the future of artificial intelligence in the realm of security and international geopolitics.

5 Challenges and risks of Chinese AI in international security

China's accelerated development of artificial intelligence has established the country as a technological powerhouse with advanced applications in security, defense and information control (Raska and Bitzinger, 2023). However, its approach has raised significant concerns in the international community, both in terms of governance and transparency and the impact these technologies may have on global stability. The lack of effective regulations, the use of artificial intelligence to bolster authoritarian surveillance structures, and the growing risk of autonomous weapons proliferation have led to intense debate about the challenges posed by the Chinese model of artificial intelligence. As these technologies expand and become integrated into security and defense strategies, the world faces a dilemma: how to balance technological advancement with the need to establish regulations that prevent abuses and avoid an escalation of confrontations driven by the automation of conflict.

5.1 Lack of transparency and ethical issues

One of the most controversial aspects of the development of artificial intelligence in China is its use for mass surveillance and the reinforcement of social control policies (Calderaro and Blumfelde, 2022). The implementation of advanced technologies for facial recognition, behavioral analysis and digital monitoring has allowed the Chinese government to establish an unprecedented surveillance system, with special emphasis on regions considered politically sensitive. The case of Xinjiang is a clear example of how artificial intelligence can be used as a tool of repression. In this region, the government has deployed a complex AI-based monitoring system that allows tracking and analyzing the activities of the Uyghur population, identifying patterns of behavior and signaling potential "threats" based on machine learning algorithms. These systems, combined with the use of biometric data and mass communications analysis, have been denounced by international bodies as an example of systematic human rights violations.

Beyond Xinjiang, the use of artificial intelligence in Chinese governance raises questions about authoritarian control of information. Automated censorship, driven by algorithms capable of identifying and blocking content deemed sensitive by the Chinese Communist Party, represents a significant risk to freedom of expression and access to information. Technology companies such as *Baidu* and *Tencent* have developed advanced filtering systems that restrict the circulation of certain narratives on the internet, consolidating a digital ecosystem in which the state has almost absolute control over information flows. This model could set a precedent for other regimes with authoritarian tendencies, which could adopt similar systems to strengthen their control over the population.

Another ethical problem posed by Chinese artificial intelligence is the lack of transparency in its development and application processes (Kanellopoulos, 2024).

The absence of external audits and limited public information on the performance of algorithms used in security and defense make it difficult to assess the biases and errors that may arise in these systems. Since artificial intelligence relies on large volumes of data for training, the lack of diversity in the data sets used can generate biases that perpetuate discrimination and errors in decision making. In a context where artificial intelligence becomes a pillar of national security, opacity in its design and application represents a challenge for accountability and responsible governance of these technologies.

5.2 Risks of proliferation of autonomous weapons

The expansion of artificial intelligence in the military has led the international community to question the impact of autonomous weapons and the possibility of effective regulation (Khan *et al.*, 2021). China has made significant progress in developing artificial intelligence-driven combat systems, including autonomous drones, automated defense systems, and electronic warfare platforms capable of operating without direct human intervention. These developments have intensified the debate on the proliferation of autonomous weapons and the need to establish control mechanisms to prevent their indiscriminate use.

The main challenge in the regulation of autonomous weapons lies in the lack of consensus among the major powers. While countries such as the United States and China have invested in combat automation as part of their military modernization strategy, other international actors, including the European Union, have advocated stricter regulation to limit the use of lethal systems without human supervision. At the United Nations, debates on banning or limiting autonomous weapons have been divisive, with proposals ranging from a total ban to more flexible regulations allowing their use in certain circumstances.

The central problem with the proliferation of autonomous weapons is their potential to trigger a new arms race based on artificial intelligence. Unlike conventional weapons, which require large production and deployment infrastructures, autonomous systems can be developed and replicated with relative ease, increasing the risk that non-state actors, including terrorist groups and criminal organizations, can gain access to these technologies (Qiao-Franco and Bode, 2023). In addition, the lack of clarity in security protocols to avoid failures in automated decision making represents a significant risk, as an error in the algorithms of these systems could lead to incidents with catastrophic consequences.

The possibility of establishing an effective regulatory framework will depend on the international community's ability to negotiate agreements that balance innovation with global security. The creation of mechanisms for verification, auditing and oversight of developments in artificial intelligence applied to defense will be crucial to avoid an uncontrolled escalation in the use of these technologies in armed conflicts.

5.3 Future scenarios: How will technological competition evolve?

The future of artificial intelligence in the field of international security will depend on how technological competition between the major powers evolves (Hunter, 2025). There are multiple possible scenarios, each with different implications for global stability. One of the most plausible scenarios is China's dominance in the development of artificial intelligence, consolidating its leadership in key sectors such as natural language processing, defense automation and cybersecurity. This scenario would imply a shift in the global power structure, with China's increased influence on regulation and international standards for artificial intelligence (Khalid, 2025).

Another possible scenario is the fragmentation of technological power, with competition among multiple players developing their own digital infrastructures and artificial intelligence platforms. In this context, the United States, the European Union and their allies would seek to reduce their dependence on Chinese technology by promoting the development of independent artificial intelligence ecosystems. This fragmentation could lead to greater polarization in access to technology and a dispute over digital sovereignty in different regions of the world.

In terms of security and defense, the hot spots around artificial intelligence could intensify in areas such as cybersecurity, electronic warfare, and information manipulation. Artificial intelligence will continue to be a key factor in hybrid warfare strategies, increasing the need for more sophisticated digital defense mechanisms (Admass *et al.*, 2024). In addition, the potential integration of artificial intelligence into strategic weapons and deterrence systems could generate new dynamics in nuclear stability and international conflict management.

The development of artificial intelligence poses both opportunities and challenges for international security. While its potential to improve efficiency and decision-making is undeniable, its use without clear regulations could destabilize the global balance and generate new forms of conflict (Cavelty and Wenger, 2022). In this context, the international community faces the challenge of defining the limits and control mechanisms that guarantee the responsible development of these technologies, preventing them from becoming a threat to world peace and security.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

The development of artificial intelligence in China has significantly transformed the global security and geopolitical landscape. Throughout this analysis, multiple dimensions have been identified in which artificial intelligence has been used as a strategic enabler, from its integration into defense and cybersecurity systems to its application in mass surveillance and information control. Artificial intelligence has not only enabled China to enhance its military and intelligence capabilities, but has also strengthened its influence in the global technological arena, challenging the traditional leadership of the United States and raising concerns about the impact of these technologies on international stability.

One of the key findings of this study is the central role of artificial intelligence in China's military modernization. Through combat automation, the development of autonomous weapons, and the application of advanced algorithms in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, the PLA has consolidated its position as one of the most advanced military forces in the use of AI. However, the lack of transparency in the development of these systems and the absence of clear regulations at the international level pose significant risks, especially with regard to the proliferation of autonomous weapons and the potential use of artificial intelligence in hybrid conflicts and cyber-attacks.

In the field of digital security, China has used artificial intelligence to strengthen its capabilities in cyber espionage and information manipulation. Automating cyberattacks and using algorithms to influence public opinion have been key strategies in expanding its power in cyberspace, leading to a response from the United States, the European Union and its allies in the form of sanctions, technological restrictions and the development of more sophisticated cyber defense strategies. However, the speed with which China is advancing in this field poses a considerable challenge for Western democracies, which must strike a balance between security and the protection of fundamental rights in the development and regulation of artificial intelligence.

Likewise, the use of artificial intelligence in mass surveillance and social control has generated international concern. The implementation of facial recognition technologies, biometric data analysis and automated censorship has consolidated a model of digital governance based on monitoring and restricting freedom of expression. This approach not only raises questions about the ethical limits of artificial intelligence, but could also serve as a reference for other authoritarian regimes seeking to strengthen their control through the use of these technologies.

6.1 Proposals for a global governance of AI in security

Given these challenges, it is essential to develop a global governance framework for artificial intelligence that guarantees its responsible use and reduces the risks associated with its uncontrolled proliferation. One of the main challenges in this regard is the need to establish international standards to regulate the use of artificial intelligence in the military and security sphere. The creation of multilateral treaties prohibiting or limiting the use of autonomous weapons without human intervention would be a first step in this direction, although their implementation faces obstacles due to the lack of consensus among the major powers.

In the field of cybersecurity, it is crucial to strengthen international cooperation to prevent and mitigate the effects of artificial intelligence-driven cyberattacks. Collaboration between countries in sharing cyber threat information and creating joint response mechanisms could improve the resilience of critical digital infrastructures and reduce vulnerability to automated attacks.

Another key aspect of the global governance of artificial intelligence is the regulation of the use of these technologies in surveillance and social control (Calderaro and Blumfelde, 2022). The international community must promote standards that protect human rights and establish clear limits on the collection and use of personal data in artificial intelligence systems. In this regard, the European Union has taken significant steps with its proposed Artificial Intelligence Regulation, which could serve as a reference for the development of regulations at the global level.

In addition, there is a need to encourage the development of artificial intelligence with a focus on transparency and accountability. The creation of independent bodies responsible for auditing the operation of algorithms used in security and defense could help prevent abuses and ensure that these technologies are used in an ethical and responsible manner.

6.2 Implications for Spain: risks, capabilities and strategic challenges

The advance of artificial intelligence as a geopolitical asset —especially in the case of China— has important implications for Spain at various levels. From the defense point of view, the increasing automation of conflict and the integration of AI-based technologies in the military doctrines of strategic actors force the Spanish Armed Forces to adapt to highly digitized operational scenarios. In this sense, it is a priority to strengthen capabilities in areas such as cyber defense, electronic warfare, autonomous systems and predictive analytics, in coordination with the initiatives promoted by NATO and the European Union. As the Department of Homeland Security points out in its Homeland Security Report 2023, technological transformation represents a source of both opportunity and vulnerability, being essential to anticipate the "strategic impacts of disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence in the field of defense and digital sovereignty" (Department of Homeland Security, 2023).

