1st IEEE Geopolitical Conference Minutes

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MINISTERIO DE DEFENSA

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1 Introduction

The Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE) organised the 1st Geopolitical Conference at the Congress Centre of the Parador de La Granja de San Ildefonso (Segovia) from 26 to 28 March 2025, to analyse the international strategic panorama, its possible implications for European and Spanish security and defence, and to debate the imminent challenges.

The event was attended by relevant personalities from the world of foreign policy and the field of European and Spanish geopolitics. Josep Borrell Fontelles gave the inaugural talk on the first day. Bernardino León Gross gave a colloquium on the second day, and Lieutenant General Miguel Ballenilla, Director of the Centro Superior de Estudios de la Defensa Nacional closed the conference on the last day.

Eighty experts participated in the roundtable discussions (*Chatam House* rule*)*, including ambassadors, university professors and lecturers in the field of international relations and international law, *think tank* directors, business representatives, civilian and military analysts. See list of participants in the annex.

Summary of conference activities

26 Mar. 18:30-21.00	Inaugural Conference (Josep Borrell)	
27 Mar. 09:30-11:15	Table 1.1: Conflict in Ukraine	Roundtable 1.2: Situation in the Middle East
27 Mar. 11.15 - 11.40	Coffee break	
27 Mar. 11:45-13.30	Roundtable 2.1: Energy Geopolitics	Roundtable 2.2: Evolution of military technology and capabilities
27 Mar. 16:00-17:45	Table 3.1. Situation in Latin America	Roundtable 3.2 Defence in Europe
27 Mar. 19.00- 21.00	Talk-colloquium Bernardino León and Gral Victor Bados	
28 Mar. 09:00-09:25	Arrival of participants	
28 Mar. 09:30-11:15	Table 4.1: Africa, north of the Equator	Roundtable 4.2: Situation in Asia-Pacific
28 Mar. 11:15 -11.40	Coffee break	
28 Mar. 11:45- 13:00	Closing Director of CESEDEN Lt. Gen. (Miguel Ballenilla)	

2 Inaugural conference. Europe at the reins of its security

Author: Josep Borrell Fontelles

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(The following text is a transcript of the lecture given by Mr Borrell at the opening of the conference on 26 March 2025.)

Good afternoon to all of you, ladies and gentlemen, and congratulations to the Lieutenant General Director of CESEDEN for this initiative and also to the Brigadier General Director of the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies, and many thanks to Colonel Castilla for his very kind presentation. I thank all the generals, officers and the rest of those present, as well as the representation of the Town Council of La Granja for their attention. It is always very pleasant to be in a town as beautiful and with as much historical resonance as La Granja.

I hope that this conference will have continuity and that it will create a brand, an echo, at a time when Spain and Spaniards concerned about defence issues need to exchange opinions and discuss what we need to do in these troubled times.

Our meeting today coincides with a parliamentary debate that must still be going on. And although I had prepared a somewhat timeless presentation, prepared already a few days ago and therefore overtaken by events, it will be inevitable that we will devote some attention to what is happening in the political debate in our country, because it is very close, it is at the very heart of what we are discussing.

The title of the presentation *(Europe at the reins of its security)*[1] reflects the fact that Europe must take responsibility for its security, that the time has come for Europeans to come to terms with what security costs and represents in the broad sense, but most particularly in the sense of military security.

(*A new period*) And the story begins, on 24 February 2022, when I woke up, or was woken up by the crisis cell of the External Action Service, telling me tersely, "they are bombing Kiev". They are bombing Kiev. These words, a short, sharp sentence, opened a new epoch in history.

Certainly, on that day, history began a new period in which the international order was broken by a blatant aggression by one country against its neighbour, an unjustified aggression, and the beginning of a war which, as you are well aware, has been going on for three years now. And, in the last few days or weeks, we have witnessed a development that we could call the reversal of alliances, with the United States telling us that it is going to bring about the end of this war through an agreement that it is already forging with Russia, without us Europeans, or Ukrainians —but especially not Europeans— having much to say so far.

And it is in this context that we Europeans have to take charge of our security and defence. Our American friends have been telling us this, and not just now, but since Obama's time. And now they repeat it with some insistence —almost brutally—, but basically, they are telling us the same thing that Obama already told us: their front is in the Indo-Pacific, and the Europeans have to take charge of the European front. They said this when the European front was calm, but now that front is the scene of the great post-war military conflagration.

(*Europe's three geopolitical shocks*) We could say or summarise that we Europeans are facing three shocks. The Putin shock, which is not new —as I have said, it started three years ago— and it

[1] The titles of the slides shared by the speaker are given in italics in brackets.

was coming, because Crimea happened before that. It is a shock that combines conventional warfare with hybrid warfare. But it is a high-intensity war, we are talking about 700,000 combatants on the Russian side, a conventional war but one that from time to time has the occasional resonance of a nuclear threat.

Then came the Trump shock since 20 January, the US detachment from Europe in favour of a retreat to Asia.

The third shock has no date; it is a structural shock; it is what we might call the post-Western world. With this post-Western shock come large and medium-sized powers that barely existed or were irrelevant when the international order was constructed —in particular China. Now, in addition to China, we have India, Turkey, Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia, Nigeria and the Arab states, which represent a very important part of the world's population and GDP. And they behave like "hedge states" that are one day on one side and the next on the other; they do not have fixed alliances but their role is decisive in influencing global events and decisions. This post-Western world also places us in front of the mirror of our dimension, which is much smaller than we think, and our responsibility.

Many of these countries are now rich and powerful enough to counterbalance the West. We recently spoke of the "rest against the west", the rest of the world against or in front of the western world. And now we wonder if the "west" still exists, if the west still exists ideologically, the Atlantic alliance —the United States plus Europe plus the Indo-Pacific countries. It is no longer the rest of the world against us; now it is whether what we call the West still exists as a geopolitical unit.

This post-Western clash will have far-reaching consequences for Europe's role in the world. The first thing I would like to refer to is cultural or anthropological: we Europeans have expelled war from our mental horizon, and that is a great thing.

(*The absence of warriors. We Europeans are no longer warriors*) Since the end of the world war, when we said "never again", we Europeans have settled into a mental horizon in which war did not exist or, in any case, it was cold or belonged to others. Hot wars were fought by others; ours was only cold, fortunately. And this has created a political, cultural, sociological attitude, typical of an ageing continent, one might say comfortable, settled in relative well-being, pacified, which resists believing that war can be a reality that directly affects us. And that, I insist, we have lost

the war reflex is progress. I wish all humanity had gone through this evolution. But when you face countries or leaders who have not lost it (the warrior reflex), on the contrary, they have it highly developed, having lost it can be a very great disadvantage.

(*The Russian threat*) Surveys by the Instituto de Empresa and Airbus ask: if your country were attacked militarily by another —as Ukraine has been attacked by Russia—, would you be willing to volunteer to defend it? And the answer is very clear: about one-third say they would be willing to do so; two-thirds say they would not take part in the response. That is good to know.

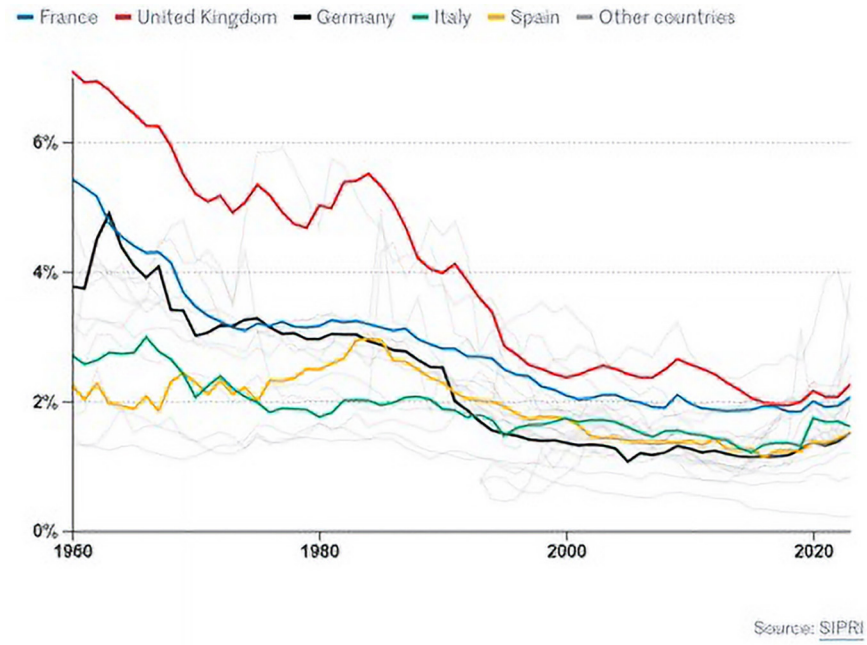
Whether we like it or not, we may have to face threats that are currently Russian, but may not be exclusively Russian.

In fact, we mentioned earlier that missiles were launched from Yemen against Israel, and that the distance between the two is roughly the same as the distance between the Sahel and Spain. It takes fifteen minutes for a hypersonic missile to reach Spain from a launch base in Russia. But from the Sahel it would take about the same time as those launched from Yemen to Israel if someone were to supply them to a potential aggressor based there. There is an eastern front that we are all talking about now, but there may also be a southern front, which fortunately is not an open battle front —we are only concerned about irregular migratory flows— but it is an arc of instability.

When I arrived in Brussels, we Europeans were in all the Sahel countries. The man who was our Special Representative for the Sahel (Ambassador Ángel Losada) is here; he knows better than anyone that now we are not in any of them and that our place is Russia. When I see the images of the young people of the Sahel, young Africans waving posters saying "Putin has saved the Dombas and now he is going to save us", if that is what the young Africans in the Sahel are saying, demonstrating in front of our embassies, I wonder if we are capable of countering the narrative and the discourse that mobilises them. Someone told them that nonsensical narrative. Russia has already saved others, I'm sure they don't know who they are talking about, but now they say they are counting on it.

In any case, the Africa Korps —because that is what the Wagners are now called— are all over the Sahel and we are not. And Russian military production has increased enormously; they have suffered tremendous losses in terms of material and troops, but they are making up for them. Today Russia is capable of replac-

ing all the losses it is suffering. The figures we have —I am not going to go through them one by one— say that, compared to the year 2022, today Russia has more production capacity for all the instruments of war. And you know that NATO is seriously assessing the possibility that this force could be directed against a member country of the Alliance.



(*Evolution of defence spending*) This is a graph that I think we should all keep in mind: it shows European disarmament since 1960, at the height of the cold war, when defence spending was between 4% and 7%. Now, for Europe as a whole, it has fallen. The figures are estimates from last year, about 2% of European GDP. If European GDP is 17 trillion, about 2%, we would be talking about defence spending in the order of about 320 billion. Spain is —let our military commanders correct me if I am wrong— at 1.2% or 1.3%, depending on what year we are talking about, what GDP and what expenditure we are referring to. But if we talk about 2023, which is probably the last year with updated data, we would be around 1.2%. It is NATO's red lantern; it is the country with the lowest military spending in the Alliance.

We can discuss what additions are in this sum and whether items of expenditure that other countries do, such as the Guardia Civil

or the Gendarmerie, could be included. But no matter how much we add, we are still below 1.3%, when Europe's average is close to 2%. And now we are considering —and I will insist on this— an increase within the "Rearm Europe" programme presented by the European Commission.

Incidentally, it is curious that a programme to rearm Europe is being presented by the European Commission, which has no defence competences, while at the same time defence ministers have not met to discuss it. It is surprising, probably because the name "Rearming Europe" is not exactly the most appropriate name to describe what it is all about. But in any case, it is what it is: an initiative proposed by the Commission within the limits of its competences, which are focused on the industrial dimension, and are accepted by the European Council. However, there is a great deal of confusion about this proposal, and I would like to spend a little time explaining what it is about and what the figures of 800 billion for *Rearm Europe* mean.

The graph clearly shows that Europe has disarmed. If we focus on the most recent years, from the 2011 euro crisis until now, it reveals that military spending was the primary target of the budget adjustments. Because it is always easier to stop stockpiling ammunition than to cut pensions. It is a couplet, but that is the way it is. If you ask citizens what they prefer —to cut pensions or to stockpile ammunition—, the answer is obvious. Military spending was the great adjustment variable throughout Europe and, in particular, in Spain. Until 2014 came with the invasion of Crimea.

As an initial response, defence spending began to rise slightly following the invasion of Ukraine. But now is when all the alarm bells are ringing. As we talk about rearmament, we must be fully aware of the fact that, in the past, we used to disarm quietly — without saying so, but steadily and effectively. Our armies were reduced to the bone —ours in particular— with minimal capabilities and limited ammunition stocks, which were also depleted by the supply to Ukraine. Why produce if nobody is going to buy in a market where with only one buyer? And that buyer is, fortunately, only one, the state.

After 2014 we started to go up, but as I mentioned, we are still only at 2%. This figure and this evolution are very important because the big question we are all asking ourselves now is: can we replace a US military withdrawal from Europe? And you know

better than I do. Is that possible? Not immediately and not without enormous effort. Not for quite some time and not without enormous effort. In general terms, we can say that replacing the American deployment to protect Europe would mean doubling the Europeans' current military expenditure. This means going from 2% to almost 4% of GDP and would involve deploying some 300,000 more troops.

The United States today has 100,000 men deployed in Europe in 33 military bases. But to replace these 100,000 with the fragmentation of our armies we would need many more. This is a generational task; it will not be solved in five years. But we have to start somewhere, and we have started with this "Rearm Europe".

Let me pause for a moment to try to shed some light on the figures. The Commission has made three proposals. And, as you know, the Commission proposes, but it does not decide; the Council and Parliament decide. It has made proposals in its field of competence in the broad sense of the word, because its competences are strictly in the field of industry. But you will see that there is an overflow towards what is no longer defence industry, but military doctrine.

The first proposal is to invest 650 billion by member states. In Brussels we like big round figures and we have a bad habit of not putting a time dimension on them; we don't know whether we are talking about flows or stocks. 650 billion is a stock or a flow? Is it per year or for how long? And who is putting it in? Let us try to clarify this. The Commission has said that by authorising member states to increase their expenditure outlook by one and a half points of GDP over four years, that could represent a cumulative investment —better to say expenditure, not necessarily investment— cumulated over the four years in the order of 650 billion.

Where does this figure come from? If you assume that all member states from the first of those four years increase their military spending by one and a half points of GDP —they all do it, at the same time and immediately, and in one year they increase by one and a half points of GDP— and they maintain that increase for the next four years, then do the math: it is one trillion in round figures. But this is a crazy hypothesis —that everyone increases 1.5 points of GDP from the first year and maintains it for four years. It is not a reasonable hypothesis.

So, what has the Commission assumed? That there is a continuous and uniform gradual increase. Each year they all increase by

approximately half a percentage point of GDP —0.375 points to be precise, which is a quarter of 1.5 points— and this accumulates year by year: 0.375 the first year, another 0.375 the following year, and so on and so forth. So on and so forth until they reach 1.5 at the end. If you calculate the accumulated expenditure with this increasing trend in expenditure, you end up with 650 billion; this is the hypothesis that underlies what the Commission is proposing.

It assumes that all member states will increase by about half a point of GDP each year cumulatively for four years. If they do that, they will have spent a total of about 650 billion, and by the end, their spending will be one and a half percentage points of GDP higher than at the start. This is a more reasonable assumption than the other —that everyone does everything at once— but, in my opinion, it is hardly a sustainable assumption.

Can we really imagine that they will all increase by 0.375 percentage points of GDP each year for four successive years? I doubt it. In any case, the Commission cannot force them to do so; they will do it if they want to, and however they want, on a national basis.

And that is the weakest point of the argument. Because if we all increase our military capabilities on a national basis, and we don't go in and eliminate the duplicities and the gaps that we have, the result can be a huge waste of resources. We can all multiply by X what is already there, but that is not going to eliminate the duplicities that we have, nor is it going to eliminate the gaps. Therefore, I would not call it rearming Europe; I would call it rearming the European states, which is not the same thing at all. Because that does not allow us to make progress in interoperable capabilities either.

What is so fashionable at the moment —the reference to the creation of a European army— is, for the moment, an entelechy. We could do better not to waste time on it and do more practical and concrete measures instead, which are basically along the lines of common defence capabilities. I know of states without armies, but I do not know of an army without a state. And this is not the situation in Europe at the moment, as someone very aptly put it succinctly: as long as Europe is not a state —and it is very far from being one— it is utopian to think that it will have an army. It could have interoperable military units capable of acting jointly, we could have a system for coordinating our invest-

ments —which is what we are trying to achieve—, but I fear that the Commission's invitation to increase this expenditure at this rate, if each state does it at national level, is not going to lead to greater military capacity at European level.

Of course there will be an increase in national capacities. And here we must distinguish between the states that are subject to an excessive deficit regime —and there are several of them, including France—, because it is doubtful whether those states that have already exceeded 3% of the deficit will also be allowed to increase their deficit by another one and a half percentage points. Or perhaps they will, even though they are already in breach of the rule. What do we do with the states that are already out of the game? And what happens to those that are not, if they increase their spending by one and a half percentage points of GDP and will be above 3%? If in the middle of those four years, by increasing half a percentage point of GDP each year (not half a point, but 0.375 percentage points of GDP each year, which in four years is one and a half points) they pass the 3% threshold and enter the Commission's surveillance regime… what happens to them? We do not know.

And what happens at the end of the four years? Some will have ended up with a spending level one and a half percentage points higher than the norm. So, what do we do? Do we put in four more years, or do we say that we have to readjust expenditure and that there is either more revenue or less expenditure on other items in order to return to a balanced budget? We do not know either.

Furthermore, let us bear in mind that we will soon have to start paying the amortisation of the Next Generation EU funds, which are going to cost us about 30 billion a year, which are not provided for in the financial perspectives. This is going to present us with a great challenge for the Community budget and for the national budgets, because this 1.5% will have to be paid for by the Member States from their own resources, that is to say, with more taxes or more debt.

Then there is the 150 billion that the Commission says it will borrow on the financial markets to lend to the states. It becomes a kind of bank: it borrows from the capital markets and lends it to the states. The states will want it if the terms of the Commission loan are better than what they can get directly from the capital market; some can, some can't.

But there are very important conditions in the small print: the Commission says that the states taking out these loans will not have to pay VAT on the purchases —a very attractive tax rebate— and, in addition, the loan has a 45year term with a 10-year grace period. These are really generous terms. But they have to go together, two by two or at least with Ukraine. Moreover, 65% of the added value of what they buy has to be European added value.

President Macron got much of what he wanted when he said yes to more spending —but with the condition that purchases be made from European industry (not exclusively, but with 65% European added value). The conditions are good: fiscal incentives, European added value and some concrete targets on how the money must be spent.

So, we are now on the borderline between industrial policy and defence policy. Promoting industry is one thing; deciding what industry should produce —because that is what the armies want— is something else. That decision is for the armies to make. I say no to the Berlaymont bureaucracy. The armies should be the ones to state what they need and hopefully do it in a coherent and coordinated way. That is why we have the CARD (Coordinated Annual Review on Defence), produced by the European Defence Agency (EDA), which is absent from these approaches, but has a fundamental role to play.

Moreover, this 150 billion is separate from the 650 billion. As we like big figures, we say 650,000 on the one hand and 150,000 on the other, so that makes it 800,000. No, they do not add up because the 150,000 will be a way of financing the other 650,000. This indebtedness of the states will be partly facilitated by the Commission, but it is not 650,000 on the one hand and 150,000 on the other. It is important to understand this in order to grasp what we are talking about, and to avoid considerable confusion about what these figures mean, where they come from and who should manage them.

Are the member states of the Union really willing to go down this road? I do not know, but I do think they should not do it in an uncoordinated way. It would be good for the defence ministers to sit down with the heads of the European Defence Agency and with the CARD on the table to say: "here is what we have collectively, here is what we don't here is what we have too much of, and now we must figure out how to organise ourselves to stop

accumulating duplication and to eliminate the shortcomings we share".

The third proposal is not neutral either: allowing cohesion and structural funds to be used to finance military spending. It is something that has never been done before and it remains to be seen whether states will want to do ir or not. Some will and some will not, but it is also a qualitative leap from resources directed at the civilian economy to being used as part of defence funding.

All this has been done under Article 122 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which states that exceptional circumstances may lead to exceptional responses. It is the same article that was used during the pandemic. This is the first time it has been used with regard to defence.

We are not going to avoid the debate —I am anticipating this— between what are "loans" and what are "grants", as was the case during the pandemic. Some will say: "I am not looking for a loan, I am looking for a grant". For the moment, we are still talking about loans, but we will soon see countries —probably our own— saying: "I can't go on taking on more debt; the financial burden should be allocated proportionally to each party's capacity". And we will also see how some will say: "No way", because, once again, it raises a problem of moral hazard.

This problem was already raised during the euro crisis and again during COVID, but because in the case of the later, it was clear that it was nobody's fault and that it affected everyone equally. Now, however, it will be raised again because there will be those who say: "I have been investing in defence for years; I am spending 4% of GDP. You, who have not done it, cannot come to me now and ask me to finance your own self-inflicted catch-up". This debate will dominate the public landscape in Europe in the coming months.

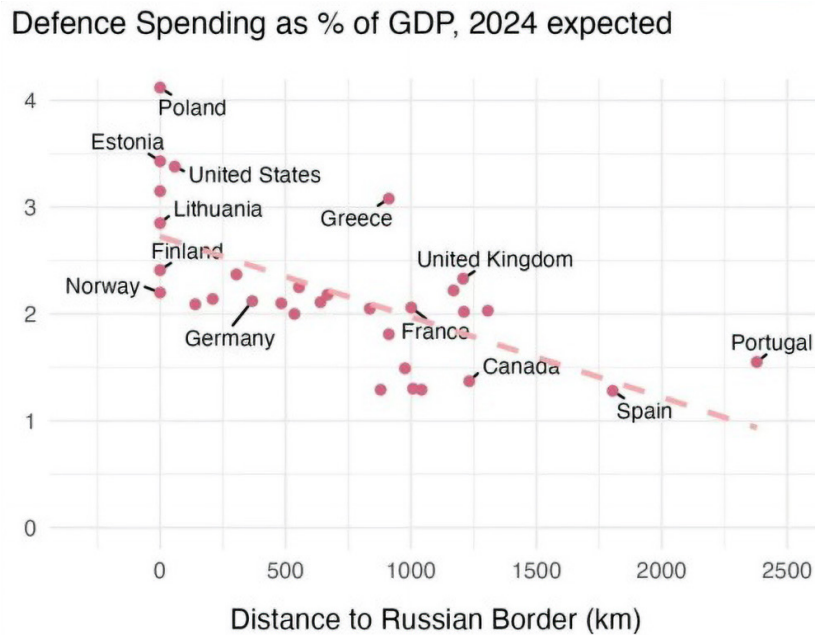
(*The fragmentation of European industry*) The Commission intervenes from the point of view of industrial policy —its sole competence— focusing on the productivity and competitiveness of the whole industry, including the defence industry, which is an important sector of it. Incidentally, we have only 30 European companies among the top 100 defence companies worldwide, and only three are multinationals. This reflects a considerable backlog.

Defence, however, is not just about having industrial capacity; it is about more than having weapons or producing them. Defence

means armies, organisations accountable to a political authority. To which political authority would be they be accountable? When we launched the *Strategic Compass*, we had a modest ambition: to deploy 5,000 troops contributed by European armies in a *Rapid Deployment Force*. But when I wanted to call it a "force", many European countries said: "No 'force' at all. How can you call it that?". They didn't want to use that term; in the end it was called "Rapid Deployment Capacity", which is more neutral. It is amazing how things have changed since then.

This reflects the fact that Europe was built on the abandonment of the very idea of power; in many ways, it was almost a rejection of power itself that gave birth to the EU. That is why talking about force generates rejection; force may be represented by NATO, but a European force raises doubts. Today we must ask ourselves what capacity Europeans have to create interoperable forces that can be mobilised in the service of common defence objectives, just as NATO does with the armies of all its member states.

This is what is sometimes called the European pillar within NATO. Call it what you will, but we will probably have to enter into a dynamic in which those Europeans who want to do so —and not all of them will— are willing to make this "rapid deployment capacity" grow and become a truly interoperable and effective capabil-



ity. Something that, despite my efforts when I left, we were far from achieving. But I think this is the more modest, down-to-earth and realistic approach for us Europeans to take in building our own capabilities, fully aware of our significant dependence on the United States and understanding that perceptions of threat will be different depending on history and geography.

(*Investment and threat perception*) Look at the defence spending of European countries and the relationship with their distance from Russia. It is an explanatory variable that draws an almost perfect regression line. The closer you are to Russia, the higher your defence spending relative to GDP; the further away you are —and fortunately, we are quite far— the lower that ratio tends to be. It is clear that Poland, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland and Norway have high levels of defence spending. Then you go down: Germany, France… We know that correlation does not necessarily imply causality, but the relationship is clear. Geography matters, and in this context, we can only recognise a dynamic in which some countries will naturally take a leading role in the process of rearmament, more so than others.

Poland spends 4.5% of its GDP on military and is South Korea's biggest customer. Why Korea? Because it is the only one that supplies it on time and at the right price; neither Europe nor the United States does. Regarding the fragmentation of the industry, I have already explained where Europe stands: we have less than we should.

(*Moving towards a credible European deterrent)* I have also mentioned that replacing the United States would require around 300,000 more troops, but I defer to the expert judgement of our military commanders. Today, we have almost one and a half million troops in all European armies combined: one and a half million, but they are fragmented and have very limited effectiveness. As far as I know, no European country has the capacity to manoeuvre army corps on the scale of around 50,000 soldiers. The only thing we know how to do is move a division —and not even all of them. Certainly France and Poland know how to do it —but we have no experience in large-scale troop mobilisation.

We need more deterrent capability, starting with artillery shells and continuing with all combat elements. What NATO says it would take to stop a Russian invasion of the Baltics is more than what the combined ground forces of France, Germany, Italy and the UK currently have. And we are not talking about nuclear

deterrence; we are referring to the capability to respond to conventional warfare.

(*The big challenge: dependence on the US*) If we talk about dependence, 55% of our weapons since the war have been imported from the United States. The F-35 is a symbolic element, but it is not just that. By the way, you may have heard that this figure was 85%; but that is a mistake. Someone said it, everyone repeated it and people ended up believing it —me included— but then a more in-depth study showed us that the dependence was 55% instead of 85%, which is not bad, but it is less.

(*European nuclear deterrence: not free, in part, from US dependence*) Even on the nuclear issue, the Trident missiles that equip Britain's nuclear submarines are built in the United States and must be sent there for periodic overhauls. Britain's deterrent capability is severely constrained because it neither manufactures nor maintains its delivery vehicles.

With that in mind, I believe that we must seize the opportunity to start a conversation in our societies that is not driven by fear. We must avoid strident concerns or creating more fear than reflection. We should not scare citizens by telling them to accumulate anti-nuclear kits at home, because fortunately, we are far from that scenario. But we must call on society to understand the risks it faces and the needs to address them.

Tackling these risks requires two things: political will and technical capabilities. The political will depends on the decision-makers: to create it, to overcome divisions and to understand that we share a common cause in providing those who ensure our security with the necessary means to do so.

I know that security is not just military security. Today, security is broadly defined: climate security, economic security. Almost everything has a security component, of course. But let's get to the heart of the matter and focus on what we could do in case things go wrong and the risk of a conflagration does not only affect Ukraine. And that is especially important for a country like Spain, given the figures I mentioned earlier. That is why the political debate in the coming days is so relevant for us.

And that is the end of it. I have skipped all the slides I had prepared and I have focused on the most important figures. I hope I have helped to clarify where and how the famous 800 billion — which is not really the famous 800 billion—, comes from and how

it is managed. Do not mix apples and oranges, and do not count the same figures twice. Give each amount a time frame, otherwise we do not really know what we are talking about.

Thank you very much.

Josep Borrell Fontelles

3 Table 1.1. Conflict in Ukraine

3.1 Systemic impact of the war in Ukraine

Author: Josep Baqués Quesada

Summary:

Beyond the war front, the conflict in Ukraine has shown a deep fracture in international society, while certifying the crisis of international organisations such as the UN and the EU. On the other hand, the BRICS group has gained new members. All this forces us to rethink the distribution of world power, which is no longer unipolar, confirming the end of Fukuyama's hypothesis as well as the return of Huntington's hypothesis, sifted by Duguin.

Key words:

War, World order, Russia, China, United States.

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3.1.1 Background

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has had a major impact on the global political system. From the first condemnation votes in the UN General Assembly, it was clear that only a few states voted against the proposed resolutions. However, many —more than fifty— either abstained or were absent in order not to condemn.

This is evidence of a first fracture in international society (calling it a "community" would be an exaggeration). More serious is the fact that the states which chose not to condemn represented more than 50% of the world's population and economy. A logical outcome, given that China and India were there. As well as most of the (usually heavily populated) Muslim countries. In that first vote, several pairs of theoretical enemies —India and Pakistan, Morocco and Algeria— opted for the same choice: not to condemn. The Indian case is interesting. After the end of the Cold War, Washington tried to integrate India into its orbit, to put pressure on China given the Sino-Indian border conflicts. Its inclusion in the QUAD (Australia, United States, India and Japan) is a clear example of this effort. But India's role in the Ukrainian war is sobering: buying hydrocarbons from Russia, refining them and selling them —at higher prices— to Western European countries. This, combined with its dual membership in the BRICS group and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), leaves little room for doubt. India, as always, is acting in its own interest. But it is clear which tree it prefers to climb to achieve this.

In fact, the BRICS have grown in the midst of war. Ethiopia, Egypt and Iran (each country with close to or slightly over 100 million inhabitants), as well as the United Arab Emirates, have formalised their membership. More spectacular, however, is the flood of states that have acceded to the status of BRICS "partners". These include Indonesia, Nigeria, Malaysia (500 million inhabitants between the first two) and NATO members such as Turkey. This is the emergence of a bloc that competes with the G7 at all levels (including ideologically).

This explains why the largest economic sanctions packages ever seen in history have had limited effect, despite their expectations. In fact, some of the states that voted in the UN General Assembly to condemn the invasion have also failed to implement them (Turkey, for example).

3.1.2 Sinking pillars

The UN itself is a major casualty of war. Called upon to prevent wars or to restore peace when they break out, it has proven ineffective to the point of irrelevance. It is true that its role was no more inadequate during the also illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003. But too many failures have accumulated in recent times. The sad role played in Ukraine has been joined by an equally unremarkable role in the subsequent war in Gaza. So, the keystone of the international security architecture designed after World War II is revealing its futility.

The EU, that eternal promise, has fared no better. A champion of sanctions against Russia, its members have been the main victims of its boomerang effect —with dramatic cases such as Germany, once the engine of Europe. But this is not the worst for Europe's ambitions. Let's remember the lack of internal union. To Hungary's discordant voice we can add Slovakia's. And we should keep an eye out for Croatia —already within the EU— and Serbia —still outside— both pursuing their own agendas that align closely with Russia and China than to Brussels. All cases combine economic and ideological (or value) criteria. This makes the diagnosis worse. Europe is showing its seams, just when Washington is questioning the transatlantic bond. Bad news is piling up.

Another remarkable phenomenon is that, in the midst of war, Africa has expelled France (and the US) from Niger to the benefit of the private Russian military company the Wagner Group. Sino-Russian influence in the Maghreb and Sahel was already evident before February 2022. But it is striking that this war, instead of slowing it down, has accelerated it (in time and space). Russia had been working on it, as evidence by the two African summits, in Sochi in 2019 and in St. Petersburg in 2023, which shows that there is an underlying strategy.

But war is war… As destruction rages in Ukraine and Russia wears itself out, China emerges as the big beneficiary. In the coming decades, it will have Russia eating out of its hand, while it con-

tinues to develop new technologies (with some late-breaking achievements in the field of artificial intelligence or AI and the conquest of outer space). Something is changing. Or at least emerging.

3.1.3 The experts were never so optimistic

US experts in International Relations and geopolitics speak of a unipolar world only until the end of the last decade of the 20th century. That is, it would have lasted a decade (the 1990s —to use two symbolic dates, between the successful Iraq war of 1991 and the attacks of 11 September 2001). But no more. However, in political, journalistic and academic, and sometimes even military circles, the illusion of alleged unipolar world was maintained until quite recently. Today, however, this is no longer tenable. A resilient Russia was not deterred by the United States or NATO in February 2022 —a fact hardly compatible with the idea of unipolarity). Then, after engaging in a war against a large state with more than 30 million inhabitants, has endured sanctions, has deployed thousands of troops and has not been defeated, neither militarily nor diplomatically, despite the efforts of NATO and the European Union.

With unipolarity ruled out, the challenge for the coming months, perhaps years, will be to determine whether we are entering a multipolar world (the easiest and most common explanation, which we will read about everywhere) or even a bipolar world, in which two antagonistic blocs confront each other, although one of them is two-headed. Nor are the hypotheses meaningless that tell us of two aspiring hegemons —one to exploit and even extend the *status quo* (the United States) and the other a revisionist power (China)— plus a third state acting as arbiter (Russia) , if we assume that it is not an equidistant position. This, in itself, augurs an uncertain future for the US hegemonic candidacy and gives wings to revisionism.

Conclusion

At the theoretical level, what has fallen is Fukuyama's paradigm of the end of history, elaborated in the moment of ethnocentric euphoria that accompanied the fall of the Berlin Wall and the implosion of the Soviet Union. Putin is hated in the West not for the war in Ukraine, but for resisting Fukuyama's diagnosis.

Once the evidence has ruled out a Fukuyamian scenario, Huntington's alternative hypothesis will have to be (re)considered. If it is possible to speak of a bipolar world, the explanation will lie in Huntington's theory, once it has been sieved through Duguin's theory. In short, starting from the existence of different civilisations, each embodying different ways of understanding life, Russia embodies the intuition of an alliance among those that, each in their own way, defend the tradition against the one the Western civilization that denies it, certainly led by the United States.

Josep Baqués Quesada
Professor of the Department of Political Science
University of Barcelona (UB)

3.2 The strategic ambition of the Russian Federation

Author: Col. José María Pardo de Santayana y Gómez-Olea

Summary:

The Kremlin has acted in Ukraine driven by Russia's two main traditional strategic vectors: access to warm seas with its corollary fear of encirclement and the aspiration to be recognised as a great power. At a time when an uncertain peace process has begun, its strategic ambitions are key to trying to understand the enormous difficulty facing potential peace scenarios. President Trump is in a hurry, his prestige is at stake, and Putin wants to take advantage of that to maximise his strategic aspirations, which will not make the culmination of the peace process any easier. At the same time, Europe is in danger of being marginalised from major decision-making processes. It is not clear how the whole process will unfold, and we cannot rule out the possibility that, instead of the war being resolved, there will be an escalation or even a situation of extreme tension.

Key words:

Strategy, Russian Federation, Ukraine war, Peace talks, President Trump.

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At a time when complex and uncertain peace negotiations have begun in the Ukrainian war, it is important to understand the Kremlin's strategic ambitions in order to understand this process and try to foresee possible future scenarios.

Russia is a country constrained by geography. Thus, since Peter the Great, the search for an outlet to the warm seas has been one of its main geostrategic vectors with a twofold focus:

- expansionist, which has produced rivalries and fears with all neighbours;
- and concern that the country might be encircled, which, together with very large and difficult to defend borders, induce a strong sense of insecurity.

NATO's expansion to include Ukraine and, at the time, Georgia was interpreted in Moscow as a potential encirclement manoeuvre.

In his renowned book *The Grand Chessboard* in 1997, when Yeltsin's Russia was hardly given any geostrategic value, Brzezinski already wrote that Russia has great geopolitical ambitions and remained a major player (Brzezinski, 1997). He also asserted that Ukraine is a geopolitical pivot and that its independence changes the very nature of the Russian state because without it, Russia ceases to be an empire in Eurasia. Thus, Moscow's relationship with Kiev is decisive for its aspirations to be recognised as a great power.

The need —and even the right—- to be a great power is the second major vector of Russian geo-strategy that together with the previous one and a deep-rooted sense of history constitute the foundations of Russia's traditional strategic ambition that President Vladimir Putin has made his own.

In 2017, when the Russian Federation was already fully engaged in its military reform and had shown a clear determination to pursue its geopolitical objectives, the US Defense Intelligence Agency's report "Russia Military Power: Building a Military to Support Great Power" also highlighted, as its title clearly indicates, that the defence of its great power status was the cen-

tral objective of its strategic reinforcement (DIA Public Affairs, 2017).

The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation of July 2021 states in its first paragraph[1]:

> "Russia's integrated policy of strengthening defence capabilities, internal unity and political stability, economic modernisation and the development of industrial potential has strengthened Russia's sovereign statehood as a country capable of conducting an independent foreign and domestic policy and effectively resisting attempts to exert external pressure".

Only a great power can conduct an independent foreign and domestic policy and effectively resist attempts to exert external pressure on it.

