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Osservatorio Strategico
Part One

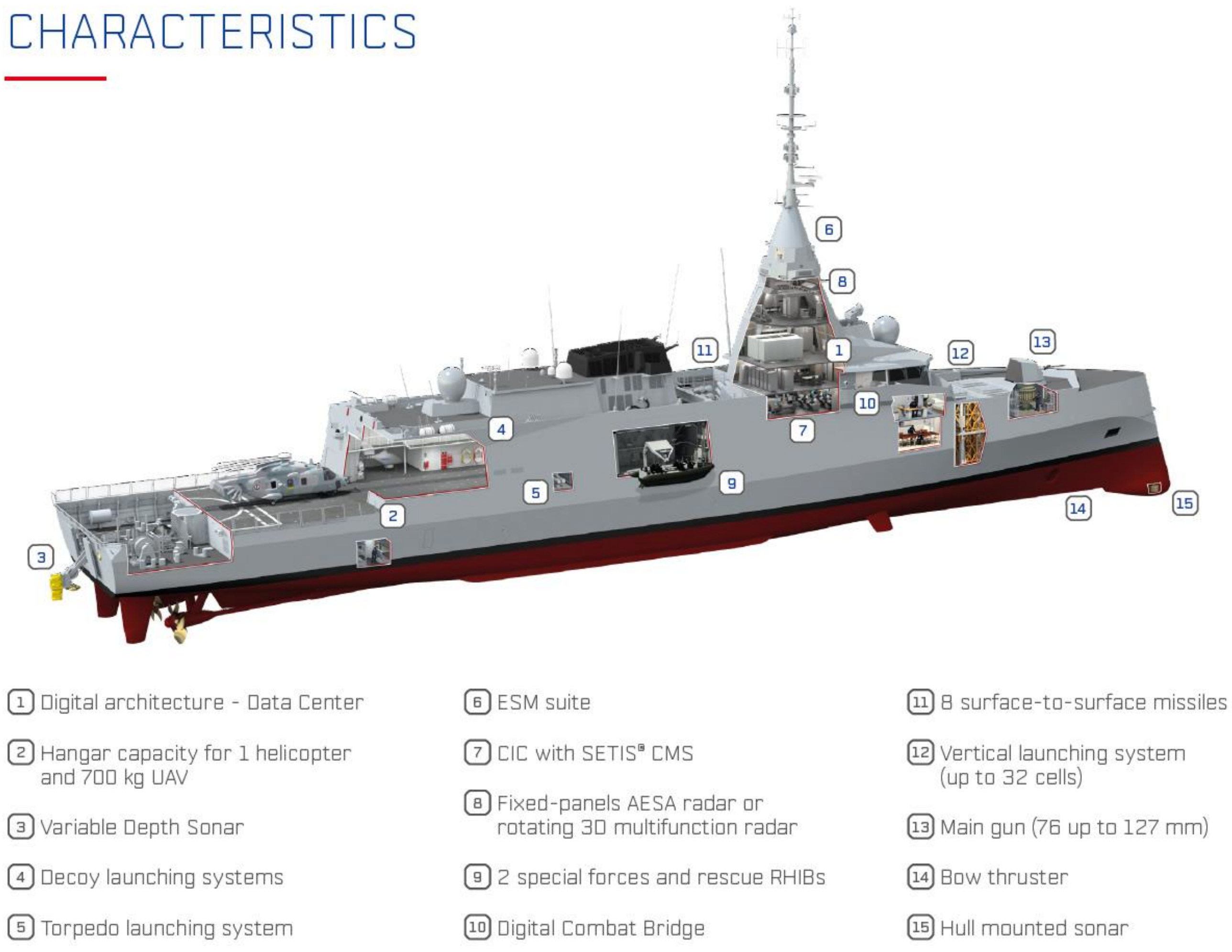
The impact of the strategic partnership between France and Greece on the balance of the Mediterranean and in the perspective of European defense

Nikólaos Panayotópoulos, Greek Defense Minister, Pierre Eric Pommellet, President and CEO of Naval Group and Eric Béranger, President and CEO of MBDA, signed a memorandum of understanding on 28 September to open negotiations for the supply of three frigates HN FDI and their equipment for the Hellenic Navy, with an option for an additional frigate. France, after beating competition from the UK and other NATO countries, will deliver the three frigates to Greece by 2025.