In the field of Public Administrations, the growing dependence on intelligent systems in critical sectors —such as infrastructure management, telecommunications or e-government— requires a national resilience strategy that combines technological robustness, solid regulatory frameworks and public-private cooperation to mitigate the risks associated with the malicious use of AI, especially in contexts of espionage, disinformation or foreign interference. The recent approval of the European Regulation on Artificial Intelligence offers Spain an advanced regulatory platform from which to contribute to the formulation of international standards of technological governance, ensuring compatibility between innovation, security and fundamental rights.

Finally, from a social perspective, Spanish civil society is also challenged by the effects that artificial intelligence may have on employment, privacy and democratic quality. The automation of processes, massive data collection and the possibility of algorithmic manipulation of information demand a proactive approach based on digital education, institutional transparency and citizen participation in technological decision-making. In this context, it is essential to prevent the digital transformation, marked by competition between powers such as China and the United States,

from resulting in structural vulnerabilities, and instead promote a model of ethical, inclusive and strategically autonomous technological development for Spain.

6.3 Future lines of research

The advance of artificial intelligence in the field of security raises multiple questions about its impact on global power dynamics and future military doctrines. Among the main lines of research to be addressed in the coming years, the following stand out:

- **How will AI affect future military doctrines?** The automation of combat, the integration of autonomous systems into strategic planning and the possibility of artificial intelligence making operational decisions without human intervention could completely transform the nature of armed conflict. It is critical to analyze the implications of these changes and assess the risks associated with the loss of human control in military operations.
- **What role will international alliances play in AI regulation?** The fragmentation of technological power and the growing rivalry between major powers could make it difficult to adopt global regulations on artificial intelligence. It will be crucial to study how alliances between the United States, the European Union, Japan, India and other strategic players can influence the creation of regulatory frameworks that promote the responsible use of AI in security and defense.
- **Can China consolidate its position as the dominant power in AI or will there be a fragmentation of power?** While China has made significant progress in the development of artificial intelligence, the United States and its allies have taken steps to restrict its access to key technologies, such as advanced semiconductors and high-performance processors. In this context, it is important to analyze whether China will achieve technological self-sufficiency and consolidate its leadership in AI or whether, on the contrary, there will be a fragmentation of power with multiple poles of technological development.
- **How can the risks of autonomous weapons proliferation be mitigated?** The possibility of these technologies being used by non-state actors or in conflicts without clear regulation represents one of the most pressing challenges in international security. Future research should focus on strategies to prevent unauthorized access to these technologies and on the creation of effective verification and control mechanisms.

Artificial intelligence is redefining the global balance of power and its impact on international security will remain a central issue on the geopolitical agenda for decades to come. While its development offers unprecedented opportunities for innovation and optimization of strategic processes, it also poses significant challenges that must be addressed with a holistic approach. The international community faces the challenge of establishing a governance framework that ensures that artificial intelligence is used ethically, securely and for the benefit of global stability. Without effective regulation

and strong international cooperation, the risk of artificial intelligence becoming a factor of destabilization and conflict will continue to grow, with unforeseeable consequences for the global order.

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British signals intelligence on Argentine naval communications in the Falklands War: procurement, processing and foreign collaboration

Abstract

Although the interception of Argentine naval communications by British intelligence in the Falklands War played a decisive role in the conflict, many questions, such as those related to its scope, its real relevance in the conflict, and almost everything related to how these interceptions took place, remain unresolved today. The purpose of this article is to advance in the understanding of these questions, in the absence of a declassification of the official documentation on the subject. To this end, we analyze the most probable means of acquisition, the intelligence activity prior to the Argentine landing operation and try to contextualize it with the most recent information related to the cooperation in intelligence matters between Americans and British in the past decades, since it seems to offer a powerful explanatory framework to understand how the services involved operated. In this way, it is intended to provide criteria to evaluate, or re-evaluate, more precisely the factors that decided the outcome and conditioned the development of the war.

Keywords

SIGINT, GCHQ, NSA, satellite.

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1 Introduction

Although the acquisition of naval communications intelligence in the Falklands War by the British had a decisive impact on the development and final outcome of the conflict, there are still large gaps in knowledge on this subject. In the body of works and studies on the conflict, the account becomes diffuse with regard to data on the means, ways of obtaining and collaboration of the United Kingdom with other countries in this work.

In general, the nature, provenance and manner of obtaining certain information that was at the basis of key actions and decisions is generally avoided or omitted, and any clue dies in a generic reference to British intelligence. Obviously, there is no more publicly accessible data. It is normal for States to jealously guard information relating to their intelligence operations, actions, means and personnel, and we will only have full access to it when it is declassified.

However, it is known that a large part of the messaging between Argentine units at sea and their commanders was intercepted, evaluated by the UK intelligence and used by the UK government, as well as by the deployed force, in its planning and decision making. A significant example would be the messages from April 29 to May 1, including that of May 1, from Admiral Gualter Óscar Allara, commander of the Argentine task force, embarked on the aircraft carrier *25 de Mayo*, ordering to initiate the attack on the British fleet, with important information regarding plans, intentions and positions of the Argentine units (Freedman, 2005: 233, 242-243).

Among the most prominent users of signals intelligence were the *Royal Navy*'s nuclear submarines (SSNs). According to Admiral Peter Herbert, the commanding officer of the UK nuclear submarines, "GCHQ Cheltenham was by far the most important source of intelligence on Argentine naval forces. Their contribution was invaluable to the success of the submarine campaign" (Herbert, quoted in Sciaroni, 2019: 43), i.e., GCHQ (*Government Communications Headquarters*), responsible for signals intelligence, was the main source of information for British submarines. Numerous indications point to the fact that this information would have been more than enough to intercept and sink the cruiser ARA (Armada de la República Argentina) *Belgrano* (Rossiter, 2008: ch. 10; Freedman, 2005: 233, 242-243; Jinks and Hennessy, 2015: ch. 7), the second largest ship of the Argentine Navy, despite the fact that the British almost certainly had more sources[1]. The aircraft carrier *25 de Mayo* was in serious danger of being located by nuclear submarines on several occasions (Freedman, 2005: 233, 243; Jinks and Hennessy, 2015: ch. 7), largely for this reason, and it was also a signal intercept that launched the search for the submarine *San Luis* by another SSN (Sciaroni and Smith, 2020: 29; Jinks and Hennessy, 2015: ch. 7). In

1 For example, the probable communication to the British authorities of the departure of the Belgrano from the port of Ushuaia, which will be discussed later; the use of satellites or other means cannot be ruled out either.

addition, the movements of some ships transiting off the Argentine mainland coast were being monitored by British intelligence and passed to submarines in the area, apparently with information from similar sources. Intelligence data, such as that one of the ships had a damaged shaft, or that they were heading to specific areas (Jinks and Hennessy, 2015: ch. 7), indicate that this may not be imagery or radar information, but espionage or, most likely, intercepted messages.

Most of the captured messages of which we are aware, having affected in some way the course of the war, had common characteristics. They are communications between commanders, on land or at sea, and units at sea, with information concerning plans, intentions, orders, *rendezvous* points, areas of operations, as well as unit reports, evaluations and other information from units to these commanders. Messages of an operational, rather than tactical nature, which offer a more general perspective and in which the sender and receiver are far apart and, by the latter, we can deduce that they are high frequency (HF) communications.

This paper aims to advance in the understanding of how British intelligence managed to penetrate the Argentine Navy's communications system, and to what extent. In order to narrow down the study, the paper will focus on the scope and relevance of the means most likely used to obtain this type of intelligence and on the support received by the United Kingdom in this area. Despite the contribution of important European nations in the field of signals intelligence and other types of intelligence, the paper will mainly deal with the collaboration with the United States as it is a fundamental piece to understand its way of operating.

The study makes use of information that has emerged in recent years on U.S.-U.K. collaboration in this facet of intelligence over several decades. It also takes advantage of an interesting circumstance that allows to reduce the possible options to a few. It is the significant interceptions by British intelligence that occurred before the seizure of the islands by the Argentine Navy, and long before the deployment of the *Royal Navy* in the area.

This work presupposes a certain knowledge of the reader about the conflict, the geography of the area, the historical and geopolitical circumstances in which it took place and, ideally, about principles of naval communications, so it does not delve into facts or topics of general knowledge and easily accessible. Nor does it delve into topics that, although related, are not the focus of the study, mainly the interceptions of March 1982, except insofar as they are relevant to the analysis.

2 Some unknowns about the satellites

In November 1986, U.S. Navy Admiral Harry Train gave lectures at the National Defense College, the University of Belgrano and the Naval War College in Argentina. The admiral had been commander in chief of the U.S. Navy's Atlantic Fleet, i.e., he had command of the U.S. forces in the area where the conflict took place (Train, 1987). Much progress has been made since then in the knowledge of

what happened in those weeks in the South Atlantic. Many of the unknowns that still existed in the years following the conflict, some of which were raised in the post-conference discussions, have been resolved over the years, but others are not fully clarified today.

One of the questions the admiral was asked, and for which there is still no clear answer today, had to do with the alleged support, on the part of the United States, to the British, with information from its own satellites. According to Train, the satellites used by both countries were purchased jointly, so the United Kingdom would have the same right as the United States to use them for whatever it deemed necessary. The admiral focuses on imaging satellites (Train, 1987: 254). While these might provide information from a fleet at any given time, their usefulness for tactical level employment, he argues, would be low. However, while it is true that tactically this information may be of little use, as it would arrive late, because of the processing time required, and that it provides little data on future intentions, it could also lead to a more detailed search with reconnaissance or maritime patrol aircraft, although we know that the British fleet lacked these. If the located force remained for a while in the same area, a few days, because it was close to a base, training or as part of a plan, and this was, more or less, the situation of the *Belgrano*, a nuclear submarine could be deploy that could relocate it with its own sensors. Even better if the satellite can update the position regularly. The thing changes if it is a force in transit that protects itself with changes of course and speed so as not to give away its intentions to the satellite.

The admiral also mentions radar satellites and states that they were not available at that time; moreover, they were not very developed, and their use would need to be complemented by other means of collection, such as imaging or electronic warfare satellites to allow some kind of identification or classification of contacts.