It goes on to state: "The Constitution of the Russian Federation establishes the fundamental values and principles that constitute the foundations of Russian society, national security and the further development of Russia as a social state based on the rule of law". With this, the Kremlin unequivocally rejects the West's attempts to exert any kind of influence or interference in matters of values.

The third paragraph goes on to state: "Only a harmonious combination of strong power and human welfare will ensure the formation of a just society and Russia's prosperity". This expresses, as the war in Ukraine has shown, the reliance on the use of force and the centrality of the material welfare of society to the legitimacy of the Russian power system. This is why Putin has consistently shown particular concern that the war should not substantially affect the way of life in Russia's major cities.

In December 2021, Dmitri Trenin wrote in *Foreign Affairs* that there was a significant asymmetry in the importance the West and Russia attach to Ukraine, and that Washington has made a promise to Kiev that both sides know it cannot keep: "Russia, by contrast, regards Ukraine as a vital national security interest and has declared itself ready to use military force if that interest is threatened" (Trenin, 2021).

[1] Available at http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/QZw6hSk5z9gWq0plD1ZzmR5cER0g5tZC.pdf

After the war began, in the same magazine Liana Fix and Michael Kimmage defended (Fix and Kimmage, 2022):

> "Although the Russian army had won its battles in 2014 and 2015, the Kremlin was losing the war for Ukraine's future. Putin believed that quickly overthrowing the Kiev government would transform this state of affairs and push Ukraine back towards Russia, punishing Kiev's European and US partners. In his view, an invasion would not lead to a wider war because Europe and the US were only superficially engaged with Ukraine".

With the war stabilised and Ukraine having shown an unexpected and astonishing military capability, in March 2023 the Russian Federation's Foreign Policy Concept justifies its historical right to be a great power and one of the centres of power in a multipolar world[2]:

> "Russia, given its decisive contribution to the victory in World War II, as well as its active role in building the modern system of international relations and dismantling the world system of colonialism, acts as one of the sovereign centres of world development and exercises its historically unique mission of maintaining the world balance of power, establishing a multipolar international system and ensuring conditions for the peaceful and progressive development of humanity on the basis of the unifying and constructive agenda".

The document also develops a powerful narrative that, with the aim of distancing the countries of the so-called Global South from the influence of the Western powers, presents the latter's strategy as a continuation of the colonialist and imperialist will to dominate and exploit the rest of the world. By doing so, Moscow aims to reduce the impact of sanctions and counter the Western strategy of isolating the revisionist powers (Pardo, 2022).

Subsequently, Thomas Graham explained that Putin continues to insist that all his goals will be achieved: weakening or breaking Ukraine's ties with NATO, curbing Ukrainian nationalism and expanding territorial gains (Graham, 2024).

> "Putin has said little about his territorial ambitions. He fervently believes that Russians and Ukrainians are one people

[2] Available at: https://mid.ru/es/foreign_policy/official_documents/1860586/

and that Ukraine can only prosper in partnership with Russia. He has spoken of his desire to regain Russia's 'historic lands' without specifying what these are, although it is clear that they include at least parts of Ukraine".

As John Mearsheimer has explained at length, the Kremlin assesses a defeat in the war as an existential threat (Mearsheimer, 2023) and Robert Kaplan similarly considers that a destabilised Russia could lead to even more dangerous scenarios than the current ones (Kaplan, 2022). In the circumstances as we know them, we can be sure that Russia will not stop the war as long as it considers any of its main strategic objectives threatened. This will likely lead to protracted negotiations and the diplomacies involved —especially the Russian and US ones— will have to work hard. In this respect, the Russian side is more experienced, has highly qualified personnel and will use all kinds of resources to achieve its objectives:

- The neutralisation of Ukraine is an issue on which the Kremlin will not compromise.
- Their demilitarisation is a more difficult issue to determine and will be one of the most complex aspects of the negotiation; it will condition certain military capabilities, particularly long-range artillery, and may affect some territories differently from others.
- Territorial concessions will be a crucial issue and it is difficult to predict how far Russia will go. Ukraine will undoubtedly be the loser. There is no room for negotiation on Crimea. The Kremlin has also asserted that the four provinces annexed in September 2022 (Lugansk, Donetsk, Zaporiyia and Kherson) must be fully incorporated into the Russian Federation, which would require Kiev to hand over to Moscow parts of these provinces that it has not yet conquered militarily. This would also create a bridgehead north of the Dnieper River that would make the line of contact more difficult for Russia to defend, but would facilitate future operations with an eye on Nikolayev and Odessa.
- Odessa is also a Russian fixation —argued for historical reasons— because its possession would strengthen Moscow's grip on the Black Sea coast and make Ukraine dependent on Russia for its seaborne exports. This would allow the Kremlin to condition Kiev's policies and, in the event of a resumption of war, would serve as a base along with Transnistria for further territorial conquest.

The realisation of the Kremlin's strategic ambitions would mean a full-fledged defeat of Ukraine. Moscow believes that Washington is in a hurry and knows that its priority is elsewhere: to be able to focus on China without the war in Ukraine draining it of material resources and political energy, while a better relationship with Moscow would make it easier for Washington to play the global balancing act, leaving behind considerations of values. Putin is willing to make concessions elsewhere in the world and the issue of economic sanctions is not, for the time being, his priority.

Even for Trump, Russia's maximum pretensions would be a bitter pill to swallow and a sign of weakness. For Europe as a whole, it would be a source of deep frustration and the danger of an internal rift over differing positions. Likewise, the already stormy relationship between the European powers and the US president could be aggravated.

We can therefore conclude that very complex months lie ahead, during which the Kremlin will strive to maximize its strategic ambitions , Trump will have to defend his prestige and influence in order to appear to the world with some control of the situation, and Europe will do its best to avoid being excluded from major decision-making. It is not clear how this whole process will end, nor can it be excluded that, instead of the war being resolved, there will be an escalation or even a situation of extreme tension.

José Pardo de Santayana
Colonel DEM
IEEE Associate Professor

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3.3 Conflict in Ukraine. Summary of the debate

Compiled by the moderator: Prof. Luis V. Pérez Gil

On 24 February 2022, Europe's security system collapsed. On that day, Russia, one of the victorious powers of the Second World War, a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (the world's governing body), one of the main creators of international law, and possessor of the world's largest arsenal of nuclear weapons, decided to resort to the use of force to try to solve a security problem it had identified in its Western strategic direction. Its initial objective was to seek the subjugation of Ukraine with as little violence as possible and as effectively as possible with the means employed. However, their plans to achieve this failed.

The launch of Russia's invasion of Ukraine also highlighted the failure of deterrence. Neither the United States, nor NATO, nor the West as a power bloc were able to prevent the Russian leadership from taking the decisive step of resorting to the use of

force on the very continent of Europe. But not only that, the resources of military power they brought to the table were sufficiently convincing (deterrent) for no Western power or group of countries to come to Ukraine's aid. One can sing praises and make grandiose statements about Western assistance, but the Russian aggression was met by the Ukrainians themselves —by their government, their armed forces and their people— who, in most parts of the country, opposed the invasion. Their will to win prevented the initial Russian operation from succeeding, but with it they were drawn into a long war for which neither side was prepared, even at the cost of losing everything, and imposed by larger interests.

The war in Ukraine, in addition to being a war for national independence, is above all a conflict between great powers in their struggle for power, influence and supremacy. In other words, it is a *proxy war* in Anglo-Saxon terminology. Sadly, then, the phrase —attributed to various sources but probably coined by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov— "fighting to the last Ukrainian" takes on its full meaning.

A change of government in the US has triggered a dramatic shift in support for Ukraine from being the ultimate supporter of its war effort to sitting down with the aggressor and beginning to negotiate a new (at least) regional power-sharing arrangement. In this framework, the *Ukrainian affair* is just another piece in an exchange of positions between established actors whose primary objective is to maintain the *status quo*. The US is doing this to focus on the Indo-Pacific, where it perceives its national security interests to be truly at stake. Russia, on the other hand, is doing it to gain recognition of a close sphere of influence that will allow it to overcome its security dilemma and support long-term national economic development. These are the interests of the great powers in Morgenthauian terms and, by their very nature, they impose themselves on the rest of the actors in the international system, who can only assent or oppose, although in this case they expose themselves to the application of the latter's power of conviction or coercion. This is what international reality reveals, and no theory that denies it is valid because it does not withstand the test of falsification —the ultimate criterion of scientific legitimacy.

This abrupt US change (counter-intuitive to Western values) also serves to highlight that the globalised international system is in the midst of an accelerated transition to a new world order, the

nature and characteristics of which are currently unknown. The big question is whether this change can be managed peacefully —i.e. without conflict between great powers— or whether it will come about as a result of a decisive confrontation between them, as the history of international relations persistently teaches us. The question was also raised as to whether the world that emerges —war or no war— will be globalised or a return to regionalism. But from a European perspective, there is also an even greater concern: that the end result of this struggle for power and global hegemony may involve —or result in— the disappearance of democracy as we know it. That is a great risk and also a deeply felt fear for which there is no answer at the moment.

These and other issues were addressed in the papers cited above and during the debate. The discussion began by examining the influence of the doctrines of Russian philosopher and political scientist Alexander Duguin on the formulation of Russia's strategic ambitions. His nationalist approach based on the thesis of Eurasianism, was considered particularly relevant, although this influence is thought to predate the Ukrainian conflict. The question then arose as to where Russia's borders lie and how far its purported sphere of influence extends, which would in any case remain to be defined in a hypothetical comprehensive global agreement that would put an end to the conflict in Ukraine. To answer this question, it is necessary to take into account the notions of territory and the Russian people, which from their perspective have flexible contours and thus allow the Kremlin to maintain a position adaptable to the military situation on the ground (Crimea, Novorossiya, later Odessa). However, some experts believe that its political ambitions do not stop there, and that a potential threat to Eastern European countries, which are members of the European Union (EU) and NATO, is on the table. Therefore, a peace agreement in Ukraine does not *per se* guarantee the security of the rest of Europe, but effective containment and deterrence mechanisms —security guarantees for Ukraine and deterrence in the rest of Europe— would need to be put in place.

This approach, in turn, raises a fundamental question from a European perspective: how does the Kremlin currently see relations with the EU, and what will those relations be like after the conflict in Ukraine? Will they be cooperative or conflictual? Assertive or under threat and coercion from an increasingly aggressive Russia? Most experts argue that Russia does not see

the EU as a power or even as a relevant actor worthy of direct negotiation —unlike the US (on the Western side) or China or India, which, in the Ukrainian war, act as benevolent non-belligerents on Russia's behalf) and are perceived by them as equals.

In this scenario of the search for balance between great powers, does Ukraine have the strength to continue fighting Russia? As has become clear, Ukraine faces two really serious problems: one is the drop in the volume of Western —mainly American— supplies, which cannot be compensated for by the EU and European countries that maintain their support. The other is the demographic factor, which limits the extent of forced conscription between the ages of 18 and 25, which together with the emigration that occurred at the beginning of the war is creating a growing gap in social support for the war effort. It is a fact that the passion of the first months, even the first year of the war, has been waning in parallel with military setbacks —failure of the summer offensive of 2023, blocking of the Kursk offensive— and the accumulation of casualties after three years of war. An imminent Ukrainian collapse seems unlikely, but the attrition to which the country is being subjected could lead it to an untenable situation and force it to negotiate under truly burdensome conditions that would depend on the decisions of third parties.

Precisely from this focus on the struggle for power and hegemony among the great powers, new hypothetical scenarios are being considered which were unthinkable until a few months ago: the United States moving closer to Russia to negotiate a global agreement to try to counter China in the long term, or the possibility of Europe moving closer to Russia once again to confront the United States, particularly in a scenario where the US withdraws from or abandons NATO. However, it is more likely that Russia, as the weakest power of the three, will seek an understanding with the other two and attempt to maintain a stable balance with both. This would contribute to its main strategic objective: the maintenance of its recognition as a great power, one that must be engaged in dialogue and included in agreements to shape the world system.

A negotiated end to the war —if some form of explicit agreement is reached— would seem to strengthen Russia's position. However, they will have to solve important problems such as the transition from a war economy hyper-stimulated by public spending (currently between 10-12 percent of GDP goes to finance the war) to a post-war economy, and determining how to apply inno-

vation and technological development within an economic system controlled by a small group of individuals that responds solely and exclusively to presidential power.

In its relationship with smaller actors, Russia has significant capabilities to conduct information campaigns (*Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference*). Thus, the EU and its member states need to be prepared to protect themselves against Russian actions in the grey zone, which are not open conflict but aimed at attacking the stability of target countries and institutions. Consequently, significant investments in the cognitive domain will be necessary to try to ensure Europe's internal stability in the face of Russian propaganda. But Europe cannot —should not— depend on what others do; rather, the necessary steps must be taken to strengthen resilience in a rapidly degrading strategic landscape in which, as noted above, major powers will seek mutually beneficial arrangements, even behind the backs of their own allies.

This is where questions of international political economy come into play, the new relations between the West on the one hand and "the rest" on the other (revisionist powers, regional powers, countries of the Global South), which have created and are expanding new international forums and institutions (BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation or SCO and Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN) that seek to degrade Western power by generating a new distribution of power that is favourable to their own interests. Once again, most experts believe that in order to face this scenario of global change it is necessary to strengthen the cohesion of the EU, with or without US economic hegemony.

Luis V. Pérez Gil
Doctor in Law with Extraordinary Prize
Lieutenant RV (ET)
IEEE Analyst

4 Roundtable 1.2. Situation in the Middle East

4.1 Conflict in Israel and its immediate environment

Author: Col. José Ignacio Castro Torres

Summary:

The terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023 in the vicinity of the Gaza Strip triggered a sequence of events that transformed the international order, not only regionally but globally. Internally, Israel was shaken, as the security of its population and territory had not reached a similar level of threat since the end of the Arab-Israeli wars. This paper will address Israel's internal and immediate environment from a security perspective.

Key words:

Israel, Lebanon, Syria Palestine, Hamas, Hezbollah.

Cite this document:

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Introduction

The domestic situation in Israel prior to the attacks of 7 October 2023 had reached a high level of tension. On the political front, the Netanyahu government faced a major crisis, with the prime minister facing three open court cases and popular discontent that had led to a large number of anti-government demonstrations.

The situation with the Palestinians was not going well and the weakness of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) had been exploited by Hamas and its affinity groups to exert pressure with all kinds of actions —including violent ones— in the Gaza Strip and especially in the West Bank. It is possible that for this reason Israeli security services failed to perceive that a large-scale attack was brewing from the Gaza Strip, where the Qatari mediation seemed to be having an effect.

At the regional level, however, relations with its Arab neighbours had improved significantly since Bahrain and the UAE recognised the State of Israel in 2020, as part of the Abraham Accords pushed by the US administration of President Trump. In 2023, Saudi Prince Mohammed bin Salman declared that Saudi Arabia and Israel had never been closer.

Not all was smooth in the Israeli regional environment, as Turkish President Recep Erdogan was a vocal advocate of the Palestinian cause. But far more dangerous was the alliance forged by the so-called Axis of Resistance, which brought together state actors such as Iran and Syria with non-state groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthi movement in Yemen or organisations such as Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad within Israel itself.

1 The attacks of 7 October and the transformation of the established order

The Hamas terrorist group had long planned a major attack on Israel, but it may well have realised that the time to carry it

out had come even earlier than expected, as disaffection with Gaza's civilian population was reaching new heights due to mismanagement and despotic rule in the Strip. Moreover, the new orientation of many Arab countries, which wanted to "do business" with Israel, was leading Palestinian groups to lose the support they had traditionally received from these states. Internationally, the world was more preoccupied with the conflict in Ukraine, along with other emerging scenarios, making it seem as if the Palestinian cause was slowly being forgotten at the global level.

Among the possible courses of action (COA) that Hamas's political and operational leaders had planned, they opted for one of "minimum agreements". This COA sought to inflict as much damage as possible on Israel, knowing that the state would bear the brunt of the damage. The main effort would be conducted from the Gaza Strip with minimal Hezbollah support from Lebanon, while all fedayeen groups in the region would support the Palestinian effort.

The unleashing of the crisis left the Netanyahu government in a situation that it would interpret as a seven-front battle. It was compelled to confront, simultaneously: terrorists in Gaza, the insurgency in the West Bank, the Hezbollah organisation in

Lebanon, Shia militias in Syria and Iraq, the Houthi movement in Yemen, and the state of Iran itself.

Against this backdrop, Netanyahu set out five objectives to be achieved. The first three were of a factual nature and aimed directly at eliminating the threat he had to face (FDD, 2023). In this sense, he set out to recover as quickly as possible Israel's border communities, which had been attacked by Hamas or harassed from Lebanon by Hezbollah. Netanyahu came to have more than 250,000 Israeli internally displaced persons (IDPs) outside their homes and had to re-establish territorial integrity and security to guarantee their return. Secondly, he had to move to an unprecedented and intense offensive against Hamas, so that the organisation would cease to exist as a consolidated political entity. The third objective was to secure the other fronts, so that he could guarantee that the threats from these could be duly neutralised.

The other two objectives set out by the prime minister were more diplomatic and political in nature: to preserve Israel's existing international support and to expand it for the duration of the main operations. The last objective was clearly inward-looking, seeking to regain internal unity in the face of its enemies. This objective would also ensure Netanyahu's survival as a political actor. However, it would prove over time that the hostage issue would dent the internal cohesion of Israeli society.

2 Situation in Israel's immediate environment

While Israel's actions have factually involved a number of regional actors, such as Iran, Iraqi Shia militias or Yemen's Houthi movement, the focus of this paper is limited to Israel itself and the territories in contact with its borders. At the time of writing, the situation is as follows:

Inside Gaza, the actions of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have led to the dismantling of the Hamas terrorist group and its related militias, with the elimination of their operational structures and of the main combatant leaders, including Yahya Sinwar himself and Mohamed Deif, considered the mastermind of the October 7 massacre. It should be noted that the organisation's political leader, Ismail Haniyeh, was eliminated in Tehran. However, the political and operational structures have been replaced, and are currently occupied by Osama Hamdan and Mohammed Sinwar, who may be

inclined to negotiate with the US (Krever, 2025). The operations have caused a large number of casualties among the Palestinian population, but there is no reliable data on the number of dead and wounded.[1]

After several ceasefire situations, not all Israeli hostages have been released, so the Netanyahu government has decided to resume operations, which has led the IDF to replace worn-out units or reinforce those deployed around the Strip (Fisher and Nader, 2025).

In the West Bank, the situation is worrying, with the IDF having to intervene because of the insecurity in the area, where attacks have been widespread and demonstrations and clashes of all kinds are the order of the day (Saltman *et al*, 2025).

On the so-called "Northern Front," the IDF carried out a series of operations to destroy Hezbollah's means of launch, while dismantling the organisation's command and control network. Of particular note was the death of its main leaders, including Hassan Nashrallah, as well as the way in which the organisation was dismantled through the destruction of its pagers and radiotelephones (Bachega, 2025).

The IDF occupied positions inside southern Lebanon to prevent attacks on the population of the Galilee area from Lebanon. In the meantime, the UN forces of UNIFIL appear to be more secure, while the Lebanese armed forces occupy positions left by the Israelis in the border area (Orion, 2025).

Events in the north have also unfolded in Syria, with the fall of the Al Assad regime and its replacement by the Islamists of Ahmed Al-Sharaam, who hastily changed his former name from Al Golani. This caused Israel to pre-emptively destroy the former regime's air and artillery projection vectors. In addition, the

1 According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, the death toll is estimated at over 50,000 people, reported in: Euronews. "Hamas-run health ministry quietly removes thousands from Gaza death toll, researchers find": https://www.euronews.com/2025/04/03/hamas-run-health-ministry-quietly-removes-thousands-from-gaza-death-toll-researchers-find. However, the figures are under study, as it is not known whether they are exaggerated or whether combatants or natural deaths are included. In any case, the UN count seems to be too slow, because the Organisation for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs waits until the incidents are independently verified, so the total number of deaths in the entire history of the conflict is currently estimated at 7248, in the document found in: OCHA "Data on Casualties": https://www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties

IDF has occupied a number of strategic positions in the Golan Heights, ensuring that no action can be taken against Israel from these positions (France 24, 2025).

Despite all this, the domestic situation is worrying for Netanyahu's government, which is facing civilian fatigue due to accusations of corruption and lack of respect for rights and freedoms. The hostage crisis has contributed to this, as the most critical sectors of Israeli society have advocated broader negotiations with the terrorists in order to secure the release of their kidnapped compatriots as soon as possible (Arnaut, 2025).

Conclusions

The first appearance that emerges from the current situation is that, in his immediate surroundings, Netanyahu's major objectives are being achieved. This may be due primarily to the dismantling of Hamas terrorists and the elimination of their top leaders. Likewise, the situation in the West Bank has not reached the scale of the Gaza Strip, but incidents between the two communities could increase.

Similarly, the Hamas threat from Lebanon can be considered dismantled, as the deaths of its top leaders and the disruption of the organisation's command and control structure have allowed the Galilee region to be secured and its civilian population to settle.

It is also noteworthy that Israel's pre-emptive actions on the Syrian army's launchers are a guarantee of security in an environment of high volatility and fighting between rival factions, which have brought Syria close to state failure.

Notwithstanding all of the above, the medium to long term does not augur well for Israel's consolidation of the goals it has achieved. In an environment where the struggle to win the hearts and minds of the civilian population is crucial, Israel has experienced a major setback, with terrorists gaining the affection of many civilians who have experienced the consequences of the conflict. It is more than possible that a new generation of Palestinians will be drawn from the future forces of terrorist movements that may emerge in the future.

The conflict has also divided Israeli society, which is torn between forceful action against terrorists and a more coherent approach

towards more moderate Palestinian sectors. In the shorter term, Netanyahu himself is seeing how the problems he had to deal with before the fateful 7 October are still with him and are likely to take their toll.

José Ignacio Castro Torres
Col. (ET) DEM.
IEEE Associate Analyst
Academy of Military Arts and Sciences

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4.2 The Iran-Israel conflict: a geo-strategic challenge for the Middle East

Author: Ambassador Ángel Losada Fernández

Summary:

The Iran-Israel conflict has escalated dangerously with global implications. In the wake of the Hamas attack in October 2023 and the subsequent Israeli offensive, regional instability has intensified, especially after the fall of the Syrian Al Assad regime and Trump's return to the US presidency. The conflict has weakened key Iranian allies such as Hezbollah and Hamas, while strengthening Israel in intelligence and US support. Three possible scenarios loom: all-out war, continuation of a hybrid war, or an uncertain but desirable diplomatic negotiation.

Key words:

Iran-Israel conflict, Hamas, Trump, Fall of Al Assad, Hybrid warfare.

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Introduction

The Iran-Israel standoff remains one of the most complex conflicts in the Middle East, with profound regional and global implications. More than a mere bilateral rivalry, it is a multidimensional conflict involving religious, political and military aspects that has redefined alliances in the region. Adding to this tension are powers such as the US, Russia, China and, to a lesser extent, the European Union, which has been relegated to a secondary role, especially since the Trump era.

Since the 1979 Islamic revolution, the Iranian regime has focused its foreign policy on ensuring its survival, taking advantage of the confrontation between Israel and the Arab countries, supporting the Palestinian cause and opposing Israel head-on, which it considers an illegitimate state and an enemy of Islam. To this end, it has fostered a network of allies —Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, the Houthis in Yemen and militias in Iraq— forming what it calls the "axis of resistance".

Israel, for its part, considers Iran's nuclear programme a direct and existential threat. It has responded with targeted assassinations, cyber sabotage and military strikes in a covert war that both sides have avoided escalating into open conflict —until now.

The horrific Hamas terrorist attack of 7 October 2023 —Operation "Al Aqsa"— and the forceful and terrible Israeli response in Gaza marked a turning point. Two recent events have further accentuated this crisis: the fall of the Al Assad regime in Syria (December 2024) and the return of Donald Trump to the US presidency (January 2025). Both have significantly altered the regional geopolitical architecture.

1 The Hamas attack and its repercussions

Prior to 7 October, Iran faced serious domestic challenges: protests following the death of Masha Amini, violent repression, international sanctions, runaway inflation and a sharp devaluation of its currency. Internationally, although it managed to re-establish relations with Saudi Arabia thanks to Chinese mediation, the possible normalisation between Israel and Riyadh —pushed by the US— represented an unacceptable threat to Tehran.

The Hamas attack and subsequent Israeli response halted this process of Arab-Israeli rapprochement, which was a geostrate-

gic relief for Tehran. However, the prolonged Israeli offensive severely weakened its two main allies —Hamas and Hezbollah— and Iran began to lose influence on the regional chessboard.

In April 2024, Israel redirected its focus to Iran, with events unfolding swiftly and dangerously. Tel Aviv bombed the Iranian Consulate in Damascus on 1 April, killing senior members of the Revolutionary Guard. Tehran, which was asked for restraint, responded on 13 April with "Operation True Promise", launching more than 300 missiles and drones at Israel in its first direct attack. Although most were intercepted, it marked a milestone in the escalation.

In May, a helicopter crash killed President Raisi and opened a new chapter. The new President, the reformist Pezeshkian, took office in an atmosphere of growing tension. However, real power remains in the hands of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei. The assassination of Hamas's political chief in Tehran on 31 July by Mossad, followed by the killing of Hassan Nasrallah on 27 September, further heightened tensions.

Despite our renewed calls for restraint, Iran, in response, launched operation "True Promise 2" on 1 October with more than 180 ballistic missiles. Israel responded by attacking military and intelligence facilities in Tehran and Karaj. Although Tehran has not yet counterattacked, it assures that it will do so in due course, keeping its retaliation in abeyance.

These exchanges reflect a dynamic of direct confrontation. While Iran has demonstrated its ability to strike, its influence in the region has been seriously weakened by the loss of Hezbollah and Hamas leadership. Israel, for its part, has regained some of the prestige of its intelligence services, which were severely criticised after the initial Hamas attack on 7 October, but is aware of Iran's destructive power.

2 The new geopolitical scenario and the alliance game

The Iran-Israel conflict is not taking place in a geopolitical vacuum. The US, Russia and China play key roles. Iran, sanctioned for its support for Russia in Ukraine, has moved even closer to Moscow. China, for its part, maintains strategic relations with Tehran, mainly as an importer of cheap oil and views Iran as a useful counterbalance to US influence in the region. This creates a complex interplay of alliances: on one hand, between Russia,

Iran and some Arab countries; and, on the other, between Israel, its close ally the US, other Arab countries and some Europeans. This creates a complex geopolitical dynamic that can either converge or come into conflict.

2.1 The fall of the Assad regime

The collapse of the Al Assad regime in Syria has been a blow to Iran and has had a seismic impact on the region. Syria was key to Iran's projection in the Mediterranean and to maintaining the logistical corridor from Iran to Hezbollah with in Lebanon through Syrian territory. Its fall has exposed the vulnerability of the Iranian regime and opened the door to a regional reconfiguration involving Turkey, Saudi Arabia and some European countries. Iran has still tried to portray itself as a pillar of the "axis of resistance", but the loss of Syria is irreparable and a blow to Tehran.

For Israel, Al Assad's departure represents an opportunity to reduce Iranian influence on its northern border, although the future of the new Syrian regime is still uncertain.

Russia, for its part, has also seen its strategic position in the Mediterranean and its projection towards North Africa and the Sahel compromised. It will seek to maintain ties with the new Syrian power through a pragmatic approach.

2.2 The return of President Trump

Trump's return to the White House in January 2025 has ushered in a new phase of confrontation with Iran. True to his style, he has re-established his policy of *maximum pressure* by signing a Presidential Memorandum on 4 February to ensure that Iran does not have an atomic weapon, aiming to reduce its oil sales to zero and thus prevent them from financing either its nuclear programme or terrorism. Moreover, he has expressed his intention to impose a new nuclear deal, after unilaterally abandoning the 2015 pact (JCPOA) during his previous term in office. Although he has expressed interest in negotiating, he does so from a position of strength, leaving the EU marginalised once again.

Meanwhile, Iran's nuclear programme continues to advance. According to the latest IAEA report, Iran enriches uranium up to

60 per cent and possesses more than 8,000 kilograms of enriched material. Although Iran officially maintains its adherence to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and there is a fatwa from the Supreme Leader prohibiting the use of nuclear weapons, more and more domestic voices are calling for a review of this stance in the face of international pressure.

Trump has also unreservedly backed the Israeli government. His statements about turning Gaza into a "new Riviera" with the resettlement of Palestinians have been strongly rejected by the Arab world.

The current US president seeks to relaunch the Abraham Accords, impose a new nuclear framework, strengthen Israel and contain Chinese and Russian influence in the region, with little or no role for Europe.

3 Possible scenarios

We are in a period of uncertainty marked by the imposition of force over multilateralism. Russia's aggression in Ukraine, the war in Gaza and the Palestinian cause along with the growing tension between Iran and Israel are examples of this. Three scenarios are on the horizon:

3.1 Total war: the worst option

The US and Israel would seek to destroy Iran's nuclear capabilities, but its facilities are dispersed, buried and heavily guarded. Therefore, no one can be sure that this goal will be fully achieved. Such a conflict could spill over and destabilise the entire region. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz would cause oil prices to soar, triggering a global recession. Iran would pull out of the NPT, develop an atomic weapon and nuclear proliferation would be inevitable if other countries such as Saudi Arabia decided to follow suit.

3.2 Continuation of hybrid warfare: the most likely scenario in the short term

Covert attacks, sanctions and international pressure have been employed without open confrontation. However, there is a risk of accidental escalation into all-out war. Moreover, regime change in

Iran does not guarantee stability: it could bring anarchy or more radical sectors to power.

3.3 Negotiation and diplomacy: the most desirable option, but also the most uncertain

Iran will not negotiate under pressure but could do so if a credible multilateral framework is offered, with progressive lifting of sanctions. The reformist presidency in Tehran could be an opportunity. Europe, if coordinated and firm, could still play a constructive role.

Conclusion

In sum, the Iran-Israel conflict has entered a critical phase. What is at stake is not only the stability of the Middle East, but global security, nuclear containment and the rule of international law. Therefore, what is clearly needed today is more diplomacy, more multilateralism and also more Europe.

Angel Losada Fernández
Spanish Ambassador

4.3 The Middle East in the context of great power competition

Author: Prof. Andrés De Castro García

Summary:

Great power competition is the most important issue of our time in International Relations. The Middle East is an extraordinary place to observe the shift of power in the world in each of the three stages discussed in this paper (bipolarity, unipolarity and multipolarity). This is how Spain has to decide who it is, where it wants to be and put the elements on the table.

Key words:

Great power competition, Middle East, Spain.

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Introduction

Great power competition is perhaps the most pressing issue of our time from the perspective of the discipline of International Relations.

It is in this sense that we can reflect on the different moments we have observed over the last eighty years. The bipolarity of the Cold War (1945-1989), in which there was a division of the world into three: the first world, led by the United States (US) and which had clear zones of influence. The second, led by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which had its own. And the third, which was a place of competition between the two blocs.

To make things easier for the reader, during the 1940s and 1950s, the US and the USSR designed the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact, respectively. That made it clear who was in whose orbit. There were even some reminder movements, such as the reaction to Hungary's attempt to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact in 1956, for which Khrushchev and Minister Zhukov prescribed 60,000 Red Army soldiers. They crossed the "border" of the "sovereign" Magyar Népköztársaság on 3 November (1956).

The "sovereignty" of the bipolar moment —and of all moments— goes hand in hand with power. And in this era, two truly sovereign states coexist, using their power to maximise national interest in their zone of influence and striving to increase it in areas of competition.

After the fall of the Wall, the unipolar moment (1989-2014) began and the US felt imbued with the authority to expand its ideological hegemony throughout the world, authorised by an American academic of Japanese descent, Francis Fukuyama, who gave the short-sighted reading that best explains the biblical "chutzpah or hubris" —in its classic version— of the twenty-five years of American unipolarity. War in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria.

All of this is the result of what we know as the "liberal hegemony", reinforced by a firm belief in the democratic peace theory and Fukuyama's notion of the "end of history". A cocktail for which —we suspect— the scholars will have other appropriate terms within their own discipline, and which we can describe as a failure in International Relations. This meant the end of the unipolar moment and the beginning of multipolarity. Which we place in 2014 due to the invasion of Crimea and the *false* threat that President Obama made to President Assad, which could not be carried out due to the deployment of Russian anti-aircraft weapons. A threat not carried out is tantamount to a loss of power.

It is true that the specific year of the beginning of multipolarity is a matter of debate. And it is no less true that it unfolded gradually, leading to the current moment (2025), in which we witness a theoretical questioning of the most basic elements of the liberal narrative: free trade, the equality of states, the world based on international rules, the expansion of democracy and human rights, among many others. This, incidentally, has called NATO into question and created an uncomfortable scenario for the EU, which is neither a geopolitical actor nor can it become one. Time will tell how long it takes us to find out as we continue to lose power on a daily basis, both in terms of lost profits and collateral damage, all of them self-inflicted.

Implications for the Middle East?

The Middle East is the ideal scenario for observing the evolution of the different moments outlined in the introduction.

Thus, in the bipolar moment, we observe that this area was in the midst of competition between the two blocs, which kept trying to control natural resources, in particular hydrocarbons. This contributed to the Iran-Iraq war between 1980 and 1988. Classic *proxy* war where the US allied with Iraq and the Soviet Union allied with Iran.

The region gave us a good understanding of the shift away from unipolarity: through the 1990 invasion of Kuwait or, in Iraqi terms at the time, the liberation of Iraq's 19th *muhafazah*. It was in that year that President Saddam discovered there was a limit to the loyalty he had shown to Washington.

He misinterpreted the unipolar moment. It was about something else; it was about spreading democracy even to places where it was (and is) science fiction. Including Iraq itself (2003) two years after the experiment in Afghanistan (2001) and years before Libya (2011).

The transition to multipolarity coincided with the arrival of DAESH and its control of substantial parts of Iraq and Syria. An unusual event occurred: the US, Russia, Israel, the Islamic Republic of Iran and non-state (or quasi-non-state) groups such as Hezbollah agreed to diminish Sunni power in these territories. Iran and the Syrian government emerged stronger in principle. Iran consolidated its influence in Iraq through the implementation of a democratic system that exists on paper but operates in a *sui generis* manner in practice. Nonetheless, it provided a constitutional framework that enabled the Shiite majority to control political power, while a Kurd became president.

In Syria, Assad consolidated his power by regaining control of the territories conquered from DAESH. Years later, however, in 2024, it was the West that promoted a change of government so that a former leader of the Al-Nusra Front could hold power, oppressing the group that until then ruled Syria as a direct consequence. The usual *folklore* of changes of government in the Middle East often produce the opposite logical outcome to what the West —acting without sufficient foresight— is supposed to want. The result is suffering, death, destruction and strategic disengagement.

The first logical consequence is that China and Russia benefit from being able to portray the US and other Western countries as irrational and hardly interpretable actors. This has implications for the lives of millions of people and leads us to intuit changes in alignment and power similar to those we have seen in Africa over the last decade —specifically on the situation in France.

Conclusions: What about the Kingdom of Spain?

The US and other Western countries made a serious mistake in interpreting the consequences of having power in the unipolar moment. They placed their greatest bet on the expansion of liberal hegemony —with the results we see today: the loss of power.

The case of Iraq and Syria is truly paradigmatic, revealing Copernican shifts that produce the disaffection of their people towards the West and its supposedly democratic model. This has

had a devastating effect on the lives and integrity of millions of people. It is curious how little is known about transitions in the Middle East, despite being always the same.

Spain has missed a unique opportunity to maintain the traditionally good relationship it has had with the leaders of that part of the world, who admired us for our regal past. Intrinsically linked to the fact that we are a monarchy, which gives us the opportunity to have a head of state who does not change his jacket —and/or face— every four years. It gives us the continuity needed to establish a relationship of trust and a long-term plan. If this could be complemented by a state foreign policy, it would be better. But stability as Head of State is a fundamental pillar that we cannot —or at least should not— do without.

However, currently it would be good not to make blatant mistakes such as alliances with unreliable actors whose continuity is not assured. Spain needs to analyse its capacity and look itself in the mirror. Then it must decide who it wants to be when it grows up, if it emancipates itself. And finally, it has to put the elements on the table to get where it wants to be. And in the Middle East we might have a realistic —and for the moment secondary— role to play. And this time, contradicting traditional wisdom, we have to move to get in the picture and avoid, on the contrary, the snapshots that condemn us and put us on the wrong side of history, leaving scores to settle for those who come after us. Let us therefore continue to be watchful, as a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises (2 Peter 1:19).

Andrés de Castro García
Professor of International Relations
Department of Political Science and Administration
National University of Distance Education

4.4 Situation in the Middle East. Summary of the debate

Compiled by the moderator: Col. José Ignacio Castro Torres

1 The Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Consequences and possible avenues of rapprochement

Much of the debate focused on the environment of the Israel-Palestine conflict. This has been a recurring theme over time and

a new catalyst that has changed the situation in the entire Middle East region has been the terrorist attack from the Gaza Strip on 7 October 2023.