The FDI frigates will be built at Naval Group's Lorient shipyard, where the second of the series has just entered production.

With the HN defense and intervention frigates, the Hellenic Navy will have a state-of-the-art, high-performance surface fleet.

A first-class frigate, the FDI HN combines the best technologies of Naval Group, Thales, and MBDA, which will supply the ASTER 30 B1 and Exocet MM40 Block 3c missiles. You will be fully interoperable with European and NATO fleets[1].



1 *Greece Signs MOU With Naval Group and MBDA For FDI Frigates*, Naval News 28/09/2021 https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2021/09/greece-signs-mou-with-naval-group-and-mbda-for-fdi-frigates/

This warship is designed for navies looking for a compact frigate capable of performing a wide range of missions alone or within a task force. At 4,500 tons, the FDI is smaller than the 6,000-ton FREMMs but packs the same firepower and features Thales' SeaFire radar.

According to Naval News, the frigates that Greece is about to acquire will not be similar to the future Amiral Ronarc'h class of the French Navy, which means that they will feature customization to meet the requirements of the Hellenic Navy[2].

Some elements (probable subsystems) of the HN IDE will be built in Greece. Naval Group has already initiated a confrontation with nearly 100 Greek companies and the agreement will create jobs in Greece for the construction phase, as well as for the maintenance of the frigates.

On the geopolitical significance of the agreement

The agreement, worth about 5 billion euros, comes two weeks after the cancellation of the 90-billion-dollar contract that was signed in 2016 between the Naval Group and Australia and which would have endowed the latter with 12 conventional propulsion submarines (diesel-electric). The increase in tensions in the Indo – Pacific area, the need to acquire nuclear submarines with practically unlimited autonomy, and the military alliance called Aukus, between the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia in an anti-Chinese key have determined the turning point of the government of Canberra in favor of supplying US nuclear-powered submarines. The project will make Australia the seventh country in the world to have submarines powered by nuclear reactors. While it is very different from the € 56 billion submarine contract that France had signed with Australia, the deal with Greece is a big boost for Macron, who heavily emphasized the need for Europe to strengthen its capabilities. defense and not to depend solely on the United States for defense.

French President Emmanuel Macron said, after meeting with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, that Greece will purchase the three frigates from France as part of a deeper "strategic partnership" between the two countries to defend their shared interests in the Mediterranean. Macron added that this is an important boost for the EU's defense ambitions. According to the French Ministry of Defense, the MoU also includes a mutual assistance clause between the two countries in the event of an attack against one of them.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis agreed that, beyond Athens' military needs, the deal could be seen as a first step to seal Europe's defense ambitions. The agreement also has a "Euro-Atlantic character", added the Greek prime minister, stressing that it is an agreement between two EU partners and members of the Western alliance.

“Our agreement paves the way for an autonomous and strong European future. A Europe capable of defending its interests in its wider neighborhood, in the Mediterranean, in the Middle East, in the Sahel, "he said". A Europe that strengthens its defense ultimately strengthens the transatlantic alliance itself".

Despite being among the continent's smallest countries, with around 2.2% of GDP, Greek military spending far exceeds that of other states, not least due to long-standing differences with NATO's nominal ally, Turkey.

Tensions between the two neighbors reached a boiling point last year, with both on a war footing over rival claims on offshore gas reserves in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. The purchase of French naval units could change the balance in the Aegean Sea, with containment of Turkey.

With this in mind, the center-right government of Mitsotakis has announced an important weapons program aimed at modernizing the Greek armed forces with the acquisition of fighter

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2 Vavasseur X., *Latest Details On The Deal Between France And Greece For 3 FDI Frigates*, Naval News 28/09/2021 https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2021/09/latest-details-on-the-deal-between-france-and-greece-for-3-fdi-frigates/

planes, frigates, helicopters, and missile systems. The € 6.8 billion defense plan already included the purchase of 18 French-made Rafale jets, which have since increased to 24. In 2018, Greece signed a $ 1.3 billion deal with US-based Lockheed. Martin to upgrade 85 of its F-16 fighters, installing advanced radar and weapon systems onboard. Defense programs represented a breakthrough for Athens, which repeatedly cut its defense budget after the 2008 financial crisis. In 2018, the country's military budget was just € 3.75 billion, down compared to 7.24 billion euros in 2008.