The aforementioned officer also explains the possibility that electronic warfare satellites could give an approximate idea of where enemy ships are located, as long as they were emitting some type of electromagnetic radiation, coming from radars or communications equipment, while insisting again on the impossibility of obtaining movement information by these means, much less in a reasonable time for tactical use (Train, 1987: 238, 254-255).

However, and based on the above argumentation, one of the interlocutors asks a question that shows that the admiral has not told everything. Indeed, if, as he stated, no satellite information allowed to obtain naval tactical information, such as kinematic data (related to course and speed) and much less about intentions, how did the United States and the United Kingdom know, days before the execution of Operation Rosario (the Argentine amphibious operation by which the islands were taken), the direction of the force and that a landing was about to be carried out imminently? Evidently, the admiral's answer did not provide anything new, or he did not want to go deeper into the subject, simply conjecturing that it could be related to electronic interceptions, without specifying, for example, what kind, let alone what or who could be intercepting them.

3 Imminence of the landing

Since mid-March 1982, incidents related to the presence of Argentine workers in South Georgia, a British possession some 700 miles from the Malvinas Islands, had been escalating in intensity until they generated, especially from the 19th, a diplomatic uproar to which the Ministry of Defense was not indifferent. On Sunday, March 28, the British Minister of Defense, John Nott, was reading at home an intelligence report of the previous day, according to which there were indications that all the submarines of the Argentine Navy had put to sea, which was true for the submersible *Santa Fe*. When he read the report, he did not think that the Malvinas were under any threat, but that the situation in the Georgias was worse than they believed (Rossiter, 2008: ch. 6; Mayorga, 1998: 60; Nott, 2002: 252).

However, that same day, the 28th, British intelligence intercepted a message addressed to the *Santa Fe* that would be analyzed the following day. It was ordered to go to some coordinates and carry out a reconnaissance of the beach in preparation for a landing; the coordinates indicated a point located, not in the Georgias, but in the vicinity of Puerto Stanley (later renamed Puerto Argentino) (Rossiter, 2008: ch. 6). That same day the bulk of the Argentine fleet set sail with the mission of taking control of the Malvinas Islands as part of Operation Rosario. On the 30th, Admiral Allara, after meeting with his commanders, decided to change the date of the landing from April 1st to April 2nd due to the terrible weather conditions (Mayorga, 1998: 60-61). On the 31st, Rear Admiral Büsser, commander of the landing force, sent a message to Buenos Aires communicating the postponement of the landing, but this message was also intercepted. The GCHQ, the government's signals intelligence agency and British counterpart of the American NSA (*National Security Agency*), decoded it and delivered it to the various government departments (Rossiter, 2008: ch. 6).

Parallel to the worrying flow of information pointing to an even greater source of tension in the Malvinas than in the Georgias, the first decisions were not long in coming. With Margaret Thatcher's approval, on the same day, the 29th, it was agreed to deploy nuclear submarines to the South Atlantic (Rossiter, 2008: Prologue). The SSN HMS *Spartan*, which was on maneuvers in the waters near Gibraltar, received a strange message on the submarine telephone from the frigate HMS *Brilliant*: it told her to head for Gibraltar immediately; there she would receive detailed instructions. In addition, he would embark provisions, torpedoes and other material to put to sea on March 31 bound for the Malvinas; it should be noted that this was his destination, not Georgias (Jinks and Hennessy, 2015: ch. 7).

On the morning of the 30th, John Nott gave the order to enlist a second submarine: HMS *Splendid* aborted her mission to follow a Soviet nuclear submarine in the North Atlantic and headed for her base at Faslane in order to prepare for deployment to the Falklands. That afternoon, a third submarine, HMS *Conqueror*, which was at the base ready to enter a five-week maintenance period, received a call from the duty officer at the base announcing that the ship had orders to enlist for war (Nott, 2002: 253; Rossiter, 2008: ch. 1).

On the afternoon of March 31, the same day that the message from Rear Admiral Büsser was intercepted, revealing the date of the landing, John Nott received a *briefing* in his office in the House of Commons in which he was given clear evidence that on April 2 there would be an Argentine landing in the Falklands (Nott, 2002: 257; Aldrich, 2010: 397-398). It was on that same day, March 31, two days before the Argentine landing, when Henry Leach, the First Sea Lord, meeting with Margaret Thatcher and John Nott, proposed to the Prime Minister to send a fleet to recover the islands, since defending them from invasion would not be feasible. Leach relied on an intelligence report that assessed the situation and for which more information was available than previously stated (Rossiter, 2008: ch. 6).

However, simply the messages ordering the submarine to proceed to a point near Port Stanley for a preliminary reconnaissance and especially that of March 31, confirming the start of operations for April 2, would have more than justified the measures that were taken: sending three nuclear submarines, because of the possibility of an Argentine landing, and the decision to send a fleet, once it was confirmed that the landing would take place, with a specific date and with the ships involved already at sea.

British intelligence had more information at the time of writing the report, which undoubtedly helped to reinforce the landing hypothesis, providing a more general and consistent view of the situation, and ruling out, for example, that it was some kind of deception operation. Also, it should have helped the intelligence analysts to counter the argument that it would probably come to nothing, as had happened in previous years. The dispatch on 20 March of the *Endurance* (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, 1991: 52-53; Prince, 2002), which was in Port Stanley, to South Georgia in order to evacuate Argentine personnel provoked the response of the Argentine military junta, which deployed several ships to prevent it. The United Kingdom put its intelligence services to work and sought support from those of the United States: the situation was becoming more confused (Gavshon and Rice, 1984: 44; Keegan, 2003: Epilogue). The British had closed their MI6 station in Buenos Aires for budgetary reasons, on which the CIA depended for human source intelligence (HUMINT) (Hastings and Jenkins, 2011: ch. 3; Keegan, 2003: Epilogue).

Nevertheless, they were not as uninformed about Argentine movements as some sources, especially British, imply. GCHQ and the NSA had detected a noticeable increase in the volume of radio communications traffic in the South Atlantic since mid-March, caused not only by Argentine ships, but also by Chilean vessels (Aldrich, 2010: 395; Keegan, 2003: Epilogue).

The Argentine Navy was conducting annual exercises with the Uruguayan Navy; from March 17 to 25, a large part of the Argentine fleet was at sea for this purpose (Facchin, 2022: 71; Hastings and Jenkins, 2011: ch. 3, Appendix D) and, between March 24 and 25, the GCHQ intercepted a message in which Admiral Jorge Isaac Anaya ordered, from Buenos Aires, to detach the corvettes ARA *Drummond* and ARA *Granville* to a point between South Georgia and the Falklands to intercept *the Endurance,* which was already in the vicinity of Georgias. Also, between the 24th

and 25th more Argentine signals are captured with intelligence information about the *Endurance* and the *Royal Marines* (Aldrich, 2010: 395; Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, 2011: 88; Hastings and Jenkins, 2011: ch. 3; Middlebrook, 2012: ch. 2; Rossiter, 2008: ch. 3).

On the other hand, British intelligence, as stated earlier, had access to other sources of information outside signals intelligence. In an assessment of the situation, available to ministers on the 28th, various facts were reported. Leave in the Argentine Navy had been cancelled, supplies and equipment had been sent to the naval bases at Puerto Belgrano and Comodoro Rivadavia and, at a meeting of high-level diplomats in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Minister Costa Méndez had reported that the decision had been taken to capture the Malvinas. At the same time, Argentine embassies had been ordered to cancel Easter leave and await developments. However, despite providing a series of consistent indications, none of this implied that the invasion was imminent (Hastings and Jenkins, 2011: ch. 3); for this, the messages intercepted and referred to above, with references to concrete actions and dates and with a fleet already at sea, were decisive.

4 Procurement

Given the critical importance of this type of interceptions, it is worth analyzing under what circumstances they took place; specifically, how British intelligence was able to access these signals, despite the cuts that were taking place in different areas related to defense, the remoteness of Argentina and the absence of infrastructure and resources in the region. An achievement that, at first sight, seems beyond the reach of any nation that is not a superpower and that, undoubtedly, tipped the balance of the conflict in favor of the British.

One of the first occasions in which the exploitation of the electromagnetic spectrum in the South Atlantic by British intelligence can be noted took place more than a week before Operation Rosario, during the escalation of tension in Georgias, even before the Board gave the order to start the operation and at a time when it was not even considered advisable to send a nuclear submarine to the area. In this regard, Vice Admiral Herbert did not see it reasonable to send a nuclear submarine to the South Atlantic, even later than March 29, for a few junkyard ships in Georgia (Rossiter, 2008: Prologue). But somehow, both the NSA and GCHQ had detected a rapid increase in the volume of communications traffic due to maneuvers by the Chilean and Argentine Navies, which occurred again on the 31st (Aldrich, 2010: 395-397; Keegan, 2003: Epilogue) and, on about the 24th, the message ordering two corvettes to detach to South Georgia was intercepted.

So, who could be intercepting these signals? If we focus on those of the 24th, the only British ship of certain relevance in the South Atlantic and with the capacity to intercept electromagnetic emissions (SIGINT), was the *Endurance*, but it had sailed around the 21st heading for Georgia, and on the 24th it was in this area, more than 1000 miles southeast of Mar del Plata, in whose proximity the corvettes were located

(Mayorga, 1988: 46). The fact that they were close to the coast implies the possibility that communications had been made in UHF, VHF or HF with low power or discrete modes, which would limit the possibility of interception to a few hundred miles centered in this part of the Argentine territory. In addition, the *Endurance* had not been detecting more than signals of little interest from the beginning of the crisis in Georgia until the date of the invasion (Aldrich, 2010: 396).