The attack does not appear to have been forced by the situation in which the Palestinian people were living but was always in the mind of the Hamas terrorist organisation. The timing of the attack may have been a consequence of the organisation's dwindling internal and external support and its decision to take action with the resources at its disposal. In Yahya Sinwar's letter to Ismail Haniya of 19 June 2022, there were three options, the preferred one being the one that envisaged Hezbollah's full involvement and main effort from Lebanon, although it needed Iran's approval. The second option also needed this approval, although the main effort would be led by the Hamas group from the Gaza Strip. And finally, a third line was chosen in which virtually the entire effort would be led by the Palestinian group, while only harassment actions would be carried out from Lebanon, without requiring Iranian approval.

In response to this situation, ideological positions were put forward, presenting the paradox that, although people may die, an idea with an eminently political purpose cannot be destroyed. In any case, the Palestinian issue must be solved, because all the other problems are of little relevance in comparison. If the Palestinian question remains unsolved, it seems difficult to do anything truly relevant in the region.

One of the possible mistakes exposed has been the failure to support the Palestinian opposition against the Hamas group, which had subjugated its own population. Now, however, we faced a situation in which the destruction of everything Palestinian prevails and may lead to the occupation of Gaza. The question that arises is whether at the present time, after the drift of events, anything can be negotiated without Hamas.

One idea that was strongly emphasised was that this is an asymmetrical conflict in which Israel is not existentially threatened, but the Palestinians are. It is quite possible that a new Nakba will be repeated, referring to the disaster to which Palestinians are subjected every time a conflict occurs, having to flee their homes to an uncertain future.

This type of situation is difficult to control and it is even possible that the EU itself could be affected. Not only would there be local

and regional destabilising factors such as territorial balkanisation in Israel or destabilisation of countries such as Egypt or Jordan in a catastrophic scenario; it is more than possible that the flow of Palestinian refugees will have to be absorbed by Europe and that it will be morally obliged to do so.

Another important aspect to consider is the traditional US position in support of Israel. In the long term this trend could change, especially within the Democratic Party, which is already considered to have two souls. It should be noted that although the party's rank and file is pro-Israeli, the younger generation is seen as pro-Palestinian.

The same may be true in other Western countries. An important case is France, where the younger generation is increasingly pro-Palestinian and where President Macron has shown his concern for the fate of the Palestinian people, in a clear connection with his future electoral base.

The question that arises is whether or not the two-state solution, which was based on Yitzhak Rabin's own non-acceptance in the Oslo agreements, is considered feasible. If it was unrealistic before, it is likely even more now, because irreconcilable positions have been reached and the majority of the population does not accept it. In any case, the conflict has two lines that must never be crossed, namely human rights and international human rights law.

2 Regional destabilisation in the Middle East

At the regional level, Iran's weakness is evident. It has used the Qods Force as an agent of its expansion but is losing prestige, although it will continue to exert its influence in one way or another. Nevertheless, Iran has this and other tools of hybrid power at its disposal, so the solution must be some form of accommodation.

Iran's survival depends to a large extent on the survival of its allies, and it must be borne in mind that the internal tensions in the country —both socially and economically— could lead to a collapse of the regime. However, the experience of other states in the region shows that the possible scenario of the Ayatollahs' regime's demise could lead to a catastrophic situation, with more uncontrolled conflict and a terrible humanitarian crisis.

It is therefore necessary to accommodate the situation and seek a path based on multilateralism, in order to reach some kind of consensus that is most beneficial to all parties. Negotiations must be conducted from a position of humility, in an attempt to avoid the Iranians perceiving themselves as being at a disadvantage and being seen as weak in the eyes of their people and their allies. Here the internal power groups must be taken into account, most notably the Islamic Revolutionary Guards (Pasdaran), who not only have great politico-religious influence, but are also one of the main economic pillars of the country, controlling 70 percent of the economy. It does not appear that the Pasdaran are willing to cede any share of power.

A neglected and under-appreciated issue for Westerners has been the role of Christians in the Middle East. Traditionally, they had been a non-hegemonic power that had a good quality of life under the structure of the various Ba'ath parties, especially in Iraq and Syria. The role of the West has been to try to export a model of democracy that does not work in the region and which in the end has only resulted in vote-buying. The West has failed to understand regional dynamics and has devoted itself to financing public policies that are not understood there, when it could have relied on the stabilising power of Christians, who in the end have been betrayed.

3 The Middle East as an area of global influence

The region has implications for the new world order that must be considered. Notably, in Saudi Arabia there have been negotiations between Russian and the US over the fate of Ukraine, especially given President Trump's proclivity for good relations with the Saudis.

However, Saudi Arabia also maintains an excellent dialogue with China, one of its major trading partners, so its position as the barycentre of the triangle of global players could be of great benefit to Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The fateful events of 7 October may have been beneficial for the Chinese in the long run, as they damaged the IMEC (India-Middle East-European Union Corridor) initiative. In any case, the Saudis are well positioned in both the IMEC and the China-led Belt and Road initiative. Saudi Arabia has thus become the backbone of both initiatives, making Saudi support essential for all.

The Iranian situation has repercussions beyond the regional level, as US sanctions may destabilise Iranian-Russian relations, effectively pushing Iran into Russia's arms, resulting in a power imbalance. It should be borne in mind that Russian geopolitical inertia leads it to seek an outlet to the free waters of the Indian Ocean. A weakened Iran would provide Russia with control of the NSTC (North South Transport Corridor) communications corridor, which from Iranian ports would link to Mumbai in India. The survival of the Iranian regime is therefore also important at the global level.

The question arises as to whether or not negotiations with Iran are viable, as the regime could maintain much of its resilience, relying on repression and the Persian-Shi'a core of its population. With the domestic context at least partially under control, the Ayatollahs' regime could seek China's counterweight in order to maintain its share of power on the international stage or at least seek a point of equilibrium, thanks to knowing how to measure the efforts to exert on the global powers.

One of the views discussed was what could be negotiated with Iran, given that the Israeli Netanyahu government aims to bring down the Iranian regime and that, similarly, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates feel the Iranians are a threat to their stability. Likewise, nuclear negotiations cannot lead to a situation in which Iran could acquire nuclear weapons, as this would lead to a spiral of proliferation that would affect the delicate global order.

In this sense, Europe could play an important role, since the Europeans of the P5+1 group, unlike the US, have not withdrawn from the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) agreed with Iran on nuclear issues. The Europeans have in their hands the "Snap-Back" mechanism for Iran to comply with the terms of the agreement and this could provide a series of economic incentives that would lead Iran to a situation of greater stability and the recovery of its middle class.

An important aspect to highlight is the "variable geometry" that has been applied by global powers in the region, which has failed to produce a real solution in the long term. The change can be seen in the US support for Saddam Hussein's Iraqi regime in the Iran-Iraq War. Subsequently, affinities changed, in an intricate system of support for different Shia and Sunni groups. Thus, a failure to evolve towards a multipolar world can be seen, where peace should be achieved through deterrence, and where unfor-

tunately the West has acted in ways that have led to disaster in the study area.

José Ignacio Castro Torres
Col. (ET) DEM.
IEEE Associate Analyst
Academy of Military Arts and Sciences

5 Roundtable 2.1. Geopolitics of energy

5.1 New World Order. The worst or the best thing that could have happened to Europe

Author: Ángel Luis Bautista Fernández

Summary:

Geopolitics and energy are deeply intertwined, with energy acting as a key factor in the global economy and international relations. The European Union (EU), dependent on energy imports, faces major challenges in an increasingly unstable global environment, marked by conflicts in Ukraine, the Middle East and tensions between the US and China.

The order established after the Second World War has come to an end, and the geopolitical structure that defined international relations has fragmented. The idea of a cohesive "West" is weakening, giving way to a scenario where each power seeks to impose its interests without respecting the bonds of trust forged over decades.

EU regulation, in its quest for sustainability, creates unnecessary obstacles to competitiveness and security of supply. Policies

are needed to harness indigenous resources and reduce external dependence, for example through renewable fuels. Spain, with its advanced refining system and technological capacity, is ready to lead in this area.

Europe must take courageous decisions to guarantee its energy security and its space on the global stage. The current crisis is an opportunity to redefine its strategy, strengthening alliances and securing essential resources. Only in this way will it be able to face an increasingly geopolitically volatile world and secure a future for generations to come.

Key words:

Energy, Renewable fuels, Gas, Regulation, Competitiveness.

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Geopolitics has always played a major role in the field of energy and vice versa. Energy is a determining factor in shaping the global economy and international relations, granting power to the one who controls it and well-being and economic power to the one who benefit from it. It is not mere importation that generates vulnerability, it is the absence of security of supply, which is not the same thing.

Geopolitical analysis always starts with who controls the resources, whether they are molecules, such as oil or natural gas; technology, as in the case of renewables or hydrogen; or critical minerals.

The European Union, which accounts for 10% of global primary energy demand and 18% of GDP (we are efficient, but increasingly less relevant), has been a systematic net energy importer since 1980.

Conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, continued friction between the US and China, and the return of Trump, shape a high-risk horizon —the highest in decades.

Not only has the order established after the Second World War come to an end, but even the Westphalian system seems to be dead. The idea we used to call "the West" is in question, and we are entering a paradigm where the strongest tries to impose its will —not only on its enemies. "The West and the rest" has become an empty aphorism.

On a positive note, this situation is once again waking Europe up —and "waking up" always comes with scares). It is forcing us to look in the mirror and recognise that it is time to confront slow growth, over-regulation and our overdependence on security, both energy and defence. Maybe this is what we need to evolve from an invertebrate to a vertebrate animal.

Europe needs to face unthinkable scenarios and recognise its dependence, first on Russia and now also on the US: What would happen to us if the US cuts off our gas supplies? Are we prepared to live in a world where we do not respect the US sanctions regime? To live without a connection to the US financial system, without the US dollar? We are not going to reach similar situations —we believe them to be dystopian— but we will consider them in our risk analysis. It is possible that the impact of doing without Russian gas in Europe is manageable… But the impact of both American and Russian gas is not.

All EU member states are net energy importers. Before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2021, Russian gas accounted for 45% of EU imports; now we are below 20%. As for oil, in 2021 more than 25% of imports came from Russia. By 2024, this figure has dropped significantly, because the oil only comes from countries that cannot stop receiving it. The US emerged as the main alternative supplier of LNG to Europe, recording historic export levels in 2022 and 2023. In fact, in 2023, the US supplied 48% of total European imports.

Europe remains dependent on the US for key military capabilities within the NATO alliance. Spain occupies a key position on the southern flank, but the lack of investment in defence —Spain is the NATO country with the lowest percentage of GDP for defence in 2024— and the consolidation of Morocco as a historical US ally generate a series of challenges that must be addressed urgently, especially considering that the US is one of Spain's main energy suppliers. Libya and Algeria are also very important energy suppliers to Spain and Europe, and Russia has influence in both.

Both the US and Russia seem to want nothing to do with the EU as a whole, avoiding Brussels for their negotiations and choosing which member states will best serve their interests. Nevertheless, it is crucial for the EU to defend a united front, drawing on its global weight and the leadership of its economic powers, such as Germany, the world's third largest economy.

We live in an era of the weaponisation of the economy and energy, where economic and energy resources are used as weapons, as tools of pressure and negotiation.

Of course, this is not new. In response to the Japanese conquests of 1940 and 1941, the US imposed an oil embargo. Of all possible alternatives, the Japanese chose to launch the famous attack on Pearl Harbor in order to seize the oil-rich Dutch East Indies.

Is the US the only thing Europe has to worry about? Far from it.

In its eagerness to accelerate the energy transition, the EU has prioritised certain technologies —mainly electrification and the use of renewable energies— to the detriment of other options. The problem is that European electrification is clearly an ideological rather than a geostrategic symptom, although it is often dressed up as the latter. As a direct consequence of this transformation, global demand for critical materials such as rare earths, lithium, cobalt and graphite is increasing substantially. China is ahead of the curve as the largest producer of the minerals used in renewable technologies. It provides 98% of the EU's supply of rare earth elements and about 62% of all 30 essential raw materials. What do we do if the supply is cut off? It has already done so with Japan in a clear example of using its resources as a geopolitical weapon**.**

Europe is at a clear disadvantage. It needs leaders capable of explaining the harsh realities to help us understand the choices we need to make. If the EU is to have a seat at the table, it needs to act decisively and intelligently, and do what is necessary to defend its position as a global power. Europe has wealth, a powerful internal market and an ability to engage amicably with other countries that can give us an advantage at this era of tariffs and misunderstandings.

Although we lack natural resources, we are home to some of the most powerful energy companies in the world, with a powerful technological and innovative capacity and an undeniable

focus on sustainability: Shell, Total, BP, ENI, Repsol or, if we include Norway, Equinor. However, European policy ends up punishing them. It's time to stop self-harming. All strategic analysis stems from understanding your vulnerabilities and strengths, as well as your resources, including these business capabilities.

The energy trilemma —decarbonising, securing security of supply and trying to have cheap energy— has been shifting towards sustainability in the EU for more than a decade. And now is the time when it should be shifted more towards security of supply. Not only in strategic raw materials, but also in natural gas and oil and their indigenous substitutes: renewable liquid fuels and renewable gases. Electrification is part of the solution, but this means we will be dependent for decades on gas if we do not want to consume coal (the biggest GHG emitter).

We need to change the way we view natural gas, because although it remains a key source for ensuring stability of supply, European policies are discouraging new investment. It is worth remembering that US exports of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), produced from fracking which is banned in the EU, played a huge role in keeping Europeans afloat during the energy crisis. *Fracking* saved Europe.

There are vast gas reserves in Latin America or Africa that Europe must secure. It is time to move past misguided taxonomies. Venezuela has the largest proven natural gas reserves in South America, followed by Brazil and Argentina. Africa accounts for 40% of global gas discoveries made since the mid-2010s, yet many of these reserves remain undeveloped or lack final investment approval.

Canada can finally develop its export infrastructure so as not to be dependent on a single customer —the US. The UK needs to change its rules that discourage investment in its mature North Sea fields.

These regions are also key to the supply of critical minerals. It is time for Europe to wake up and use its bargaining power to strike strategic deals to secure stable supplies of these raw materials —let us compete with China for them.

And, of course, even if we develop the renewable liquid fuels industry to the maximum, our tanks and aircraft will continue

to consume liquids for decades (remember the case of Germany in the Second World War). Spain has the best refinery system in Europe —one of the best in the world and one of the largest in relation to the size of the country— ready to transform itself and produce decarbonised products from waste and indigenous resources. Our fighters have already successfully tested our Bio-kerosene and our tanks can run on renewable diesel produced in Spain.

A study by Imperial College Oxford explains how Europe has the capacity to replace almost half of its imported, mineral-based liquid fuels with low-carbon, renewable products from indigenous resources. The barrier is European regulation and the lack of incentives to invest in them due to the ban on the internal combustion engine. Chemistry is stubborn, if we want SAF (Sustainable Aviation Fuel), we get biodiesel; if there is no market for it, we will import it instead of producing it in Spain and Europe.

Much of our security of energy supply in the coming decades will be at stake in European regulation, whether we increase our weakness or strengthen it. EU regulation is creating unnecessary challenges when, as we have seen, we do not have the resources. Let us avoid complex and costly regulations that are a drag on competitiveness and scare away potential suppliers — Due Diligence and Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directives, Methane Regulation, etc.—, let us remove the ban on the internal engine if it runs on renewable fuels, and let us go for technology neutrality.

Mario Draghi, in his report on the future of European competitiveness, acknowledges that "Europe must react to an unstable geopolitical world, where dependencies become vulnerabilities and it can no longer rely on others for security". Whatever we undertake in Europe we will do in a more sustainable way, but we need to remove the straitjackets that bind us from Brussels.

Suddenly we are on our own, we depend on ourselves. The future of the next generations of Europeans depends on the decisions we take now.

Angel Luis Bautista Fernández
Director of Institutional Relations and
Regulatory Coordination of REPSOL S.A.

5.2 The geopolitics of energy in an international order in transition

Author: Ignacio Urbasos Arbeloa

Summary:

The liberal international order and the multilateral system are in a process of decomposition. The major powers, as a result of geopolitical competition, have embarked on a process of de-globalisation that focuses on economic security and national interests. The energy industry, which since the 1990s experienced unprecedented financial, regulatory and commercial integration, is now heading towards a scenario of fragmentation and restrictions. This fragmentation is taking place in the form of energy blocs increasingly isolated from each other by expanding international sanctions, geo-economic competition between the US and China, neo-mercantilism and climate protectionism. This scenario requires the EU to update its energy security policies, accelerate the transition, diversify suppliers and gain strategic autonomy.

Key words:

Energy geopolitics, Power competition, Globalisation, Energy security.

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The international liberal order is in the process of decomposition (Amo, 2025). The dismantling of multilateral institutions by their own creator and benefactor, the US, shows an international system in rapid transformation. The major powers, as a result of geopolitical competition, have embarked on a process of de-globalisation that focuses on economic security and national interests. Trump's victory is an accelerator, but not the cause, of this process in which the natural decline of the West, the loss

of legitimacy of the international liberal order and the erosion of the Transatlantic Alliance converge.

The energy industry, which had undergone a process of rapid financial, regulatory and commercial integration since the 1990s, now seems to be heading towards a scenario of fragmentation and restrictions that are part of great power competition. This fragmentation is taking place in spheres of influence that include energy blocs increasingly isolated from each other by expanding international sanctions, geo-economic competition between the US and China, neo-mercantilism and climate protectionism.

From hyperglobalisation to fragmentation

In the 1990s, the energy industry underwent a process of accelerated globalisation, driven by market liberalisation, privatisation of state-owned companies and technological progress. Deregulation allowed private actors to enter sectors previously controlled by national monopolies. With the end of the Cold War, a new geography of opportunities opened up for transnational investment, driven by new technological advances.

The *financialisation* of commodity markets took energy trading to a new level of complexity, with the proliferation of *traders* and futures markets. With the rise of new emerging economies —especially China— there was a rapid increase in international trade in oil, natural gas and coal. This, together with the construction of new infrastructure, generated new energy flows that overcame the old patterns of an exporting global South and a consuming North.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the West's response —punishing the Russian energy sector with sanctions and restrictions— has been a major catalyst in the process of fragmentation and reversal of the globalisation process. The EU has gone from being Russia's main energy customer to a marginal buyer. Business ties linking European capitals to Moscow have been severed, and the creation of a phantom oil fleet has liquidated the existence of common markets such as the transport of hydrocarbons. The long-term supply contracts that governed these relations have also been cancelled. Arbitration tribunals are now trying to elucidate the rights of the parties involved in this energy divorce, although the likelihood that the rulings will

be ignored (Ason *et al*, 2024) is clearly very high, exposing the deterioration of global public goods (Chin, 2021) such as legal certainty.

The infrastructure that had linked the two markets for decades is also, for the most part, ready to be dismantled. The US is now a major supplier of oil and gas to the EU, while China has become, along with India, Russia's main buyer of oil and gas. Nord Stream, the symbol of German-Russian energy cooperation, now lies unusable at the bottom of the Baltic Sea. Meanwhile Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia have disconnected from the Russian electricity grid, leaving the enclave of Kaliningrad (Kurmayer, 2025) as an energy island in the middle of Europe.

The fragmentation of the energy market goes beyond the conflict between the West and Russia. Never before have so many barrels of oil (Economou and Fattouh, 2024) been subject to US sanctions. The more than 10 million barrels per day of Russian oil under G7 price caps are joined by 3 million Iranian barrels and almost 1 million Venezuelan barrels under US sanctions —or unilateral restrictions. These countries have not stopped exporting oil, they have simply resorted to new techniques of evading sanctions in a parallel market, with much of their sales going to China and other counter-hegemonic powers willing to challenge US supremacy.

International sanctions have also imposed restrictions on the free flow of technology. The first sanctions in 2014 already limited Russia's access to Western technology related to deepwater and Arctic hydrocarbon production. After 2022, these restrictions have increased (Urbasos, 2024), and as Western technology companies have exited the Russian market, new domestic or Chinese suppliers have emerged to replicate European prototypes with varying degrees of success.

Energy is no stranger to the geo-economic war between the US and China over control of critical technologies such as microprocessors and digital networks. China is already preparing for a new potential US offensive —for example, by banning the export of rare earths and other critical minerals such as gallium, germanium and antimony, citing potential dual-use concerns. This process is not new; the US imposed tariffs on Chinese solar panels during the Obama Administration and China responded with tariffs on US LNG during the first Trump Administration's trade war. Thus, the world's largest buyer of LNG —China—

does not trade with the largest exporter —the US—, which paradoxically is also the largest market outside China for solar panel imports.

The bloc policy also affects the major energy trade axes. With the help of climate change, Russia is trying to advance along the Northern Arctic Route (Gruening and Rao, 2024) to sell its hydrocarbons on the Asian market without going through European port logistics. The US is pressing Panama for guarantees that the canal will not, in one way or another, come under China's influence. Meanwhile, the Belt and Road strategy is progressively consolidating China as a global player with a growing international presence in ports, pipelines and electricity grids.

The arrival of Trump in the White House marked a new phase in the fragmentation of markets, as the US began pressuring its allies to buy American hydrocarbons to reduce its bilateral trade surplus. The neo-mercantilism practised by the US president is already bearing its first fruits. Europe has pledged to increase LNG purchases, while Japan, South Korea and the Philippines have shown interest in investing in the North Alaska gas mega-project despite its questionable environmental credentials or financial viability. In this way, the US aims to position itself as the oil and gas supplier to its allies, extending its dominance over the geopolitical sphere of influence, consolidated in the area of defence, to the energy dimension.

As an indirect effect, other hydrocarbon suppliers such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar are forced to find new clients outside the G7. It is no coincidence that one of the most repeated themes at the BRICS meetings is the formalisation of a method of payment for oil exchanges that does not require the use of the dollar or the SWIFT system. Saudi Arabia and China have long been moving in this direction with the ambition of building a financial ecosystem parallel to that of the United States, protected from Washington's sanctions and scrutiny.

A final element is that of climate protectionism —i.e. the application of trade and regulatory measures designed to protect domestic industry from foreign competition in the name of climate action. The EU has already launched the CBAM, which imposes a levy on imported steel, aluminium, cement, electricity, hydrogen and fertilisers equivalent to the price of European CO_2.

The measure, justified by the need to avoid "carbon leakage", is a first step in the creation of climate clubs (Kaufman and Saha, 2023) that will exclude those economies with higher emissions and/or inability to develop the necessary bureaucracy (Gecić, 2025) to implement complex carbon accounting systems. The lack of maturity of many of the key technologies for industrial decarbonisation —particularly those associated with hydrogen— will make such measures necessary in the medium term. These could enjoy renewed popularity in the context of a generalised trade war and a revaluation of economic security. With climate multilateralism in crisis in the face of the United States' exit — for the second time— from the Paris Agreements, an emissions reduction pathway agreed by the different international actors seems to be dissipating in favour of one dominated by fragmentation and dissent.

Energy in the EU in a new geopolitical scenario

This new geopolitical scenario calls for an update of the EU's energy security policy. First, European institutions and those of its member states must be empowered to operate and develop their own international sanctions. Europe's lack of self-sufficiency in enforcing sanctions and dependence on certain US financial services disproportionately exposes European companies to Washington's unilateral decisions.

In a context of power competition, the EU must be able to autonomously develop its relations with China, avoiding being drawn into an aggressive decoupling that would entail economic disruption with the potential to derail the energy transition.

In the face of Trump's neo-mercantilism and the demand for increased purchases of US hydrocarbons, the EU needs to maintain a coherent policy of energy diversification that does not replicate past mistakes and excessive dependence on a single supplier. To this end, it must strengthen alliances with other traditional suppliers, offering a model of open decarbonisation that avoids the climate-driven trade exclusion of key partners in its neighbourhood.

European countries must continue to accelerate the energy transition, driven by indigenous renewable resources, without forgetting the importance of energy security, especially fossil fuel security. The EU must achieve the desired strategic autonomy to

operate as a global actor with its own voice in a rapidly changing scenario. Energy and its geopolitics do not escape the consequences of a decaying international order.

Ignacio Urbasos Arbeloa
Researcher at the Elcano Royal Institute

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5.3 Geopolitics and strategic minerals

Author: Mar Hidalgo García

Summary:

One of the biggest challenges facing the mining sector in the coming years for these critical minerals is the gap between production and expected future demand growth. Without a secure supply of critical raw materials, it will not be possible to move towards green and digital transformation.

Excessive dependence on China, export restrictions, and the rise of state protectionism related to critical minerals have shown that the market mechanisms to adequately supply these materials are more influenced by geopolitics. For this reason, the secure supply of critical minerals is determining global geopolitics in an increasingly relevant way.

Key words:

Strategic minerals, Rare earths, Cobalt, Lithium.

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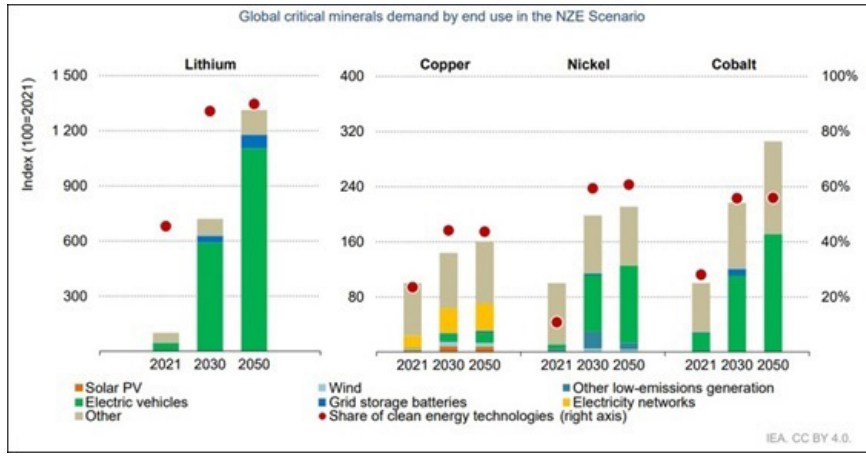
In the current context of the economic war between the US and China, there is geopolitical competition focused on building more resilient and diversified supply chains for critical minerals that are essential to move towards the energy and digital transition, and strategic for the defence and aerospace sectors.

Over the next few years, demand for these minerals is set to multiply at an alarming rate as we move towards decarbonisation and technological progress.



1 The main problem: concentrated production and processing in China

The Covid-19 pandemic called into question the merits of globalisation in international trade, highlighting the vulnerability of supply chains for certain health products. This concern has permeated all trade sectors. In the specific case of critical and strategic minerals, there has been a shift from a strictly economic model —focuses on price and delivery time— to a geopolitical model, where sourcing, security and defence implications, and uncertainty about security of supply now matter.

In this geopolitical model of trade in critical minerals, China's dominant position in the production, access and processing of these critical minerals —such as rare earths, lithium and cobalt— stands out above all.

To cite a few facts: China produces 99% of battery graphite, more than 60% of lithium chemicals, 40% of refined copper, more than 80% of processed rare earths, and 70% of refined cobalt today, while dominating the entire end-to-end graphite anode supply chain. In addition, they produce two thirds of the world's electric vehicles, 85% of battery cell production, 90% of cathode production capacity and 98% of anode materials globally, while leading in the production of solar panels, wind turbines and hydrogen electrolysers. These figures are overwhelming.

In this context, it is worth highlighting the risk of China using trade in critical minerals as a geopolitical weapon or coercive tool. It is enough to recall that, in 2010, China already imposed restrictions on rare earth exports in retaliation for maritime territorial disputes with Japan.

On the other hand, trade restrictions on critical minerals have increased worryingly in recent years. In the midst of the trade war between China and the US, we are witnessing the imposition of restrictions on trade in minerals and technological products on security grounds. In these cases, the World Trade Organisation can do little to prevent such protectionist measures.

Other countries, such as Indonesia and the Philippines, are also restricting mineral exports —in this case nickel— in order to promote value chains at home.

Another important aspect to highlight —which is affecting trade and generating uncertainty for investment in the mining sector— is the increase in government measures aimed at protecting their mineral resources through nationalisation policies. That, for example, is the case in Chile with lithium.

In addition to these protectionist measures, there are other —perhaps more hidden— factors that highlight how the supply of critical minerals is determining global geopolitics in an increasingly relevant way. Within this economic war between China and the US, China is using the yuan as the currency for trade transactions in some of these minerals. The use of the yuan is allowing them to move towards de-dollarisation. Some transactions with African countries are carried out in yuan and with alternative

banking systems to SWIFT. It is also worth highlighting the sanctions imposed on Russia by Western countries, which are causing some mineral exports to find markets in Asia, specifically in China, where transactions are also carried out in yuan.

For the US, dependence on China is a matter of national emergency and it is therefore urgent to obtain critical minerals that are fundamental to its defence and aerospace sectors. It is important to see how the US is trying to displace China's access to critical minerals in regions where China is well established, such as Africa and Latin America. The strategy is based on offering mineral resource exploitation that promotes local development or even the use of minerals as a bargaining chip in exchange for security in conflict-ridden countries. The Lobito corridor could be an example of this new approach.

This US strategy of decreasing its dependence on China and obtaining more diversified and resilient supply chains has also extended to the conflict in Ukraine. US access to rare earths and other minerals present in Ukraine is a key component of a possible peace deal between Ukraine and Russia to end the conflict.

Finally, in the near future, this geopolitical rivalry between the major powers in the search for new mineral deposits in terrestrial areas may extend to other regions such as the Arctic, outer space and the deep sea.

2 The EU's response: The Law on Fundamental Issues

With the entry into force of the Basic Materials Act, the EU aims to strengthen value chains, diversify supply sources, improve the capacity to monitor supply risks, and improve sustainability. To this end, a series of objectives have been set that can be considered ambitious given the EU's external dependence.

Regarding the targets set out in the Critical Raw Materials Act, it is established that by 2030 10% of EU's annual consumption of critical materials must come from domestic mining, at least 40% from materials processed within the EU, and 25% from recycling. For imports, a maximum of 65% dependence on a third country is set.

The challenges in implementing the Critical Raw Materials Act are neither few nor easy, as geopolitics increasingly shapes trade in these strategic resources. Although the EU will rapidly

improve its domestic mining capacity by opening new deposits and increase the circularity of strategic minerals, the reality is that it will remain dependent on external supply because some of these minerals —such as cobalt and nickel, which are needed for battery production— are not present on European territory.

For the EU, the risk of failing to seriously address secure and sustainable access could lead to a spiral of de-industrialisation and a decline in its competitiveness that would push it further away from the world's leading economies.

3. The importance of mining in Spain

Spain is a country with a mining tradition. It holds the largest copper reserves in the whole of the European Union and also hosts important lithium, nickel and rare earths projects.

For the first time, the European Commission has adopted a list of 47 strategic projects to boost national capacities for strategic raw materials. Seven of these projects are in Spain —specifically in Galicia, Castilla la Mancha, Extremadura and Andalusia to exploit lithium, cobalt, copper and tungsten.

Despite the fact that new mining projects meet sustainability standards, opposition from environmental groups may ultimately

prevent these projects from being realised. Therefore, a major communication campaign will be needed to counteract these views.

It is also important to highlight the need to generate "clusters" so that the value chains stay in Spain or at least in the European Union. It is not just a matter of implementing a model for extracting our mining resources, but of generating wealth within the countries.

Finally, it is necessary to modify Spanish legislation, which is very old, to adapt the mining sector to this new reality and even to consider the mining sector as a strategic sector.

*Mar Hidalgo García**
Senior Analyst IEEE
@ieee_mhidalgo

5.4 Geopolitics of energy. Summary of the debate

Compiled by the moderator: Col. Ignacio Fuente Cobo

The current energy debate in Europe revolves around the need to gain competitiveness and reduce energy dependence, especially on liquefied natural gas (LNG), whose structural cost makes it uncompetitive compared to other regions such as the US or Asia. This situation makes it necessary to rethink the European energy model, where sustainability and competitiveness should not be seen as opposites, but rather as complementary.

One of the key points discussed is the role of nuclear energy. Despite the scheduled closure of power plants in some countries such as Spain, there is a clear global trend towards extending the useful life of existing plants, as in the US and Japan, and a consensus to triple nuclear production. Nuclear energy, as it does not emit CO_2 and provides base *load* energy, is seen by many experts as essential to ensure a sustainable and stable energy transition and to avoid excessive dependence on gas.

However, it is acknowledged that new nuclear developments in Europe have been costly and with significant delays —such as in the UK or Finland—, raising doubts about their economic viability. Despite this, many consider it a mistake to close existing plants if they can still operate safely, and point out that other countries such as Japan, with historical reasons for rejecting nuclear power, are still committed to it.

The energy security debate is also linked to the geopolitical context. Sanctions imposed on producer countries such as Iran, Venezuela and Russia have generated collateral effects, benefiting countries like China, which have access to oil at discounted prices. Moreover, the possible outbreak of a direct conflict between Israel and Iran and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz could have catastrophic consequences for global supply, pushing up oil prices.

As for the future relationship with Russia, current sanctions on oil and coal require unanimity to be lifted, which with countries like Poland or the Baltics seems unlikely. Although gas is not sanctioned, it is difficult to imagine the return of Russian gas on a large scale, especially via Nord Stream 2, whose technical and legal status is uncertain. Instead, a partial revival via Ukraine might be more feasible, albeit limited in volume.

Finally, a crucial challenge is addressed: how to communicate to the public that the energy transition will be more costly than initially expected? While renewables are the cheapest sources generating electricity, they require massive investments in grids, storage and digitalisation to guarantee a stable supply. Furthermore, it underlines the need to raise awareness about exploiting own resources —such as critical minerals— in a sustainable way, which is essential to move towards a green and digital transition.

The energy transition to cleaner sources has multiple implications, including a direct impact on military capabilities. Currently, most military systems —such as tanks and aircraft— still rely on fossil fuels. Although zero-emission diesel can already be produced, a critical mass of production is still lacking to meet the needs of the defence sector. In fixed installations, however, it is possible to integrate renewable energies like solar panels and wind turbines.

The decarbonisation of the military is a technical and strategic challenge. The operability of the armed forces cannot be compromised in favour of climate objectives. The problem lies particularly with the defence industry, which needs to develop sustainable products without being excluded from access to European green transition funds. It is a question of finding a balance between environment, security and economy, which is becoming increasingly difficult.

On the other hand, the energy transition also implies a shift in dependence from fossil fuels to the critical minerals needed for green and digital technologies. This new dependence presents problems: minerals are geopolitically more concentrated —often in countries such as China or Russia—, and supply is currently not keeping up with expected future demand. While there are reserves to be exploited —in the Arctic, on the seabed or even on the Moon—, their development requires considerable technological and strategic investment.

Digitalisation and artificial intelligence also increase global energy demand, raising questions about whether renewables alone will be able to meet it. In this sense, the push to accelerate the energy transition may need a more realistic rethink.

Geopolitically, China has led a strategy of controlling essential minerals from a holistic perspective: education, industry, defence, and research, which has given it a competitive advantage in the race for technological and military sovereignty. In this context, future tensions are likely to arise, for example, between China and Russia in the Arctic —an area rich in mineral resources, gas, and oil.

With regard to the global energy mix, despite decades of boosting renewables, 80% of the world's primary energy is still fossil fuels. In Europe, this percentage is around 70%, despite having almost completely eliminated coal in some countries. Renewables have served to cover the increase in demand but have not significantly altered the structure of the global energy mix.

The so-called European "Green Deal", once presented as the new economic paradigm for growth, has lost political momentum. It is now perceived more as a constraint than an economic opportunity. Europe, which accounts for only 6% of global emissions, has a limited impact on global climate change. Thus, the question arises whether European efforts should focus more on influencing countries with higher emissions weights, such as China and India.

China, with a high dependence on coal, has managed to industrialise while keeping energy costs low. Today it emits as much or even more per person than Europe, while India, even with low per capita emissions, will increase considerably in the coming years. Coal-fired power generation is currently the largest emitter of CO_2 globally. Replacing coal with gas alone would significantly reduce emissions. Europe should therefore focus on

exporting sustainable technologies to emerging countries and promote trade agreements that include climate clauses.

Despite criticism, the EU has had a significant global influence in the fight against climate change. Its commitment to net zero emissions has inspired other major powers to set their own targets: China by 2060 and India by 2070. Renewables —especially solar energy— are growing exponentially worldwide, largely thanks to early European support.

Finally, it highlights the key difference between dependence on flows —such as gas or oil, the disruption of which has immediate effects— and dependence on *stocks* —such as minerals, which once acquired, remain in storage. This distinction is essential for rethinking energy security from a new perspective.

The EU's *REPowerEU* initiative emerged as an urgent response to the energy crisis triggered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent gas dispute. The proposal sought to reduce energy dependence on Russian gas, contain energy prices, and accelerate the energy transition to more sustainable sources. The assessment of this strategy can be made in three key dimensions: price control, boosting renewables, and diversification of supply.