However, even before the latest deals, Greece spent 2.28% of its GDP on defense, well above the EU average of 1.2%. Between 2019 and 2020, Athens quintupled its military spending. However, the country's GDP has shrunk by a quarter over the past decade. Both Mitsotakis and Macron insisted the deal was "not aimed" against anyone else. The French President declared that “this is not an alternative to the alliance of the United States. It is not a question of a replacement, but of taking responsibility for the European pillar within NATO and drawing conclusions for our protection. On the Greek side, however, Mitsotakis said that Athens will soon renew a defense cooperation agreement with Washington on a five-year basis rather than the annual extension as happened in the past[3].

Evaluation and forecast analysis

The agreement between France and Greece finds its understanding in the light of the respective and recent disappointments of the two European countries. On the one hand, Greece, which has long criticized NATO's neutral attitude towards the Greek disputes towards Turkey, on the other, Paris, which believes that Washington is using NATO to supply Eastern European countries with US armaments, in particular aircraft from combat. According to Athanasios Platias, professor of strategy at the University of Piraeus, Article 5 does not cover threats among alliance members. Pierre Morcos, Visiting Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), said the agreement is more than just the beginning of a new European strategic autonomy. "It is a continuation of the many efforts made by France in recent years to strengthen Europe's military credibility," he said, citing as examples the creation of the European Defense Fund, the launch of the European Intervention Initiative, the Franco-German for the design of a combat tank and future combat aircraft and the creation of the Takuba Task Force in the Sahel. He stressed that the need for greater European autonomy was undoubtedly reinforced by the AUKUS crisis, which confirmed the underlying trend of a US reorientation towards China and the Indo-Pacific[4].

According to Faithon Karaiosifidis, defense expert and editor of the Greek magazine Flight, France, through the agreement with Greece, "can present the agreement as a basis for the integration of European defense and the start of a European army". He is also aware that, in the face of other more advantageous offers, the military assistance clause could have made a difference, in light of the tensions with Turkey. The mutual defense clause leaves open the question of whether or how France will undertake to support Greece should tensions with Turkey flare up again. The text contains a provision committing each country to aid the other in the event of an attack on its territory. But it is unclear what this might mean concerning Greece's disputes with Turkey over disputed maritime zones[5]. The Strategic Defense and Security Partnership unites two NATO members for the first time to support each other from an attack originating within the alliance. Greece and France will be able to use each other's military ports and airports for a renewable period of five years. The partnership invites them to engage in an annual strategic

[3] Smith H., *Greece to buy French warships in multibillion-euro defence deal*, The Guardian 28/09/2021 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/28/greece-to-buy-french-warships-in-multi-billion-euro-defence-deal

[4] Argyros K., Pollet M. and Michalopoulos S., *France and Greece take first step towards EU force in NATO*, Euractiv 29/09/2021 https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/france-and-greece-take-first-step-for-eu/

[5] Stamouli N., *France inks Greek defense deal after losing sub contract*, Politico.eu 27/09/2021 https://www.politico.eu/article/france-greece-make-defense-deal-following-loss-sub-contract-us-australia-ships/

dialogue and to align their foreign and defense policies, focusing on energy, terrorism, migration, armaments, weapons of mass destruction, and maritime security in the Middle East, the Balkans, Africa, and the Mediterranean. Against this background, the respective defense industries could also cooperate in joint projects[6]. The pact is also Greece's second formal security guarantee against Turkey after a mutual defense pact with the United Arab Emirates was signed last November. With the modernization of the F-16s, the purchase of Rafale, and frigates, Greece is covering some of the lost ground, as in all these years, Turkey has significantly strengthened its defense industry, achieving in no time beyond the 70% of its systems in the house. Turkish drones Bayraktar TB2 have turned the tide of wars in Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh and could pose a formidable threat in the Aegean.

Although Mitsotakis said he had no intention of waging an arms race with Turkey and reiterated at the 76th UN General Assembly that he "has a vision for the Eastern Mediterranean, joining forces to cooperate against the climate crisis and illegal migrations, rather than clashing over hydrocarbons ", Turkish reactions to the strategic partnership were not long in coming. The pact is also Greece's second formal security guarantee against Turkey after a mutual defense pact with the United Arab Emirates was signed last November. With the modernization of the F-16s, the purchase of Rafale, and frigates, Greece is covering some of the lost ground, as in all these years, Turkey has significantly strengthened its defense industry, achieving in no time beyond the 70% of its systems in the house. Turkish drones Bayraktar TB2 have turned the tide of wars in Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh and could pose a formidable threat in the Aegean[7]. Ankara has defined the maritime claims of Greece as contrary to international law and has contested the armament policy of Greece considering it dangerous for regional peace and stability and for the European Union itself of which Greece is a member[8].