Could they have been North American SIGINT satellites? The truth is that they do not seem to be good candidates either. For the United States, Argentina was not a priority intelligence target, at least in purely military matters, in which it was justified to invest scarce satellite resources. But all indications are that at least one VORTEX satellite, probably the one put into orbit in October 1981, provided information to the British. This series of satellites was primarily intended to obtain signals intelligence (SIGINT), mainly Soviet strategic communications (Day, 2022); in the case at hand, they could have seamlessly intercepted radio frequency communications between the Argentine command and its forces, including messaging, and specifically communications with naval units at sea, if they had been used for that purpose. One of the great advantages of the use of satellites over ground stations or units at sea is their ability to intercept emissions at the higher frequencies, i.e. UHF (Ultra High Frequency) and VHF (Very High Frequency)[2]. However, in 1982, the Americans had not achieved global coverage with their spy satellites, and it was not easy for the British to get this kind of support from their greatest ally. At the time, the Reagan administration was intercepting communications in Central America with this type of satellite, the region closest to the South Atlantic covered with them. A British GCHQ officer who liaised with the NSA stated that "We had to negotiate very hard to get it moved, and then only for limited periods" (anonymous officer, quoted in Urban, 1996: 57), i.e., it was necessary to negotiate very hard to get the Americans to agree to move them, and only for short periods of time. During these limited windows of a few hours at a time, only GCHQ would monitor signal traffic, and report back to the NSA if there was anything of interest (Aldrich, 2010: 441; Urban, 1996: 57). While it seems undoubted that this collaboration took place, it is unlikely that it occurred before April.

It was only at the end of March that Thatcher's cabinet began to pay attention to the crisis in South Georgia, but they were not yet even considering a crisis over the Falklands. On the 19th, at the start of the crisis in Georgia, the Commander of the Fleet was instructed to investigate the possibility of sending ships to the Falklands, rather as a show of British resolve, but nothing urgent: a deployment in the next nine months was considered adequate. The conclusions were little short of disappointing, as any option would be too costly (Rossiter, 2008: ch. 6). It is possible that the type

2 These emissions propagate in a straight line and are limited to the horizon (a few tens of miles), once passed, they continue in a straight line into space. Only aircraft flying very high and relatively close to the source, or satellites, could intercept them due to the curvature of the earth. Lower frequency waves, such as HF, refract in the atmosphere and can propagate following the curvature of the earth, reaching ranges of thousands of nautical miles.

of conflict they expected, low intensity, something akin to the South Thule crisis in 1977 (Rossiter, 2008: ch. 6; Hastings and Jenkins, 2011: ch. 2), hardly compensated for even a minimal deployment.

The nine-month deadline relates to the assessments and estimates of bodies such as the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) on the status negotiations with Argentina. As of June 1981, the JIC estimated that, if the Board perceived that London was refusing to seriously include the issue of sovereignty over the islands in the negotiations, it would resort to more coercive means, being able to act even without notice, although it would most likely escalate gradually with more limited measures. Already at this stage it was considered that it would be very difficult and very costly to provide a military response to many of the actions Argentina might take to exert pressure (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, 1991: 17-19). By the end of 1979, the Foreign Secretary, Lord Carrington, had already stated that the attitude of conceding nothing on sovereignty carried with it a serious threat of invasion. However, in February 1982, a series of reports that ended up on Margaret Thatcher's desk provided more concrete information. They already warned that, during that year, a confrontation, almost certainly military, seemed inevitable with Argentina (Gavshon and Rice, 1984: 18-31). If it occurred, the intelligence estimated that it would most likely take place at the end of the year, after a gradual increase in tension (Hastings and Jenkins, 2011: ch. 3).

In this scenario, which we can estimate would start to change from March 28 and, above all, from March 31, it is doubtful that the GCHQ was pressured to negotiate with the NSA the reorientation of its satellites, starting on the 19th and obtaining the first relevant intercepts on the 24th, two days before the first orders were given to invade Malvinas, and only one day after the invasion was decided, which was supposed to be a secret decision, and moreover in the reduced daily windows of use; even more so when they gave themselves nine months to take action. The very decision to send the *Endurance* to Georgia had been made by the Prime Minister without consulting anyone else. With the possibility of a confrontation still seen as remote, Admiral Terence Lewin, Chief of Defence Staff, had no problem in traveling to New Zealand at that time, after endorsing the Prime Minister's decision regarding the *Endurance* (Prince, 2002).

On the other hand, the US Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, had assured President Galtieri that reports that the United States had provided the British with intelligence and satellite information were not true. This conversation took place in early April, after the revealing intercepts of March (Day, 2022; Freedman, 1986: 314). Haig would later reassure again that they did not provide intelligence support before the collapse of the negotiations, which occurred on April 30, when he announced that the negotiations had failed and that the United States would support the United Kingdom (Haig, 1984: 293, 296). However, it should be borne in mind that the public or private statements of political leaders during the war, or even afterwards, should not be taken at face value; it is not usual for them to lie, since they would lose credibility for later occasions, but neither do they provide, evidently, precise or clear information; the truth is that reality is much more complex and allows playing with language. In fact, as we shall see, Haig was not entirely lying when he said that he

had not supplied intelligence to the UK, but it is also certain that, without the US, the British would have had access to little more than weather information messages, as far as naval signals intelligence is concerned; it is also very likely, as we have been arguing, that they would not (yet) have provided satellite information; which would be more understandable if there were already other less scarce and cheaper means of obtaining it available. This last reason, that the US and UK had other cheaper and more abundant means of obtaining signals intelligence, is, in fact, postulated as one of the main arguments as to why satellites were not resorted to.

But, if it wasn't the satellites, what could be intercepting communications traffic these days?

The next option to consider is electromagnetic signal search stations. The NSA had an extensive network of such stations in different parts of the globe, and they would certainly account for much of this kind of interception, especially with regard to naval communications. In the early 1960s, while the Soviet Union was little less than surrounded by ELINT stations, there was hardly any coverage in South America; among the closest would be Panama and Puerto Rico. During the conflict, there would also be Ascension, a CGHQ post run by some thirty professionals (Bamford, 1987: 274; Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, 1991: 86), and stations on the Dutch island of Curaçao, operated by Dutch and possibly Americans, which did operate on the island at least in the 1960s, and which appears to have been able to achieve some results during the conflict (Wiebes, 2005: 262; Platje, 2005: 311).

But it seems more realistic to think, given the great efficiency in interception, that this took place in closer posts. According to some sources, U.S. tracking stations in southern Chile would be responsible for most of this type of interceptions (Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, 1991: 131; Hastings and Jenkins, 2011: ch. 3 and 8). The truth is that they would not only explain the detection of signals of Chilean and Argentine maneuvers and key messages in early stages, but would also be an option that would more reasonably guarantee, during the war, the obtaining of signals continuously and without time limitations, as would be the case of satellites or aerial means such as the Nimrod, although this type of reception has other disadvantages.

Going further into this hypothesis, the border area between Chile and Argentina in the south was also a focus of tension at that time. Disputes over the Beagle Channel had almost brought the two countries to war in 1978 and, as of January 1982, the dispute reached another peak of tension. The Argentine government moved troops to the border with Chile and relations between the two countries hit rock bottom (Hastings and Jenkins, 2011: ch. 3).

Argentina had sought problems with Chile and the United Kingdom practically at the same time, in the Beagle conflict with the neighboring country in 1978 and in a first crisis with the British over the South Thule Island in 1977, which undoubtedly marked the strategy to be followed by the latter regarding the South Atlantic dispute in the following years. It would not be unreasonable to think that the British would have approached Pinochet's regime offering collaboration in the face of a common threat from 1978 onwards.

British intelligence, conditioned by the 1977 crisis, was guided by a few principles regarding the Malvinas and Georgias. On the one hand, at the beginning of 1982, it believed that, if there was any military pressure on the Malvinas, it would not take place before the end of the year, and that it would be preceded by clear diplomatic signals, such as pressure at the UN and public statements highlighting the lack of involvement of the United Kingdom in the resolution of the dispute. On the other hand, the British intelligence community felt pressured by the fact that it had raised the alarm in 1977, with much more tension than they expected for the incident in South Georgia, without Argentina actually having any invasion planned, and did not want to be exposed again; for that it would have to have more solid criteria. Finally, he felt that Argentina should not be responded to in a way that might push the country into a pre-emptive attack before they were prepared to deal with it (Hastings and Jenkins, 2011: ch. 3); interestingly, this seems to be what finally happened with the dispatch of the *Endurance* to South Georgia.

With respect to the first estimate, that any military pressure would not take place before the end of the year, it can be said that his assessments were not far off the mark. At the end of 1981, Admiral Anaya, then commander-in-chief of the Argentine Navy, commissioned Admiral Lombardo, during a brief meeting in Puerto Belgrano, in person, to plan the recovery of the islands. As Anaya told him, the intention was indeed to exhaust the diplomatic route, underway at that time, and to resort to military means only if it failed; initially a deadline was set to be ready to operate between July and August (Aldrich, 2010: 393; Gavshon and Rice, 1984: 28-30; Mayorga, 1988: 38-41, 57). Taking into account the reports of February 1982 and the intentions expressed by the Argentine admiral, it seems difficult to think that the British intelligence was not at least partially aware of the intentions and movements of the Junta, and especially of those of Anaya in this regard, since they could hardly have estimated such a specific date limit without knowing the intentions of the Junta, or of its members, which was the only authority with the power to initiate the necessary actions for an invasion and according to its will. In this regard, it is interesting the account of the then commander of the *Endurance*, Nick Barker, who insists on the warnings he received from the Chileans during his visit to Punta Arenas, at the end of January, that the Argentine intentions were not at all friendly. According to him, the Chileans would have been the first to discover Anaya's invasion plan and he emphasizes the role of the Chilean intelligence, which he considered better informed than the British in these matters (Barker, 2002: ch. 7).

But continuing with the southern tip of the American continent; British intelligence had selected some indicators that should alert it that the invasion was underway. One of these would be the mobilization of mountain brigades on the Chilean border, the most obvious choice for the islands. It is known that GCHQ was monitoring the radio frequency traffic of these brigades: as long as they were on the border, there would be no danger (Keegan, 2003: Epilogue). But, as we know, this did not happen. The initial operations were carried out by the Argentine Navy and Marines in their entirety, and later elements of brigades that were not on the border were deployed for fear of a Chilean reaction, taking advantage of the conjuncture

(Aldrich, 2010: 394-395; Keegan, 2003: Epilogue). But what would be interesting in this matter would be to be able to answer the questions concerning how British intelligence was obtaining those signals: had they reached an agreement with the Chileans to deploy signals interception stations in their territory or to use the Chilean means of signals intelligence jointly? was it the American station in southern Chile alone that was monitoring? or was it all three ways?