Price control and social impact:

Nearly 800 billion euros —including the UK— were invested in subsidies and tax cuts to contain inflation and prevent a social collapse during the hardest months. This intervention was key to averting a winter of social discontent that could have fuelled the rise of populist or pro-Russian movements across Europe. The action was generally seen as positive, although some critics point out that the high cost must be accompanied by a structural overhaul of energy taxation and regulation that makes energy more expensive than the cost of generating it.

Renewables and supply diversification:

REPowerEU removed many regulatory hurdles, allowing for increased deployment of renewables, as seen in Germany with the revival of the wind energy sector. However, some experts criticise unrealistic targets in areas such as green hydrogen and biomethane. Disproportionate expectations were raised regarding

their short-term viability, which could affect institutional credibility and more ambitious climate targets, such as those for 2050.

In terms of energy diversification, the reduction of dependence on Russian gas through agreements with new suppliers such as Algeria and Norway, and pipeline expansion was highlighted. However, dependence on liquefied natural gas (LNG), especially from the US, remains high.

Future viability and energy autonomy:

It was pointed out that electrification with renewable sources is the most solid way to improve European competitiveness, especially in the face of the impossibility of competing with low labour costs like other regions. Green hydrogen is presented as a solution to replace grey hydrogen in already consuming industries —such as refineries—, but not for widespread use in the short term, due to its high cost and low efficiency. The H2MED project was criticised for its high cost and low technical feasibility.

A crucial point was the analysis in the Draghi report, which calculates that decarbonising 50% of European industry would require 50 billion euros, an affordable figure if revenues from CO_2 allowance auctions were used. To achieve this, mechanisms to ensure price stability for industry and measures to protect against external competition, such as Chinese steel, are proposed.

In conclusion, *REPowerEU* has been a necessary and positive step, albeit with sometimes over-ambitious goals and an urgent need to adjust expectations and strategies to maintain energy autonomy in the long term.

*Ignacio Fuente Cobo**
Colonel of Artillery
IEEE Senior Analyst

6 Table 2.2. Evolution of military technology and capabilities

6.1 Military Power in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Author: Prof. Guillem Colom Piella

Summary:

Throughout history, warfare has evolved due to strategic, doctrinal, organisational and technological factors. Technologies linked to the Fourth Industrial Revolution are driving a potentially disruptive change in the art of war. The paper will focus on five key changes: 1) artificial intelligence, which improves decision-making and automation of military systems; 2) battlefield transparency, which enables more precise control through advanced sensors and integrated networks; 3) A2/AD bubbles, which make it harder to project adversary forces through layered defence systems; 4) multi-domain operations, which combine actions in different domains to maximise their impact; and 5) mosaic warfare, which decentralises military capabilities, distributing them across small, affordable systems. These changes transform the way modern conflicts are conceived and executed.

Key words:

Military revolution, Artificial intelligence, A2/AD, Multidomain operations, Mosaic warfare.

Cite this document:

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Throughout history, warfare has undergone profound transformations due to the confluence of strategic, doctrinal, organisational and technological factors. Although the main driver of change tends to be doctrine, because it guides the use of military capabilities[1], technology has often been the catalyst and the most quantifiable and observable element of change (Biddle, 2014; Adamsky, 2010; Posen, 1984 and Rosen, 1994). From the invention of gunpowder to artificial intelligence, technology has increased the lethality, speed, accuracy, range, and efficiency of armies. However, without doctrinal and organisational adjustments that optimise the use of new technologies to generate strategic advantage, this in itself does not guarantee military innovation. Change can be defined as "[…]the result of a comprehensive change process that substantially affects doctrine, training, and often organisation and/or equipment in one or more branches of an army, leading to a significant increase in effectiveness in accomplishing one or more of the assigned missions" (Jordán, 2014). An innovation can have either evolutionary or disruptive effects. In the latter case, it may take the form of a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) (Colom-Piella, 2008), likely to profoundly transform the way we fight by rendering previous means and methods of warfare irrelevant or obsolete.

Indeed, the major changes we are witnessing in the military sphere, driven by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, may culminate in an RMA whose scope remains unknow. Their impact may be such that they could trigger about a Military Revolution capable of altering the relationship between state, society and the

[1] A military capability integrates material, infrastructure, manpower, training, doctrine, organisation and interoperability (MIRADO-I).

way war is conceived and waged. This is not surprising considering that advances such as artificial intelligence, big data, additive printing, the internet of things, quantum computing, new materials and the increasing convergence of digital, physical and biological technologies are not only improving the effectiveness and lethality of sensors, platforms and vectors, but are also transforming the way armies organise, deploy, supply and operate. In this sense, digitisation, interconnectivity, advanced manufacturing and, above all, battlefield sensorisation have given rise to an environment where real-time information and automation play a central role in the planning and execution of military operations. Paradoxically, these operations are likely to take place in information, electronic and cyber-degraded environments.

After this brief introduction, the following is an overview of the most significant changes resulting from these technological innovations. First, artificial intelligence is establishing itself as a key tool in the armed forces. Its ability to manage and process large volumes of data in real time or its ability to identify and analyse patterns allows for improved logistics, predictive maintenance, guidance and automation, threat detection and, above all, decision-making. Thanks to artificial intelligence, command and control (C2) systems can manage with great agility, effectiveness and speed the growing volumes of tactical, operational, and strategic information provided by sensorisation of the entire battlespace. This can increase situational awareness, reduce the latency between Observation, Orientation, Decision and Action (OODA) and shorten the *kill chain*, or the process from target detection to destruction (Brose, 2020). This can achieve faster and more accurate responses in highly dynamic environments.

It is this very automation of processes that allows human intervention in observation, navigation, targeting, and decision-making to be reduced or even completely removed from the equation, enabling the development of a wide range of semi-autonomous or fully autonomous systems, weapons or platforms (Scharre, 2018). These robots capable of operating in isolation, in collaboration with humans or other systems, or interacting with each other dynamically as swarms, will eventually populate the future battlefield (Brimley and Work, 2014).

The second major change relates to the increased transparency of the battlefield, which is radically transforming military operations. While the sensorisation of the theatre of operations began

to take hold with the last RMA in the 1990s, when computers and the internet enabled the creation of C4ISTAR systems (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition, and Reconnaissance) that promised to dispel the "fog of war" and lay the foundation for networked operations, today the battlefield is a highly transparent environment at the physical, logical, electronic, and informational levels. The abundance of sensors —from satellites, radar, and drones to mobile phones and social media— coupled with the ubiquitous electronic signature of any unit, no matter how small, ensures that every movement can be monitored and detected in near real-time.

In addition, the networked integration of sensors, command and control systems or fighters can facilitate the consolidation of the long-awaited "system of systems" promised at the last RMA. As hinted at by the Ukrainian *Delta*, this federated ecosystem allows for the fusion of information from multiple sources and, thanks to artificial intelligence, to allocate and prioritise targets to be hit by the most efficient vector, thus accelerating the *kill chain* mentioned above.

Obviously, this would not be possible without the proliferation and cheapening of precision weaponry (Watts, 2014). The increasing availability of guided delivery vehicles —from sophisticated long-range missiles to simple lethalised FPV drones— allows targets to be engaged with unprecedented precision, reducing collateral damage and maximising tactical impact, while simplifying logistical chains. However, as observed in the war in Ukraine, the Achilles' heel of precision munitions remains their guidance system, in many cases vulnerable to electromagnetic interference. Indeed, the dependence of modern systems —satellites, drones, platforms, radios, telephones or GPS— on electromagnetic space makes their protection or denial a strategic priority (Clark *et al*, 2019). This vulnerability is so critical that the ability of militaries to operate in environments where cyberspace and the electromagnetic environment are degraded becomes essential, as the war in Ukraine has shown (Watling and Sylvia, 2025).

These same technologies are also contributing to the creation of Anti-Access and Area Denial (A2/AD) bubbles, thus constituting the third major operational innovation of note. While the intention to prevent an adversary from gathering forces near the theatre of operations, gaining free access to it or manoeu-

vring easily across the battlefield is not a new concept[2], the spread of advanced sensors, anti-ship missiles, long-range surface-to-air missiles, ballistic missiles, electronic warfare systems, offensive cyber capabilities or anti-satellite weapons are being integrated with more traditional means —naval mines, attack submarines, medium- and short-range surface-to-air missiles, fighter aviation and guided munitions artillery— to form multi-layered defence networks, like a *matryoshka* (Tangredi, 2013). While these multidimensional bubbles are not impregnable, their mere existence has a deterrent effect by expanding the country's defensive perimeter, exercising *de facto* sovereignty over areas of interest and hindering adversary movements. It is precisely this extended coverage that facilitates the development of another dynamic characteristic of today's world, namely the projection of grey zones over the adversary's direct area of influence, as the latter dominates the escalation thanks to the bubble provided by A2/AD capabilities. In this sense, the coming years will see an increase and overlap of these bubbles as countries equip themselves with long-range ground and air delivery vehicles to exert influence beyond their borders.

The fourth change is, to some extent, a consequence of the previous ones: the emergence of multi-domain operations. The integration of the cyber, space and information domains has blurred the differences that still existed between the land, naval and air domains. Because technology has exponentially expanded the battle space to the point of blurring any distinction between front and rear, accelerated the OODA cycle to unimaginable limits, and enabled actions in one domain to directly affect others, multi-domain operations integrate land, naval, aerospace, cyber-electromagnetic, and even non-military activities, the aim is to generate synergistic effects across all domains, exploiting strengths in one area to exploit enemy vulnerabilities and creating operational dilemmas for the enemy in the use of force (McCardle, 2019). Synergy, flexibility, speed, adaptability, the ability to operate in a

[2] Strictly speaking, their direct antecedents emerged in the Soviet Union in the 1980s. These were reconnaissance and strike complexes (*Razvedyvatel no-Udarnyy Kompleks* or RUK). Comprised of three elements —precision munitions, advanced sensors and an automated command and control system— RUKs would be capable of identifying adversary forces and accurately engaging them from great distances. A RUK would be located inside a bubble, primarily anti-aircraft, to prevent the adversary from hitting its most prized assets, such as strike aircraft or long-range missiles.

distributed manner, and knowledge of adversary nodes and centres of gravity are characteristics that turn multi-domain operations into a war for the decision-making process.

Finally, the fifth and last change to be mentioned relates to mosaic warfare. Factors such as the sensorisation of the battlefield, the distributed use of force, the long development cycles of large platforms, their escalating costs and their intrinsic vulnerability to cheaper, and simpler systems transform the operating environment. In a transparent battlefield, where any large platform acting as a node of a centralised system can be identified, whose defences can be easily overwhelmed by cheap, lethal and abundant vectors, and whose loss can have significant operational effects because they cannot be easily replaced, the solution seems obvious. Rather than concentrating key capabilities in a few high-value assets, mosaic warfare distributes these functions among a myriad of small, affordable and expendable systems that act collaboratively (Clark *et al*, 2020). This simplifies research and development costs, reduces logistical requirements, makes systems available in time and quantity, increases the resilience and flexibility of armed forces, and reduces the risks associated with the loss of large platforms.

In conclusion, while technology alone does not guarantee military success, its role as a catalyst for innovation is undeniable. Mediated by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, its impact on present-day warfare is being seen in the transparency of the battlefield, the acceleration of decision-making, increased precision and improved efficiency through the proliferation of cheap, expendable systems. Combined, these changes could lead to a Revolution in Military Affairs that might even incite a Military Revolution that transforms the state, society and its relationship to war. A change that could perhaps occur in the next decade, coinciding with the advent of the "singularity", the day when machines and algorithms catch up with human intelligence. Many of the technology-related features of modern warfare discussed in the paper are being implemented by many countries to solve their strategic problems or to increase their competitive advantage over their adversaries. Others are attempting to do so with varying degrees of success because they face the main inhibitor to change: inertia (Villanueva, 2024). What is clear is that, in a competitive and fluid environment, the Red Queen's words to Alice are prescient: "[…]it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you

must run at least twice as fast as that". Now all that remains is to know where you want to go.

Guillem Colom Piella
Adviser to the Cabinet of the JEMAD

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6.2 The Armed Forces and Technological Development

Author: BG. Carlos Javier Frías Sánchez

Summary:

In the past, doctrinal evolution guided doctrine. Armies assessed their combat requirements and asked industry to develop the weapon systems needed to execute doctrine. Military organisation was adapted to this way of working. Today, however, the process is the opposite: technological evolution is so rapid that it leaves doctrine behind. This is a process that will not be reversed, forcing armies to change their organisation and their procedures for procuring materiel and developing doctrine.

Key words:

Doctrine, Technology, Organisation, Procurement, Weapons systems.

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Technology has always been one of the main drivers of innovation in warfare. However, for most of history, technological progress was slow and, as a consequence, armies had time to adjust to adapt. In some cases, advances were disruptive and

resulted in crushing defeats for those side that was unable to keep up with technological progress —such as the introduction of iron weaponry or the stirrup. However, during most historical periods, the form of combat was relatively constant: the Roman legions that confronted the Goths at Adrianople (378 AD) were substantially the same as those organised by Gaius Marius in the 1st century BC. In the same way, the combat of the dynastic armies of the *Ancien Régime* remained unchanged for more than a century… However, in the 19th century, scientific advances accelerated, to the point where armies were regularly surprised when they tried to fight in the way they were accustomed to. The high point of the disconnect between military doctrine and technology was perhaps the outbreak of the First World War, when European armies tried to fight as in Napoleon's time —closed order, open field attacks—, despite the enormous technological evolution of weaponry. The result was paralysis of manoeuvre, huge casualties, and the transformation of the conflict into a war of attrition.

It is common to attribute the enormous number of casualties in the First World War to the incompetence of the belligerents' General Staffs, unable to foresee the effect on the battlefield of new technologies —rapid-fire artillery, the repeating rifle, the machine gun… However, it is important to note that technological progress is constant, while conflicts —the only real scenario for testing the suitability of doctrine to combat conditions— are isolated episodes separated by long periods of peace. Therefore, it is not surprising that it is extremely difficult for militaries to keep pace with technological evolution.

This phenomenon is more pronounced today, for several reasons: the first is the absence of major conflicts —to the extent that the war in Ukraine seems to us to be a "revolutionary" event, something that would surprise previous generations—; the second is the greater speed of technological progress, much greater than in the past; the third, but not least, is that, for the first time in history, it is the civilian world that is driving technological development. In other words, the military use of technology normally occurs when that technology has been in the everyday lives of our citizens for some time. As a result, the military utility of seemingly innocuous or non-military devices is often not apparent to military states. Ukraine's military use of software applications directly derived from civilian life is a good example

of this. These tools were introduced by Mykhailo Fedorov, the Ukrainian Minister of Digital Transformation, a businessman in digital enterprises, educated as a computer engineer and with no military background, and not by the Ukrainian General Staff, who were likely only vaguely aware of their existence and doubtful of their military value.

The armed forces, like all state administration, are a product of their time. Our current armed forces have a structure designed during the Cold War, when technological advances were much slower and, moreover, driven by military needs. That is to say, militaries would identify an operational need to improve their combat capability and commission civilian companies to develop products to meet that requirement. A good example of this process is Secretary of Defence Harold Brown's *second offset strategy*, which led to advances such as computer networks and GPS. Over time, civil society found ways to use this technology for other purposes. In that world, doctrine was ahead of scientific progress, and armies asked for what they thought they would need based on their analysis. The structure of armies, procurement procedures, timelines for commissioning equipment… were designed for that world that no longer exists.

Currently, it is not military needs that drive scientific development, so the system does not work. Scientific advances are moving much faster than doctrinal developments. In fact, the reality of technological progress regularly renders doctrine obsolete. The development of the Ukrainian war is a case in point. Before the war, the use of UAS was sporadic, and few would have thought that they would be the protagonists of the battlefield —posing a serious threat to even the most advanced tanks and modern artillery. Even more surprising is the prominence of commercial drones —virtually toys— with very limited performance, but extraordinarily cheap and easy to produce. Although it is true that the development of the Nagorno-Karabakh war, in 2020, already pointed towards these developments.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the General Staffs devoted most of their efforts to studying the two key factors in combat at the time: the enemy and the terrain. And to do so, they had personnel specialised in such studies. Today, as much —if not more— attention needs to be devoted to the third key factor: technology. As a result, armies must set up dedicated bodies to study technologi-

cal advances, to assess their impact on combat. In the same way that in centuries past spies and diplomats were used to study the enemy and reconnaissance trips were made to learn about the terrain where a conflict might develop, the study of the effects of technology on combat requires specific actions to be taken. Thus, it is necessary to create specific units within doctrine development centres dedicated exclusively to technological studies, staffed by experts with deep technological knowledge and military personnel with sufficient technical knowledge to understand the effects of technology on combat. Similarly, a programme of experimentation must be designed to verify the maturity of new technologies and their possible effects on the way we fight. And procedures need to be developed to rapidly translate the lessons learned into doctrine and procedures in use.

Since technology is advancing very quickly, doctrine may need to adapt just as quickly, along with the materials needed for its implementation. This makes it necessary to have the means to continuously update and disseminate doctrinal modifications, but also to design a much more agile procurement procedure than the current one. In the same way, experimentation carries with it the inherent possibility of error: most of the experiments carried out will probably not bear any fruit. Yet they are essential to validate or rule out technological advances. This forces the system to incorporate a certain "tolerance for error", which is not usually the case in public administration.

A multitude of potentially disruptive technologies are emerging today, along with others that may be "one day old": UAS have demonstrated their vulnerability to electronic warfare and, predictably, to directed energy weapons and laser weapons — although this does not affect those with fibre-optic guidance to any great extent. As a result, it is possible that UAS will either play a lesser role in the future battlefield than they appear to us today, or that they will continue to play a prominent role —this would be a good example of the need for an experimentation programme. Another constant trend on the battlefield is the replacement of personnel —increasingly scarce, due to the demographic dynamics of our societies— by machines, and the proliferation of unmanned combat systems of all kinds is foreseeable. Similarly, the emergence of quantum computers could bring about a complete revolution on the battlefield —and even more so if they are associated with Artificial Intelligence. And, like these examples, there are a multitude of technologies on the horizon that require

us to prepare for them. And that requires organic and mindset changes.

Carlos Javier Frías Sánchez
Brigadier General of Artillery
Director of the Army War and Leadership School

6.3 Evolution of military technology and capabilities. Summary of the debate

Compiled by the moderator: David Ramírez Morán

The presentations were preceded by a few words from the moderator recalling the amount of 800 billion euros, which arose in two different contexts involving the European Union, and which has generated a certain risk of confusing two very different measures.

Last year, the report commissioned from Mario Draghi was published, aiming to assess how the EU should regain the competitiveness needed to restore its international relevance. The report identified the need for a significant annual investment to achieve this goal. On the other hand, EU President Ursula von-der-Leyen, already this year, announced that an investment of this amount would be mobilised over six years, until 2030, so that member states could undertake the necessary investments to provide themselves with additional defence capabilities in the new international context.

There are two fundamental elements in defence: the personnel and the material they use. In relation to the latter, technology has always been a differential element that tips the balance of the confrontation, which is why it was decided to focus the session on technology and military capabilities. They make it possible to exercise defence by establishing a situation of deterrence, which prevents conflict and, if it occurs, leads to its resolution through a use that minimises casualties and reduces the duration of the conflict as much as possible.

Following the presentations above, the debate took place. The first interventions focused on clarifying some economic issues, addressing what the EU's proposed 800 billion investment should be spent on, and contrasting this amount with the current 400 billion plus, which has not been enough to alter Russia's position in the Ukrainian conflict. The operational capability of the armed

forces and the importance of their technological dependence on products from the US, which can withdraw access to certain technologies or prevent the use of its defence products in a conflict, were also discussed.

It was emphasised that the European Commission has no powers in defence, which reduces its capacity to act and practically leaves it only with the option of offering money, thus justifying the measure of authorising defence spending —as opposed to other alternatives— by relaxing fiscal control measures (relating to debt and budget deficits). However, spending for its own sake does not necessarily lead to solutions to existing problems.

A needs assessment and a procurement plan are necessary, which will come up against a lack of industrial fabric to develop the products. However, there are other problems that cannot be solved with money alone but require deeper changes in society. The first step is to acknowledge and clearly define the problem —something that has not yet been done.

Another problem is the absence of doctrine in the EU, which leads to reliance on NATO doctrine. Some participants saw this as a shortcoming, highlighting the lack of designated bodies at the European level responsible for the development and implementation of such doctrine. Going a step further, doctrine is developed to solve problems —for example of a strategic nature— and at the EU level, the problems that need to be addressed are not identified. Solutions will depend on the nature of the problem. Once the strategic problem and the doctrine for the use of assets have been defined, both should be shared at the European level. This would involve identifying what capabilities are available, what is lacking and how and at what cost the necessary means can be acquired. This coordination work is still pending.

There is a significant dependence on foreign products, affecting all allies, coupled with long-standing underfunding, which is particularly pronounced in Spain's case. Some pointed out that Spain's strategic approach will determine the types of systems it needs. Defence planning can be based —basically— either on threats or capabilities, taking into account the available budget and other factors that will lead to a force design.

It was recalled that platforms have a very long lifespan and it is not easy to modify them during this period in order to adapt their functions. In fact, the underfunding of Spanish armies has been going on for many years and there are very old platforms still in

use. Sustained underinvestment over a long period of time can mean that much greater resources are required when trying to recover a given capability. The recovery of military capabilities lost due to lack of investment also results in a lack of demand for the industry that sustains such capabilities. Therefore, the recovery effort also implies retraining —recovering *know-how*— and developing —again— productive fabric, i.e., greater investment is required, and that the industry foresees that it will be sustainable. Otherwise, there is no investment.

It was noted that 65% of the equipment purchased with this 2% of GDP comes from the US, contributing to the financing of the country's strategic autonomy. In contrast, only one European company is among the leading technology companies. The urgencies imposed by the war in Ukraine have driven a capability procurement model that is overly oriented towards foreign purchases. Thus, alternatives should be considered, especially after the geopolitical shift under Trump. It was noted that alternative suppliers are possible because Europe has sufficient technology to manufacture all the products needed by the Ukrainian military.

Of relevance to the Ukrainian capability development model is how to adopt its doctrinal innovations in the use of new media, and to emulate its rapidity in generating software applications and incorporating them in order to increase the effectiveness of capabilities.

Regardless of the type of defence planning, the problem is to define what we have to defend ourselves against and what military instrument we want to have at our disposal, along with what that instrument must be capable of (level of military ambition). The problem, therefore, begins with identifying one's own current situation, assessing the capabilities of a potential opponent, and defining what military instrument is needed to match a given level of ambition —along with the risks one is willing to assume. Then, the necessary investment should be considered. But successful defence planning requires a necessary strategic culture.

With regard to strategic and defence culture, some academic works were mentioned positively —such as Alberto Bueno's 2019 thesis (2019) on strategic culture in Spain— and the book *Responsibility to Protect*, on German strategic culture, which has many similarities with Spain.

As a result of these approaches, the speakers were specifically asked about the list of capabilities required. Reference was made to the Petersberg tasks, but it was also pointed out that war has come to Europe, and this change in the situation should lead to missions in high-intensity combat scenarios. A number of necessary capabilities were identified such as: in-flight refuelling, command and control, long-range and precision munitions, electronic warfare, communications security, A2/AD capabilities, information systems, advanced anti-ship missiles…

In terms of technology, it was discussed how disruptive changes are approaching, such as the evolution of autonomous weapons systems, as well as human intervention in the monitoring and control of artificial intelligence.

Issues related to the human factor of capabilities, which is fundamental in warfare, were also addressed. Social changes were recalled when it was pointed out that, historically, men went to war while women stayed at home. There are also other issues linked to the human factor and the economy. For example, in Israel today there are problems because every soldier deployed is also a worker who does not contribute to society. This highlights the need to wage war with fewer personnel; something that automation and technology can help achieve.

According to some surveys, only a third of Europeans would be willing to fight while defending; relatively few consider anything worth defending. This reinforces the need to look for ways to fight with fewer troops. The existence of the ongoing debate in Europe on military service and the problem of reserves in conflict was also noted.

In the past, the reduction of own casualties was achieved, in part, by firing at greater distances. Today, technology can help with new ways of fighting that require fewer personnel, and technological progress can also help to more quickly replenish equipment damaged during combat.

Ukraine came up when analysing why it was resisting and concluded that it is because of its ability to understand and analyse technological impact and to experiment, adopt, and adapt available technologies to the battlefield. In the EU and elsewhere, this process is either not taking place or, when it does, it lacks the collaboration needed to achieve larger goals.

It was again highlighted how the Ukrainians have managed to bring new technologies to the battlefield in a very short time. Both Europeans and Americans need to accelerate these adaptation processes, and the experiences in Ukraine can help.

The need for investment and dedication of resources to defence was an issue that came up at several points during the debate. The long period of peace in Europe has led to an investment deficit, resulting in armed forces with a lack of human and material resources. Rebuilding these capabilities, many of which have been degraded or even lost, would require a considerable effort.

There was no doubt among the participants that achieving military capabilities that are useful on today's battlefield requires a significant investment. The necessary investment is met with rejection in a society that is not aware of the need for defence —it has not known how, or been able, to inculcate such awareness.

The long peace enjoyed has led to a decline in the perception of threat or risk, which has also fuelled a tendency to consider conflict that is much less likely to be resolved by defence. Today's reality contrasts with this thinking; there are states that do rely on the use of force to achieve their objectives, because they have a different idiosyncrasy. It is identified as necessary to communicate the need for credible defence to the population.

The development of new capabilities or adaptations also requires experimentation. Start-ups and SMEs were praised over large companies for their greater capacity to adapt. Some questioned a public funding model that supports a research phase that extends over several years before reaching the prototype and/or possible developments. The possible option of mutualising the cost of investments among those interested was also raised; a difficulty for this is in finding a coordinator for such research.

With regard to how research is conducted, the need to invest in some areas where commercial products are already available was raised, with the aim of developing adaptations tailored to capability needs and eliminating dependencies. We should not always depend on who invented the first product or technology. Examples of this could be the development of Large Language Models (LLM), or other elements of Artificial Intelligence, semiconductors, etc. Perhaps the EU should encourage this type of research, which would further autonomy.

In terms of the defence industry, several problems were identified that characterise the European ecosystem. Unlike other regions, there are no specific capabilities for defence developments that bring together the relevant actors: academia —in its capacity as researcher and trainer—, armies —as users of the systems— and industry —as developer of products and in charge of maintaining capabilities in optimal conditions. The need for a European DARPA to channel research projects and bring public funding mechanisms closer to start-ups, small and medium-sized enterprises was raised. The need for a possible Spanish DARPA-type agency was also mentioned, at least for start-ups.

Regarding funding, the uncertainty generated by the impossibility of having stable investment in the medium term to encourage longer projects, in line with the life cycles of defence systems, was highlighted. Nor do the regulations —with very complex and inflexible procedures— contribute to increasing the capacity for experimentation and the interest of the different actors in tasks related to defence R&D&I. Mention was also made of the contrast between small and large companies, whose objectives should be promoted equally, so that the advantages of one complement those of the other. To achieve synergies, on the one hand, to make better use of the flexibility and agility of small and medium-sized companies and, on the other hand, the financial stability and experience in large projects of large companies.

R&D was identified as a risky activity, which must be assumed in order to achieve results. The nature of the needs and the characteristics of the market mean that the risk, instead of being deposited with the companies, which obtain a profit in return, ends up falling on the citizens —the end customers who need the projects to go ahead. Hence the need to mutualise risk and not only use public funding. A possible example of the above could be the S80 AIP.

The aforementioned Spanish DARPA could provide a response to new mechanisms to foster innovation and improve the interlocution between public and private researchers involved in defence. Budgetary unpredictability also works against achieving these objectives. In any case, with the current model, the reduced risk assumed by companies involved in large systems or projects was identified.

Public procurement law was also identified as a major problem. Not being able to take technological risks, to achieve results, or

to present a final product, works against the funding of innovative research projects. A general experimentation plan is needed to simplify the use of public money to adopt and adapt new technologies.

The comment on the need to adapt Spanish legislation, the law on public sector contracts, was particularly relevant, so that the enactment of the EU's omnibus law allows investments to be managed under its terms as soon as possible.

In relation to research and innovation, there was also discussion of the problem of a mentality in society that leads universities not to carry out research into military matters. This is related to the aforementioned perception that defence is not necessary, and goes so far as to exclude defence-related issues from the research areas included in the statutes of some universities. In these cases, it makes no difference whether 2% of GDP is reached as an investment, because it will not be used to create new capabilities by drawing on the research of these centres. Although it was also acknowledged that there are universities that invest more than 10% in defence and security research, in some cases reaching more than 20%, especially when dual technologies are taken into account.

Nuclear deterrence was also discussed. After explaining the European positions on this issue, where there are countries that have signed treaties banning this type of weaponry, the suitability of these positions was contrasted with the current situation in Ukraine. It was recalled how it was forced to abandon its nuclear capability under agreements involving Russia, the UK and the US (Budapest Agreements of 1994). Russia's nuclear capabilities put it in a position of strength that allows it to go ahead with its "special operation". It is important not to shy away from the debate on nuclear deterrence in the EU as part of effective deterrence, where only France has such capabilities —in any case, far less than Russia. The debate should cover the possible availability of such capabilities (scenarios, decision mechanisms, etc.)

Finally, it was pointed out that, while the hackneyed approach that "you go to war with what you have" may be very eloquent and constructive, the reality is that "if there is nothing, the result cannot be good". That said, the appropriateness of the name "Rearming Europe", which seems to have been rebranded to Preparation 2030 (in the Commission's *White Paper*) in order to convey a less warmongering message, was also questioned.

After highlighting the fact that the conference was attended mainly by people who were aware of defence and security issues, the work carried out by CESEDEN to disseminate a defence culture was praised. However, it was questioned whether it would be appropriate to place this responsibility solely in the hands of the Ministry of Defence, as it should be a cross-cutting state policy, not limited to the Ministry of Defence.

David Ramírez Morán
Senior Defence Scientist
IEEE Analyst

7 Roundtable 3.1. Situation in Latin America

7.1 The Risks of Increasing Militarisation in Latin America

Author: Prof. Rafael Martínez Martínez

Summary:

From the end of the dictatorships to the present day, there has been a significant institutional evolution of the armed forces which, with greater or lesser intensity, has generalised civilian supremacy in the institutional structure of Defence. Military justice, understood as a privilege for the uniformed, has been nearly eradicated, although there are still reforms to be undertaken. Women have been integrated, although still in low percentages. Strategic planning has also been explored, becoming a consolidated model in the countries with greater democratic development.

Moreover, there is no risk of war on the immediate, or even remote, horizon in Latin America. This leads to debates on whether or not it is necessary to maintain the defence machin-

ery, whether or not to continue allocating resources to a risk —war— that is unlikely, and also on what to devote them to in the event of maintaining them. There are four possible positions: (i) the abolitionists, who take advantage of the situation to call for the eradication of armies; (ii) the normative or essentialists, who cling to the tradition of Prussian functions and do not want to hear about any other possibility; (iii) the adaptive, who, while respecting the essential functions —deterrence and defence— consider it feasible to update their roles. And, finally, (iv) the pragmatists, who choose to assign them missions of all kinds and conditions —including those far removed from the military— as state needs arise.

The latter option, which is the predominant one, has triggered a global process of militarisation in the region that carries significant risks. Worst-case scenarios —Venezuela, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador…— could show us a return to militarism, which never comes alone, but is always accompanied by the loss of democracy.

Key words:

Latin America, Militarisation, Militarism, Wildcard administration, Armed forces.

Cite this document:

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From the end of the dictatorships to the present day, there has been, with greater or lesser intensity, a significant institutional evolution of the armed forces which, for example: has generalised civilian supremacy in the institutional structure of Defence. Military justice, understood as a privilege for the uniformed, has been nearly eradicated, although reforms remain to be undertaken. Women have been integrated, although still in low percentages. Strategic planning has also been explored, becoming a consolidated model in the countries with greater democratic development. Thus, while we can affirm that this democratising transition from political power to more administration has

been successful in practically the entire region, the same cannot be said for the democratic consolidation of this same process, which continues to face significant deficits in almost the entire region.

On the other hand, there are no war risks on the immediate, or even remote, horizon in Latin America. This leads to debates on whether or not it is necessary to maintain the defence machine; whether or not to continue allocating resources to a risk —war— that is unlikely; and also, on what to do with the armed forces if they are maintained. In response to these questions, there are four positions:

1. Abolitionists, who take advantage of the situation to call for the eradication of armies.
2. The normative or essentialists, who remain wedded to the tradition of Prussian functions and do not want to hear about any other possibility.
3. Adaptive ones, which, based on respect for the essential functions —deterrence and defence— consider it feasible to update their roles. In this dynamic of constant updating and modernisation, the logic of three "R's" (Martínez, 2020) is imposed. According to this framework, in order to survive the changing reality without losing focus on their defensive role, the armed forces must redefine their missions, resize their structure and, finally, reconvert the presumably surplus part into the assets of other agencies. In other words, the future of armies does not lie in large human contingents, but in small armies with high technology and mobility (Dandeker, 2000).
4. Finally, there are the pragmatists, who believe that, given that reforming and modernising the armed forces may be a political trap —one where you know how it all begins but not how it ends—, and keeping them idle is an unaffordable luxury, it is much simpler and less controversial to assign them missions of all kinds and conditions, including very non-military ones, as state needs arise.

This being the case, Latin America is a geographical space in which the main threats to governments do not come from other states, but are linked to transnational organised crime, cyber-crime, the growing wave of insecurity due to the increase in crim-inality, or uncontrolled migration, to cite a few examples. These phenomena are redirecting the military towards public security missions.

It is also obvious that climate change and related natural disasters are a serious problem facing the region. As are the severe deficits in the welfare state, such as public health, schooling, growing inequality or the lack of development in certain indigenous populations. All these realities are justifying the fact that troops are also taking on tasks focused on the country's development —meaning the extension of basic services— as well as disaster management —an event that generates great destruction or damage— and calamities —misfortune that affects many people. All of these trends, far from a redefinition of roles, carry the risk of militarisation.

In fact, militarising emergencies, development, and public security compromises the military's training, equipment, and doctrine for deterrence and defence, and is likely to erode its effectiveness. At the same time, the training, equipment and doctrine that one accumulates as a military officer, while useful in an emergency, is not optimal for civil defence, nor for policing or social work. This global dynamic of militarisation in the region, from a pragmatic point of view, can be understood, but it is in no way risk-free. Even one of the staunch defenders of pragmatism, Pion-Berlin (2016), proposes limits to this profusion of activities in order to avoid falling into the dynamics of militarism: (i) never in densely populated areas, (ii) never facing social programmes, (iii) never if the mission requires training and material that is foreign to them, and (iv) never if they have to act as police officers.

The main functions of the SAF are deterrence and defence. These are the roles from which they derive the missions they will later perform. Along with these main roles, there are what are known as auxiliary roles, i.e. collaborative and secondary at the same time. Collaborative, given that these are missions in which the SAF will come to the aid of the State; secondary, because they are not inherent to its activity, but rather are improper to the defining role —deterrence and defence— of the military administration. On the other hand, in the absence of better resources, the logistical capabilities and territorial distribution of armies may make them necessary.

The reality is that practically all countries have integrated domestic order, national development, and disaster and calamity response into their legislation as activities in which the armed forces, under certain circumstances, can help. However, although they are legally listed as support functions, therefore auxiliary, the daily practice is that, in anticipation of the regularity of these

three tasks, the SAF are also equipped, trained, and indoctrinated in the performance of these activities as the main ones.

The question we must ask ourselves is: why this militarisation? Alongside Alberto Bueno (2023, 2024, 2025), we have identified four possible justifications —none of which contribute to the process of democratic consolidation of the military administration. First, militarisation could be an indicator of *militarism*, because the transition was never completed —this would be the case in Guatemala. Or because, although the democratic transition has begun, there has been an involution that places militarism back in the picture —this would be the case in Brazil under President Jair Bolsonaro or in Nicaragua after the return of the autocrat Ortega.

Secondly, militarisation, especially in development and emergencies, can also threaten a process of *image-cleansing* in order to achieve greater social acceptance. As is the case in Mexico, this constant dedication to social relief missions tends to generate very positive social perceptions towards its executors. Even if a ruler believes that the absence of risks of a defensive nature makes it advisable to abolish armies because their function is no longer useful to society, they could achieve a covert abolition through this process of denaturalising their original function.

The third explanation does not speak of fears or misgivings, but of pure and simple pragmatism. Political decision-makers see no need to dismantle an existing good administration. One that, while it will not defend us, can provide us with all kinds of useful services: an administration that is a *catch-all*. In their imagination, with these non-defensive missions, the military have an occupation, which society is grateful for, and they solve problems for them. So, if everyone wins, what's the problem? In their eyes, this option for the catch-all administration offers only advantages. But Jenne and Martínez (2022) warn of the dangers of such a dynamic: 1) the breakdown of legal certainty, 2) a failure of military reform and modernisation, 3) serious difficulties in developing civilian capabilities, and 4) the abuse of the catch-all administration is consistent with an undemocratic political culture.