The reaction to the agreement between France and Greece came from the spokesman for the Turkish Foreign Ministry Tanju Bilgic who described the pact between France and Greece as a bilateral military alliance that damages NATO and is aimed against Turkey, a NATO country. A significant of the Turkish reactions was the media coverage given to opposition to the agreement with France by the political group SYRIZA and its leader, former Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras. The main Greek opposition party criticized the recent agreement with France, declaring it unacceptable at present.

Tsipras asked the government for a commitment not to send Greek soldiers to any crisis area far from Greek or French territory. Tsipras also stressed that the purchase of the Rafale warplanes (18 planes for a cost of about 2.5 billion euros) and three frigates from France, in addition to being expensive, would have constituted an additional burden on the shoulders of Greek taxpayers.

Tsipras also challenged the recent agreement with Israel to establish and operate a Tel Aviv pilot training center in the southern Greek province of Kalatama, costing 1.8 billion euros, and criticized the deployment of air defense systems. of the Greek Patriots together with the dispatch of a contingent of a hundred soldiers to Saudi Arabia, believing that this foreign policy could risk involving Greece in a dangerous conflict in the Middle East[9].

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6 Psaropoulos J., *Greece ratifies landmark intra-NATO defence pact with France*, Al Jazeera 7/10/2021 https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/7/greece-ratifies-intra-nato-defence-pact-with-france

7 Psaropoulos J., *Greece, France tout European defence autonomy with warships deal*, Al Jazeera 28/09/2021 https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/28/greece-france-tout-european-defence-autonomy-with-warships-deal

8 *Greek parliament approves defence pact with France*, Reuters 7/09/2021 https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/greece-france-defence-pact-protects-against-third-party-aggression-greek-pm-2021-10-07/

9 Gencturk A., Defense deal with France unacceptable in current state: Greek opposition party, Anadolu Agency 5/10/2021 https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/defense-deal-with-france-unacceptable-in-current-state-greek-opposition-party/2383715

After the Iraqi Elections

On the 10th of October, the Iraqi people voted for a new Parliament, however, the final results appear to be partially surprising and partially divisive.

The political and security situation in Iraq has always been volatile since 2003 due both to internal conflicts between different groups (Sunnis vs Shiites, Kurds vs the central government, ISIS vs Iraqi government, and so on) and external involvement in internal politics, mainly the role of Iran that has supported, and it continues to do so, both Shia political parties and armed militias. The 10 October elections have been taken place in this unstable situation and do not appear to have resolved it. Quite the contrary, the elections seem to have deepened pre-existing problems and fault lines.

Apart from political and security issues, which we have already considered in previous *Strategic Observatory* papers, Iraq is facing acute social problems linked to energy shortage, unemployment, lack of service, and corruption. Such issues have led in the past years to violent protests and dissatisfaction with the Iraqi ruling class. In response to mass protests in 2019 that toppled a government and showed widespread anger against political leaders, the government brought forward this election for several months. Moreover, strong security measures have been adopted by the Iraqi government also to reduce corruption[1]. However, the turnout was low, around 40% of the Iraqi population voted[2], making these the least-participated elections since 2004, showing a widespread disillusionment in the Iraqi society toward the national politics.

The biggest winner is Shia Muslim religious leader Muqtada al-Sadr's party, Sadrist Bloc (73 seats)[3], increasing the number of seats he holds. He is a pivotal political figure in Iraq because he was the leader of one of the strongest and most violent armed groups during the Iraqi insurgency against the American and Western troops, and from 2007 he began to play a crucial role in the national politics and the government. He is trying to support a kind of national view of Iraqi interest and therefore is one of the most vocal critics of the US presence in the country, but he is also a critic of Iran's involvement in Iraq even though he has good relationships and links with Teheran. Al-Sadr has won the election, but he will not be able to govern alone since, to form a new government, 165 seats are needed. It follows that a long period of difficult political negotiations between several political parties has just begun.