Various sources claim that Chile actively intercepted Argentine intelligence to then send it to the British (Treharne, 2015: 67-68; Richelson, 1988: 58), beyond lending territory for electronic interception Nimrod aircraft or Punta Arenas radar. According to journalist Duncan Campbell, Chile reached an agreement, shortly after the war began, with the British government, whereby a complete exchange of intelligence was agreed, including the monitoring and deciphering of Argentine communications to be carried out by Chilean naval intelligence; in exchange, Pinochet would not only obtain collaboration to protect his nation from Argentine aggression, but the United Kingdom would commit, as has been subsequently proven, to look the other way with respect to the regime's violations against human rights (Campbell, 1985). General Fernando Matthei, a member of the Chilean Military Junta and openly Anglophile, gives some clues as to how the collaboration in communications intelligence matters would have been:

> "[...] I opened up to him everything we had in terms of intelligence. Our intelligence was not about agents, it was not about espionage; it was about a... permanent monitoring of what the other side was doing, by means of electronic equipment, listening... to transmissions, communications, radar emissions, all that, and... to fix the positions and to have... to know what equipment they had" (Matthei, interviewed in Televisión Nacional de Chile, 2022: 19m33s).

However, this collaboration seems to have begun weeks after the seizure of the islands. The British liaison officer who would contact Matthei was advised on April 11 that he would be the liaison in Chile to coordinate part of this support (Edwards, 2014: ch. 1), which could indicate that, if communications were being monitored earlier, it would be through the Americans, or else, through some kind of collaboration not revealed by Matthei. On the other hand, monitoring the volume of communications traffic, without necessarily reading them, is something that could easily be done by the Chileans without receiving the keys to decrypt them.

Nor did Lord Parkinson, a member of the War Cabinet, leave any doubt as to the provenance of the intercepts of some of the key messages for the series of events that resulted in the sinking of the *Belgrano*. Lord Parkinson discusses how Chilean intelligence services allegedly provided intelligence that set in motion the decision to sink the ship. Specifically, he points to the interception of the Argentine command's communications, which its orders to her commanding officer, Héctor Bonzo, by the Chilean intelligence services, although it is not possible to deduce from his words whether they sent decoded or encrypted data: "They [Chile] had intercepted the Argentinian command's instructions [...] We had been discussing what we would do

if we found it [the Belgrano] because we knew the Belgrano was out to sink a carrier" (Parkinson, quoted in Brown and Sengupta, 2012). Although we do not know what the U.S.-U.K.-Chile collaboration was like, some authors (Richelson, 1988: 58) imply that it was Chilean intelligence that was responsible for its decoding; others suggest that there may have been no decoding: "it was not known that Lady Thatcher was also supplied by the Pinochet regime with more vital raw intercept data revealing the orders to the Argentine commanders in action around the Falklands", referring to data sent by the Pinochet regime, indicating that the signals could have been sent from Chile in raw form, which may mean that they were sent unprocessed (Brown and Sengupta, 2012).

In any case, everything seems to indicate that the messaging regarding the movements of the *Belgrano*'s group, or at least part of the series of messages obtained that helped the *Conqueror* to find its battle group, was intercepted by the Chileans in the framework of this collaboration, who could also easily observe the movements of ships in Ushuaia. There is evidence that they could have also provided the notification of the *Belgrano*'s departure from port to the British authorities (Richelson, 1988: 58; Freedman, 1986: 328). The fact that they operated in southern Argentina, relatively close to Ushuaia and Punta Arenas, would have facilitated the reception of signals from southern Chile; in fact, it would be the ideal area to intercept them.

Regarding the U.S. tracking station in southern Chile, little is known about it. The NSA operated, in the late 1960s, at least two signal tracking stations in the country, one on Easter Island and the other at an unspecified location. When Salvador Allende came to power, both stations were evacuated and the material was transported to an American base in Panama (Hersh, 1983: ch. 22). It is likely that, after Pinochet's coup d'état, sponsored and engineered by the United States, the stations were reopened.

The Chilean territory was, on the other hand, key for the U.S. On the one hand, it allowed controlling low frequency (LF) communications with Soviet nuclear submarines in the American South and the South Pacific (Hersh, 1983: ch. 22) and, on the other hand, it could do the same with Chilean and Argentine HF radio frequency communications/signals. It seems that, by wresting power from the socialist Allende, an ally of the Soviet Union and Cuba, the US had removed any threat to its hegemony in the area and had improved its position, and thus that of the British, vis-à-vis Argentina in '82.

An argument against using only Chilean stations would be the great distance that separates Buenos Aires from the neighboring country, more than 400 miles, and even more from the south of this, more than 900. While it is feasible to intercept signals at those distances for lower frequencies, such as HF communications, as long as they are emitted with a minimum intensity and ionospheric conditions are adequate, it would be practically impossible to intercept UHF/VHF transmissions from any point in Chile. We do not know the parameters of the transmissions of the 24th, by which two units close to Mar del Plata were sent to Georgias, but if UHF/VHF, or HF channels were used in low power or in a discrete mode, they could hardly have been intercepted by Chilean stations.

Moreover, the most important messages relating to naval operations during the war, including plans, intentions and orders, seem to have reached British intelligence for the most part, and we only know the most relevant ones, no doubt a tiny percentage of all those they processed, so it would be reasonable to think that they had more means at their disposal and not that a single station in southern Chile could access all Argentine naval communications.

Similarly, there are other indications that British and, above all, US intelligence penetration, during and before the start of the conflict, went beyond a few hours of daily satellite or signals stations on foreign soil. Labour MP Tam Dalyell, active during the conflict, stated shortly after the conflict that, by 1 May, US intelligence had penetrated all levels of Argentine military command (Gavshon and Rice, 1984: 111). An impressive example would be the presence of the CIA detachment in Buenos Aires in the same building of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on Paseo Colon. The CIA could thus control the deliberations of the high command, not only by means of its privileged access to important officials, but also by electronic mechanisms (Gavshon and Rice, 1984: 261). This last argument was used by Dalyell to argue that the British government knew much of the Junta's deliberations. In addition, and as discussed above, British intelligence was aware on the 28th that Minister Costa Mendez had informed several diplomats at the Foreign Office that the Junta had decided to reconquer the Malvinas; they could also have obtained information, before March, concerning the intentions of the Junta or its members, initial directives on the seizure of the islands, or the initial stages of planning, as seen above, which could indicate some kind of listening mechanism or human intelligence and a considerable presence of the CIA, NSA or their British counterparts.

What has been seen so far seems to suggest that the American intelligence services, and perhaps the British, had a certain infrastructure within the country. Means of collection located within Argentine territory would explain better than those studied so far the significant interceptions of the period March 24, 25. Evidently, intercepting radio frequency traffic between Buenos Aires or Puerto Belgrano and ships in the vicinity of Mar del Plata with receivers close to the transmitters/receivers has all kinds of advantages: it is easy to achieve 24-hour availability, as opposed to the low availability and high cost of satellites; the receiving equipment is cheaper, can be technologically simpler and less powerful, since it does not have the disadvantages of remoteness: adverse weather conditions, signal attenuation, interference. They could also pick up traffic on the higher frequency bands, VHF and UHF, if they were placed within the horizon of the transmitter/receiver, something impossible with the Chilean stations. *Endurance* would be a good example of a modest station, with few resources, but very useful when close to the transmitter/receiver; in fact, it intercepted key emissions for the development of the events in Georgias, but more on that later. We know that *Endurance* was in the vicinity of these islands on these dates. But even if it had been nearby in the period referred to, it would not have been easy to get all the traffic it picked up from the sea to the GCHQ base in Cheltenham for processing without a communications satellite, which the British did not yet have. It should be remembered that the receivers must pick up all communications broadcasts and send them to

Cheltenham, and only after laborious processing and analysis at headquarters, where the specialized personnel are stationed, are the important ones filtered out, not before. This reinforces the idea that infrastructure would have been necessary in Argentina simply to send the information that was obtained and/or U.S. support.

To spy on the traffic of the Argentine Navy with its commanders on land, it could have been enough with equipment deployed, for example, in vehicles, such as vans, or buildings, among which the American and British embassies in Buenos Aires would be the best candidates. There is hardly any information on the subject, although we have indications that the CIA had penetrated the Argentine military, as stated by Tam Dalyell MP. Richelson gives us a more precise clue as to who could have done the job. According to this author, there was a *Special Collection Service* (SCS) station in the US embassy in Buenos Aires in the 1980s, and it would have provided information to the British[3] (Richelson, 2016: ch. 8). Under this innocuous name hides one of the most invasive, secretive and effective intelligence organizations in the U.S. intelligence community. The SCS was created in 1978, bringing together the CIA's skills in clandestine operations and the NSA's technical capabilities into one intelligence organization, with the two agencies alternating leadership. The SCS had among its main objectives the gathering of signals intelligence from government establishments abroad, usually embassies or consulates. Its teams focused on communications at the highest level, which would be facilitated by the fact that they usually worked in national capitals; according to Richelson, the intelligence they obtained was of high quality, especially if the embassy was located on high ground or close to the foreign or defense ministries (Richelson, 2016: ch. 2), suggesting that this organization might have listened to Costa Mendez when he announced to diplomats the decision to invade the islands.

The service also carried out actions to place sophisticated listening equipment (from hidden microphones to satellite dishes) in the most inaccessible places and tried to capture and recruit key foreign communications personnel (Bamford, 2002: ch. 11). This type of work, especially invasive, could be very effective in gaining access to information even before it was encrypted. An example would be that of an INSCOM team, a U.S. Army unit, which, between 1982 and 1983, managed to place a bug, bribing cleaning and security personnel, in the conference room of General Manuel Antonio Noriega, in Panama (Richelson, 2016: ch. 8). Although the United States was monitoring communications with a satellite in Central America at this time, we see that it was also using other means, which also provided it with information that was not accessible by satellite. Most likely the same was happening in Argentina.