Fourthly and finally, militarisation, in the face of the unsuccessful police fight against criminal organisations, aims to *increase the use of force.* This would undoubtedly be the case with Salvadoran President Bukele and his calls for an iron fist against gang members. In fact, he has always referred to "being at war" against

them. Armies are used in public security because the criminal organisations' capacity for force exceeds that of the police, and the state wants to be able to replicate this with greater intensity in order to have any chance of discouraging these cartels.

To recap:

Two clear ideas emerge from the above: 1) in general, throughout the region, there are still areas in which forces bust be modernised to advance towards democratic consolidation; 2) the absence of military threats has not triggered a strategic debate about resizing and redefining defence policy externally. Instead, the existing structures have been maintained, and, through pragmatism, the armies have shifted from being a military administration to a catch-all administration.

States should make efforts to articulate the administrative agencies necessary for the threats they possess. Perhaps this will entail resizing the volume of troops and reconverting parts of their armies into those other specialised administrations that they do require. But this Pandora's Box will surely be one that few will want to open.

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*Rafa Martinez**
Professor of Political Science and Administration

University of Barcelona

7.2 An opportunity for the Ibero-American project

Author: Cristina Manzano Porteros

Summary:

Donald Trump's return to the White House has placed Latin America at the centre of the geopolitical debate. Many of the new US president's priorities are focused on a region that oscillates between economic dependence on both the United States and China and the desire not to be caught in a struggle between great powers. With all the challenges that the global landscape implies, there are also opportunities for a strengthened relationship between Latin American and EU countries, as well as for the future of the Ibero-American project.

Key words:

Latin America, European Union, United States

Cite this document:

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Donald Trump's return to the White House has put Latin America at the centre of geopolitical analysis. The region has spent decades aspiring to stop being considered the backyard of the US and demanding greater attention from Washington, and it has succeeded, albeit abruptly. After the first measures of the new presidency, from the treatment of immigration to tariffs, from the battle against fentanyl to the rivalry with China, the relationship between Latin American countries and their northern neighbour has undergone a radical change since 20 January.

At this point it remains unclear whether the Trump administration's main objective is to recover the full extent of the Monroe Doctrine —America for the Americans— as a guide for its policy towards the so-called Western Hemisphere, or whether its actions respond to transactional calculations. After all, Latin America has large reserves of the minerals the world needs for the green and digital transitions —the latter seems to matter more to the US president than the former— and it is a territory where Chinese presence and influence have been increasing exponentially in recent years. Be that as it may, it has introduced new factors of uncertainty into an already unstable landscape. Declarations about turning Canada into a new state or retaking control of the Panama Canal move the US away from its former postulates of a rules-based world order and reintroduce coercion and hard power as the drivers of international relations. A change of course that has also been felt very noticeably in the US position towards Ukraine and Russia and has been greeted in Europe as the end of the era in which Europeans and Americans were preferred and privileged allies.

This new reality is set to change the geopolitical situation in Ibero-America, although it is not yet clear what the resulting new order will look like.

In any case, the current geopolitical landscape in Latin America displays a number of characteristics, which are listed here:

1. Mexico and Central America's dependence on the US, as opposed to China's dependence on the southern part of the continent.
2. Fragmentation along ideological lines.
3. The desire not to be caught up in the rivalry of the two great powers.
4. The weakness of integration processes.

5. Ambiguity over the global order that the region defends.

A complex context which, however, may also offer new opportunities for both Europe and the Ibero-American Community.

The EU, in the words of the president of the European Commission, has already identified Latin America as a priority ally in the context of Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the need to guarantee strategic products. The alignment of values, economic complementarities, and historical, cultural and human ties —the latter especially with Spain and Portugal— more than justify a new relationship between the two sides of the Atlantic. The staging of this relaunching, after years of estrangement, was the EU-CELAC Summit held in Brussels in 2023, with the impetus of the Spanish presidency of the Council and the then High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy of the Union, Josep Borrell.

The arrival of a new team at the Commission, the weight of the war in Ukraine, and the Russian threat on EU foreign policy, as well as the difficulties for a harmonised dialogue in Latin America, including in CELAC, have led to a certain scepticism about maintaining commitments. However, the challenges posed by the Trump presidency may serve as an impetus to strengthen the other transatlantic relationship.

As an example, on 6 December 2024, shortly before the change of power in the US, Brussels and MERCOSUR concluded negotiations on the agreement that had been blocked for years. A long process of ratification remains ahead in Europe, at different levels, and it is likely that the political and commercial components will end up being separated to facilitate its entry into force. According to a study by the Elcano Royal Institute, if ratified, the EU would have trade agreements with 95% of Latin America's GDP, positioning the EU as Latin America's main strategic partner and MERCOSUR as a key player in sustainable and high value-added supply chains (Berganza *et al*, 2025).

A little later, in January, the modernisation of the EU-Mexico Agreement was concluded —another step in the trade integration of the two blocs.

The commitment to free trade, sustainable development, and multilateralism are the foundations on which to build a strengthened Euro-Latin American relationship, at a time when all three elements are being questioned by the US. The High Representative Kaja Kallas at an event in the European Parliament in February:

"The strength of the EU-LAC relationship stems from a common history of deep ties between our peoples. We share a commitment to values that are not only European, but universal. Democracy, human rights, a rules-based international order. We also share a conviction to defend our interests while making the best of our alliances. In Europe we call it strategic autonomy; in Latin America and the Caribbean they call it sovereignty, but we mean the same thing".

It is also a good opportunity to reaffirm the role of the Ibero-American Community, which is made up of the 19 countries of Latin America that speak Spanish or Portuguese and the three countries of the Iberian Peninsula (Spain, Portugal and Andorra). In a region where the different attempts at integration have suffered all kinds of ups and downs, the Ibero-American Conference has been able to maintain a space for political dialogue at different levels. Moreover, Ibero-American Cooperation has been consolidated as a unique model in which the countries themselves decide what they want to cooperate on. More than 30 programmes in a wide range of fields —from culture to science, from health to disability or access to justice— are working to help transform public policies for the benefit of their citizens. With one foot in America and the other in Europe, the Ibero-American countries naturally exercise this relationship between the two regions. The membership of its members in a variety of global initiatives and institutions —BRICS, G20, Group of 77— facilitates an exceptional vision and understanding of the world at a time when the parameters hitherto in force are losing their validity. The Community's operating principles —horizontality, inclusiveness and consensus— represent a form of multilateralism that, despite its difficulties, has managed to move forward for over thirty years in a changing global context. And, alongside all this, the human ties that bind the Community together transcend the circumstances of politics.

"The countries of the region perceive the Community as a space to strengthen political dialogue, as an instance to adopt common positions on global issues, as an instrument to promote cooperation**,** as a mechanism to generate rights, and as a platform to strengthen the connection between Latin America and Europe", said the Ibero-American Secretary General, Andrés Allamand.

The fact that the next summit will be held in Madrid in 2026 is a new opportunity to revitalise the Ibero-American project.

According to José Manuel Albares, Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation of the Spanish government:

"For Spain, the fundamental objective is to begin a new stage of reaffirming and consolidating the system, identifying new priorities and reorganising working methods. To this end, we have received a clear mandate from the members to launch a profound reflection with the aim of strengthening and adapting the working methods of the Ibero-American system to the current times".

The example of effective multilateralism will be the best antidote to those who advocate a return to spheres of influence and the power of the strongest.

Cristina Manzano Porteros
Director of External Relations
Ibero-American General Secretariat

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7.3 Situation in Ibero-America. Summary of the debate

Compiled by the moderator: Lt. Col. Francisco Márquez De la Rubia

1 The risks of Latin America's increasing militarisation

Since the end of the dictatorships in Latin America, the armed forces have experienced significant institutional advances. Civilian supremacy in defence has been consolidated, military justice privileges have been reduced, female inclusion has been promoted (albeit in low percentages) and strategic planning has been fostered. However, although the transition to democracy has been largely successful, democratic deficits persist in several countries, especially regarding transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in defence policy decision-making.

Currently, the region does not face immediate war risks, which has led to debates on the need to maintain the armed forces and their possible redefinition. Four positions stand out:

Abolitionists: They propose the eradication of armies in the absence of war threats, arguing that resources allocated to defence could be redirected to more urgent social policies.

Normative or essentialists: They uphold the tradition of Prussian defence and deterrence functions, resisting any attempt to redefine the roles of the armed forces.

Adaptive: They call for the modernisation of the armed forces, focusing on redefining their missions and resizing their resources to adapt to new threats, such as organised crime and natural disasters.

Pragmatists: They propose assigning different missions to the armed forces, even outside the military sphere, in order to justify their permanence and usefulness to society.

The latter option, predominant in the region, has led to a militarisation that entails risks, such as the erosion of democracy in cases like Venezuela, Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador. The militarisation of areas such as public security, emergency management, and national development can affect the defensive preparedness of the armed forces and, in the long term, denaturalise their main role. This translates into a loss of efficiency in their original missions and an operational overload that can affect the quality of their performance.

Reasons identified for this trend include the attempt to clean up the military's image, administrative convenience, the increased use of force in the face of criminal challenges, and the maintenance of the armed forces as a "catch-all administration". The latter, while practical in the short term, poses democratic risks and limits the development of specialised civilian capabilities. It also contributes to a misperception of the true nature of military functions, blurring the lines between internal security and national defence.

2 An opportunity for the Ibero-American project

Donald Trump's return to the US presidency has placed Latin America in the geopolitical spotlight, increasing tension between US and Chinese influence. This situation has generated uncertainty

about the region's role in the new global order, especially in relation to issues such as immigration, tariffs, the fight against fentanyl and geopolitical influence over Canada and the Panama Canal.

The region faces complex challenges, such as economic dependence divided between the north (the US) and the south (China), ideological fragmentation, weak integration processes, and ambiguity over the global order they defend. However, this juncture also offers opportunities to strengthen ties between Latin America and the European Union (EU), establishing new forms of strategic cooperation that can foster more autonomous and sustainable development.

The EU has identified Latin America as a strategic ally, especially in the context of the war in Ukraine and the need to secure strategic supplies. The 2023 EU-CELAC Summit in Brussels marked the relaunch of relations, highlighting the importance of cooperation on democratic values, sustainable development, and multilateralism. This relaunch represents a crucial opportunity to address common issues such as climate change, energy transition, and technological innovation.

The trade agreement reached in 2024 between Brussels and MERCOSUR, together with the modernisation of the EU-Mexico Agreement, reinforces this strategic link. The consolidation of these agreements could position the EU as Latin America's main economic partner, strengthening more sustainable supply chains and promoting technology transfer.

Furthermore, the Ibero-American Community —which brings together the countries of Latin America, Spain, Portugal and Andorra— represents a unique platform for dialogue and cooperation in diverse areas, from culture to social development. Its next summit in Madrid in 2026 is presented as a key opportunity to reinforce these ties and adapt strategies to the new global realities, strengthening Ibero-American institutions and promoting joint development projects.

3 New geopolitical tensions and the threat of intervention

For decades, Latin America has largely avoided inter-state conflict, with internal strife and criminal economies being the main sources of tension. However, geopolitical competition between great powers, economic instability, and bilateral tensions are changing this dynamic and increasing the risk of inter-state disputes.

Tensions are escalating in key areas such as the territorial dispute between Venezuela and Guyana, the border conflict between Nicaragua and Colombia, and frictions between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. In addition, the Trump administration's combative rhetoric towards countries such as Mexico and its obsession with the Panama Canal generate significant political risks, including the possibility of US military interventions.

The lack of effective regional fora to coordinate mitigation strategies, such as UNASUR and its South American Defence Council, limits joint response capabilities to these threats. The growing influence of external powers and interventionist rhetoric reinforce the urgency of strengthening regional institutions to address common challenges from a collective and consensual perspective.

In this context, Latin American countries should seek strategies that strengthen their autonomy and internal cohesion, avoiding being dragged into the dynamics of confrontation between great powers. Inter-American cooperation, the strengthening of the Ibero-American Community, and the consolidation of strategic links with the EU represent viable ways to reinforce their position on the global stage. Moreover, it is crucial to foster regional initiatives that promote economic integration, environmental sustainability, and democratic governance.

In conclusion, in the face of uncertainty and geopolitical tensions, the strengthening of relations between Latin America and the EU, as well as the promotion of the Ibero-American project, are strategic ways to guarantee greater autonomy and cohesion on the international stage. These challenges also represent an opportunity to rethink the region's role in the world, promoting an inclusive development agenda that respects the cultural and economic particularities of each country.

Lt. Col. Francisco Márquez de la Rubia
IEEE Analyst
@FMarquezdl

8 Table 3.2. Defence in Europe

8.1 CSDP and the changing paradigm of the international system: a path to a renewed PESCO?

Author: Prof. Natividad Fernández Sola

Summary:

The presentation of the White Paper for European Defence 2030 (19/03/2025) raises many questions for the future and calls into question some of the EU's current lines of action, such as PESCO or the never-used enhanced cooperation in CFSP.

Key words:

(Re)evolution of the international system, Common security and defence policy, Permanent structured cooperation.

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1 Preliminary considerations on the transition of the international system and the position of the Organisations in Europe; NATO, EU, etc.

Since the beginning of the century (2008), a transition in the international system has been taking place, manifested in the end of unipolar hegemony, the erosion of multilateralism, the return of power competition, and the rise of China. A first clash with reality came with the Maidan in Ukraine that ended up escalating in 2022 with Russia's special military operation in Eastern Ukraine. That moderate transition has undergone an —expected— turnaround with the US becoming President for the second time. This has meant an acceleration, an abrupt change of —also announced— priorities. The last Munich security conference was a real tornado for Europe in this respect.

Talking about European defence today means talking about Ukraine, the US, NATO, the EU, and defence spending.

1.1 Current assessment of NATO; its handicaps

The end of American protection in Europe seems inexorable — even the possibility of strengthening the European pillar within NATO, which was once seen as viable. Nor can the disappearance of NATO be ruled out if it does not serve US interests. Don't forget US President Trump's recent proposal to leave NATO's Supreme Allied Command.

1.2 The EU as an alternative to NATO? There are several aspects to consider

- Positive elements: strategic autonomy, and non-dependence on a foreign power.
- Negative elements: a clear lack of unambiguous political orientation, capabilities, unified command, strategy, and mutual

distrust. The path designed in 2022 by the Strategic Compass is unfeasible as it was drafted under the shock of the start of the Russian military operation in Ukraine, and focuses on this while ignoring other more structural situations. The clear US position in favour of a peace agreement makes the document an unrealistic and unworkable basis.

1.3 Can the European Defence White Paper 2025 reorient the EU?

Much of its content was anticipated by the Commission President's letter of 4 March 2025 presenting her *REARM Europe* initiative. Aspects to consider:

- *Readiness 2030* is materially impossible. The critical capabilities that European countries lack have been known for a long time, yet little has been done to mitigate them. Moreover, the ammunition and missiles stockpiled have been sent to Ukraine.
- A document for Europe's post-war defence of Ukraine cannot have as its main point the development of *Europe's defence industry to help Ukraine*. This is simply an outdated and tactically unintelligent proposition. It ignores the fact that Ukraine and Russia are negotiating the peace agreement at the urging of the US and that such a stance would lead to further fuelling the conflict while antagonising all three parties involved in the negotiations.
- *Spending better, together and in Europe* means recognising that the capacities Europe truly needs —both in quality and quantity— do not currently exist at the European level. Nor will there be by 2030, because that is not enough time and because, for the time being, EU member states do not have a consensus position on who builds them, or on whether to forgo purchasing them from other markets.
- Establishing a *strong and innovative European defence industry* is a laudable but unrealistic goal in the short term. First, because countries with defence industries applaud the initiative with a view to winning in national terms, not to become part of a European industrial cog that it is not known who would control. Second, because states are free to acquire their capabilities wherever they wish.
- A warning should be made here to some Member States that may be left behind, despite having a significant defence industry, if the criterion for the distribution of the 800 billion is

based on the countries that contribute a higher percentage of their GDP to their defence budgets.

- The desperate offer to a third state, such as the UK, to lead the EU defence community alongside France —albeit limited to the defence industry— only increases suspicions of a partner that has never felt like one and left the EU after decades of obstructing the common security and defence policy and its structures. Moreover, its intelligence services are not associated with those of other European states but with another group that is more sympathetic to it. In accepting this invitation, the UK is acting as a *free rider*, even if it claims to be the US's mandatary on the Continent, and not particularly attracted to the European market. One could cite the case of the hesitations over European fighter aircraft and the multiple hesitations over leaning towards the American market.
- Achieving *deterrence through disruptive innovations* would be a wonderful goal if the EU had not lost the cutting edge of innovation almost two decades ago. In this field, recovery will take a long time and will first require investment in basic research before developing applied research in the defence field.
- The *simplification of current legislation* is a real necessity highlighted by the Draghi and Letta reports. However, that, on its own, cannot generate the R&D needed to create the defence equipment and weapons systems required.
- *The financing options for the rearmament of Europe* —as opposed to technological progress— amounting to 800 billion, are relative to the percentage to be put up by the member states. The escape clause is a poisoned gift that could damage the economic stability of the states and the eurozone as a whole by bypassing the required budgetary discipline. The purpose of the SAFE (Security Action for Europe) instrument, as well as any possible contributions from the EIB, remain unclear.

2 What is missing from the White Paper on European Defence?

- There is no investment in addressing the pressing threats to European security in the south. These challenges require capacities, unity of action, firm criteria to manage irregular and mass immigration, and social policies to address the lack of integration of some of the migrants.

- Nor is there any instrument in sight for the resumption of relations with Russia —a necessary next step after the peace agreement— which would make it possible to avoid further disagreements through diplomatic channels.
- An objection of principle that the White Paper ignores, the Commission's interference in an exclusive competence of the Member States, such as defence. The area of the European defence industry may fall within the competence of Commissioner Kubilius, but the rest does not. It is also unclear why the document is being presented by President vor der Leyen and not by the High Representative for the CFSP. Under the pretext of an emergency situation —which there is no justification as to why it is an emergency— the balances of the founding Treaties cannot be upset.

3 Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) as a way to achieve some progress and its limitations

- PESCO could be used to achieve some European defence industrial breakthroughs with some of its existing and new projects. However, it is not designed to boost the defence industry *per se.*
- This would require a re-interpretation of PESCO by bringing together complementary projects, suspending less relevant ones, or proposing new ones. The open character of PESCO should be rethought and all participating states should be required to comply with the requirements of the Treaty on European Union.
- The question remains as to whether this package of clearly prioritised measures contained in the European Defence White Paper 2025 will put an end to PESCO projects, a formula in which there is currently no prioritisation in line with European defence interests and where the national interest factor is unavoidable.

Propositional conclusions

- Strengthen PESCO to shape differentiated integration —at two or three speeds— with prioritisation of projects, monitoring, and auditing of results.
- *Europe first*. Develop European defence, not Ukrainian defence.
- Push for the most competitive technological development at the highest level, reducing non-essential expenditure. Only if

the product is competitive will spending 3-5% of defence procurement on European equipment be viable.
- Developing a common foreign policy, a *sine qua non* for guiding the direction of security and defence policy. This is difficult in the current situation of cognitive dissonance in which the EU finds itself.
- Promote an inclusive pan-European security treaty to prevent conflicts, given the current capacity to deter them.

Suggestion of new European elections or reconfiguration of the leadership of the European institutions to guarantee their democratic legitimacy. We are faced with the irremissible end of the European political class that has defended positions that are no longer viable today.

Natividad Fernández Sola
Professor of International Law and IR
University of Zaragoza

8.2 The European Union facing a new transatlantic link

Author: Col. José Luis Pontijas Calderón

Summary

The new US foreign policy is entailing a paradigm shift in its traditional relationship with Europe in general and the European Union (EU) in particular, leading to a redefinition of the transatlantic link, which can react by highlighting its potential, but applying a pragmatic vision to its geopolitical environment.

Key words

Geopolitics, European Union, United States, Common security and defence policy, Russia.

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Introduction

When analysing the possibilities available to the EU, important issues need to be considered. Perhaps the most important one is that the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is not designed to act as a defence tool. As it is included in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (according to Articles 21 to 42 of the Treaty on European Union TEU), it is legally designed for external action only, excluding internal operations. But this does not prevent a more flexible interpretation of the treaty from providing some solutions to the problem.

Moreover, the EU's external action has been criticised for its lack of reactivity and anticipation in addressing geopolitical problems and crises in its neighbourhood, which adds to the above.

1. The limitations of the CSDP: the principle of unanimity and others

One of the limitations most frequently mentioned by analysts and experts is the so-called unanimity principle, which is accused of being the main cause of the EU's deficient external action and therefore of weighing down its joint operability. However, an inquisitive analysis of this principle shows that it also brings advantages and is not the only cause of the aforementioned deficiency (Moreno, 2025).

Thus, the virtues of the principle of unanimity include: reinforcing democratic legitimacy, preserving balance, being a spur to consensus-building and being a sign of collective commitment. It is therefore not an arbitrary obstacle, ensuring that states maintain control over their security and defence contributions and commitments.

Moreover, reforming this principle would require reforming the TEU, for which there is little political will among member states, making it unlikely a priori.

But we are also forgetting other constraints that hinder external action and impede its internal dimension, especially in the field of security and defence, among which we should mention the following:

- The fact that the CSDP is designed for external action.
- The prohibition of financing defence activities with EU budgets (Art. 41.2).

- The predominant focus on European industry, which has so far been disappointing, with the number of acquisitions within the EU barely exceeding 18% of the total (Arteaga, 2025). That means that approximately 80% of acquisitions are in external markets, 63% of which are in the US.
- The burden of external military action on Member States, since the provision of resources and means is at their own expense.
- Weak civilian and military command and control capacity CSDP.
- Dependence on NATO for collective security, which undermines NATO's strategic autonomy in a key area recognised in the White Paper on the future of the European Union (European Commision, 2025).
- Lack of a common security and defence culture, with a shared vision of risks and threats, caused by Europe's weak strategic culture, in which the provincialism of the smaller states clashes with the more global vision of the larger ones and which, in part, has led to the failure of military operational initiatives such as *Battle Groups*.
- Lack of a common security and defence strategy, which is the result of the previous one.

All of this results in the diversity and divergence of priorities among the MS, which blocks the will of the MS for decisive external action by the Union as a whole.

As if this were not enough, any progress towards a more capable and competitive European defence industry is also weighed down by problems that are difficult to solve: the desire to protect the different national industries —we are talking about jobs and technological development, which is very important—, the strong tendency to buy state-of-the-art materials and armaments in foreign markets, which leads to cementing security and defence partnerships outside the Union —preferably with the US, but not only.

2. The hidden beauties of the TEU

However, the TEU hides little-exploited or unexplored possibilities that would allow it to improve its external action without the need to amend the treaty. For example, PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation), launched in 2017, has failed to deliver the results expected so far, but it could be a very useful tool if there is sufficient political will.

Another possibility is to interpret the TEU flexibly, which is what the European institutions have started to do since 2021, giving it a whole defence dimension that it did not initially have, for example:

- The extension of the European Peace Fund to supply lethal material to Ukraine, which also includes indirect financing by MS.
- The possibility of a military training mission within EU borders.
- The creation of a defence fund with an industrial reinforcement component for ammunition, on a community legal basis.
- Macro-financial assistance to non-member state (Ukraine) with a military component.
- Budgetary flexibility in terms of defence investment, as envisaged in the new White Paper.

Institutional reforms could also be carried out, such as the creation of a European security council, an autonomous council of defence ministers separate from that of foreign ministers, or the strengthening of the Political and Security Committee (PSC) by extending its prerogatives and functions.

Real opposition to moving towards a Europe of defence concerns all MS and not just a small group. As past experience shows, a reform of the TEU would likely make little difference in this regard. We have examples that demonstrate the aversion to such modifications, so there is little willingness to repeat the experiment.

3. Redefining the Transatlantic Link

But the trend that has triggered all this debate and feverish reaction within the Union has undoubtedly been the Trump administration's surprising turnaround in its support for Ukraine, which has left Europe (EU and UK) in a state of shock, from which it is trying to recover. Aside from the histrionic and surprising gestures and statements of the US leader, it is clear that Washington's new foreign policy is bringing about a change in the traditional transatlantic relationship between the two shores. Thus, it is demanding a strong European commitment to its own defence and security —albeit one that is also infused with special interests, in which the US arms industry and liquefied gas are not absent— and is applying a starkly transactional vision to its economic relations, alliances, agreements and international cooperation in general.

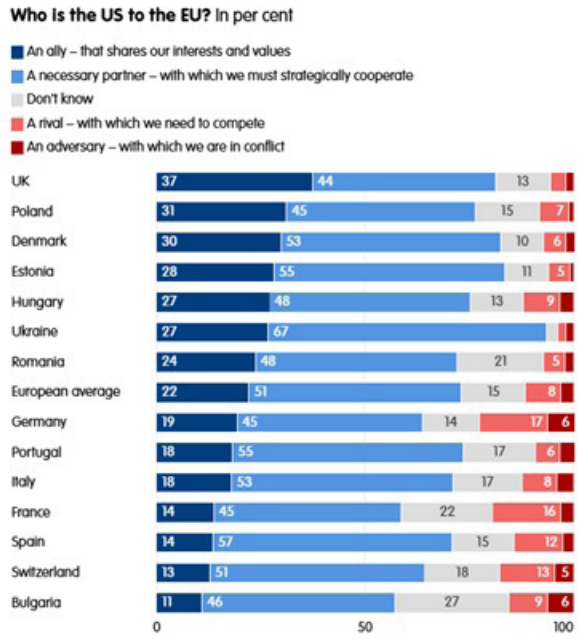
This purely transactional view is permeating the international system, where such an approach is increasingly common. This forces us to recognise and accept that we are facing a transactional world and to respond to it.

Thus, the challenges for the Union would be:

a) Find their own place in this *à la carte* world with a zero-sum mentality, to be able to defend our interests.
b) Preserve unity —EU's great power multiplier— as its strength lies in it. This is crucial not only in relation to the US (Trump is circumstantial, but Washington's position is structural and will most likely continue after him), but also in the face of pressure, inference, and interests of other powers —especially the big ones, but not exclusively.
c) Increase their capacity for autonomous decision-making and action, i.e. their political will to do so.

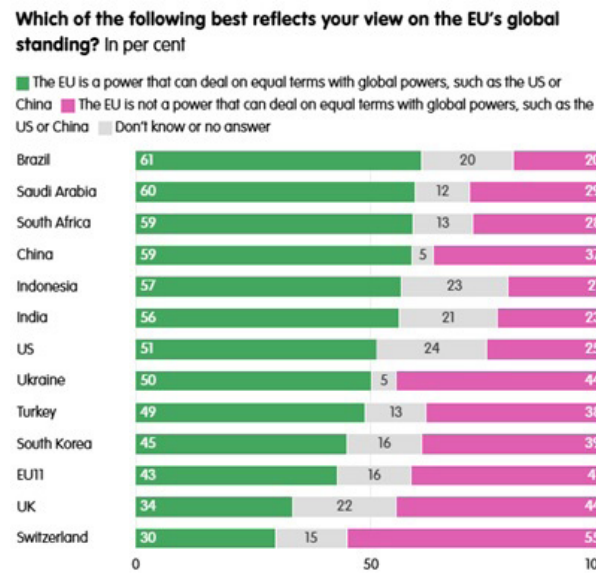
4. Advantages of the EU

In the face of this, we might ask what leverage Europeans have to preserve their unity and defend their interests. The first is that we are beginning to wake up and realise that we have dif-



ferent and sometimes divergent interests from those of the US. European opinion of its traditional ally is changing, with a growing sense that it is less of a partner and more of a necessary ally (see figure below; Puglieri *et al*, 2025). This is important, because it will allow us to design our relations more assertively with the US hegemon.

The Union must be aware that it can do much more than simply rely on the fickle will (we are now clearly aware of this) of Washington. For the world sees us as a global power, better than we see ourselves, as the figure below demonstrates (Puglieri *et al*, 2025).



At this point, we are in a position to begin to glimpse the general lines that the EU might take in this new situation:

- Seeing the world as it is, not as we would like it to be, and defining the US in terms of its actions: ally, partner and competitor, and —why not?— rival in some sectors.
- Regarding the Trump administration: remain calm (apply the "two-week rule" —do not overreact before allowing a reasonable amount of time to pass in the face of the Trump administration's statements and/or actions), avoid panic, remain united and do not lose sight of long-term priorities.
- Avoid seeing the Global South as an uncertain whole and consider these countries for what they are —large, middle and

small powers, with their distinct cultures and interests— which requires tailoring policies and strategies to each.
- Abandon the binary Cold War mentality (*either with me or against me*), without renouncing our core values, but accepting that it is possible to cooperate and compete simultaneously in this transactional world —including the US.
- But, above all, we must preserve our unity, which is our greatest asset and which will make it easier to defend our interests, especially against the most powerful.
- This will require us to be less transactional among the MS, while practising a more assertive foreign policy towards the rest —including the US—, if we are to be taken seriously by the White House.

Let us not forget that the panoply of weapons that Brussels can wield against Washington is not insignificant, including the following:

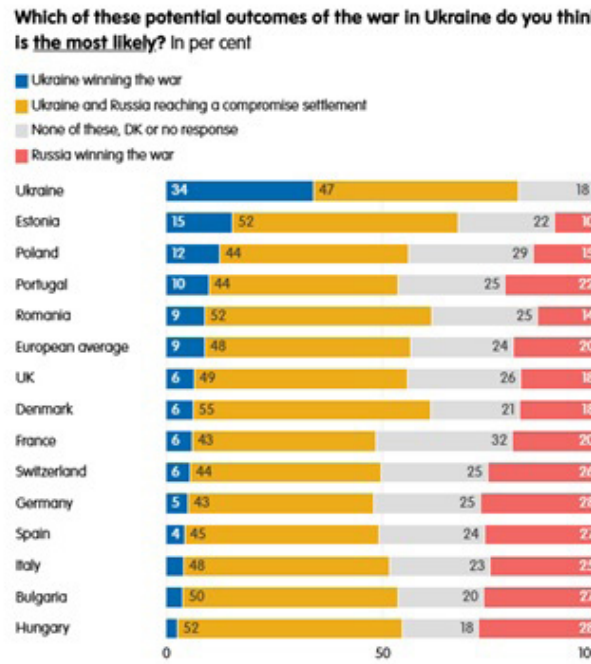
- We are very much needed —indispensable— in the US effort to contain China.
- It needs us on cross-cutting issues such as cybersecurity, intelligence, the technology race in outer space, and control of the Arctic —because five countries bordering the Arctic are European.
- NATO's value; there is no comparable alliance in the international system and it tacitly supports US geopolitics.
- The US economy is substantially dependent on European investments (45% of the total, with about 2.4 trillion in 2023), on gas exports to Europe (50% of LNG exports and 28% of total gas), and on arms (25% of the total in 2023, with an increase of 11%).
- The data collected in Europe, which feeds their algorithmic models, is important for large technology companies.
- The access of its military forces to European bases, essential for deployments and operations in the Middle East —where Isreal, its key ally, is located—, Africa, and the Indian Ocean.
- All in all, this could be summed up in Europe's not inconsiderable ability to exert pressure on Washington by doing, buying, and investing less. Provided, of course, that it acts as a solid bloc.

5. A new, truly autonomous approach and possible far-reaching reform

This new realistic way of looking at our environment and our international relations should perhaps lead us to refocus our

position regarding the conflict in Ukraine, in which we got involved by resolutely supporting the aggrieved party, driven by the moral consternation the aggression provoked. But when one accepts the roll of the dice of engaging in armed conflict, one is exposed to having to accept the cruellest of the laws of war: *vae victis* (Woe to the vanquished!), something Clausewitz already warned about when he stated that war is the realm of uncertainty.

So perhaps it is time to consider the option of recognising defeat in Ukraine and accepting the new European balance —from Lisbon to Vladivostok— that Moscow wants and Washington accepts, imposed by force of arms. The alternative is to continue to fuel the conflict without US involvement, with little or no chance of turning the tide, as it has not been possible to do so. This would only serve to prolong the suffering of the Ukrainian people, consume a substantial part of our resources, and fail to prevent the outcome. Moreover, it would perhaps worsen the final negotiating conditions that Kyiv would have to face. Indeed, European confidence in victory over Russia is very low, as the following figure shows (Puglieri *et al*, 2025):



In an armed conflict, moral dismay must give way to geostrategic pragmatism, which suggests agreeing a negotiated end to the conflict with —not against— Washington.

Clearly, this new direction in European foreign policy required new decisions, which should logically call for a renewal of the EU's administrative and decision-making leadership. This time, however, the opportunity should be seized to subject these positions —Commission and Council presidencies, as well as the Council's departments— to parliamentary scrutiny. We should not allow leaders with enormous power who, without having been democratically elected (the result of a completely opaque process of interest-peddling among the MS), exempt from any kind of control over their actions and omissions, to remain in office despite their poor performance. This would require new elections in the short term and significant changes in the medium term (which would not require amending the TEU), but would contribute to improving the democratic functioning of the European institutions.

8.3 Defence in Europe. Summary of the debate

Compiled by the moderator: N.C. Abel Romero Junquera

After a brief presentation by the moderator on the current European strategic scenario, recalling what Minister Borrell had said in his presentation the previous afternoon, two papers were presented with the idea of fuelling the debate. First, Professor Fernández Sola addressed the impact of the new American administration on defence issues and its impact on NATO, to which she added a critical analysis of the recently presented White Paper on Defence. In the second presentation, Colonel Pontijas analysed the limitations of the CFSP/CSDP in defence matters, the limitations of the Lisbon Treaty itself, but also the opportunities it offers in relation to the three major challenges facing us: finding Europe's place in the new global geopolitical scenario, preserving the unity of the EU, and being able to act autonomously. The content of both papers precedes this summary.

The debate-colloquium began, within the framework of the *Chatam House* rules, by addressing the irrelevance of questioning the NATO defence umbrella, since it is the security guarantee of the allies. This framework is considered to serve the interests of the 23 EU countries in NATO (for Europe, a weaker US commitment to European defence is an undesirable but possibly real

option). However, US interests and priorities must be accepted. Moreover, the need to contribute more in capabilities and budget, and even potential options such as involvement in the Pacific in support of the US, are likely to be considered.

Reflections were made on the Ukrainian war situation, Russia's spending and European defence spending, and especially on the current negative message we are giving to Russia about our inability to deter them if they do not abide by the terms of a future ceasefire or peace treaty. Russia's situation in relation to the war was discussed, including the little progress it has made (it is not really winning), as well as the fact that while it has been threatening Ukraine for years, it has never done so against other European states. Russia knows that it cannot invade any European country, given its limitations in terms of budget, population, and capabilities. The relevance of deploying a European operation on Ukrainian territory in the face of Russian opposition was also discussed, arguing that the current situation calls for an approach guided more by strategic pragmatism than moral indignation.

It was argued that Europeans' strategic culture had clearly evolved in the aftermath of the war in Ukraine, while significant obstacles to effective European defence governance remain. The possibility was assessed that the White Paper, despite its limitations, could be the incentive for a change in which Europe starts to take charge of its defence, and to some extent develop its own strategic autonomy. Additionally, it was considered whether a *coalition of the willing and the able* Europeans states, who could provide security guarantees to Ukraine, could be the seed of a new way of approaching European defence, away from structures that have so far caused us to fail in the attempt, such as PESCO. These "counter-intuitive" options were discussed more as an exercise in the framework of the desirable than as a reality, as there are no cases or will on the part of the EU that allow us to expect this to become a reality. Added to this were arguments that a European-led peacekeeping force in Ukraine —initially we seem to be talking about a force led by France and the UK— would be a force that has taken part for one of the contenders, which does not seem entirely coherent, and in any case cannot be expected to be acceptable to the other side (Russia).

There was a debate on the figures in the White Paper, which highlighted the fact that all the tools used so far to promote the defence industry (PESCO, EDFs, etc.) have meant that only 18%

of military spending has been on European products, with the reality being that the vast majority of spending is made in the US —data on the accuracy of the figures was cross-checked, which in any case did not affect the substance of the main argument. Whether the White Paper can be an incentive to move forward is an option that many experts doubt, as the reality is that some European countries are prioritising the bilateral with the US over the European.

The option for Europe to deploy in the Indo-Pacific currently seems unfeasible both for lack of means and of will and unity among Europeans. This lack of unity and resources is reflected, for example, in the inability to deal with the Houthi threat in the Red Sea, a scenario that initially affects us more than the Indo-Pacific, and is more important for member states. Europe was unable to provide a single, effective response to the Red Sea crisis, for reasons that had nothing to do with the underlying problem —countries' interests, links to the Israel-Gaza crisis, etc. The reality seems to be that the EU does not currently have the will to deploy in seas outside its immediate vicinity, and if it were to do so it would normally use diplomatic instruments, supported by a credible military force, which is not currently the case. There is a combination of unwillingness and lack of capacity.

Some experts wonder whether the EU —a global and economic power— would need a defence tool for deterrence or a rearmament plan that lacks citizens support. Instead, what it can do is strengthen other tools such as economic and diplomatic instruments, obviating the military at the EU level, assessing that the defence dimension is not viable, among other things due to the interests of the different countries that clash with unanimity in decision-making.