Taqaddum (Progress, 37 seats) is the second party led by COR Speaker Mohammed Halbusi and he prevailed in the competition among Sunni Arab coalitions. State of Law (35 seats), which also includes the Shia Islamist Dawa (Call) Party and smaller Shia Arab and Turkoman parties, is the party of former prime minister Nouri al Maliki and it has improved on its 2018 outcome. Therefore, Maliki may play an important role in the new government despite its strong links to Teheran.

Consequently, Muqtada al-Sadr remains one of Iraq's most influential political figures, however, it remains unclear if he can form a stable government. Sadr's strategy to maintain followership is his claim to be a reformer supporting the protesters without siding with them and avoiding the premiership although he had members of his party in previous cabinets holding important ministries. To form the government, he has to either agree with Fatah or, more likely, form an alliance with Maliki[4] maintaining a strong presence of Iranian interests in Iraqi politics.

1 https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/10/iraqi-elections-begin-strict-measurements-prevent-fraud.
2 https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/11/muqtada-al-sadr-set-to-win-iraq-election.
3 https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11769.
4 https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/23/muqtada-al-sadr-iraqs-kingmaker-in-uncertain-times.

However, the most worrying sign of the elections is the bad result of the parties linked to Iran and the PMU. Fatah Coalition, a coalition of Shia, Iran-friendly opponents of the U.S. military presence in Iraq, won two-thirds fewer seats than in 2018 (16 seats) while Haquq (Rights) Movement linked to Kata'ib Hezbollah, which is widely considered a close ally of Iran and its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF), won just one seat. Consequently, these groups have denounced the election results as "manipulation". Hadi al-Amiri, one of the most powerful pro-Iranian figures in Iraq, said the results were "fabricated", and the Hezbollah Brigades rejected the election[5]. Abu Ali al-Askari, a security and military official in the Hezbollah Brigades, issued a statement challenging the elections and calling on "the armed resistance factions to prepare for a critical stage"[6]. It is fair to say that the negative electoral result of Fatah is more related to the Iraqi electoral law than to a real failure to attract votes and to be supported by the Iraqi population. It is too early to say whether these strong statements may be transformed into armed and violent actions against the government, however, they are not a positive sign nor an indication of national unity.

One of the first consequences of this tension has been the protest on the 19th of October when hundreds of supporters of the pro-Iranian paramilitary force protested against fraud at recent parliamentary elections. Fatah also denounced United Nations officials responsible for monitoring the elections and helping to prevent voter fraud. Moreover, Iraq's independent election commission received more than 1,300 appeals following the elections. Although it threw out the majority of the complaints, on the 27th of October, the election commission began to manually recount the votes of the 234 contested electoral stations across the governorates of Salah al-Din, Basra, and Baghdad. However, the election commission is not expected to do major changes[7].

In an already divided country like Iraq, these kinds of tensions are not a good sign in the direction of the stabilization. Quite the contrary, these protests, and the election results may deepen the fault lines in the Iraqi society between groups linked to Iran and those more independent or with a different political agenda.

Main Events in the Maghreb and Mashreq Area

Morocco

At the beginning of September, Morocco received drones from Turkish and the drone issue is particularly interesting because a recent report has highlighted the history of Moroccan use of drones and the most recent acquisition. The country first acquired drones in the late 1980s when it acquired several BAE Systems R4E SkyEyes from the United States. It would take until 2013 when new reports of Moroccan drone acquisitions surfaced, culminating in the acquisition of three IAI Herons from Israel a year later, a state that Morocco recognized only in 2020, but with which it has long informally cooperated on security matters. Then, in June 2020, Morocco acquired four MQ-9B SeaGuardians along with manned-unmanned teaming kits (MUTKs) that would enable Morocco's newly acquired AH-64E Apache attack helicopters to collaborate with surveillance drones by receiving the video feed of nearby drones. Morocco also acquired Chinese-made Wing Loong[8]. Moreover, the Moroccan government has announced the ratification of the country's draft finance law for 2022, marking an increase in defense and military spending of almost 5% over last year in bolstering its military capabilities by acquiring state-of-the-art equipment, including fighter jets, tanks, training aircraft, arms, and ammunition. The proposed budget also highlights the African nation's future procurement plans, including submarines, radar systems, short and medium-range missile

5 https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/12/iraqi-pro-iranian-groups-reject-elections-a-scam.
6 https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/10/sadr-and-independents-biggest-winners-under-iraqs-new-election-law.
7 https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/27/independent-body-to-give-verdict-on-iraq-election.
8 https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2021/10/operating-from-shadows-moroccos-uav.html.

systems, and naval vessels. With the proposed increase in military spending, the country is expected to rise again as a top arms importer on the continent.