5 Espionage among allies

There is hardly any information at present on how the NSA, GCHQ or SCS obtained signals intelligence during the Falklands conflict and before, especially with

3 Richelson cites Gavshon and Rice, already discussed in this article, although he specifies SCS.

regard to naval communications, but in other cases information has been leaked on the mode of operation that may give us clues as to how it could have happened in the case in question. Although some of these cases are independent episodes, they are still new chapters in the intelligence collaboration between the Americans and the British and may shed light on the way of acting in the South Atlantic conflict, suggesting patterns of action.

One of the most notorious examples would be the spying plot at the highest level in Germany by the NSA, which definitely came to light when computer specialist Edward Snowden, who had worked at the CIA and the NSA, made public classified documents on various NSA programs in early June 2013. The German magazine *Der Spiegel* worked its way through a series of these documents, uncovering the extent of these activities in Germany. This revealed not only that US intelligence agencies had been intercepting Chancellor Angela Merkel's cell phone calls for more than a decade, but also that they had turned the US embassy in Berlin into a listening station.

According to one of the documents, from 2010, the SCS was operational in Berlin, and not only in the German capital but also in Paris, Madrid, Rome or Geneva. The SCS was able, among other things, to intercept not only cell phone calls, but also microwave, satellite and millimeter wave signals (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2013).

But it doesn't end there. In 2015, the Danish Defense Intelligence Service launched an investigation in the wake of the Snowden documents. The result of the investigation concluded that the Danish intelligence service had collaborated with the NSA: American intelligence was intercepting phone calls, text messages and chat messages from authorities in neighboring countries of cables crossing Danish territory ("U.S. spied on Merkel...", 2021).

In addition, the NSA was using the Bavarian base in Bad Aibling to spy on European neighbors via SIGINT. All indications are that the German intelligence service, the BND (*Bundesnachrichtendienst*), was collaborating in this task, although it is not known to what extent it was aware that the NSA was also spying on targets in the federal republic (Baumgärtner *et al.*, 2015).

And, unsurprisingly at this point, we should add the work of an old acquaintance: the GCHQ. The British took advantage of their proximity to Europe to spy, not only on countries but also on leading members of the EU, in collaboration with the Americans. The British service used its geographical location to monitor satellite communications and important communications cables coming into its territory from Germany. Interestingly, much of this espionage had nothing to do with security, but was purely economic and industrial espionage (Poitras *et al.*, 2013).

It is clear from this example that the United States and the United Kingdom spy on their allies, and jointly. A technologically advanced country like Germany was not able to prevent it, while the BND collaborated very closely with the NSA; the fact that they were allies undoubtedly contributed to Germany lowering its guard. One can also observe the great variety of means to obtain information: communications were spied on by satellite, but also by cable, radio frequency or telephony, and most of the time with means on the ground, in fact, there is no mention of satellites specifically

for SIGINT collection. Thus, it is reasonable to think that the United States and the United Kingdom were in a position to set up an espionage network in Argentina with such a high degree of penetration that it would more than cover many of the needs of the Falklands war. The same is true of espionage in Chile, Argentina and other South American countries in the 1970s, to which reference will be made later. The case of Germany shows, for example, that when there is a stable espionage network, the means of obtaining intelligence are mainly on the ground and the use of satellites is minimal. This could be the case in South American countries in the 1970s and in Argentina in the 1980s: a stable SIGINT espionage network would already exist. This example, moreover, shows how the embassy and the SCS operated in the German capital, which, as we have seen, was most probably active in Buenos Aires in the 1980s and, without any doubt, in several European capitals recently, suggesting a clear pattern of action.

6 Deciphering

So far, we have dealt with the different ways of obtaining signal intelligence. However, we have omitted a fundamental aspect, essential for accessing the captured information: decryption.

On February 11, 2020, the *Washington Post*, in collaboration with the German television station *Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF)*, published an article discussing what it defined as the intelligence coup of the century, referring to what became known as Operation Rubicon (Miller, 2020). In reality, they were simply confirming something that had been leaked to the public for decades. Although not all the details were known, by the mid-1990s there was publicly available information that the Swiss company Crypto AG was being used by the NSA to spy on hundreds of countries around the world, both US allies and non-allies (Shane and Bowman, 1995), and the BND was also suspected of being involved.

On the other hand, during World War II and thereafter, the relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom on SIGINT issues has been quite close.

Although at the beginning of the 20th century the British Empire had almost total control of the world system of communications cables, to which it had access without any shame (Bamford, 1987: 30-32), as was to be expected, the United States ended up overtaking the former metropolis. The United Kingdom was in any case not just another US partner, allied only by strong historical and cultural ties, but had retained the valuable experience of its time as a superpower in the exploitation of foreign communications and could also offer valuable assets to the alliance, without which the United States would have had much more difficult to achieve the degree of global control it achieved, as would be the case of its overseas territories: Cyprus, Yemen, Ceylon, South Africa, Diego Garcia, Ascension, Hong Kong or the British territory itself, in Europe (Harding, 2014: ch. 8; Bamford, 1987: 493-494).

The fact is that, in the 1950s and 1960s, one of the main concerns of the Americans and the British was to supply cipher machines to NATO countries. The post-war

equipment was becoming obsolete. The cipher machines were extremely expensive, and the U.S. bore much of the cost of retrofitting the Europeans. One reason for this was to prevent the Soviets from gaining access to NATO communications, although there was another, more powerful and less confessable motivation: they wanted to prevent European countries from developing their own encryption industries, thus exporting their machines and making it difficult for the Anglo-Saxons to gain access to communications from countries whose products they had more than controlled. Needless to say, Western European countries were already being spied on by them in these years and were targets of their intelligence, especially France, but also Germany (Aldrich, 2019: 198-201, 325-326; Aldrich, 2010: 209-210).

In addition, US intelligence launched new and radical initiatives. The NSA proposed a *free licensing* scheme whereby NATO countries would be authorized to manufacture American and British crypto-equipment under free license, in order to discourage continental European research and production; interoperability and commonality was in line with the alliance's efforts to achieve more efficient armed forces. At the same time, the NSA and GCHQ were quietly encouraging alliance countries to introduce legislation to regulate (and hinder) the export of crypto equipment, in the same way that arms exports were controlled (Aldrich, 2019: 199-201).

But in this scheme, there was a small drawback: the restrictions were not valid for neutral countries such as Switzerland or Sweden (Aldrich, 2019: 201); these countries were not linked to an alliance such as NATO, so they did not have to follow its guidelines. Switzerland was a recognized producer of cipher machines, and being a neutral country strengthened its reputation and made its products more palatable to potential buyers. Faced with this serious problem posed by the "neutrals", the NSA was not going to stand idly by. The most important challenge was posed by the Swiss company Crypto AG, owned by Swedish businessman Boris Hagelin (Aldrich, 2019: 201).

Starting in the mid-1950s, the NSA closed deals with several companies in these countries and was negotiating with Boris Hagelin in what can be considered one of the greatest successes of American intelligence in the Cold War. To take control of Crypto AG, the NSA had sought a partner, already in the 1950s, and this was none other than the German BND (Aldrich, 2019: 202).

The NSA also pressured national companies to rig machines if they wanted to receive export licenses (Shane and Bowman, 1995). Something similar was happening in Europe. Germany was a very advanced country in cryptology, with leading companies in the sector. The BND had chosen Siemens as a front to supply technology, which actually came from the NSA, to Crypto AG and, in some cases, the alliance hurt start-ups in this country (Dobson, 2020; Aldrich, 2019: 202).

In 1963, Crytpo AG was selling equipment not only to Argentina, but also to countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Iran or Libya; products for which they paradoxically paid large sums of money to then be spied on at the highest level by the ultimate owners of the company (Aldrich, 2019: 204). But also, diplomatic and military

communications of countries such as Spain, Italy or Ireland were being thoroughly tapped (ZDFinfo, 2020: 2m36s).

GCHQ was aware of this BND, NSA and CIA operation from the beginning, although it did not participate. However, in the 1970s GCHQ begins to get involved in the processing of NSA intelligence information. In 1970, the United States launched its first Ryolite satellite, capable of absorbing huge streams of signals, which it then had to download to ground stations located at specific sites in different parts of the globe, one of them being the Menwith Hill base in the United Kingdom. On the other hand, with a dwindling budget after the post-Vietnam War cutbacks and with satellites capable of absorbing massive amounts of SIGINT, the NSA was forced to look abroad for support. As a result, GCHQ became very closely involved with the American agency in processing this type of information; the collaboration was "almost total" according to NSA historian Robert Johnson. At Cheltenham, a large part of the information sent by satellites was already being processed in the 1970s at the request of the NSA (Aldrich, 2010: 345-346). It is likely that as a consequence of this collaboration the NSA would have provided the GCHQ with the means and knowledge necessary to decrypt the signals coming from Crypto AG equipment. Similarly, the BND had shared with the Dutch TIVC (Technical Information Processing Center), an intelligence branch closely linked to the Dutch Navy, information regarding the algorithms used by these teams and used during the Falklands conflict to help the British (Jacobs, 2020).

Thus, in 1982 there were several countries that could read information from the Crypto AG machines, the same ones used by both the diplomatic service and the Argentine Navy (Jacobs, 2020). The United States, Germany and the Netherlands could and did read messages encrypted by them. Everything indicates that the United Kingdom was also in a position to decrypt the messages before the conflict began, although there is a debate as to whether the United Kingdom had to resort to its European allies once the conflict started, since it did not have the knowledge to decrypt the information and American support was delayed (Jacobs, 2020).

Regarding the question of the March messages, the information available suggests that the British were the first to read and evaluate them, not the Americans. As the then British Defense Minister John Nott relates, on March 31, when Thatcher was informed of the imminence of a landing in the Malvinas, he sent his private secretary to check whether the intelligence material they had had also been received by American intelligence and found that it had not. A message was also prepared for the Prime Minister to ask Ronald Reagan if he was aware of the signals intelligence they had received (Nott, 2002: 257).