The issue of the Sahel and the demographic outlook for the region, which implies an immigration problem in Europe (with examples from the Canary Islands), was discussed, and the question arose as to how the Spanish, French and Portuguese are not capable of convincing Europeans of the importance and future risk of this threat. It was discussed that NATO's priorities do not include the southern flank —despite declarations— and that expert warnings about the serious deterioration of the situation in the Sahel are not taken into account. The White Paper itself dedicates only two lines to the Sahel, which means that we do not prioritise the region as an EU defence policy objective.

The issue of limited funding to develop security and defence in the Sahel was addressed, which is one of the causes of Europe's failure in the region, despite the creation of the EPF in 2021, which was more permissive, but came too late to address the problem. On top of this, in 2022 this fund was diverted to Ukraine where it was practically monopolised, to the detriment of the Sahel.

It is argued that achieving a CSDP with the 27 member states is impossible. As a result, the option of a Europe of defence with several nuclei, based on reinforced cooperation (clusters of several countries unite around common interests) is gaining traction. This raises a fundamental dilemma: reinforcing the European defence policy at the level of the 27 members, or strengthening national defence policies individually, trying to achieve shared objectives. Agreeing on interests is extremely difficult, and the core option could allow us to be effective by groups of countries rather than all the 27 together —which makes it practically impossible to achieve a successful outcome. Such an approach would be in the Union's interest.

During the debate it was felt that the Defence White Paper does not really live up to its name, as it has many shortcomings and its content is essentially limited to defence industry. It was concluded that the reason for this limitation is that it is the only area where the Commission has competences, and therefore uses it as a gateway to get involved in defence issues in the strict sense. In fact, the paper goes into the development of military capabilities and identifies them —an exercise that had already been carried out previously—, which is really a matter for the Member States and the Council and in no case for the Commission. As an example, the document addresses the importance of military mobility, which is in fact a PESCO project developed several years ago, and is therefore not at the level of the Commission either, nor does it represent an innovation with respect to the current situation.

The EU's inability to deter (essentially aimed at a weak but strengthening Russia that is learning from the conflict) was discussed, as well as how we might overcome this weakness, to which some experts argued that Russia is deterred and will not dare to play the conflict card with NATO.

It ended with a reference to the Indo-Pacific —the Strategy approved by the EU in 2021 for the region—, which had making us a security and defence actor in the region as one of its seven priorities. The reality is that, after three years, we have made

very little progress, and it is a fact that when the AP4 (Australia, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand) think of security between the Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific, they think of NATO, not the EU.

This prompts repeated assertions that the EU must address what it is capable of doing, rather than what it would like to do. It should avoid creating false expectations by approaching these issues —not just Indo-Pacific—, with a certain dose of reality, grounded in its limited capacity for projection at the European-level. Prioritisation is necessary, given Europe's scarce and very limited means to maintain an extensive effective presence abroad.

Abel Romero Junquera
Captain (res.)
IEEE Analyst

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9 Summary of the geopolitical dialogue with Bernardino León Gross. Paradoxes in the Middle East

Compiled by BG. Victor Bados Nieto.

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The colloquium features Brigadier General Victor Bados Nieto, Director of the IEEE, and Spanish diplomat Bernardino León Gross, with first-hand experience in multiple negotiations in the Middle East and North Africa. He has held several high-level positions of responsibility in the region, including having been the Special Representative of the European Union for the Southern Mediterranean (2011-2014) and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Libya and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) (2014-2015). The colloquium was preceded by a presentation by León, who provides an in-depth analysis of the balance of power in the area stretching from Morocco to Iran. His address followed a conventional chronological narrative, structured around three key milestones of the 21st century, which he synthesised into eight paradoxes that define the political and strategic evolution of the Middle East. The lecture, enriched by his personal and professional experience, was followed by a colloquium with General Bados and, after that, a Q&A from the audience that explored key aspects of the region in depth.

Bernardino begins by detailing the three geopolitical milestones or —"snapshots"— that structure his presentation: the 9/11 attacks in 2001, the Arab Spring in 2011 —the popular uprisings in Gaza—, and the arrival of Donald Trump and his two administrations, which he called "the new disorder", marked by shock and intervention.

The first turning point was the attack of 11 September 2001, which unleashed the so-called "war on terror" led by the US. This phase marked a radical change in the way Western powers intervened in the region, with a focus on security, regime change, and forced democratisation. However, far from consolidating order, this intervention sowed chaos and fuelled the rise of terrorism and non-state actors.

A decade later, the 2011 uprisings marked a new milestone. While they were initially seen as a democratic awakening, the outcome

was unexpected in most cases. Some regimes fell —as in Libya and Tunisia—, others were radicalised, —as in Egypt—, and in other cases, more often than not, a wave of repression, civil wars, and institutional collapse ensued. Attempts at democratisation did not generate order, but new forms of fragmentation. The most recent phase, marked by Donald Trump's unconditional support for Israel, the push for the Abraham Accords, and the current Gaza war, has revealed new dynamics: the weakening of the Palestinian cause, the normalisation of Arab-Israeli relations without resolving the conflict, and growing regional dysfunctionality. Non-state actors, such as Hamas, continue to play a key role in triggering the conflict.

The Spanish diplomat then structured his presentation around eight major paradoxes that, in his opinion, serve to define the evolution of the region over the last 25 years. This was not a linear narrative, but rather a journey through the contradictions that have marked Middle Eastern politics and society.

The following are the eight paradoxes on which Bernandino León structures his paper.

1 The paradox of failed regime change

Since the beginning of the 21st century, numerous international and regional actors have attempted to transform political regimes in the Middle East, with results that, in most cases, have been contrary to initial expectations. The idea of democratising the region, promoted by the US after 9/11, led to military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and efforts to promote electoral processes in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. However, these changes have led to a power vacuum, fragmentation and, in many cases, increased chaos and violence. The failure of these attempts is reflected in the fact that, instead of stabilising the region, these processes have deepened existing crises. For example, the war on terror, which sought to eliminate jihadist groups, coincided with an increase in jihadist attacks in the region —such as in Iraq, Syria and Yemen. The Arab Spring, which promised democratic change, led to civil wars and the strengthening of authoritarian regimes, as in Egypt, where repression intensified after the fall of Mubarak. This phenomenon reveals a paradox: efforts to change the political order have only further destabilised the region, demonstrating that external transformations, without solid internal support, generate more chaos than order. The

region thus offers a "reality check" to those who believe that the imposition of Western democratic models can be achieved without consideration of local cultural, social and political particularities.

2 The paradox of the absence of strong regional institutions

In other regions of the world, when states face deep crises, international and regional organisations often play a stabilising and mediating role. In the Middle East, however, these institutions have lost credibility and capacity for action. The Arab League, originally intended as a forum for cooperation and solidarity, has been relegated to a symbolic role, unable to manage internal conflicts or promote effective integration. The weakening of regional institutions is due to several reasons: ideological fragmentation, inter-country rivalries, and the loss of the Palestinian cause as a unifying element. The creation of the Abraham Accords, which normalised relations between Israel and some Arab countries, broke with the tradition of Arab solidarity with Palestine, further weakening regional cohesion. The lack of a strong institutional framework prevents the region from responding in a coordinated manner to crises, leaving the field open to ad hoc alliances and the intervention of external actors.

This institutional vacuum is also reflected in the international community's inability to mediate effectively in conflicts such as Syria and Libya. The fragmentation of interests and the absence of a shared vision prevent the construction of lasting solutions, perpetuating the cycle of violence and chaos.

3 The paradox of great powers and weakened regional hegemons.

The major global powers —the US, Russia and China— have shown a notable lack of coherent strategy in the region. The US, after withdrawing from Iraq and Afghanistan, has adopted a policy more focused on containment and crisis management, with no long-term plan for regional stability. Russia, which intervened in Syria in 2015 to support Bashar al-Assad, has shown that its presence is more reactive than proactive, seeking to maintain its influence without any comprehensive vision.

China, on the other hand, has begun to establish an economic and diplomatic presence in the region, but has not yet deployed

a strategy of hegemony comparable to that of the other two powers. The lack of clear leadership by the major powers has opened up space for regional actors who, in their weakness, seek to consolidate their influence: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey and Israel.

These countries, albeit with conflicting interests, have taken advantage of the absence of an overarching authority to coordinate the region to strengthen their own positions. The crisis in Egypt, the polarisation in Turkey, and the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia exemplify how the fragmentation of power at the international and regional levels perpetuates instability.

4 The paradox of power fragmentation and the proliferation of non-state actors

The weakening of states has led to a situation where militias, Islamist groups, and non-state actors occupy spaces of power previously held by central governments. In Syria, Libya and Yemen, these actors contest territorial control, creating a scenario of "balkanisation" where traditional borders become blurred and state authority fragmented.

This phenomenon has been seen in the proliferation of jihadist groups like ISIS and Al Qaeda, which have managed to establish caliphates and zones of influence in territories controlled by different actors, complicating any attempt at a political solution. The presence of Shia militias in Iraq, Kurdish forces in Syria, and the various factions in Libya illustrate how the fragmentation of power makes it difficult to rebuild solid and functional states.

The result is a region marked by insecurity, violence and unpredictability, where non-state actors act autonomously and sometimes in alliance with external states or interests, further complicating conflict resolution.

5 The paradox of order and chaos

Despite efforts to establish political and social order, the region has been plunged into persistent chaos. Foreign intervention, civil wars, and internal rivalries have created a scenario where stability seems unattainable. The logic of international politics, based on immediate and short-term interests, has replaced long-term projects.

This chaos manifests itself in the destruction of infrastructure, the massive displacement of populations, the radicalisation of movements, and the proliferation of armed groups. The situation in Syria, for example, exemplifies how the search for order has resulted in a scenario of destruction and fragmentation, in which military solutions and peace negotiations seem to have stalled.

The chaos also has an impact on the daily lives of millions of people, who face conditions of poverty, insecurity, and lack of basic services in a seemingly endless cycle.

6 The paradox of broken solidarity

Historically, the Palestinian cause was a unifying element for the Arab world and a basis for regional solidarity. In recent decades, however, this solidarity has been weakened by shifting alliances and diverging interests. The normalisation of relations between Israel and some Arab countries —such as the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain— has shown a breakdown in regional cohesion.

This weakening of solidarity prevents the region from having a common position on the conflicts and from exerting joint pressure for a just and lasting solution in Palestine. The fragmentation of interests and the prioritisation of short-term alliances have pushed the Palestinian cause into the background, weakening the capacity of Arab countries to mobilise and resist.

7 The paradox of interrupted modernisation

Integration and modernisation projects —such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)— sought to create a more cohesive region, with common currencies, integrated economic policies, and a framework for cooperation that emulated European models. However, these efforts have been disrupted by internal conflicts, rivalries, and political changes.

The example of the Gulf shows how aspirations for modernisation have been thwarted by tensions between countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar and by internal crises in countries such as Kuwait and Oman. The lack of a unified vision has prevented the region from moving towards greater integration and stability.

8 The Paradox of International Involvement and Power Withdrawal

As international powers decline their active presence in the region, local and regional actors have become more prominent. The US withdrawal after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Russia's reorientation towards Ukraine, have left spaces that other actors —such as Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia— have occupied with their own strategies.

This change has generated a scenario in which international interventions are more conjunctural and less directed by a global vision, leaving the region in a state of uncertainty and fragmentation. The lack of clear leadership at the international level prevents the construction of lasting solutions and favours the continuity of conflicts and rivalries.

Taken together, these paradoxes reflect a scenario where efforts to transform, stabilise, and modernise the region are constantly frustrated by internal and external contradictions. The Middle East region is in a cycle of chaos and fragmentation, with diverse actors acting on the basis of immediate interests, and without a common project to move towards lasting stability. Understanding these paradoxes is essential to designing realistic and effective strategies that can contribute to a more stable future in one of the world's most complex areas.

Following Bernardino León's presentation, General Bados asked him a couple of questions before giving way to questions from the audience. The questions from the Director of the Institute were as follows:

"Did the Arab Spring strengthen authoritarian regimes?"

Response:

"Yes, the 2011 uprisings failed to establish solid democracies. Where regimes fell —Libya, Syria, Tunisia—, the transition was chaotic or frustrated. Elsewhere, governments reacted by tightening control and repression —as in Egypt under Al-Sisi. Moreover, the European financial crisis prevented the EU from adequately accompanying these processes. Bernardino León even admits his responsibility as EU representative at that stage."

"Is a two-state solution for Palestine still viable?"

Response:

"Yes, but it is difficult. The alternative —a single state with legal inequality between citizens— is unacceptable. The two-state solution requires political will and international support —technical, financial and political—, but León argues that it is viable. He recalls negotiation experiences such as the Geneva or Taba Accords as proof that a fair agreement can be reached."

The questions from the audience were as follows.

"Did Europe abandon the democratic transition in Tunisia?"

Response:

"Yes, Europe failed to accompany the Tunisian process with the necessary intensity. Although there was support at the beginning, over time it diminished drastically. European countries' priorities were elsewhere (such as the euro crisis), and many European governments were more comfortable with the old regimes than with the new democratic actors. Ennahda's moderate Islamism of the Renaissance Party was abandoned, and the country's current situation is critical."

"Does Morocco's normalisation with Israel create internal risks?"

Response:

"Not in the short term. Although there have been massive demonstrations against the war in Gaza and the rapprochement with Israel, the Moroccan government has calculated that the benefits —recognition of Western Sahara, military and technological cooperation with Israel, Gulf investment— will offset popular opposition. Bernandino León believes that Morocco will regain political legitimacy thanks to the strategic fruits of this agreement."

"What is the future of the Abraham Accords?"

Response:

"They will continue. If Trump returns to power, he is likely to reinforce them with more economic and diplomatic incentives for new countries. However, his ideological basis —normalising with Israel without resolving the Palestinian conflict— is fragile. The diplomat believes that the Gaza war proved that ignoring the Palestinians does not bring lasting stability. The Palestinian cause remains the centre of gravity of the conflict."

"What was the role of diplomacy in Libya?"

Response:

"Bernardino León responded by acknowledging that the Skirat agreement was possible thanks to collective and diplomatic work, but that the subsequent problem was the absence of international forces to implement the agreements. The too fragmented militias prevented the consolidation of a real peace."

"Did the Gaza war change the course of the Abraham Accords?"

Response:

"Yes, internal disagreements in the Gulf monarchies and popular reaction have made this clear. The war showed the limits of normalisation without a political solution. The paradox is that, while Arab society turned towards Palestine, governments were caught between their rapprochement with Israel and internal pressure."

Conclusions

The colloquium, led by diplomat Bernardino León Gross, offered an in-depth and nuanced view of the challenges facing the Middle East in the 21st century. Through the lens of eight interconnected paradoxes, he revealed a regional landscape marked by instability, fragmentation, and the persistent frustration of attempts at transformation. Key points that the diplomat highlighted include the failure of regime change in the various states that suffered from the Arab Spring, as external and internal efforts to impose models of governance and modernisation have resulted in chaos and increased repression, highlighting the disconnect between global aspirations and local realities.

There has also been a weakening of regional institutions with a lack of strong regional organisations and the erosion of unifying elements, such as pan-Arabism and the Palestinian cause, hindering cooperation and conflict resolution.

Also noteworthy is the leadership vacuum of the major powers: The absence of a coherent strategy by Russia, the US and, to a lesser extent, China, has allowed regional actors to pursue their own interests, exacerbating tensions with a proliferation of non-state actors. Thus, the weakening of states has facilitated the emergence of militias and armed groups disputing territorial control, perpetuating violence and instability.

In this sense, the breakdown of regional solidarity, as the normalisation of relations between some Arab countries and Israel, has fragmented regional cohesion and weakened the Palestinian cause.

These circumstances have caused the region to face a cycle of chaos and fragmentation that makes it difficult to build lasting solutions due to a lack of trust in institutions and political polarisation that complicate governance and regional cooperation. Finally, the absence of clear international leadership exacerbates uncertainty and disarray in the region.

Brigadier General Víctor Bados Nieto
IEEE Director

10 Bureau 4.1 Africa north of the Equator

10.1 The war in Sudan that hardly anyone cares about

Author: Blanca Palacián de Inza

Summary:

Now entering into its second year, Sudan's civil war remains mired in deadly international neglect —widespread neglect except by the powers involved, regional and more distant. Like a proxy war, they are fuelling the conflict and preventing it from ending, even through exhaustion.

International action prevents peace either by action or omission. The world has turned a blind eye to a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions that is also hitting neighbouring countries hard — especially South Sudan, which is on the brink of civil war.

When there is no political solution on the horizon because both sides see themselves as strong enough to win, only international attention and pressure can bring about progress towards peace. But the world is unwilling to open its eyes, leaving a bleak outlook for the immediate future.

Key words:

Sudan, South Sudan, Darfur, al-Burhan, Hemedti.

Cite this document:

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The armed conflict in Sudan, which is the biggest humanitarian crisis in the world, is now in its second year since April 2023. It was then that began the direct armed confrontation between the General of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the paramilitary General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti, in command of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Despite this, these two opposing blocs are by no means homogenous, but rather bring together a variety of groups with volatile interests.

During the first year of war, international attention was essentially focused on the war in Ukraine, and more recently in Gaza. This "deadly disinterest" (Aldecoa, 2024) in the situation in Sudan has, to a large extent, contributed to the fact that the country finds itself in a crisis of epic proportions.

This is the third Sudanese civil war, an internal conflict that is internationalised and entrenched with the help of the actions and omissions of other countries. As was pointed out at the conference, it is a civil war because that is how these conflicts are classified, although it could literally be called a military war due to the composition of the opposing sides.

As has become clear, the second half of the 20th century in Sudan was marked by civil war. Behind these conflicts —and still palpable in the country's current crisis— is the economic, political, and social inequality between North and South Sudan. The two civil wars resulted most visibly in South Sudan's independence in 2011. The future of the world's youngest country was not peaceful either, as only two years later a civil war began that would last six years and that, at the time of the 1st IEEE Conference, seems to be stirring again. The situation could be extraordinarily dramatic if we take into account the huge number of citizens from

the neighbouring country to the north who have sought refuge in the south.

We find, in what was once a single great country, two civil wars that seem to have no end, with a more than possible genocide in the Darfur region which, although unlikely, could become the equivalent of Sudan of the Middle East under the parallel government of the RSF. More than likely, in addition to the internal support that prevents any of the warring parties from exhausting themselves —the formation of the aforementioned parallel government—, is that the civil war will drag on for even longer and thus worsen the severity of the agony for its population.

What interests does Spain have in Sudan? All of them, one could answer, because war shortens distances, as it has done between Kiev and Washington. Because, in addition to moral and humanitarian issues, population movements, hunger, diseases, and the destruction of natural resources end up affecting everyone. Because perhaps it is not wise to turn our heads to the East and rush to buy emergency kits, when from the South we can be cut off from the blow.

Meanwhile, the world looks the other way, with the focus too narrow and concentrated on a kind of situation in which it seems that not all the dead are worth the same. The world is post-Western, and Africa is no different. Yet Africa seems to be resigning itself to this reality without having taken note of the lessons learned. And in the gaps it once occupied, there are now other actors, such as China and Russia. The latter power also seems to be supporting both sides in the conflict in Sudan because of the fact that we have already gained a port on the Red Sea (Port Sudan) in the troubled waters… And the West is neither here nor to be expected.

Blanca Palacián de Inza
IEEE Analyst.

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10.2 Algerian-Moroccan tension and its regional consequences: from Libya to the Sahel

Author: Prof. Carlos Echeverría Jesús

Summary:

Tension between Algeria and Morocco began when both became independent. From then until today, both have devoted their respective efforts to consolidating the state in terms of domestic policy and to finding their place on the international stage in terms of positioning and alliances. Morocco is a monarchy and Algeria a republic, the former close to the West and the latter close to the Soviet Union during the Cold War, but with their own peculiarities. With the end of the Cold War and up to the present day, the vicissitudes of both states have often led to the tensions that have traditionally characterised the relationship. Today, they are experiencing a moment of particular hostility between them, with diplomatic relations broken off since 2021 and having become, in terms of their bilateral relations, what in Security and Defence Studies and Geopolitics is known as a textbook case of the security dilemma. This bilateral tension is illustrated by Morocco's claim to Algerian territories, disagreements over the future of the non-self-governing territory of the former Spanish Sahara, now Western Sahara, and a veritable arms race. And all this has already had, and will surely continue to have, consequences for Spain's security and defence in the future.

Key words:

Algeria, Security dilemma, Israel, Gas pipelines, Libya, Maghreb, Morocco, Arab uprisings, Russia, Western Sahara, Spain, Western Sahara, Eastern Sahara, Sahel.

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The Marrakesh Treaty signed in 1989, which is still in force today as none of the States parties have denounced it, brought together Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia. Within this African sub-region, the non-self-governing territory of Western Sahara, the former Spanish Sahara, remained undefined, as it still is thirty-six years later. The strategic tension between Algeria and Morocco, from the 1960s to the present day, has been one of the factors that have prevented cooperation in the Maghreb from being consolidated, and the War of the Sands (1963), the armed clashes of Amgala (in 1976, and within the framework of the war between the Polisario Front on one side and Morocco and Mauritania on the other), or, more recently, the closure of the land border from 1994 to the present day are, among others, some milestones of a tension that endures.

The following events and dynamics show how bilateral relations between the two states have consistently fallen short of the stability that would have made it possible to establish a good neighbourly relationship that could have contributed to the stabilisation of the Maghreb and its immediate neighbourhood. The obstacles placed by Morocco to the holding of a referendum on self-determination in Western Sahara, even though Rabat had initially accepted such a formula in order to make progress in resolving the conflict, were at their most visible when Morocco decided not to accept the generous formula offered to them in the early 2000s with the Baker Plan II. From then on, Morocco opted to consolidate its occupation of the territory, effective in 80 percent of the territory, and in 2007 launched an autonomy plan which, since then and to this day, it has tried to impose as a formula for a solution within and outside the region. Although MINURSO's mandate continues to be renewed every year by the UN Security Council, the fact is that the conflict is not being resolved, and the tensions not only political-diplomatic but also security-related on the ground continue to make this a major obstacle —although it is not the only one— to stabilising the region.

The Arab uprisings that broke out in the autumn of 2010, with their first stage in the territory of Western Sahara —on the outskirts of El Aaiún, in Gdeim Izik— shook several Arab states and first Algeria in January 2011 and then Morocco in February of the same year, were fortunately halted by the authorities of both states, but the consequences have contributed to heightening tensions between them.

The collapse of the Libyan state due to the uprisings that broke out in February 2011, which quickly turned into a civil war that ended up becoming an internationalised civil war, was to have dire consequences inside and outside the Maghreb, extending to the whole of North Africa and the Sahel strip with its epicentre in Mali. Egypt, which had also been the stage of a consolidated Arab uprising since late January 2011, also suffered the effects of Libya's destabilisation, reflected for example in the return to the country of hundreds of thousands of Egyptians who had been living and working in its western neighbour. But it was Algeria that was most affected by the uprisings that succeeded in toppling the regime of Muammar al-Gaddafi, for two reasons. The first was because the interference of foreign actors —Western and non-Western ones— disrupted the regional status quo, encouraging instability on its eastern border, but also on its southern border with Mali. And second, because this instability would allow Morocco, from then until today, to find a window of opportunity to extend its structural competition with Algeria to both Libya and the Sahel.

The Western Sahel —comprising five Sahelian states: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger—, had been grouped in the G-5 Sahel organisation from 2014 until its dissolution in 2023. The bloc emerged due to the growing instability that began in Mali in 2011 and soon spread to its closest neighbours. The security challenges that Algeria had managed to keep under control in previous years only increased in the intervening years. And it was a scenario where various foreign actors deployed troops —with France in the lead (Operations Serval and Barkhane)— to provide various responses to this accelerated destabilisation.

In those years, Morocco was projecting its influence in political-diplomatic, security, and economic terms in the Sahel sub-region and also in Libya, with Rabat's deployment contributing to Algeria's concerns. The added factor in terms of worsening relations between Algeria and Morocco would be the latter's return to the African continental integration process. Morocco had left the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1984 when it admitted the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as a member. In January 2017, it decided to return to its successor, the African Union (AU), to counterbalance SADR and to pursue an ambitious policy of influence in the continen-

tal dimension, an arena in which Algeria had been very comfortable until then.

Between 2017 and the present, Morocco's growing ambition in its external projection —both to entrench the autonomy formula in order to consolidate its absorption of the non-self-governing territory of Western Sahara and to play an increasingly influential role on the African and Arab stages— has served to further aggravate the state of relations with Algeria. Given that Algeria was suffering from major internal challenges at the time (worsening health of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, outbreak of the Hirak protests, etc.), the situation on the ground has become increasingly tense.

Morocco's ambitious policy during this time has led to problems with its two neighbours due to its territorial claims, both in relation to Algeria —from which it claims what it considers its "Eastern Sahara"— and Spain —from which it claims the Spanish territories in North Africa—, all the while striving to consolidate the autonomy formula to resolve the Western Sahara conflict.

In relation to Libya, the Moroccan towns of Skijda and Bouznika have become a reflection of diplomatic efforts to stabilise the Arab country, sharpening Algeria's perception of direct Moroccan interference in a key scenario for Algeria's security. In the Sahel, and given the deterioration of the situation in recent years that has called into question diplomatic tools led by Algeria —such as the Algiers Agreements of May and June 2015 aimed at resolving the north-south conflict in Mali, which was at the epicentre of the destabilisation of that country and the Sahelian sub-region—-, this has led to a worsening of the situation from an Algerian perspective, as Morocco's influence has been strengthened.

And last but not least, the evolution of events in the Near and Middle East has opened up new dynamics that from Algeria's point of view have also been destabilising. These include the effects of the Arab uprisings in places like Syria and Yemen, the aggravated Israeli-Palestinian conflict and heightened foreign interference, all of which, once again, served to strengthen the role of its Moroccan rival. The rapprochement between Morocco and Israel, reflected for example in Morocco's incorporation into the Abraham Accords formula (2020), which has consequences for the evolution of the Western Sahara dossier and strengthens Morocco economically and militarily, is the culmination of this whole process of deterioration in bilateral relations.

At the height of 2025, and in the wider framework of geopolitical competition between great powers, with the inauguration of Donald J. Trump, the fifth war between Hamas and Israel that has evolved into a regional war in the Middle East, the war between Russia and Ukraine with effects in various scenarios including the African continent, the added bilateral tension as Algiers and Rabat compete with two pipeline projects to bring gas from Nigeria to Europe —the Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline (TSGP) and the Nigeria-Morocco Gas Pipeline (NMGP)—, and with a deterioration of security that does not stop in Libya or the Sahel, the present and future of Algeria and Morocco in regional terms and the allocation of roles in this convulsive scenario guarantee moments of tension between the two, with consequences for their neighbours and in particular for Spain.

Carlos Echeverría Jesús
Lecturer at the Faculty of Political Science and Sociology of the UNED

10.3 Sahel: Russia's advanced stronghold in Africa

Author: Col. Pedro Sánchez Herráez

Summary:

In a planet in full geopolitical reconfiguration, the disputes between old and new powers to achieve their interests reach all corners of the globe. The Sahel, a space of internal structural instability, but at the same time of intra-African and global interconnection and mobility, is seeing how the efforts made by Moscow —among other powers— are gradually leading to the West's gradual displacement from these lands and the consolidation of a kind of advanced bastion to achieve not only a presence, but also to get as close as possible to the Atlantic Ocean. A reflection on this subject is the focus of this text, which synthesises the paper presented on 25 March 2025 at the *1st IEEE Geopolitical Conference*.

Key words:

Sahel, Russia, Western, Narratives, Southern front.

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The term "Sahel" —meaning shore in Arabic—, refers to the wide strip of land stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea that forms the southern shore of the great Sahara Desert.

In this vast area, the population lives essentially, and within the framework of a subsistence economy, from the direct exploitation of natural resources, especially agriculture and livestock, generating a powerful competition for these resources —fertile land, water, pastures. If we add to this the fact that economic activities are closely linked to the different ethnic groups present in the region, it means that any struggle for resources automatically becomes a dispute between ethnic groups, which contributes to generating a powerful qualitative leap in the degree of social confrontation.

Considering both climate change, which alters the rhythms of the seasons and makes everything much more complex, and excessive population growth, which doubles the population every 20 years, the socio-economic outlook for the Sahel is somewhat bleak.

If we add to this the fact that the countries that make up this broad band —between 10 and 12 depending on the analyses consulted, but for the purposes of this document we will consider what is normally referred to as the institutional Sahel, comprising Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad— are among the poorest on earth, which means that they are weak states, and therefore their security tools, which should provide the primary and basic element that a state should provide for its citizens, are very scarce. As a simple reference, the surface area of the five countries mentioned above is ten times the size of Spain, but between them, their armed forces do not match Spain's in terms of numbers, equipment or capabilities.

As a direct consequence of this economic weakness and lack of security tools, the state's presence in these vast territories is very limited, creating a sense of power vacuum and reinforcing ethnic identity as the main element of identity over the concept of citizenship.

Therefore, if security is scarce, if government action and presence is weak in a large part of the territory, and if the degree of economic and social development is very low or almost non-existent, a paradigmatic model of permanent structural instability is generated. That, added to the aforementioned disproportionate demographic growth and changing climatic factors, means that —from this structural instability— it is very complex for these countries to be able to emerge on their own.

In these vast spaces outside state control, jihadist terrorist groups —both Al Qaeda and Islamic State offshoots—, as well as organised crime groups, flourish, sometimes cooperating, sometimes competing, but in any case, controlling a large part of the territory, constituting the real power in many of these regions.

And the population, in the absence of state-provided security, in many cases organises self-defence groups —which, as an unintended effect, contribute to increasing disputes between ethnic groups— or simply, in order to ensure mere survival, become part of these groups.

There is another way out of this expectation of a lack of future in a situation of structural weakness and growing insecurity: emigration. And Sahelian migration is a fact, as can be seen from Spain by simply consulting the news.

And this environment of structural weakness is exploited and encouraged by outside powers to pursue their interests.

1 Europe has lost the narrative war in the Sahel

Outside powers, especially Russia, but also China, Turkey and others, are gradually establishing themselves in the Sahel in pursuit of their interests. These nations are blowing on the embers of the colonial era —especially France being the great metropolis of the past— pointing out that they have never been colonialist powers, that the countries of the West are only trying, as they have always done, to take advantage of their wealth in raw materials…

And this narrative that feeds these ever-present embers in the Sahelian populations —as in other parts of the planet— is growing, as is the recourse to blame the colonial past to jus-

tify everything that is not going well, and to argue that, therefore, the current Western presence in these lands is merely neo-colonialism.

In contrast to this narrative, it should be noted that the aid provided to these nations has been enormous, both by the EU and by different European countries. And it was not only economic aid, since France deployed a military mission —Serval/Barkhane— at Mali's express request in 2013, which reached 5,000 troops, while the United Nations deployed the MINUSMA mission, which reached 15,000 troops and is the mission with the most deaths in the history of the UN; and finally, the EU deployed the EUTM Mali mission to train the Malian army. Western support for these countries has therefore been significant.

But on this planet in full reconfiguration where the battle is fought on all battlefields —land, sea, air, space, cyberspace and cognitive—, the most important one is precisely the latter, because if I can get you to think the way I want you to think, I have won the battle without the need to use any kind of weapon. And so, these new powers blow on these existing embers with their powerful propaganda machinery. And the narrative is working, it is succeeding, and the accusations against the "West" are steadily growing.

It is also necessary to consider the interpretation of certain facts as arguments in favour of these narratives. Thus, for example, the request for arms by these countries to fight terrorism and organised crime in their nations is constant; but considerations of human rights compliance by these nations in their military responses have led to refusals to deliver or sell certain types of weaponry… This has been met by Sahelian leaders with responses suggesting that the West has a double standard, since Ukraine is supplied with arms without question, and they ask how nations that have been slave-owners can dare to talk about human rights.

Continuing with the narrative, the conclusion is that the West's aim is to maintain instability in order to continue obtaining raw materials and to prevent these countries from stabilising and freely deciding their own destiny. And it continues in this vein, questioning how it is possible that, after almost ten years of international military missions, terrorism has not been eradicated, even going so far as to make accusations of connivance with terrorism in order to maintain instability.

Therefore, just as all these missions have been invited to leave —and have already done so— to a large extent, so has the presence of Western nations and institutions. But there is no such thing as a vacuum in this area; it is always being filled. And in the case of the Sahel, it has been filled by new powers, and increasingly and prominently by Russia.

2 Alliance of Sahel States. Russian stronghold in West Africa

The growing insecurity in the Sahel has been the breeding ground for a sequence of *coups d'état* in many Sahelian nations. In response, the Economic Confederation of West African States (ECOWAS) condemned such coups and called for a return to constitutional rule. But in the summer of 2023, there was speculation that ECOWAS might sponsor a military intervention in Niger to reverse the coup, with the coup countries announcing that a Western nation was likely to be behind it in order to regain power in the region.

This led Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger to create, shortly afterwards that same year, the so-called Alliance of Sahel States (AES) — an alliance defined as pan-Africanist, which broke away from ECOWAS and which aims, according to the repeated words of its leaders, to recover its sovereignty, establish its own rules and customs, and not bow to the demands of the West. In fact, they have stopped borrowing from the International Monetary Fund and they intend to create a new single digital currency and design a common biometric passport in addition to serving as a model for this renewed anti-Western pan-Africanism. And some nations in the region, such as Togo, are increasingly moving closer to the ESA.

It is necessary to consider that Moscow —like other powers— does not make any demands in return for requests for arms or any other type of support: it does not demand compliance with human rights, it does not demand that governments meet certain standards… It does not demand anything more than simply payment for what is requested. By selling arms and the services provided by the Wagner/Africa Corps security company —praetorian guards of governments and in some cases actors in the direct fight against terrorist groups—, it manages to have a much greater presence and prestige than the now almost non-existent or very residual prestige of the West, a West that is increasingly seen as an exhausted model.

Considering Russia's age-old desire to seek access to warm seas, and an outlet to the Atlantic, this could be realised through the growth of the ESA towards the Gulf of Guinea, so that it can be argued that Moscow has gained a powerful foothold in the Sahel.

When all eyes in Europe and the West turn eastwards —towards Ukraine—, it is necessary to consider that a state can be dissuaded and negotiated with, and relations can be established in political, diplomatic, economic spheres, etc. to reduce the degree of threat if it exists. But in the face of threats such as excessive population growth, climate change, or the unbridled growth of jihadist terrorist groups, among others, it is very complex, if not impossible, to try to negotiate or dissuade threats.

Thus, while Africa and the Sahel have been seen as NATO's and Europe's southern flank since the Cold War, perhaps they should be seen as the southern front.

Pedro Sánchez Herráez
Colonel of the ET. INF. DEM
PhD in Peace and International Security
IEEE Analyst

10.4 Africa north of the Equator. Summary of the debate

Compiled by the moderator: Óscar Garrido Guijarro

At the roundtable on the African continent held during the *1st IEEE Geopolitical Conference*, one of the topics discussed was the current Sudanese conflict. Two years after its outbreak, the civil war in Sudan continues to be internationally neglected, except by the powers involved, which, in the manner of a proxy war, are fuelling the conflict, thus turning the third Sudanese civil war into an internationalised internal conflict. International action prevents peace, either by action or omission. The world has turned a blind eye to a humanitarian crisis of major proportions that is already seriously affecting neighbouring countries as well. When there is no political solution on the horizon —both sides see themselves as strong enough to win— only international attention and pressure can bring about progress towards peace. But the world does not want to open its eyes, leaving a bleak outlook for Sudan's immediate future and a humanitarian crisis affecting Sudan itself and its neighbours. Europe should look more intensely towards its southern neighbours.

Another issue that was widely discussed, and which is also of paramount importance for Europe, in general, and Spain, in particular, is the Algerian-Moroccan tension and its regional consequences. This bilateral tension is largely fuelled by Morocco's insistence on solving what it considers its "territorial deficit", an insistence that has been alienating it from all of its neighbours since the early 1960s and continues to this day. Today these territorial demands are reflected in the occupation of Western Sahara, the claim on Spanish territories in North Africa, and the claim on the western Algerian territory that Morocco calls 'its Eastern Sahara'. Algerian-Moroccan tension has been further aggravated in recent years by the expansion of this dynamic of confrontation to two territories adjacent to the central Maghreb. On the one hand, to Libya, which together with Mauritania constitutes the so-called "peripheral Maghreb", and, on the other, to the Sahel strip, with special attention to the countries of the Western Sahel.

The tension in relations between the two giants of the Maghreb has been particularly heightened since Morocco presented its autonomy plan for the Sahara in 2007. Since then, through seduction or coercion, Morocco has been trying to convince other international actors that its proposal is the formula for resolving the conflict. Moreover, since the current Moroccan monarch opted in 2017 to rejoin the African Union, Morocco has been setting an increasingly proactive and ambitious pace regarding its expansionist objectives, which is increasingly aggravating for Algeria. In the face of Moroccan activism, Algeria feels that its neighbour is doing all it can to tarnish its image. Alongside concerns about its Maghreb neighbour, Algeria also looks with concern to the Western Sahel. It considers it to be its zone of influence and is concerned about the presence of jihadism in the region.