Tunisia

On the 11th of October, Prime Minister Najla Bouden named a new government, and she said the government's top priorities would be to tackle corruption. Her new appointments include Samir Saiid, a banker, as economy and planning minister, and Taoufik Charfeddine as interior minister. Some of Bouden's appointments have links to President Saied, including Charfeddine. However, the moderate Islamist Ennahda party, which ruled Tunisia before the President suspended the Parliament in July, issued a statement rejecting the new government labeled it as unconstitutional.

After the change in the political situation related to the events in July, Tunisia is also trying to find new diplomatic relationships. In light of this, Tunisia's Central Bank appears to be in advanced talks with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to obtain financial aid for the cash-strapped country. However, talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were also ongoing[9]. The economic situation is very grave, and the rating agency Moody's has recently downgraded Tunisia's sovereign rating from B3 to Caa1 while maintaining the negative outlook.

Since the role played by President Kais Saied in the current situation, Tunisian Western allies, mainly US lawmakers, have expressed frustration over the political crisis. Tunisia is one of the most important North African states for the U.S. and it was named by former President Obama as a Major non-NATO ally (MNNA), but members of Congress have criticized and questioned whether U.S. assistance to the country should be withheld. Saied's office released a statement saying the president had expressed his dissatisfaction to the U.S. ambassador over the congressional hearing. Since the Arab Spring, the U.S. has sent $1.4bn in assistance to Tunisia and unlike other countries, economic aid has been roughly balanced between security assistance and supporting the economy and democratic institutions[10].

Consistent with this situation, Tunisia's media regulator closed a television station, Nessma TV, owned by the Heart of Tunisia party leader Nabil Karoui, and a religious radio station, Quran Kareem. The opposition said that the move is part of the President's strategy to attack his opponents because both the broadcasters were critical of the president. However, it is fair to say that one of the most important political strategies of President Saied is to combat corruption and illegality and both the closed broadcasters were operating without a license. Moreover, already in 2019, the channel was closed for the same reason[11].

Egypt

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi inaugurated on the 28th of September the Bahr el-Baqar wastewater treatment plant in Port Said governorate, in the northwest of the Sinai Peninsula. The plant was registered in the Guinness Book of Records as the world's largest agricultural wastewater treatment plant. The plant will treat the water collected from the Bahr el-Baqar drain, to be distributed to northern Sinai in a bid to resolve issues related to the agricultural sector in northern Sinai that has been badly affected by the security operations since 2013[12]. The Egyptian security situation is improving and, as a consequence, President al-Sisi has announced the lifting of a nationwide state of emergency that had been in place since the April 2017 bombings of two Coptic churches by an affiliate of the ISIL (ISIS) armed group.

9 https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/tunisia-advanced-talks-saudi-arabia-uae-financial-aid.
10 https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/tunisia-us-lawmakers-slam-kais-saied-cement-rule.
11 https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/tunisia-closes-television-radio-critical-president.
12 https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/10/egypt-inaugurates-water-plants-sinai-amid-development-plans.

Egypt is trying to extend its influence in the region in different sectors and different ways. In recent months it has collaborated with countries in the region to resolve local conflicts. In light of this, Egypt is trying to defuse the fault line between Sunnis and Shias, therefore, the Grand Mufti of Egypt's Al-Azhar has announced that he will make a historic visit to the holy city of Najaf in Iraq in November, where he is expected to meet with Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, visit Shia shrines in the holy cities of Karbala and Najaf. It is also likely that he will visit Baghdad, Mosul, and Erbil as part of an Iraq trip[13].

Israel

Midhat Saleh, a former Syrian Druze lawmaker, was fatally shot on the 16th of October allegedly by Israeli sniper fire. This could mark a new phase in the Israel war against Iranian entrenchment in neighboring Syria. Midhat Saleh was killed in Ein el-Tinneh, a village along the Israeli frontier in the occupied Golan Heights and the Israeli military declined to comment, but if the rumors[14] are right the death of Saleh would mark the first time that Israeli snipers are known to have killed someone identified as an Iranian-linked target across the boundary. It is also fair to remember that Israel said it will not tolerate a permanent Iranian military presence in Syria and has acknowledged carrying out scores of air attacks on alleged Iranian arms shipments and military targets in Syria in recent years.