On the other hand, Haig narrates how on the same Wednesday, March 31, he received a visit from the British ambassador announcing that the invasion was underway. Haig then asked his own intelligence community to verify the British information, after which analysts confirmed that an imminent invasion was likely (Haig, 1984: 263).

Clearly, if the information came from the NSA, Nott would not have sent his secretary to check whether US intelligence had received the same information, much

less confirmed to him that it had not. The same is true of Thatcher's question to Reagan. Haig's account confirms that there was no knowledge of this information on the American side, so unless the versions of both Haig and Nott were deliberately altered to protect American neutrality in the conflict, the key signals of March 1982 were obtained/processed by the British.

In addition, it is worth bearing in mind the words of the then Labour member of Parliament, Ted Rowlands, "Our intelligence in Argentina was extremely good. That is why we took action in 1977. [...] we have been reading its telegrams for many years" (UK Parliament, 1982, col. 650), referring to the South Thule crisis, during his intervention in Parliament in 1982, and astounding important members of the executive for what he had just revealed publicly. In other words, UK intelligence, probably with US support, was reading Argentine communications in the 1970s and all indications are that it was also reading them shortly before the conflict began in 1982.

In this regard, it should be noted that the North Americans were, since the beginning of the 70s, fully involved in listening to communications in the Southern Cone, among other areas of South America. To the probable tapping of communications, via products acquired from Crypto AG by Salvador Allende's regime in Chile (SRF, 2020: 16m04s), we can add the monitoring during the military coup in Argentina in 1976 and that of the entire network of nations participating in Operation Condor in the 1970s, including Argentina (Brustolin *et al.*, 2020; CIA, 1977; Kornbluh and Osorio, 2020). With a dense espionage network in the Southern Cone, of which Argentina was only a part, it is likely that the intelligence Rowlands spoke of came wholly or mainly from here, and no doubt the decryption would be courtesy of the US. it is doubtful that such close allies were duplicating means and efforts, and it seems reasonable that this espionage network was the one that later bore fruit in 1982. From sources close to the BND it is conjectured that the British would have obtained the decryption methods from the Americans almost certainly[4] (Jacobs, 2020). It should be noted that the BND had a covert listening station at Alvear in northern Argentina during these years (ZDFinfo, 2020: 19m00s).

As reported by the *Washington Post*, which had access to CIA documentation, "In 1982, the Reagan administration took advantage of Argentina's reliance on Crypto equipment, funneling intelligence to Britain, [...] according to the CIA history, which doesn't provide any detail on what kind of information was passed to London", that is, that the Reagan administration channeled intelligence to London during the conflict, but the analyzed document does not specify what kind or any other detail (Miller, 2020). This information is compatible with a collaboration in the style of the one already cited with respect to satellite information processing in the 1970s, in which the GCHQ processed intelligence from satellite signals, thus freeing up NSA resources for other priority areas for them. That is, the Americans could have

4 Operation Rubicon, of which the UK had been a "parasite" all along, would have benefited it to the point of deciding the final outcome of the conflict, according to these sources.

delegated the processing of information, obtained through their means deployed in Argentina, which would be encrypted with Crypto AG machines, to the British, taking into account their special interest in the Malvinas issue (Hastings and Jenkins, 2011: ch. 3); in this way they would send them the total of the information as they obtained it, without decryption, raw, and they would process it autonomously, using the methods and knowledge provided by the Americans for the decryption. The information would be *funneled* in its entirety, unprocessed; this would explain why the CIA document did not provide details of the type of information being sent. This also implies that American intelligence was unaware of the content of that information, and that it made no decision as to what information was passed to it. Note that this scheme is also similar to the way the VORTEX satellite operated: the British would monitor the flow of information while operating it themselves and inform the Americans in case of any developments.

In this regard, John Lehman, former US Secretary of the Navy during the conflict, provides additional information. In mid-April, Haig was forced to deny new information according to which the United States had provided satellite intelligence to the United Kingdom. According to him, the United States "[had] not acceded to requests that would go beyond the scope of customary patterns of cooperation" (Haig, quoted in Lehman, 2012: 81), i.e., it had not acceded to requests that went beyond the scope of customary patterns of cooperation. And here, according to Lehman, was the catch: both countries already collaborated a lot, their collaboration structure did not, in general, need political decisions (Lehman, 2012: 81-82). The way of cooperating on signals intelligence gathering, as we have described it, and well established since before the war started, would fit perfectly into this scheme. And it would hardly fit the request, for example, for the exceptional use of VORTEX satellites.

As seen above, the Americans were almost certainly not listening during March to Argentine communications; they were focused on China and Russia: they simply did not have the manpower for everything (Aldrich, 2010: 399).

7 Conclusions

Although the information on intelligence gathering in the Falklands War and, in particular, on signals intelligence is still quite incomplete, the analysis of the available information allows us to draw some conclusions.

U.S. collaboration, and certainly in the decryption of the messages from the Crypto AG equipment, was decisive for the final outcome of the war. The signals intercepted in March were communications between ships at sea and their commanders ashore. We know that the Argentine Navy used this equipment to encode their signals and that some of them were transmitted on HF, because of the distance from shore, and therefore were easy to intercept; other signals, such as those of March 24 were transmitted closer to shore, so they could have been transmitted more discreetly, including VHF/UHF. In this period the only ship with intercept capability was at Georgias –even southern Chile would be closer– so they were most likely intercepted

from land, with the American embassy or buildings run by the American, or even British, government being the places that possibly housed the receivers, though not necessarily, as HF interception (assuming VHF/UHF was not used) is the easy part of the task and there are other options.

The fact that these signals were intercepted, when the degree of alert was not very high, indicates that the listening effort was considerable. To hit these relevant signals, they would have had to process many others, probably as many as they could pick up. Sending a high volume of signals to the UK also requires some infrastructure and the British assets in the area (the *Endurance*) would doubtless be using (American) communications satellites to relay the raw intercepts. The most logical thing is that they were sent from the ground. There are also no indications or leaks of the existence of British intelligence infrastructure in Argentina, as there is from the US, with possible stations in Chile, the presence of the SCS and the CIA in Buenos Aires, as well as the presence in the 70's in the Southern Cone; we also know that the BND had at least one listening station in the country, but nothing concrete from the UK. Although this does not definitely exclude the presence of British means of their own in the country, the total absence of indications, in contrast to the extraordinary performance of the SIGINT means at their disposal, seems to indicate that the infrastructure was not theirs. This may suggest a division of labor and resources between the two allies, with the United States putting more resources in America and the United Kingdom in Europe.

As the March messages were obtained before the British and their allies deployed means in the area, it can be deduced that the listening infrastructure was already there beforehand, surely it is the one that existed since the 70s and mainly American, although it is possible that the role of the Chilean signals intelligence also played an important role. As we have seen, this infrastructure worked perfectly, with no British means of collection at sea, let alone in the air or in space. The British task force did not have sufficient air surveillance, reconnaissance or intelligence means at any time during the conflict, so that the interception of naval messages, mainly communication messages between commands on land and units at sea, such as those that were key in the sinking of the *Belgrano*, could have been carried out from this infrastructure, or by Chilean teams, with the information being processed by the GCHQ.

Although some sources speak of decryption of Argentine naval communications by Chilean intelligence, it is unlikely that the British or Americans would have shared the methods of the Crypto AG machines with them, when the Chileans themselves were being spied on in the same way. It is reasonable to think that they delivered the intercepted information in raw form, without decryption, to the GCHQ, so it could be that they did not know the content of the messages they sent, including those of the *Belgrano*. This situation, in which they collaborated in espionage while being spied on, would be similar to that of the NSA in Bad Aibling, Germany.

The use of the VORTEX satellite even before the Junta decided to carry out the invasion does not seem reasonable for the reasons given above. Its use would have been much more useful in the landing phase and days before, to intercept Argentine

very high frequency communications on the islands (UHF, VHF). This would require having the receiver/transmitter in direct line, within the horizon, at a very short distance, which would put at risk the British units doing so.

The United Kingdom received important support in other areas of intelligence, apart from naval SIGINT, and not only from the United States. Countries such as Germany or the Netherlands made an invaluable contribution. The Netherlands intercepted and decoded signals from its bases in Europe (Wiebes, 2005: 275), as also had access to decryption methods. Communications equipment produced by American companies, which would affect Argentine field units, would also have been vulnerable (Aldrich, 2010: 399), possibly thanks to the American effort to control this type of companies at a global level. It is possible that the intelligence support that the United Kingdom received at the beginning of the war from the Dutch and Germans had more to do with the processing of intercepts, since the GCHQ should be saturated, than with assistance with the decryption methods of the Crypto AG teams, something they were already able to do on their own.

From the evidence provided throughout this work, it is clear that a characteristic of the collaboration between the US and the UK was its structural nature, more than punctual, not limited to Argentina, lasting, with a sharing of functions and a joint use of certain means and infrastructures. This collaboration was so consolidated that for most of the actions in which the participation, assistance or use of American means was essential (as in the case of decryption) a political decision was not necessary, as they were of a routine nature.

Paradoxically, despite the important support given by Germany to the United States and especially to the United Kingdom, none of them had any scruples about spying on their communications in the following years.

Finally, the real impact of intelligence in this war must be taken into account when assessing the causes that led the British to victory, even more so when, by its very nature, it has been a hidden factor for decades.

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REVIEW

Medio ambiente, seguridad y salud: Grandes retos del derecho del SIGLO XXI

Various authors

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The work on which this brief approach is made is structured, as its title indicates, in different parts: environment, safety and health, thus responding to some of the major —and main— issues to be addressed and that make up some of the great challenges of the law of the XXI century.