And finally, rivalry also extends to the energy dimension, centred on the leadership of gas projects by one state or the other. The oldest, conceived in the 1980s, is the Algerian project, which aims to connect to Nigeria via Niger. It is shorter, cheaper more viable and developed. But the Moroccans have also designed a pipeline to connect to Niger's gas fields, which would cross practically fifteen West African states, including the territory of Western Sahara. This is a newer, more complex and more costly scenario, but Morocco has many supporters and a lot of ambition. In the years to come —centuries, decades— these two states will continue to compete for these projects, and we will have to keep

a close eye on the connections that this issue has in diplomatic terms.

Finally, the Russian presence in the Sahel and the implications for southern Europe were discussed. The Sahel is a vast area south of the Sahara desert that constantly generates news reports that convey a sense of a highly unstable environment.

The region is struggling for natural resources in which farmers and ranchers, in defence of their traditional way of life and survival, are fighting over fertile land. This is an area with high population growth and is particularly hard hit by the negative consequences of climate change. The effects of climate change have altered the rhythms of rainfall and drought and therefore condition the availability of fertile land. As a result, the traditional economic activities on which approximately three quarters of the Sahel's population depend for their livelihoods are under threat.

Moreover, the significant ethnic fragmentation of this region further weakens fragile states, lacking internal cohesion, in which the flourishing of organised crime and jihadist terrorism is favoured. Thus, the Sahel, a region that has traditionally served as a major hub of African interconnection, has now become a new epicentre of drug distribution on a global scale. On the other hand, the fragile or non-existent state presence in a large part of the territories has made it possible for the region to become the main sanctuary for international jihadism.

In a changing world order, the West and its model seem to be in a phase of retreat *vis-à-vis* other powers and other narratives, and a sample of this new situation is perfectly illustrated in the Sahel. Moscow, in its constant attempt to seek outlets to warm seas and regain the status of a world power, has increased its presence and action in the Sahel to the detriment of Western presence in general, and French presence in particular.

Naturally, Europe and the West have their sights set on the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, but the growing threat to the old continent from the southern flank should not be neglected, mainly due to the worrying increase of jihadist terrorist groups in the Sahel, but also to the growing Russian presence in the countries that make up this region.

Oscar Garrido Guijarro
PhD in Peace and International Security
IEEE Analyst

11 Roundtable 4.2 Situation in Asia Pacific

11.1 Asia-Pacific or Indo-Pacific? Scenarios of Cooperation and Conflict.

Author: Javier Fernández Aparicio

Summary:

The evolution of the geopolitical concepts of Asia-Pacific and Indo-Pacific are determined by the context of global strategic competition, especially between the United States and China, with India in second place. Traditionally, from the mid-twentieth century to the early twenty-first century, the Asia-Pacific was the frame of reference for defining this vast area, centred on economic cooperation, regional integration and inland seaward projection, plus the near-total dominance of the United States and a China that was beginning to rise to global power. In contrast, the concept of the Indo-Pacific has emerged in the last decade as a geopolitical vision that emphasises maritime security and the containment of China's growing assertiveness throughout the region, promoted by countries such as the United States, India, Japan and Australia, and being, geographically speaking, a space of connectivity between the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

Thus, the shift in the region's strategies and the actors involved, including in the EU, from the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific concept, reflects a clear readjustment in perceptions of power in this vast territory, including perspectives ranging from economic to security and the resilience of its societies. This shift also responds to its growing global importance as a key arena for the smooth running of economies around the world, especially concerning their supply chains. It also implies a struggle between Chinese influence, through tools such as the Belt and Road Initiative, and the consolidation of security alliances between various alternative actors that are now very visible, which are now becoming the current dominant framework for geostrategic competition in the 21st century.

Key words:

Asia, Asia-Pacific, Indian Ocean, Indo-Pacific.

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From a historical perspective, the concept of Asia-Pacific has evolved over time until it has collided with that of Indo-Pacific, a term not yet included in the RAE dictionary and whose broad meaning, often confusing, varies in Spanish between the union of both geographical terms or separating them by a hyphen. It is no trivial matter, since the way we use to express things, especially geographically and politically, determines our vision of them.

The Asia-Pacific concept emerged in the second half of the 20th century as a geopolitical and economic construct. Let us remember that a large part of the world still uses the term Asia-Pacific and not Indo-Pacific, as can be mainly seen in official documents from China and Russia.

The origin of the Asia-Pacific concept is not merely geographical, but was linked, above all, to the importance of China's rise to the top of the world order and its projection towards the oceans. But,

for other powers such as the United States, for which the Pacific was its own *Mare Nostrum* after the war against Japan, China's rise was not a cause for alarm at the time. In fact, at the end of that century, classic works such as *The Pacific: New Strategic Challenge* (1990) by the War College professor Hervé Coutau-Bégarie hardly dealt with China's assertiveness in the region, a factor to be valued among those of Japan, the then Soviet Union, some European countries or the incipient strength of ASEAN, but subordinated to US primacy.

The other part that concerns us today, the "Indus", the Indian Ocean, was not even collected. There was no such union of seas or interests, at least on paper. On the contrary, the work on the Indian Ocean by the American analyst, writer and great traveller Robert Kagan, *Monsoon*, from a later date, 2010, masterfully analyses the countries of this sub-region, especially its factors, but there is no trace of an outward projection towards that other immense brother, the Pacific, and much less the conclusion that both oceans and their coastal and island countries were and are connected. It is true that Kagan already foresaw the importance of the United States paying attention to this region, and it was not for nothing that the original title of the book was *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of* American *Power*, but in Spanish it was translated as *Monzón: un viaje por el futuro del Océano Índico*.

Historically, the political entities of the time were not watertight compartments. In fact, on the contrary, cultural, economic and even political relations were fruitful between all the Asian countries with access to the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, from India to Japan, and from China to Oceania, following the possessions and trade of the established European powers. The explanation for the sudden discovery of the Indo-Pacific ("discovering the Pacific" has always been a saying in Spanish used to refer to the absurdity of making obvious what is clearly already obvious) as an enormous connected space, a capital scenario for the course of global geopolitics, must be attributed to other reasons, which will no doubt be outlined and which have less to do with geography, obviously, than with politics, where there has been an important nuance here: China's rise and expansion.

Indeed, the Indian Guerpreet Kurana, director of the National Maritime Foundation in New Delhi, and captain in the Indian Navy, to whom the academic use of the term Indo-Pacific is

owed for the first time in 2007, —although in many texts this authorship is not mentioned— , corroborated in a recent interview (Kuo, 2018) how the concept was born at the beginning of the 21st century as a result of three factors: the shift in the importance of Asia's weight from internal to external maritime, the growing rise of India and, above all, the progressive political and military assertiveness of China, with the novelty of the so-called "String of Pearls" strategy in 2005, according to reports by US analysts, for whom the Asia-Pacific concept already seemed insufficient. Then came then Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's address to the Indian Parliament in 2007, citing the Indo-Pacific as the reference space for economic and political connectivity and security, with Japan and India at its extremes, with both countries positing themselves as its guarantors. There is no trace of geography, beyond the obvious connection of seas, and much of geopolitics.

There is a historical precedent to this geopolitical concept of the Indo-Pacific: the work of the German geographer Karl Haushofer. Between the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich, he viewed this enormous space from a social and political point of view. He aimed to assert the identity of the Asian peoples of the region and their liberation from colonialism —especially British colonialism— while weakening them. Additionally, he foresaw the future global importance of then dormant powers such as China, India and Japan. The German defeat in the war meant that Haushofer and the Indo-Pacific concept were forgotten, but this eminently geopolitical concept was already there, buried but ready to reappear when the time was right.

Via Japan and its FOIP (*Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision*), the United States welcomed with interest this concept that included the challenge of containing China's activities throughout the vast region, as the term alludes to two vast maritime arenas but also encompasses the Asian hinterland of the countries that make up the region and its neighbourhood, as well as the role given to India as a major player in the security architecture of the area –with its own interests, of course–. It is also no coincidence that it was during Trump's first term in office that the term Indo-Pacific was coined in his administration's official documents, such as the first *Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy* of 2019. It is no coincidence since, in today's perspective, it was the beginning of the policy of containment, mainly but not only economic, towards China.

The term Indo-Pacific was successful and, today, it is a true declaration of geopolitical intentions rather than a geographical reference, although it is based on this point as the union of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Meanwhile, from the Chinese or Russian point of view, the Asia-Pacific continues to be a conversation point. The official documents and published strategies of many of the countries that are key players in the region –or those like the European Union or its member states that want to be– refer to the Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical construct with implications for security, economy and many other issues. For example, the latest Quadrilateral Dialogue (QUAD) summit documents refer to China's determined stance in the South China Sea or the Taiwan Strait, with the objective of maritime security, but also issues of technology and cybersecurity, protection of critical infrastructure and supply chains, the fight against climate disasters or the risk of pandemics.

In geographical terms, the concept of the Indo-Pacific has no unambiguous definition or agreed geographical delimitation. Different countries have proposed their own interpretations of this strategic region. Japan, for example, in promoting its Strategy for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, defines the Indo-Pacific as stretching from Asia across the Indian Ocean to the Middle East and Africa. Australia, in turn, presents it as a bridge connecting the Western Pacific to the Indian Ocean. For India, according to a statement by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2018, the Indo-Pacific is the space stretching from the coasts of Africa to the coasts of America, while for the EU it is the region from the east coast of Africa to the Pacific island states. For the US, it is the space stretching from the west coast of India to the west coast of the United States, although the *Indo-Pacific Strategy* of February 2022 did not offer any clarification, but rather alluded to issues of interest, such as security of connectivity or resilience, as well as potential allies.

What seems clear is that the Indo-Pacific has become a key arena for cooperation and competition between the main powers, led by the United States and China, but in this multipolar world, India, Japan, Australia, the EU, the two Koreas and a host of interests in the mixture of countries that make it up must also be taken into account. A space prone to economic integration, trade and connectivity, but also to tensions and the struggle for strategic influence. The interplay of alliances and dependencies reflects this duality between collaboration and rivalry. Thus, the future of

the Indo-Pacific looks set to depend on the balance between economic cooperation and competition for power, thereby defining the global order in the coming decades.

Javier Fernández Aparicio
IEEE Analyst
@jafeap

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11.2 Implications of Trump 2.0 in East and Southeast Asia.

Author: Ambassador Emilio De Miguel Calabia

Summary:

Trump's second term threatens to be more disruptive than his first. This article analyses its possible effects on the different regions of the Indo-Pacific and how it may influence the state of Sino-US rivalry.

Key words:

ASEAN, Australia, China, Korea, USA.

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Analysing President Trump's first weeks in office, the discontinuities with respect to Trump 1.0 stand out. Trump 2.0 is more disruptive and has surrounded himself with a team in which there is no one who can serve as a retaining wall like Secretary of State Rex Tillerson or National Security Advisor H.R. Mc Master in

his first term. This team shares with him a conspiratorial worldview, a desire to achieve immediate results, a rejection of established processes, rules and administration, and an eagerness to reshape global geopolitics for the benefit of the US. A rejection, in short, of anything that might hold them back. We will now look at what Trump 2.0 might mean for the Indo-Pacific, sub-region by sub-region.

Trump 1.0 largely focused its foreign policy on the rivalry with China and strove to contain it through a trade war, the results of which were disappointing compared to Trump's expectations. The Biden Administration introduced a more comprehensive and structured approach that included the formulation of long-term strategies (Indo-Pacific Strategy of February 2022 and Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, among others) and close collaboration with allies.

With Trump 2.0, we seem to be back to putting all our eggs in the trade war basket. One of Biden's most successful policies, denying China access to disruptive technologies, is likely to continue. In any case, it is surprising that in these early stages Trump has been tougher on Canada and the EU than on China. Or, perhaps, not so surprising when one considers that several of the techno-barons he has surrounded himself with have significant interests in China.

Trump 2.0's rapprochement with Putin, if consolidated, could drive a wedge into the strategic partnership between China and Russia, in which Russia has been the junior partner. Russia will not abandon this much-needed partnership. An anti-Russian shift in US foreign policy cannot be ruled out either during this or the next term. However, a rapprochement with the US would provide it with a tool to loosen the Chinese bear hug.

One possibility that cannot be ruled out is that China and the US might reach a kind of sphere of influence-sharing agreement in the Indo-Pacific. In this case, Korea and Japan would have the most to lose. The Biden Administration had secured a Trilateral Agreement in August 2023 in which Japan and Korea forgot their past misunderstandings and together with the US deepened their strategic and defence partnership. It is likely that Trump 2.0 will not wish to continue with this Agreement and, worse, will subject them to a trade war. In such a case, the only possible, albeit imperfect, option would be to seek

security partnerships with third parties, such as the EU or Australia.

ASEAN and its members are another grouping that stands to lose from Trump 2.0.

Trump 1.0 ignored the Partnership. A grouping of middle powers, with a certain integrationist akin to the EU, does not fit Trump's worldview. The ASEAN MS live in a permanent unstable equilibrium, avoiding having to take sides between China and the US. China's economic and commercial footprint is very strong, but access to the US market is still very important to them. Moreover, the US is their preferred security partner. The situation is particularly urgent for Vietnam and the Philippines. With the confrontation with China in the South China Sea having festered, military cooperation with and assistance from the US in strengthening these countries' control over their maritime space is more urgent than ever. A possible outcome is an ASEAN increasingly tilted, despite itself, towards China.

For India, Trump 2.0 can be an opportunity. Trump and Indian Prime Minister Modi established cordial relations during Trump 1.0. Indian trade and immigration in the US may be hurdles, but they are not insurmountable. A rapprochement with the US doesn't necessarily jeopardise India's strategic autonomy and may help navigate its great strategic dilemma: its old ally and arms supplier, Russia, has a close strategic partnership with its main potential rival, China, which also has a close collaboration with its great rival Pakistan.

Australia is one of the few countries with which the US does not have a trade deficit, so there should be no problems on that front. Australia is the world's leading producer of strategic minerals and the fourth largest producer of rare earths. There would be scope for a deal with the US and Australia could use it to save two initiatives that could be in jeopardy under Trump 2.0: the AUKUS and the rotating marine force in Darwin. In this case, as in the case of Japan, its best alternative would be a defence rapprochement with Japan and Korea and a continuation of the NATO rapprochement begun in 2022. In any case, whether NATO maintains its interest in cooperating with the PfP4 will depend in part on Trump's shift in US-NATO relations.

Finally, there is the South Pacific, a space to which Trump 1.0 paid little attention and where geopolitical rivalry with China has sharpened since 2022. The recent USAID contract cut has only

affected one contract in the South Pacific ("Strengthening financial capacity in the Pacific Islands for climate change adaptation and resilience"). 1 contract out of 230 does not sound like much, but China has already shown its willingness to occupy any spaces in the region that the US vacates. A greater concern for the Trump administration would be to neglect the *Partners in the Blue Pacific* initiative, which was the Biden administration's structured response to China's attempts to gain a foothold in the South Pacific.

In conclusion, what are the prognoses that can be made? China can emerge stronger if four things happen: 1) if the partnership with Russia is maintained; 2) if it reaches a lasting understanding with India; 3) if the technological gap with the US is further narrowed; 4) if China resolves its current economic problems, which are an annoying thorn in its side. None of the four circumstances seem impossible to achieve. In addition, as a bonus, the weakening of the US security guarantee can be brought to Taiwan.

In contrast, Trump 2.0 may leave the US weaker in the region. The combined experience of Trump 1.0 and Trump 2.0 will likely lead its allies to seek more concerted action among themselves, knowing that US support can no longer be taken for granted. US soft power is likely to suffer. One of the strengths of US foreign policy is that it was a policy of principles and values. This seems to be coming to an end. If the US does not offer a democratic model, the alternative is regimes that are legitimised by economic performance alone.

Emilio de Miguel Calabia
Director of the Casa Asia Centre in Madrid

11.3 India and its Neighbourhood: The Rise of the Indian Ocean's Strategic Importance[1]

Author: Dr. Ana Ballesteros Peiró

Summary:

India is gaining increasing recognition as an Asian power of significant importance. Its hegemony in South Asia, its immediate

[1] This paper is an excerpt from the article titled India and its Western Muslim Neighbourhood, included in the monographic *Strategy Paper on India* edited by Javier Gil Pérez for the IEEE. The volume is currently in the process of publication.

neighbourhood, is undisputed, as is its growing influence in the so-called 'extended neighbourhood', which encompasses countries in Southeast Asia and the Middle East. While India has its own merits, interest in its role on the Asian continent is enhanced by its status as a counterweight to China.

The inclusion of the Indian Ocean in the earlier Asia-Pacific concept has transformed this region into an Indo-Pacific security system. In this context, the global competition between the US and China is tangibly played out in India's maritime backyard. This environment is therefore of the utmost global interest.

Key words:

India, Indo-Pacific, Indian Ocean, Multilateralism, Multi-complex order.

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India's importance on a global scale is growing. Historically, India has perceived itself as a global leader, even if this view has not always been recognised by other countries. At this moment of transition in the international order, with economic and political power shifting towards Asia, India's position is becoming more prominent. Not only has it climbed to fifth place in the global economy, expecting that it will overtake Japan and Germany before the end of the current decade, but its potential as a major power in Asia is transcending the boundaries of South Asia, a region in which it has traditionally dominated.

Equally, the international scene favours this shift towards greater status. China's assertiveness in other Asian regions is increasing interest in what India can bring as a counterweight. Gradually, as the Delhi government acquires the material capabilities to become the global actor it has long craved, recognition as such is reflected in its increased international interactions. As a result, India is present in the strategic calculations of the US and other

global powers, such as the EU, Japan, China and Russia (Kapur, 2023: 19).

India's foreign policy has reflected, as in the case of other countries, a process of adaptation to domestic, South Asian and global changes. Economics is the central factor in the formulation of foreign relations. India's foreign policy remains committed to preserving the autonomy to make decisions based on its economic development interests.

To understand today's world, the factors used to measure state power cannot be limited to material capabilities alone. It is necessary to include other factors, such as the capacity for interaction, diplomatic relations and global presence, with which middle and regional powers, without achieving global power status, achieve an impact beyond their regions. These factors define the current moment, which, without questioning the multiplicity of coexisting polarities (bi-, uni- and multipolarity), show that we are facing a multicomplex world, in which several systems coexist (Acharya, 2017: 276).

India's relationship with the countries of South Asia falls under the *Neighbourhood First* policy, a central plank of its foreign policy. This area includes the countries of the South Asian Association: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. India attaches great importance to this immediate neighbourhood, although it faces serious obstacles to stabilising neighbourly relations. These obstacles are partly due to India's own behaviour; secondly, to rivalry with Pakistan; and thirdly, to the entry of China and its Belt and Road Initiative project, which acts as a disruptive element in regional dynamics.

At the second level, a second concentric circle is established according to India's importance and distance, known as the *Extended Neighbourhood*. This includes Southeast Asian countries such as Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia. India's increasing assertiveness has allowed it to become a player with a growing presence among the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This classification also includes West Asia or the Middle East, in particular, the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf and, to a lesser extent, Iran.

The border conflict between India and China accentuates the competition between the two countries in the Indian Ocean (Baruah, 2023: 89). Moreover, faced with the need to avoid the negative effects of the Great Global Competition, India opts in a third way,

avoiding a return to the bipolar dynamics of the Cold War. The Delhi government seeks to foster multipolarity, even if an alternative system to growing bipolarity has yet to be defined (Menon, 2023). To this end, India seeks potential allies with whom there is strategic convergence. Given that the ASEAN states are in similar circumstances and do not want a return to bipolarity either, India is welcomed as an alternative to the US and China.

This idea also underpins the development of its *Look West* policy, with the Persian Gulf countries as part of the extended neighbourhood. This vision is based on the need to secure access to other markets and energy sources (Tandon, 2016: 353; Menon, 2021: 227) through the Indian Ocean. In the past, India prevailed in this maritime space due to its privileged position, but now it must compete with China for access to Gulf resources and to ensure the protection of sea lines of communication (SLOCs), especially given the US reluctance to uphold the doctrine of security and protection of its Arab partners.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have adopted a more proactive approach to self-defence, a shift that has been brewing since President Barack Obama's administration (Al-Saif, 2024). This has led to a convergence of interests between the Gulf countries and India's doctrine of strategic autonomy. In this context, India has signed a Framework Agreement and a Cooperation Agreement with the GCC and is negotiating a Free Trade Agreement. With the United Arab Emirates (UAE), India signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement in 2022, in addition to a strategic security partnership, a trilateral dialogue with France (UFI) and the I2U2 (India, Israel, US and UAE), a precursor partnership to the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). In 2024, India also signed a memorandum of understanding on nuclear cooperation with the UAE for civil nuclear energy.

Delhi's importance for Gulf markets and its economic and political weight are evident. In addition to the normative dimension — respect for sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs— India's relationship with the region also responds to a geopolitical imperative characterised by the need to establish partnerships with countries possessing resources that India needs (Dijkink, 1998: 294). Geo-economics, therefore, is the main motivation that drives India towards these countries.

Rapprochement with the US has also been crucial for Delhi, although there are fundamental differences with two countries: Russia and Iran. While Washington has welcomed India's relationship with the GCC countries, it has been necessary to keep India at arm's length from Tehran, truncating priority connectivity projects for India, such as the North-South Transport Corridor, which was intended to facilitate its access to Central Asia, taking advantage of the good reception of third actors in this region and its good relationship with Russia.

Within this framework, India moves with great skill and ability to maintain good relations with a wide range of partners. Consequently, its behaviour is a clear manifestation of the defining characteristics of international relations in the 21st century and the multicomplexity that characterises them.

*Ana Ballesteros Peiró**
Senior Research Associate at the Real Instituto Elcano
@AnaBalPei

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11.4 Situation in Asia Pacific. Summary of the debate

Compiled by the moderator: Cdr. Federico Aznar Fernández-Montesinos

1. The Asia-Pacific versus the Indo-Pacific concept

This is the century of Asia. Asia-Pacific is a space that designates two distant continents and the empty space between them, even if its name refers to only one of their shores. It is a geographically diverse space in terms of culture, ethnicity, religion, institutions (democracies, dictatorships, communist regimes...), asymmetrical and characterised by geographical distances; to which its continuity and inseparability from the Indian Ocean must be added. As a political space, it includes three members of the Security Council, six nuclear powers, three G-8 members and seven G-20 members. It is very difficult for a political body to be able to represent such diversity.

But the Pacific Ocean does not only bathe the Asian continent that is being highlighted. It reaches the West Coast of the Americas and Australia, which it connects and integrates. It is necessary to think of the pressures of the Trump Administration on Panama, which have resulted in the recovery of the Canal ports by American companies and, with it, the disconnection of China from the east coast of the Americas.

This was, at the time, a Spanish sea, something that is not often recalled today. In 1522, as a result of the treaty signed with Portugal in Zaragoza, Spain limited its presence beyond the Moluccas and, with it, its options over Oceania, but it discovered a good part of the South Pacific islands and maintained its presence until the end of the 19th century. Spain was a protagonist of the first globalisation.

The sea allows a continuity that, as Admiral Mahan said, facilitates the projection of power. That is why the great empires that succeeded Spain were also maritime empires. The sea has thus been a decisive space in the processes of changing the world order.

In short, the Pacific is a vast sea and therefore an immense void. It occupies 163 million km^2 and is home to 4.5 billion people and more than 50% of the world's GDP. But it has been integrated into an even larger space, the Indo-Pacific, which implies the formulation of a new geopolitical concept. And, to paraphrase Steiner, what goes by name comes into existence. This entails touching on some of the characteristics of this space.

The Asia-Pacific idea incorporates a continental —rather than coastal— Chinese-dominated outlook, while the Indo-Pacific concept has a maritime bias that emphasises the connectivity of the two oceans and their narrowness. But it also allows all the dynamics that take place in the Pacific to be transferred to the Indian Ocean, including the dynamics of competition. In doing so, the new geopolitical concept alters the different relative balances of power between the actors present on the Pacific stage.

The Indo-Pacific is also an expanded naval theatre in which the competition between the US and China and, subsequently, the changing world order takes place. The new chessboard gives the United States clear superiority while facilitating the inclusion of other actors such as India. This broadens the play of possible alliances, which serves to dilute and counter Chinese superiority in its immediate surroundings, the South China Sea.

Moreover, by doing so, India's rise is at odds with China's. India is being offered the opportunity to project itself and become a global power. This is happening at a time when the concept of middle and regional powers is changing as a result of the loss of relative power of the great powers with the rise of the others.

There are powers of this kind that are capable of projecting themselves beyond their regional environment and seek to keep the major powers away from their immediate strategic environment. The experience of Afghanistan or Donbass itself suggests that it is not so easy to conquer small countries, something that should also be considered in the case of Taiwan.

Indeed, the countries of the Indian Ocean are reorganising themselves and generating a kind of maritime regionalism involving the littoral countries. In doing so, they are trying to escape the dynamics of bipolar competition by taking advantage of a multipolar environment.

The Indo-Pacific broadens the diversity of the Asia-Pacific and simultaneously refers to the American West Coast, the Strait

of Malacca, Africa, India and even Yemen and the Middle East, all of which are studied independently and are now approached from a holistic perspective, which is not so much geographically based as politically and willingly. The results are different in each case.

There are, consequently, many Indo-Pacifics that add containment and connectivity, while being secured by Western-led pacts such as QUAD (Japan, United States, Australia and India) or AUKUS (Australia, United States and New Zealand). And Europe could be linked to it through NATO.

2 The big players

China has traditionally been considered a continental power. But it has added maritime power to this status. This addition makes it a global power in its own right and, as a first step, it seeks control of its nearby seas.

The country follows the model that Mahan referred to at the end of the 19th century, even though its geographical conditions are not the most favourable for becoming a maritime power. For the admiral, he who controls the sea controls trade; he who controls trade controls the wealth of the world; and he who controls the wealth of the world controls the world. It is not for nothing that 90% of the world's commercial traffic is maritime.

Following this logic, China has equipped itself with a powerful merchant navy, as well as a navy that numerically —but not in terms of capabilities— even surpasses that of the US Navy. Moreover, it has taken control of a large part of the world's ports, which gives it an important chain of support with which to position itself at the focal points of world traffic. What is more, the dynamic has been transferred to the regional environment and a large part of shipbuilding is carried out in this region. South Korea, Japan and Taiwan are building powerful merchant fleets and reinforcing their navies. China has thus become a major industrial power and a major maritime power.

But China suffers from major structural problems: ageing, the real estate bubble, youth unemployment, the need to kick-start its domestic demand —which is dragging on— the dismal demographic projections which nevertheless benefit India, and the fact that its technological success is based on technology transfers from the West.

It is also a prisoner of its success. Thus, its culture prevents it from adopting the right solutions, such as resorting to formulas like emigration in the face of the rising average age of its population, while its domestic demand is falling.

All in all, the country has made a very clear commitment to scientific innovation rather than technical innovation, since it is scientific innovation that makes a paradigm shift possible. Moreover, it is a timeless commitment, and there is no room for narratives that undervalue successes that are timeless. The example of the success of *Deep Seek* —which is a success to a certain extent and even a strategic surprise that is subject to different evaluations— is situated along these lines, shows the levels at which competition is installed and the consequences of being technologically surpassed.

2027 is a date of particular significance for China not only because it marks the 100th anniversary of the creation of the People's Liberation Army and President Xi's third term in office, this date may be shaping its agenda.

The problems of the West are not the problems of the region nor their references. There is a bias in the West's approach to the region as it only approaches it through the work of Western authors. Thus, its time cycles are much longer than those of the West; and strategies respond to them.

The United States is losing global power, as Zbignew Brzezinski himself recognised in the 1990s. Brzezinski proposed measures to delay a process of change that he recognised as inevitable. President Trump sees the situation as contingent and advocates changing the established framework with radical measures.

Such a loss of power can be seen in the careless way it treats Europe or even in its abandonment of the Middle East, which has allowed that space to be taken over by China; it does not have enough power and is therefore retreating to deploy its means where it is most effective and profitable. It may therefore want to close the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East before concentrating on China. Of the four battle groups it maintains active simultaneously, two are in the Pacific.

In any case, the Trump administration has modified its approach to the region. But it is possible that, far from what was intended, the new approach will weaken the US presence in the region. This could be an area of Chinese dominance if American control over it

were to wane. The outcome depends on China maintaining their partnership with Russia, reaching an understanding with India, maintaining levels of technological progress and being able to resolve the serious structural problems that beset it.

The so-called *Thucydides trap* is based on mutual and growing suspicions between China and the United States. However, a possible division of the world into spheres of influence seems possible, but a military confrontation not so much. Relations between the two actors are too closely intertwined and geopolitical competitions are won on military ground. The power of the United States is currently unchallenged, but the economy does point the way to the future.

Europe is also present in the Indo-Pacific, geographically, through France, which is the world's second largest country in terms of maritime space. France holds important possessions as French Polynesia and New Caledonia. France already cooperates with India but lacks an articulated and credible European strategy (there are countries with as few links to the Asia-Pacific as Ireland and Lithuania that maintain their own strategies for the region despite their limited presence). Moreover, France is withdrawing from both Africa and the Indo-Pacific where the US has excluded it from AUKUS. There should be a common security and defence policy that avoids rivalries between member states.

Europe is still viewed with resentment for its colonial past and judged to be trapped by its relationship with the United States. This reduces it to the status of a mere lender. Its policies lack visibility and its narrative is contrasted with others such as Russia, China and the Global South. Yet the EU is judged by the saying *Big Ideas Small Budget.*

Japan, Taiwan and South Korea are dependent on the US for security and defence. Taiwan is key to the island chain strategy, the format used to geopolitically contain China and prevent it from taking over its immediate space.

Taiwan is a Westernised country that does not want to be part of China but can hardly remain independent. The failure of the Hong Kong model — one country, two systems— makes it difficult for it to be attracted; and it will hardly be invaded. But it is possible that it will fall by subjugation by accepting the inevitability of its subjugation as a key to the future. Such an eventuality inevitably raises questions about the strategic and advanced-value chips it produces and their relocation to the United States.

So far, it has benefited from the US security guarantee, but the continuity of such support has been questioned. Nevertheless, Japan has come very close and, if necessary, can replace the United States and include the island in its strategic sphere. But misgivings and memories of Japanese domination are still very much present in the region.

Despite this, Japan has eased restrictions on its military and defence policy, although the debate is still very much open in Japanese society. In fact, it has sent a frigate to the Taiwan Strait in 2025.

If Taiwan were to be reincorporated into China, Japan could be nuclearised, as this would be the only way for the country to guarantee its security on the same terms as North Korea or Pakistan.

ASEAN is a cooperative organisation made up of middle powers with little desire for integration and which China wants to use as a way to enhance its influence. But it is a highly geographic and highly political association that has formed an identity from which China is excluded.

In fact, China has also made its presence felt in the South Pacific, which until then had been close to the West and even under its control. Issues such as the abolition of USAID may contribute to the strengthening of China's position.

India is an increasingly important actor, a net provider of security that is developing very pragmatic policies and whose rise is unstoppable. Given its size and diversity, the country can even be understood as a kind of European Union.

India is a democracy and engages horizontally with its partners while China engages vertically. India wants to have strategic autonomy, but it has to maintain a balance in its reactions to the main players at a time when there are too many asymmetries and too many ideological differences between China, India and Russia.

India has a complex and contradictory relationship with China. India is better able to accommodate China than China is able to accommodate India. India has a privileged position due to its geographical centrality in the new scenario. The two powers confront each other on the sea and, continentally and materially, on the Himalayan border. In 1962 they already had a war over this border, India was backed by the USSR while the United States

supported China; and in 2022 there were incidents between the two countries.

The China-Pakistan corridor, which bypasses the Strait of Malacca but contributes to India's isolation and is complemented by the network of maritime logistical footholds known as the "String of Pearls" around the Hindustan peninsula, must be mentioned. It fears that it will open up a second front with Pakistan, but negotiating with the Pakistanis is not easy either. The Emirates and Saudi Arabia are also part of these triangular games and are currently closer to India than to Pakistan.

Russia has been a traditional ally and arms supplier. The United States presents a new relationship opportunity that would take the form of its integration into the Quad. There are two hurdles in its relationship with India: access to the Indian market and migration, but both are surmountable.

All in all, and within the triangularity, China will maintain its strategic alliance with Russia. Russia controls Arctic accessibility and presence on the Indo-Pacific by controlling one of its accesses which, as a consequence of global warming, provides an alternative route to the Strait of Malacca and improves its access to Europe, while allowing Arctic gas to be transferred to the Asia-Pacific. Indeed, Russia has reinforced its Pacific fleet by adding twelve new submarines. And it is worth mentioning its alliance with North Korea, which supplies arms to countries such as Laos and Myanmar.

We are facing what is known as a porous globalisation, a process of alterations and continuous rebalancing.

Federico Aznar Fernández-Montesinos
Commander, Navy
IEEE Analyst

Annex. Alphabetical list of participants (abbreviated CVs)

****Dr. Acosta Sánchez, Miguel Á., Professor of International Public Law and International Relations at the University of Cádiz, Jean Monnet Chair "Immigration and European Maritime Security" of the European Commission,**** Dr. Acosta is an expert in international and European security issues, especially in the maritime field. His current research focuses on the analysis of the available internal and external security mechanisms to deal with irregular migratory flows in the Euro-Mediterranean area. In addition, as an associate researcher at the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence at the University of Cadiz, he contributes to the analysis of migration and security policies in the European Union. He has published numerous articles in specialised journals and participated in international conferences, providing valuable perspectives on the legal and political challenges in the field of European and global security.

****Ahedo Cordón, Pablo. Ministry of Defence/CESEDEN/ESFAS, Professor, Department of Strategy **** The Lieutenant Colonel is a leading expert in military strategy and international security. As a professor at the Centro Superior de Estudios de la Defensa Nacional (CESEDEN) and the Escuela Superior de las Fuerzas Armadas (ESFAS), he provides high-level training to mil-

itary officers and civilians. His experience in military operations, in the field of military intelligence and his academic knowledge allow him to offer a comprehensive view of contemporary strategic challenges. He has participated in the elaboration of strategic analysis documents for the Ministry of Defence and has taught and lectured at various national universities and at the Diplomatic School.

****Álvarez-Ossorio Alvariño, Ignacio.** Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies at the Compl**utense University of Madrid.** Previously he was a professor at the University of Alicante, where he directed the Inter-University Institute for Social Development and Peace. In 2019 he joined UCM, where he directs the Complutense Research Group on the Maghreb and the Middle East. He also teaches postgraduate courses at the Diplomatic School, the Gutiérrez Mellado University Institute and the Ortega y Marañón Foundation. He is the author of a dozen books on political and social dynamics in the Middle East, as well as a contributor to various media.

****Aznar Fernández-Montesinos, Federico.** He is a Senior Analyst at the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE) and Professor at the Centro Superior de Estudios de la Defensa Nacional (CESEDEN), holds a degree (UNED) and PhD (UCM) in Political Science and Administration, is a Navy Commander, author of five books and more than 200 academic articles on the theory of war, geopolitics, political science, strategic thinking and leadership, and military sociology. His latest work is titled *War. Theory for Understanding 21st Century Conflicts*.

Brigadier General Bados **Nieto, Victor M. IEEE, Director ** Brigadier General Bados leads the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE) as its director. With an extensive military career, he has spent 19 years in units of the Legion, in different General Staff posts, in different international operations, NATO postings in the United Kingdom and Italy and academic training in Spain and the United Kingdom. Under his leadership, the IEEE strengthens its position as a think tank in strategic analysis and international security. GB. Victor Bados encourages collaboration between the military and academia, promoting the further internationalisation of the IEEE.

****Ballenilla y Garcia de Gamarra, Miguel.** Lieutenant General Ballenilla heads the Centro Superior de Estudios de la Defensa Nacional (CESEDEN), the highest level military educational ins-

titution in Spain. With a distinguished military career, he has held positions of responsibility both at the national level and in international operations. As Director of CESEDEN, he leads the training of senior military and civilian commanders in the field of defence, consolidating his role as a reference in strategic thinking. His career combines extensive operational experience with a solid academic background, thereby contributing to excellence in Spanish higher military education.

****Ballesteros Peiró, Ana. Real Instituto Elcano, Senior Research Associate,**** Dr. Ballesteros is a recognised expert on the Middle East, South Asia and the Islamic world. As a Senior Research Associate at the Elcano Royal Institute, her research focuses on international relations in South Asia, especially India. She has conducted extensive fieldwork in these regions and is the author of numerous academic publications. Her perspectives on the role of religion in Muslim societies and on foreign relations between South Asia and the Middle East are highly valued in academic and diplomatic circles.