Moreover, Israel continues its improvement in the diplomatic and economic sector toward the region. On 20 October, Israel and the United Arab Emirates agreed to cooperate on space missions. The deal, finalized at the 2020 Dubai Expo, includes collaboration on the Israeli Beresheet 2 space project bound for the moon in 2024. Israeli and Emirati students will work together to design a new satellite tracking the moon[15]. The collaboration with UAE is also confirmed by a recent air force exercise, the "Blue Flag" exercise that is held every two years since 2013 in the Negev desert. While UAE aircraft are not flying in the drills, Ibrahim Nasser Mohammed Al Alawi, commander of the United Arab Emirates air force, landed in Israel to attend the operations in a very significant visit.

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett met on the 22nd of October, in Sochi Russian President Vladimir Putin[16]. The meeting, scheduled to take some two hours, lasted almost five and it is very likely that the most important topics discussed have been the Israeli concerns over Iranian military entrenchment in Syria and the Iranian nuclear talks. It is also likely that Putin expressed his concerns over alleged Israeli attacks in Syria not being coordinated ahead of time with Russia. This is an important issue that was highlighted in 2018 when Russia confirmed that Syrian air defense shot down accidentally one of its military planes with 15 personnel on board but laid the blame with Israel because Tel Aviv had given less than a minute's warning ahead of the strikes, which was not enough time to get the military surveillance plane out of the way.

Syria

The Idlib region, the last stronghold of Turkish-backed and Islamist opposition, remains one of the most unstable and violent in Syria. On 11 September, three Turkish soldiers were killed in a bomb attack in Idlib, and Turkey responded by hitting US-backed Kurdish groups in northeast Syria. Syrian military forces already have intensified attacks on Idlib. As a consequence, Turkey sent more troops to northwestern Syria in a move that underscores Ankara's growing concerns about a government offensive on the region. Ankara is concerned that a Russian-backed government offensive on the heavily populated region could trigger a new surge of refugees at its border at a time when public opinion in Turkey has turned wary of hosting more refugees. In fact, since early September, Russia

[13] https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/grand-mufti-egypts-al-azhar-meet-sistani-iraq.
[14] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/17/shooting-in-syria-could-mark-new-phase-in-israeli-campaign.
[15] https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/10/israel-emirates-collaborate-space.
[16] https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/10/bennett-meets-putin-sochi-discuss-iran-syria.

has been stepping up its military attacks and airstrikes in Idlib and its surroundings and this escalation may be a prelude to a Syrian government offensive to take Idlib[17].

In mid-October, two roadside bombs have exploded near a bus carrying troops in the Syrian capital Damascus, killing at least 13 military personnel and wounding three others. Blasts in Damascus have been rare since forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad took control of rebel enclaves around the city.

At the end of October, the Syrian government completed the reconciliation deals in the Daraa countryside. Fighting intensified in Deraa and its countryside this past summer, and the government imposed a harsh siege over the area. Russia brokered a cease-fire in late August.

On the 20th of October, a remote US military outpost, which housed US Special Operations forces, and a local rebel militia known as Maghawir al-Thawra (MAT), in the southern Syrian desert was hit by a suspected drone attack. No U.S. casualties have been reported, according to U.S. Central Command. Washington maintains more than three thousand troops in Syria and Iraq combined in the wake of the multinational war against the Islamic State. Instead, the base occupies a vital border crossing thought by U.S. policymakers to be coveted by Iran-backed forces and the Assad regime.

Lebanon

The security situation in Lebanon is more and more volatile. On the 5th of October, the Lebanese army seized thousands of kilograms of ammonium nitrate in a northeastern town near the Syrian border, weeks after 20 tons of the explosive substance were found in the same district. The chemical compound is predominantly used in agriculture, but it is sometimes an ingredient in the manufacture of explosives.

On the 14th of October, at least six people have been killed and dozens of others wounded when gunfire erupted as Hezbollah supporters gathered to protest against the judge investigating the Beirut port explosion. The army deployed heavily to the area and sent troops to search for the gunmen and urged civilians to leave the area around the incident. Armed clashes in the capital lasted for several hours, with exchanges of fire involving snipers and rocket-propelled grenades[18]. In this context, and with an economic crisis that looms large, President Michel Aoun has sent a draft law to hold parliamentary elections ahead of time in March 2022 instead of May back to parliament for reconsideration. Some days before Parliament asked for earlier elections to avoid campaigning during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. Although the international community has demanded that the Lebanese authorities hold elections on time[19], on the 28th of October the Lebanese parliament voted to hold legislative elections on the 27th of March, confirming the earlier vote challenged by President Michel Aoun.