In this way, and on the basis of a structure that is both interesting, flexible and agile, certain aspects of these great areas of knowledge —or necessary knowledge— are approached, all interrelated and whose reading leads and moves the reader to think from areas and points of view that perhaps have never been considered before, despite the fact that, apparently, they could be very hackneyed topics and very worked from other fields. But it becomes a crucial approach to approach them from the perspective of Law, especially in this complex 21st century which, immersed in a powerful global geopolitical reconfiguration, leads everything to be questioned and reconsidered... and not always in a way that is in the interest of people, of human beings, or even, and not even, in accordance with the law.

It is for this reason that this work has been published, destined to become a reference in its field, with María Isabel Torres Cazorla and Elena del Mar García Rico, long-time academics with a very significant body of work behind them, and Andrés Bautista Hernáez and Alicia María Pastor García, as coordinators, as editors and authors. Structured in three parts —Environment, Safety and Health— and articulated by means of seven chapters, seven articles that, although each one could be published individually in specialized journals for their quality and rigorousness, the fact of doing it together forms an extraordinary mosaic to fulfil the purpose of the work.

Thus, at the beginning of the book and its first part dedicated to the environment, María Isabel Torres Cazorla, with the graceful style with which we are accustomed to, addresses the always interesting and complex issue of the obligations of States in relation to climate change, under the suggestive title *Too little, too slow? The importance of environmental protection before the International Court of Justice*, trying to show whether this heading corresponds to reality, whether the States, both as key pieces of the international order and, above all, responsible for their citizens, have been diligent in this regard.

The issue is not trivial; the environment is obviously a global environment, and international legal regulation in this regard is fragmentary and usually acts in a reactive manner, in many cases even without directly addressing the area of responsibility, so that a sort of "climate justice" (page 24) is in the process of being assessed, to demand a higher level of commitment than has existed up to now.

The text is full of examples and cases: the nuclear tests carried out in the past —and the effects generated by them—, the exploitation of phosphates in Nauru, the construction of a dam on the Danube, cellulose factories on the Uruguay River... among others, make up a sample of facts to be considered in this environmental protection, which is intimately linked to and inseparable from sustainable development. So much so that it is pointed out and explained how, and therefore, climate change is an unprecedented challenge on which depends not only the welfare of present generations, but also of future generations.

The text, which is rich in bibliography, also ends (page 52) with a hymn to hope:

> "Let us hope that the International Court of Justice will take up the baton and take up the cause of environmental protection and the fight against the climate crisis and its devastating effects (...) Present and future generations will thank it and this will be a great tribute to international justice and to the survival of the planet".

Continuing along these lines —the protection of future generations—, the following chapter, *The protection of future generations as transformers of international law and guarantee of the environment of those who will succeed us*, by Nicolás Carrillo Santarelli and Francesco Seatzu, remarks (page 62) that "(...) future generations are and can be protected by international standards (...)".

To this end, an in-depth analysis is made as to whether these future generations can be considered a subject of international law, and different points, different headings in which, with clear and direct language and full of references, it is shown how it is feasible to protect future generations, It is considered that serious environmental damage can be seen as a breach of duties towards future generations, insofar as it may limit their ability to enjoy fundamental rights (page 68), even introducing a concept called "principle of intergenerational equity" (page 71) which, once again, establishes this direct relationship with sustainable development.

And all this, it is pointed out, without forgetting that the consideration of the need to protect these future generations has, must have, effects in the present, since it may entail the adoption and creation of specific measures that must necessarily be accepted and complied with by the existing subjects of law —individuals, States, companies, etc.—. It is not, therefore, a toast to the sun thinking of a better future from a very illusory perspective but shows how the design of a better tomorrow allows the maintenance and consolidation of a better present.

Beginning the second part of the book, more focused on the field of security, the third article. *The environment and international conflict*, by Javier Roldán Barbero, raises interesting and shocking questions such as (page 104) "social ecology, which requires a new social contract, both internal and international", or the need to (page 106) "symbolically sign a peace agreement with Mother Nature, to leave her in peace, not as a demand for the future, but as a necessity of the present" or that (page 107) "Human beings are becoming victims and perpetrators of environmental threats" (page 107) "Human beings are becoming victims and perpetrators of environmental threats" (page 107) "The environment and *international conflict*" (page 108).

To this end, the author analyzes how these issues have a direct impact on the political, economic and social climate of any country, even stating that social peace and territorial peace depend more and more on the administration of natural resources; but not only does this direct impact occur at the internal state level, but also at the international level, since (page 115). "Environmental issues have acquired a preponderant role in the international agenda", and, furthermore, as "(...) the concatenated evils of the environment are the quintessential example of the need for a true global governance".

Therefore, and reiterating what was stated in previous chapters, he points out that the environmental issue has a powerful holistic component, which permeates most areas of international relations, making it necessary, he notes, to have a multilevel legal framework, despite the existing difficulties... among which, the current short-termism complicates the establishment of the necessary long-term policies.

The following chapter, the fourth, deals with issues such as neurotechnologies, and how they can pose a risk to human dignity, even to the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, since, as is exquisitely pointed out on page 141, "what is at stake is the human brain, what makes us significant and unique as a species", aspects addressed in a clear and comprehensible manner by Daniel García San José in his article entitled *International law in the face of the risks of neurotechnologies*.

He points out how the unstoppable scientific progress and all technological innovations leave a certain bittersweet aftertaste, and while our parents and grandparents also had to face challenges related to the development of new technologies, certainly artificial intelligence and the potential symbiosis with neurotechnologies have ethical and legal implications of a scope unknown until now. It is even proposed (page 147) that issues such as personal dignity, free will, mental privacy, equal access and protection against bias be recognized as neuro-rights, even as potential new human rights.

In view of the scope and importance of these issues, he points out –once again– that it seems reasonable to establish a kind of international governance, since the practices and actions that may be developed in one State may have and generate legal effects in other States, for which reason the author develops a series of proposals related to the need for such international regulation, which include, among others, and in a sample of the importance of this issue (page 164), the need to establish a United Nations High Commissioner for artificial intelligence and neurotechnologies.

Continuing the work, the fifth chapter, *Security and health: on unilateral sanctions in situations of health vulnerability,* by Elena del Mar García Rico, analyzes, in a style that is both entertaining and didactic, full of scientific rigor, the core issue of the matter, the legality of unilateral sanctions in the international framework and the close connection between international security and health.

In fact, and although, as the author points out, these are areas that have been considered relatively distant from each other for centuries, within the framework of the "(...) holistic vision that presides over this collective work (...)" (page 172), it is necessary to understand the importance of protecting the right to health, especially in a globalized and hyperconnected world, where health vulnerability takes on new dimensions: just think of the recent COVID pandemic.

This in-depth investigation is unraveled in a gradual manner, ranging from an approach to the term "unilateral coercive measures" in the framework of the United Nations to the "legal order that would result from the application of this matter", in addition to raising the existing debate on the legality of such unilateral coercive measures, the consequences of such sanctions on the population and their impact on human rights, and always in the light of "the obligation to protect the right to health in the adoption of sanctions" (pages 172-174).

And, it goes on to point out that on this issue, as on many others, there is a lack of consensus, in an environment in which the application of sanctions —unilateral coercive measures— constitutes a common practice in international relations, by a certain number of States against "other members of international society considered responsible for non-compliance with international norms" (page 177); to complicate matters further, the adoption of such unilateral coercive measures is often condemned by the United Nations General Assembly as "contrary to basic norms and principles of international law" (page 188).

Not only is this basic issue addressed, but other aspects such as the distinction between retaliatory measures and countermeasures, the conditions of proportionality and temporality, the so-called smart or targeted sanctions, and secondary sanctions, among others, are discussed in a clear and accessible manner. And temporality of the same, the so-called smart or selective sanctions, secondary sanctions, among others, are described in a clear and accessible manner. And all this reiterating that it is necessary to assess it in the light of the negative impact of unilateral sanctions on the population of the sanctioned State and its potential incompatibility with fundamental norms and principles of the international order, questioning the legality of certain sanctions that restrict, ultimately, the right to health as a fundamental right.

Health constitutes the central core of the third part of the book; and, to begin with, José Manuel Sánchez Patrón, in his chapter (the sixth), entitled *The declaration of "public health emergency of international concern" in the face of pandemics,* takes us back to the recent HIV/AIDS-19 pandemic, and how this raised serious questions about the response provided by the World Health Organization.

With a very powerful documentary support and in an article full of references and explanations, the need for the declaration of the so-called Public Health Emergency of International Importance (PHEIC) constitutes a "(...) key part of the response system to extraordinary situations in which the spread of a disease or pathology may constitute a risk to international public health" (page 242).

The analysis of the formulation, the regulations of the declaration of an ESPII, the procedure to follow, the elements on which it will be based, the economic effects of the same, the need for a grading system... articulate the chapter, with the aim of introducing improvements that will allow the development of effective tools for future contingencies, for future challenges.

And closing the part dedicated to health and finalizing the work, Jorge Antonio Climent Gallart, in his chapter *La respuesta incompleta del TEDH a la esterilización forzosa de las mujeres romaníes.* addresses issues, among others, such as the right to the protection of private and family life, the right not to be subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment as well as the right not to be discriminated against.

And all these questions, of capital importance, are dealt with by means of a methodical, serious and rigorous legal analysis, starting from the legal background of the judgments formulated for this purpose, and placing special emphasis on the importance of the right to consent.

Going further into the issue of consent, and using quality references and arguments, it is pointed out (page 303) that the welfare of the human being must take precedence over the exclusive interest of science, as well as the guarantee of equitable access to appropriate quality health care. And the analysis is so fine-tuned that it even raises questions such as whether in the context of sterilization the word forced or coerced are synonyms.

For this reason, and in view of the object of study addressed, questions arise that are all surprising, especially considering that the actions under study, the forced sterilization of a certain group of women, have not taken place in these distant and apparently lawless territories; they have occurred in a European country, in a country of the European Union.

To conclude, it should be noted that in this complex, interconnected and technified world in which we live, it is essential to be aware of the number of derivatives that any issue raises, especially if they are so interrelated among themselves as the environment, safety and health, as is clearly evident after reading these more than three hundred pages, these seven documents that, each one by itself, is a pearl in itself, and that together, form a powerful starting point to further delve into these issues.

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