****Baqués Quesada, Josep. University of Barcelona, Lecturer in Political Science **** PhD in Political Science from the University of Barcelona (UB). Professor of geopolitics at the UB and the Instituto Universitario General Gutiérrez Mellado; Director of the Revista de Estudios en Seguridad Internacional; Deputy Director of the knowledge transfer portal *Global Strategy*; author of several books, the most recent being *Ensayos sobre la guerra (*Bosch, 2024), *Cómo funciona el mundo. Una perspectiva desde la geopolítica* (Tirant, 2023). Regular contributor to the IEEE, the *Revista General de Marina* and EMAD. Awards: *Serge Lazareff* (SHAPE & NATO, 2021); Admiral Francisco Moreno (CG of the Navy, 2021); Cross for military merit (aeronautics), in 2021.

****Bautista Fernández, Angel Luis. REPSOL S.A., Director of Institutional Relations and Regulatory Coordination.**** He joined Repsol in 1995, holding various positions in the Corporate Audit, Control and Risk Department. In 2008 he was appointed Director of Financial Planning and Management at Repsol, and five years later, he was appointed Director of Investor Relations, the company was recognised as one of the European companies with the best Socially Responsible Investment (ESG) programme. Bautista has been in charge of Institutional Relations since March 2016, leading them with Spanish, European and North American authorities and institutions, and representing the company in international organisations such as the International

Energy Agency (IEA), the Atlantic Council, the National Petroleum Council and the World Economic Forum (WEF), attending the Davos Forum every year. He also represents Repsol in numerous forums, including the Spanish Energy Club, the Elcano Royal Institute, CEOE, the Aspen Institute, the B20 business process, BIAC, the business arm of the OECD, where he has been vice-chairman of the International Investment and Responsible Business Conduct Committee, and the Spanish Committee of the World Petroleum Council (WPC), which he currently chairs. In 2020, the Institutional Relations Department formally incorporated responsibilities in Regulatory Coordination with a global vision of the company, with a priority focus on *core* cross-cutting issues related to energy transition, guarantee of supply and energy costs with the European Union, Spain, Portugal and the United States.

Borrell Fontelles, Josep. The former High Representative and Vice-President of the Commission is a prominent figure in European and international politics, with an extensive career that includes senior positions in the Spanish government and European institutions. He has played a key role in the formulation and implementation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy. His expertise covers critical areas such as transatlantic relations, Mediterranean policy and global challenges. Borrell is known for his strategic vision and his ability to navigate complex diplomatic negotiations, contributing significantly to the positioning of Spain and Europe on the international stage.

Casado Sierra, Mariano, President of the Observatorio de la Vida Militar Degree in Law from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (1985). Free practice as a lawyer since 1985. From 1999 to September 2001, he was director of the magazine Justicia Militar. Co-President of the Military Law and Security Section of the Madrid Bar Association. Member of the Military Life Observatory of the Spanish Parliament since 2013. He has chaired this body since November 2023. XXXV Course on National Defence of the CESEDEN. XXVII Course on Senior Human Resources Management of ESFAS. II Course on Mission-Oriented Leadership and Command EGLET.

Cassinello Aubán, Emilio. Toledo International Centre for Peace (CITPax), Director General Ambassador Cassinello leads the Toledo International Centre for Peace, an institution dedicated to conflict prevention and resolution. With a distinguished diplomatic career, he has played a key role in

numerous international negotiations. His experience ranges from peace processes in the Middle East to dialogue initiatives in Latin America. As Director General of CITPax, Ambassador Cassinello promotes innovative approaches to mediation and peacebuilding, contributing significantly to Spanish and international diplomatic efforts.

****Castilla Barea, Juan Carlos.** Colonel Castilla, a senior analyst at the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE), holds a PhD in International Security from the UNED and has followed the PhD programme of the European Security and Defence College (ESDC). His military and academic experience allows him to offer in-depth analysis on security and defence, specialising in the Euro-Atlantic area, NATO and EU issues, as well as the defence industry. He is an active contributor to the debate on the adaptation of these international organisations to the challenges of the 21st century.

****Castro Torres, José Ignacio.** Colonel Castro is an associate analyst at the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (**IEEE**). His work focuses on the analysis of regional conflicts, energy geopolitics and the evolution of asymmetric threats. He has published extensively on topics such as security in the Middle East, the impact of new technologies on warfare and counterinsurgency strategies. He holds a PhD in peace, security and defence studies and a master's degree in radiation protection in nuclear and radioactive facilities and teaches at several universities. He is a corresponding member of the Academy of Military Arts and Sciences.

****Cembrero Vázquez, Ignacio. Journalist.**** Cembrero is a journalist specialising in North African issues, immigration and international security. With a long career in the media (*El País* and *El Mundo*), he continues to write in Spain for *El Confidencial* and abroad for *Orient XXI* (Paris) and *Middle East Eye* (London). He lectures at universities and foundations in Spain and abroad. He has covered the Islamic world and international conflicts for years. He is the author of several books such as *Vecinos alejados* (*Distant neighbours*), on Spanish-Moroccan relations, and *La España de Alá* (*Allah's Spain*), on Muslim immigration in Spain. He studied at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques in Paris, the French National Foundation for Political Science and the Institut des Hautes Etudes Internationales at the Sorbonne University.

****Cerezo Sierra, Ana. Head of Regulatory Public Affairs at Iberdrola Spain,**** Dedicated for the last 18 years to the energy

sector, first in International Relations and for the last 11 years in Regulation. Director of the Energy and Sustainability Chair of the Fundación Ortega-Marañón and coordinator of the energy issues of the *Revista de Occidente* since 2021, also participating as an article writer in several of them. Graduate in Political Science and Administration from the UCM, specialising in International Relations. Master in Intelligence Analyst (I Edition) URJC and UC3 of Madrid and Master in Energy Business of the Spanish Energy Club.

****Colom Piella, Guillem. Univ. Pablo Olavide, Professor of Political Science ****** Professor Colom is a tenured professor of Political Science, currently on special service as advisor to the Office of the Chief of Defence Staff and head of geopolitical analysis. He is an associate professor at the IEEE, a member of the Innovation Hub of the Allied Command Transformation and a full member of the Academy of Military Arts and Sciences. Prior to joining the university, he was stationed at the Armed Forces Transformation Unit, supporting military transformation and defence planning processes. His research interests are in strategic studies, in particular defence policy, military innovation and capability building. He is the author of three monographs, editor of five and author of more than two hundred scientific, technical and dissemination works.

****Cosidó Gutiérrez, Ignacio.** Professor of Philosophy, Politics and Economics at the **Francisco** de Vitoria **University and Director** of the Centre for the **Global Common Good.** Degree in Political Science from the Universidad Complutense, PhD in Geography and History from the UNED and Diploma in National Defence from the CESEDEN. He has extensive teaching experience in several universities. He has combined his academic career with political activity, both in parliamentary and executive positions, having served, among other responsibilities, as Head of the Technical Cabinet of the Civil Guard, Director General of the Police and Spokesman for the Popular Group in the Senate.

****De Castro García, Andrés. UNED, Professor of International Relations ****** Dr. De Castro is Professor of International Relations at the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED). His research focuses on the Middle East and North Africa, Spanish foreign policy, European security and power dynamics in the international arena. He has published extensively on various topics in International Relations and Security Studies. Dr. De Castro García is renowned for his analysis of contempo-

rary geopolitical challenges and his contribution to the academic debate on the Middle East and Spain's position in the international arena.

****De la Corte Ibáñez, Luis. Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Director of Strategic Studies and Intelligence at the Centre for Research in Forensic and Security Sciences.**** Dr. De la Corte is Professor of Social Psychology at the same university. He specialises in Terrorism, Political Violence, Organised Crime and other issues related to Security and Defence, Strategic Studies and Intelligence. Collaborator with various public bodies linked to the Ministries of Defence and the Interior. Author of several books and numerous scientific articles and analyses on the above subjects. Dr. De la Corte Ibáñez is frequently consulted by governmental institutions and the media on issues related to the prevention of violent extremism. He is a corresponding member of the Academy of Military Arts and Sciences.

****De los Reyes Ramirez, Rocio.** De los Reyes is a senior analyst at the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE). Her work focuses on the analysis of geopolitical trends and emerging security challenges in the Ibero-American region. With a strong background in international relations, he regularly contributes reports and publications on issues such as security in Latin America and the Caribbean. His analytical perspective is valued in Spanish defence and foreign policy circles.

****De Miguel Calabia, Emilio.** He studied Law at the Autonomous University of Madrid. He entered the Diplomatic Career in 1990. He specialises in Asian affairs. He was Deputy Director for the Pacific, Southeast Asia and the Philippines; in this post he was in charge, among others, of the ASEM Process (Asia-Europe Meeting) and relations with the Pacific Islands Forum. He has spent 16 years in Asian destinations (Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) and speaks Thai. He was Ambassador of Spain in Bangkok, with accreditation in Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. He has been Ambassador-at-Large for the Indo-Pacific. He currently directs the Casa Asia Centre in Madrid.

****Diez Alcalde, Jesús. M. Def. MOPS, Expert Analyst on Africa/ CHIEF COLONEL J9 EM MOPS.**** Colonel Diez Alcalde is a recognised expert on African affairs and military operations. As Chief of Section J9 of the Military Operations Staff (MOPS), he leads the analysis and planning of civil-military aspects of international operations. His experience in Africa has made him an

authoritative voice on the continent's security challenges. Colonel Diez Alcalde has published extensively on regional conflicts, terrorism and security cooperation in Africa, contributing significantly to the understanding of security dynamics in the region.

****Durán Cenit, María Encarnación (Marien). University of Granada, Senior Lecturer/Coordinator of the Master's Degree in Strategic Thinking and Global Security**** Dr. Durán is a leading academic in the field of security studies. As a senior lecturer and coordinator of the Master in Strategic Thinking and Global Security at the University of Granada, she has played an important role in the training of future experts in international security. Her research covers topics such as armed forces and international missions, civil-military relations and armed conflicts. She also specialises in Turkey as a case study. Dr. Durán Cenit is recognised for her interdisciplinary approach and her contribution to innovation in the teaching of security studies.

****Echeverría Jesús, Carlos. UNED. Faculty of Political Science and Sociology.**** Dr. Echeverría is an expert in international relations and security, with a special focus on the Mediterranean and the Arab-Islamic world. As a professor at UNED, he has conducted extensive research on terrorism, regional conflicts and security dynamics in North Africa and the Middle East. His analyses on the evolution of terrorist groups and Islamist movements are widely recognised. Dr. Echeverría Jesús is a frequent commentator in the media on international security and foreign policy issues.

****Estrada Villaseñor, Cecilia. Universidad Pontificia de Comillas, Director of the Chair on Refugees and Forced Migrants,**** Dr. Estrada leads the Chair on Refugees and Forced Migrants at the Universidad Pontificia de Comillas, with a special focus on the study of forced migration and its implications for human security. Her work focuses on refugee protection, migrant integration and asylum policies. Dr. Estrada Villaseñor has contributed significantly to the debate on the European response to migration crises and the associated humanitarian challenges, promoting a human rights-based approach to migration management.

****Fernández Aparicio, Javier.** Fernández Aparicio is a senior analyst at the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE). His work focuses on Asia Pacific, analysing its geopolitical trends and emerging security challenges. With a solid background in interna-

tional relations, he regularly contributes reports and publications on topics such as the evolution of regional conflicts and security dynamics in the areas under his study, which are of strategic interest to Spain.

****Fernández Rodríguez, José Julio. University of Santiago de Compostela, Professor/ Director of the Centre for Security Studies at the USC.**** Dr. Fernández Rodríguez is Professor of Constitutional Law and Director of the Centre for Security Studies at the University of Santiago de Compostela. His research covers areas such as comprehensive security, digital rights and civil liberties in the context of new threats. He has published extensively on the adaptation of the legal framework to contemporary security challenges, including terrorism and cybersecurity. He is recognised for his analysis of the balance between security and fundamental rights in modern democracies. He has also served as Ombudsman of the Autonomous Community of Galicia.

****Fernández Sola, Natividad. University of Zaragoza, Catedrática Dcho Internacional y RR.II.**** Dr. Fernández Sola is Professor of International Law and International Relations at the University of Zaragoza. Her research focuses on the foreign and security policy of the European Union, European defence and Russia in the Sahel. She has published extensively on the evolution of the CFSP/CSDP and the role of the EU as a global actor. Dr Fernández Sola is an authoritative voice, among other topics, on the analysis of transatlantic relations and Europe's position in the international system.

****Fonfría Mesa, Antonio. Univ. Complutense de Madrid (UCM), Professor of Applied Economics.**** Dr. Fonfría is a recognised expert in defence economics. As a professor at UCM, his research focuses on the defence industry, military technological innovation and the economic analysis of security policies. He has published extensively on topics such as defence spending, the competitiveness of the European military industry and the economic implications of new security threats. Professor Fonfría Mesa is frequently consulted by national and international institutions on defence economics issues.

****Frias Sánchez, Carlos Javier. Mº Def/ ET/MADOC, Director of the EGE.**** Brigadier General Frias heads the Army War College (EGE), a key institution in the advanced training of military officers. With an extensive military career, he has held

senior positions in operations and strategic planning. As Director of the EGE, he leads the adaptation of military doctrine and education to new security challenges. His experience combines operational practice with a deep understanding of the evolution of military strategic thinking.

****Fuente Cobo, Ignacio.** Colonel Fuente Cobo is a senior analyst at the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE), specialising in geopolitics and regional conflicts. His work focuses particularly on Africa and the Middle East, areas where he has developed a deep knowledge throughout his military and academic career. He has published numerous analyses on terrorism, insurgency and energy security. Colonel Fuente Cobo is recognised for his ability to provide strategic perspectives on complex regional security dynamics.

****García Cantalapiedra, David. University of CC.** He is a lecturer in the Department of International Relations, Faculty of Political Science of the UCM. Politics, UCM. He has taught US Foreign Policy at the Diplomatic School; he has also taught the Staff Course at the ESFAS and the National Defence course at the CESEDEN. He was a US Research Fellow at the Real Instituto Elcano (2007-2009); worked for NATO in Afghanistan and on NATO's Nuclear Posture 2008-2012; 2012 ECA-US State Department Fellow; 2013 Loyola Fellow and Visiting Professor, UN University for Peace in Manila; 2017 EU Center Fellow in Singapore. He has been Director of the Complutense Group for International and Strategic Studies since 2017.

****García Encina, Carlota. Real Instituto Elcano, Senior Analyst **** Dr. García Encina is Senior Analyst for US and Transatlantic Relations at the Real Instituto Elcano, Senior Associate Analyst at CSIS in Washington, and Professor of International Relations at the Universidad Pontificia Comillas. She began her research career focusing on security and defence issues, and in recent years has focused on US foreign, defence and domestic policy; the transatlantic relationship; and the bilateral relationship between Spain and the US. He also coordinates the Spain-Israel Strategic Dialogue between the Elcano Royal Institute and ELNET's Forum of Strategic Dialogue.

****García Marín, Javier.** Dr. García Marín is Professor of Political Science at the University **of Granada, specialising** in political communication and public opinion on security and defence issues. His research focuses on how the media and public opinion influ-

ence the formulation of security policies. He has published works on public perception of security threats, the role of the media in international conflicts and strategic communication in defence. Dr. García Marín contributes significantly to the understanding of the social dimension of security.

****García Rodríguez, Andrea. Director, ImpaQT / Associate Researcher CEPS **** Dª García Rodríguez combines her role as Director of ImpaQT with her work as Associate Researcher at the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS). Her expertise focuses on the intersection between technology, policy and security. Her research addresses topics such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence in defence and the geopolitical implications of new technologies. García Rodríguez contributes to the debate on the adaptation of European security policies to the changing technological environment.

****Garrido Guijarro, Óscar.** He is a senior analyst at the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE), specialising in geopolitics and security in sub-Saharan Africa and in issues related to religion and cultural identity. Garrido Guijarro holds a PhD in Peace and International Security from the Gutiérrez Mellado Institute, a master's degree in diplomacy and international studies from the Diplomatic School and a degree in Journalism and Political Science. He is the author of numerous articles and analyses on issues related to Africa and the Middle East and has published two books: *Torn from the Promised Land*. *Comunidades árabes cristianas en Oriente Medio* (Editorial San Pablo) and *La Guerra de África* (published by the Instituto de Estudios Ceutíes). He is also the coordinator of the last four editions of *Panorama Geopolítico de los Conflictos*, an annual publication of the Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos.

****Garrido Rebolledo, Vicente. Universidad Rey Juan Carlos (URJC), Professor of International Public Law and International Relations. Director of the "Francisco Villamartín" Chair of Defence Studies.**** Dr. Garrido is a recognised expert in non-proliferation and arms control. As Director of the Chair of Defence Studies at the URJC, he leads research and teaching on international security issues. His work focuses on nuclear proliferation, export control regimes and European security. He has participated in numerous international conferences and is the author of influential publications on disarmament and non-proliferation. Dr. Garrido Rebolledo is an authoritative voice

in the analysis of strategic challenges related to weapons of mass destruction.

****Hidalgo García, Mar. IEEE, Analyst.**** She holds a degree in Chemical Sciences and is a civil servant in the Defence Scientist Scale. She is a senior analyst at the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE), specialising in the area of chemical and biological threats, the impact of climate change on security, as well as the geopolitics of natural resources. Her work focuses on the analysis of emerging risks in chemical and biological weapons proliferation, the management of water, mineral and food resources as drivers of conflict situations and the consequences of climate change and environmental degradation on security and defence. She regularly contributes reports and publications on the evolution of these types of threats and risks and their impact on national and international security.

****Laborie Iglesias, Mario A. Instituto Universitario Gutierrez Mellado (IUGM), Colonel **** Colonel Laborie combines his military experience with a solid academic career at the Instituto Universitario Gutiérrez Mellado. With a PhD in International Security, his research focuses on the evolution of armed conflicts, strategic studies, the transformation of armed forces and new forms of warfare. He has published numerous works on geopolitics, transatlantic relations, international security and peace operations. Cor. Laborie Iglesias is recognised for his ability to integrate military and academic perspectives in the analysis of contemporary security challenges.

****Leon Gross, Bernardino. Instituto Diplomatico MEDOR (Rome). Director General**** Bernardino (Málaga 1964) is a diplomat and politician. In Spain he was Secretary of State for the EEAS and Secretary General of the Presidency of the Government, as well as Sherpa of the G20 (he negotiated Spain's entry into this group). He was the EU Special Envoy for the Arab Spring countries and subsequently the UN Special Envoy for the Libyan conflict, where he negotiated the only agreement signed since 2011. Advisor to the EUEU on the Middle East Peace Process in 1998. He is Professor of Diplomacy at IE, Sciences Po, MEDOR/Rome and Oxford-Cambridge. He has directed the Spanish-Moroccan Three Cultures of the Mediterranean Foundation and the Barenboim-Said Foundation.

****León Serrano, Gonzalo. Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Professor **** Dr. León is professor emeritus, an expert

in technology and its impact on security and defence. As a professor at the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, his research focuses on technological innovation, artificial intelligence and its application in the military field. He has led numerous research projects on autonomous systems, cybersecurity and disruptive technologies in defence. Dr. León Serrano is an authoritative voice in the analysis of the strategic implications of technological advances for national and international security.

****López Alonso, Carmen. Universidad Complutense Madrid, Profesor Emerita Dpto Historia, Teorías y Geografía Política.**** Dr. López Alonso is a renowned scholar in the field of international history and politics. As Professor Emeritus at the Complutense University of Madrid, her research covers topics such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, the history of the contemporary Middle East and international relations in the Mediterranean. She has published influential works on the formation of the State of Israel and the Palestinian question. Dr López Alonso is renowned for her in-depth and nuanced analysis of the complex historical and political processes in the Middle East.

****Losada Fernández, Ángel. Former Iranian Ambassador and EU Special Representative for the Sahel,**** Ambassador Losada brings a wealth of diplomatic experience, especially in critical regions such as Iran, the Sahel and Afghanistan. In addition to being a Spanish diplomat, he has been an international civil servant for the UN, NATO and the European Union. In this sense, as former EU Special Representative for the Sahel and EU mediator in the peace process in Mali, he has played an essential role in the formulation and implementation of EU policies in this strategic region. His in-depth knowledge of security dynamics in Africa and the Middle East makes him an authoritative voice on issues of diplomacy, conflict prevention and international cooperation in areas of high geopolitical complexity.

****Manfredi Sánchez, Juan Luis. University of Castilla La Mancha, Professor of Journalism and International Studies **** Dr. Manfredi is an expert in international communication and public diplomacy. As Professor at the University of Castilla La Mancha, his research focuses on the intersection between media, foreign policy and international security. He has published extensively on digital diplomacy, strategic communication and the role of the media in shaping public opinion on international affairs. Dr. Manfredi Sánchez contributes significantly to the understanding of how communication influences global security perceptions and

policies. He has been Prince of Asturias Professor at Georgetown University (2021-2024).

****Manzano Porteros, Cristina. Ibero-American Secretary General ****Manzano is Director of External Relations at the Ibero-American Secretariat General. She has developed her career in the fields of communication, management and international relations. Previously, she has been, among other things, director of the international analysis publication *esglobal*, deputy director of the think tank FRIDE, columnist for *El País* and *El Periódico* and contributor to various media. With a degree in Information Sciences, she did postgraduate studies at the University of Maryland (USA) thanks to a Fulbright scholarship.

****Marcos Martín, Francisco José. Mº Def/ DIGENPOL / DICOES, Geopolitical Analysis Area.**** Colonel Marcos Martín is an analyst in the Geopolitical Analysis Area of the Spanish Ministry of Defence, specifically within the scope of DIGENPOL/ DICOES. His work focuses on geopolitical and strategic analysis of the international environment affecting Spain and its national interests. With a solid military and civilian background and experience in international operations, Francis Marcos is an expert in joint operations planning, geopolitics and international conflicts.

****Marquez De la Rubia, Francisco.** Lieutenant Colonel Márquez is a senior analyst at the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE). His work focuses on the analysis of security and defence issues, with a particular focus on geopolitical dynamics and contemporary strategic challenges centred on the US and Latin America. His publications and analyses contribute significantly to the understanding of international security trends and their impact on Spanish defence policy.

****Martínez Martínez, Rafael. University of Barcelona, Professor of Political Science and Administration **** Dr. Martínez holds a degree in Law and a PhD with an extraordinary award. He has been Vice-Rector of the UB, Director of Studies and is currently Director of the Department of Political Science. He has been a visiting professor at the Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques (Paris) and at the University of California-Riverside. He has published on the democratisation and modernisation of the armed forces. His work includes the book *Soldiers, Politicians and Civilians*. *Reforming Civil-Military Relations in Democratic Latin America* (2017) with David Pion-Berlin (Ed. Cambridge University Press), which won the Giuseppe

Caforio-Best Book Award ERGOMAS (European Research Group on Military and Society) in 2019.

****Milosevic Milosevic, Mira.** Dr. Milosevic is the Senior Research Fellow for Russia, Eurasia and the Balkans at the Elcano Royal Institute, a business school professor and author of 4 books, specialising in geopolitics and international relations. Her work focuses on the analysis of global power dynamics, with a particular focus on great power relations and emerging challenges to international security. Her research and publications provide valuable insights into the evolution of the world order and the implications for Spanish and European foreign policy.

****Moltó Sánchez, Áurea. Real Instituto Elcano, Director of REDElcano.**** Moltó directs the advisory bodies (Scientific and Advisory Council) and relations with the network of think tanks of the Elcano Institute. She holds a degree in Information Sciences from the Complutense University of Madrid and a diploma in Advanced Defence Studies from the Centro Superior de Estudios de la Defensa Nacional (CESEDEN, Ministry of Defence), and postgraduate studies in the Contemporary Latin America programme at the Instituto Universitario Ortega y Gasset. She began her professional career at Agencia EFE and directed the magazine Política Exterior, a reference publication on international affairs in Spain, leading its digital transformation. She has been a visiting senior researcher at The Inter-American Dialogue (Washington DC) and an advisory member of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation. She is Secretary General of Transparency International Spain and Fellow of ASPEN-Spain. She is a regular contributor to Spanish and international media.

****Mora Tebas, Juan.** Colonel Mora is a leading contributor to the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE). With an extensive military career and experience in international operations, he provides valuable analysis on security and defence, especially in relation to Africa and the Middle East. His contributions to the IEEE include detailed studies on regional conflicts, terrorism and security dynamics in areas of strategic interest to Spain.

****Moreno Fernández, Patricia. Joint Staff (Force Development Division/ Sc Analysis and Foresight), Analyst / Former President of the Spanish Atlantic Youth Council ****** Patricia has combined her work as an intelligence analyst with outreach work on security and defence issues. She is currently an analyst in the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and her work in the Force

Development Division, specifically in the Analysis and Foresight Section, contributes to guiding the ongoing transformation of the Spanish Armed Forces and defining the military strategic framework in which they operate. Previously, she held the position of President of the Spanish Atlantic Youth Council, demonstrating her commitment to the promotion and dissemination of Defence Culture among the younger generations of our country.

****Moreno Ramírez de Verger, Fernando. Director of the High Level Course on European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP),**** Colonel Moreno chairs the Alumni Association of the European Security and Defence College (ESDC). He has extensive experience in security and defence issues at the European level and is a regular speaker at courses and seminars on security in Europe, and in particular on the Common Foreign and Security Policy. He is also Associate Professor at the Escuela Superior de las FAS, Professor of the IEB's Master's Degree in IR and Doctoral Fellow of the ESDC's Doctoral School.

****Morillas Bassedas, Pol.**** Dr. Morillas directs the prestigious think tank Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (C**IDOB**), where he leads research and analysis on international affairs and geopolitics. His expertise covers topics such as European foreign policy, global governance and contemporary security challenges. Under his leadership, CIDOB has strengthened its position as an influential think tank in the analysis of international relations. He holds a PhD in Political Science, Public Policy and International Relations from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) and an MA in International Relations from the London School of Economics. Author of the book *En el Patio de los Mayores. Europa ante un mundo hostil*, soon to be published by Debate.

****Palación De Inza, Blanca.**** Palación holds a degree in Modern and Contemporary History from the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. Master in Peace and Security from UNED. She works as a senior analyst at the IEEE where she has been contributing, for 15 years, to the dissemination of security and defence culture in Spain. She specialises in women and children in armed conflicts and in the East African region and its security challenges.

****Páramo Carretero, Ana Isabel. School of Intelligence, Director.**** Professor Páramo directs the School of Intelligence, is an intelligence trainer at several universities and advises companies in this discipline. She has extensive experience in both the public and private sectors and is familiar with contemporary secu-

rity challenges. Under her direction, the Intelligence School plays a relevant role in the development of analytical and operational capabilities essential to the Spanish intelligence community.

****Pardo De Santayana y Gómez-Olea, José M. IEEE, Analyst **** Colonel Pardo De Santayana became retired in March of this year. He is currently an associate professor at CESEDEN attached to the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE). His work at the IEEE has focused on the analysis of strategic and geopolitical issues on global security challenges. He is a renowned specialist on Russia and its sphere of influence. His publications and analyses contribute significantly to the understanding of international dynamics and their impact on national and international security.

****Parra Perez, Agueda. ChinaGeoTech Forum **** Dr Parra brings a unique perspective as an independent analyst, specifically in the field of Chinese geotechnology. Her expertise at ChinaGeoTech positions her as an authoritative voice on issues related to the intersection between technology, geopolitics and China-West relations. Her work is particularly relevant in a context of China's growing importance on the global technological and strategic stage.

****University of La Laguna, Professor of Constitutional Law and IEEE Analyst **** Dr. Pérez Gil combines his academic role as Professor of Constitutional Law at the University of La Laguna with his experience as a Volunteer Reservist and IEEE Analyst. His main lines of research are conflict theory and nuclear warfare. This combination allows him to bring a unique perspective that integrates legal knowledge with strategic analysis. His work contributes to the understanding of the legal and strategic implications of contemporary security challenges.

****Pérez Martín, Juan Javier / ET School of War and Leadership. Director of the Department of Organisation and IR.**** The Colonel has been a lecturer for five years in the Department of Strategy and IR at the Escuela Superior de las Fuerzas Armadas (ESFAS) of the CESEDEN. He has been Coordinator and Professor of the Strategy, Security and Defence module of the Inter-University Master's Degree in Diplomacy and IR of the Diplomatic School. He has been assigned to the Ministry of Defence, as an analyst of the Division of Coordination and Security and Defence Studies (DICOES) of SEGENPOL. He has collaborated and published articles in the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies, as well as in the Spanish Defence Review, and

has participated in the preparation of strategic analysis documents for the Ministry of Defence. He also teaches and lectures at various national universities and military education centres.

****Pontijas Calderón, José Luis. Universidad Carlos III, Professor of Geopolitics and Strategic Studies.**** Pontijas is a retired Colonel, PhD in Applied Economics (Univ. Alcalá de Henares) and Master in International Relations (Sociedad de Altos Estudios Internacionales -CSIC). His postings include the Eurocorps Headquarters (Strasbourg), the Military Staff of the European Union (Brussels), having been a Euro-Atlantic security analyst at the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (2017-2022). He currently teaches geopolitics and strategic studies at several universities and institutes: Carlos III University, International University of La Rioja, LISA Institute and the Isabel Galindo-La Latina Institute (Nebrija University). He is the author of numerous articles on geopolitics.

****Portero Rodríguez, Florentino. Fundación CIVISMO, Senior Researcher/ Professor History and IR / IEEE Collaborator.**** Professor Portero is a renowned scholar and researcher in the field of history and international relations. As a Senior Research Fellow at the CIVISMO Foundation and an IEEE Fellow, he brings a historical and strategic perspective to contemporary foreign policy and security debates. His work is particularly valuable for understanding long-term trends in international relations and their impact on global security.

****Quesada Herrero, Salvador.** Quesada holds a degree in English Philology and is a career civil servant in two teaching bodies: Cuerpo de Profesores de Enseñanza Secundaria in the speciality of English and Cuerpo de Profesores de Escuelas Oficiales de Idiomas in the speciality of Chinese. He is currently studying for a Master's Degree in Public Management. He has experience in the international field, having worked in the diplomatic representations of Spain in Beijing, Shanghai and Canton (Guangzhou), where she carried out functions related to education, international cooperation and cultural management, among others. He has recently joined the IEEE as a senior analyst, where he conducts research and teaching on strategic issues related to China and knowledge dissemination in institutional settings.

****Ramirez Morán, David. IEEE, Analyst.**** Ramirez is a senior analyst at the IEEE, a telecommunications engineer

(2001) and a master's degree in security and defence systems management (2013). Specialising in geopolitics and technology, he has published numerous analyses on the impact of technology on strategic sovereignty and the technological dependence that results. He has also addressed topics such as cryptocurrencies, language models and their role in access to knowledge, and the environmental impact of AI. He has extensive experience in research and outreach on issues related to industry and the financing of national and European defence and security markets.

****Rodríguez Pinzón, Érika. Fundación Carolina.** Sociologist (2001) and PhD in International Relations from the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (2015), with a diploma in Advanced Studies in Political Theory, Theory of Administration and Public Management (2007). Diploma in Law and Political Science from the Centre for Political and Constitutional Studies of the Spanish Ministry of the Presidency (2006). She currently directs the Fundación Carolina. Permanent lecturer in the Department of Applied Sociology at the Complutense University of Madrid (on leave of absence) and non-resident senior fellow at the Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center of the Atlantic Council (ad honorem). Specialist in security, education and development in the Latin American region.

****Romero Junquera, Abel. IEEE, Analyst.**** Captain Romero Junquera is a senior analyst at the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE). His experience in security and defence issues at the European level, particularly in the EU, brings an interesting perspective to the analysis of European defence and the role of the Union. His contributions to the IEEE also cover maritime security issues, naval strategies and geopolitical challenges in maritime spaces.

****Ruiz Arévalo, Javier. Army/ MADOC, Relations with the University **** Colonel Ruiz Arévalo, PhD in Law, is responsible, from the Army's Training and Doctrine Command (MADOC), for relations with universities, promoting Army-University collaboration. He contributes to enriching military training with academic perspectives and vice versa, achieving a more comprehensive approach to security and defence studies. In the academic field, he teaches at the University of Granada. His work focuses on the field of Strategic Logistics and the analysis of the Central Asia-Afghanistan region. He is a recognised expert on Afghanistan.

****Sanahuja Perales, José Antonio. Universidad Complutense Madrid, Catedrático de RR. II.**** Dr. Sanahuja is Professor of International Relations at the Universidad Complutense. His work focuses on the change of power and the structures of the international system, relations between the EU and Latin America, regional integration and development cooperation. He has worked in the external action of Spain and the EU as special advisor for Latin America to the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Policy, and as director of the Fundación Carolina. He has also been a Robert Schuman Fellow at the European University Institute in Florence.

****Sánchez Cózar, Irene.** She is Coordinator of the Madrid Office and Programmes at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). Before joining the ECFR in 2022, she worked as a researcher at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in Berlin, in the ADELA Regional Programme in Panama with the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung institution. She holds a master's degree in international War Studies from the University College Dublin and Potsdam. He has experience in international relations and strategy. His work focuses on the coordination of projects and analysis on European foreign policy, with a special focus on security and defence.

****Sánchez Díaz, Sonia. Universidad Francisco de Vitoria, Vice-Dean of Internationalisation **** Professor Sánchez Diaz holds a PhD in Political Science and International Relations and is a specialist in the Middle East and Israel. Throughout her career, she has combined her profile as an international political advisor and analyst with project management, teaching and research. Since 2019, she is Professor of International Relations at the Universidad Francisco de Vitoria and, since 2023, Vice-Dean of Internationalisation in the Faculty of Communication. She holds a degree in Political Science from the UCM and two master's degrees in international relations from Durham University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She has worked at the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Prime Minister's Office and Centro Sefarad-Israel. Author of several publications, she has led courses and seminars on politics, economics and society in Spain and Israel.

****Sánchez Herráez, Pedro.** Colonel Sánchez Herráez is a senior analyst at the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (**IEEE**). His work focuses on the analysis of regional conflicts, geostrategy and evolving security threats. His publications and analy-

ses are particularly valuable in understanding security dynamics in regions such as Africa and the Middle East. Sánchez Herráez is recognised for his ability to provide strategic perspectives on complex global security scenarios.

****Silva Soto, Álvaro.** Silva holds a PhD in Social and Legal Sciences and teaches International Law and International Relations at the San Pablo CEU University. His work focuses mainly on the study of the connections between law and international relations, as well as on military history. He currently coordinates the master's degree in Geopolitics, Security and Defence at the Royal Institute of European Studies.

****Torreblanca Payá, José Ignacio. ECFR**** Torreblanca is Director of the Madrid Office of the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) and Professor in the Department of Political Science and Administration at the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED). He has been a Fulbright EU-US Scholar, Professor at the George Washington University in Washington D.C. and researcher at the European University Institute in Florence. His field of research and work covers the foreign policy of the European Union, the geopolitics of technology and the relationship between social networks, disinformation and foreign interference.

****Torres Soriano, Manuel Ricardo. Pablo de Olavide University, Professor of Political Science **** Torres Soriano is Professor of Political Science at the Pablo de Olavide University in Seville. He teaches several postgraduate courses on strategic communication, cyber-intelligence and terrorist activities in cyberspace. He is the author of the books: *El Eco del Terror. Ideology and propaganda in jihadist terrorism* (2009), *Al Andalus 2.0. La ciber-yihad contra España (*2014) and coordinator of *#Desinformación. Power and manipulation in the digital age* (2019). He is a member of the Advisory Council of the Real Instituto Elcano, the Forum against Disinformation Campaigns in the field of National Security (Ministry of the Presidency) and has been a member of the Advisory Council of the European Counter-Terrorism Centre (EUROPOL).

****Urbasos Arbeloa, Ignacio. Real Instituto Elcano, Researcher.**** Urbasos is a researcher at the Energy and Climate Programme of the Real Instituto Elcano. He is an expert in the geopolitics of energy. His research areas focus on the Euro-Mediterranean region, energy transition in oil-producing countries

and security of supply. He has previous experience in the energy sector and was a member of the Institut Français de Relations Internationales (IFRI).

****Uriarte Ayala, Ignacio.** Professor of International Relations, researches on Democracy and Development in Europe and Latin America. Parliamentary advisor in the Bureau of the Congress of Deputies. Former Director of Planning at the Ibero-American General Secretariat (2015-2023) and Member of Congress (2008-2015) as part of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and International Cooperation. Extensive experience with multilateral organisations, the implementation of impact projects and the formation of multi-stakeholder strategic alliances in different countries. He has lectured at universities in Latin America and has published articles in the media and academic journals.

****Vázquez Orbaiceta, Gonzalo.** Vázquez Orbaiceta is a researcher at the Naval **War College**'s Centre for Naval Thought, specialising in maritime power, naval thought and NATO maritime strategy. He holds a degree in International Relations from the UNAV and is currently a student on the master's degree in War Studies at King's College London as a scholarship holder of the La Caixa Foundation. He has worked at NATO's CMDR COE in Bulgaria and published in journals and centres in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia.

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