Lebanon has also diplomatic problems with several Arab states in the region. Saudi Arabia expelled Lebanon’s ambassador and said it was ending all imports. The row stems from recorded comments made in August by Lebanon’s information minister, George Kordahi when he criticized the war in Yemen as a dead-end and defined the war a Saudi “aggression.” Lebanon’s Prime Minister Najib Mikati distanced his government from the comments, but other Arab countries such as the UAE and Kuwait summoned their Lebanese ambassadors opening a grave diplomatic crisis.

17 https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/09/russia-intensifies-idlib-attacks-ahead-summit-turkey-iran-syria.
18 https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/14/one-killed-beirut-hezbollah-protest.
19 https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/22/lebanons-president-aoun-rejects-draft-electoral-law.

Arabian Peninsula

On 06 October, four workers were wounded after an explosives-laden drone targeting the kingdom’s Abha airport was intercepted. On the 8th of October, at least 10 people have been reported injured in attacks on an airport in Saudi Arabia’s city of Jazan, near the border with Yemen. The first projectile was fired from a drone, shattering the airport’s facade windows, and causing injuries. A second explosives-laden drone was intercepted the day after.

Drones are increasingly used in the Arabian Peninsula, but they are also increasingly used by the countries of the region to extend their influence in nearby conflicts. One of the most notable examples is the Ethiopian government's use of UAE unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs). After these claims, now evidence has emerged of several Chinese-made Wing Loong operating out of Assab air base in Eritrea to undertake combat missions over Tigray[20].

On 26 October, the U.S. and Bahrain navies conducted a joint exercise at sea, “New Horizon”, launching a series of drills integrating unmanned systems into regional maritime operations. It marked the first time the U.S. Navy was integrating unmanned surface vessels with manned ships at sea in the Middle East and the first time with a regional partner testing in Gulf water.

Jordan’s King Abdullah II visited Qatar on the 12th of October to discuss “deep-rooted bilateral relations” as well as regional and international developments. The two monarchies likewise signed a memorandum of understanding regarding investment. This is a further step in the normalization of the diplomatic relationship between the two countries after that Jordan sided with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain in their dispute with Qatar, and severed relations, in 2017.

[20] https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2021/10/uae-combat-drones-break-cover-in.html.

The Sudanese crisis: deconstructing a simplified reading and some predictions

Within a month, two coup attempts occurred in Sudan. Security forces foiled the first one, around which many doubts remain, at the end of September. The second attempt, on October 25, succeeded by de facto stalling the democratic transition process that began with the fall of Omar al-Bashir in spring 2019. The political transition has gone through alternating phases, following the power-sharing agreement between the Sudanese Army Forces (SAF) and the civil society components represented by the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) alliance. Under Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, the civilian government has tried to impose institutional and economic reforms, regularly blocked by the army.

For many months, it was clear that, within the SCS, there were different and competing positions in the political direction. Since 2019, the executive, largely consisting of civilian representatives, has sought to promote deep structural reforms. Hamdok's government had two main goals: to reorganize the country's financial and economic system; and work on the constitution of the institutional bodies that were to become the backbone of the future Sudanese rule of law. Prime Minister's overall goal was to conduct free general elections by 2024 in a stable and peaceful environment. For this purpose, the cabinet has had to face a series of challenges, such as the implementation of the appeasement agenda with the rebel groups still active in the peripheral regions of the country and the launch of a reform plan of the security apparatus. Beyond the challenges, the civilian members of the executive enjoyed limited autonomy. The military had retained more power within the SCS than civilians had. Further, they dictated the guidelines and established the boundaries within which Hamdok and his ministers' actions were to move. In addition, the military revised the terms of the power-sharing agreement reached in August 2019 several times in recent years. The most important amendment concerned the deadline for the definitive transfer of power from the military to civilians. The first agreement called for the transition phase to be completed within three years of the SCS taking office. However, in the fall of 2020, the SAF leader unilaterally opted to extend the transition phase until 2024.

Since July 2019, relations between the military and Sudanese civil society have progressively deteriorated. Over the past few months, the relationship between SAF and FFC had become asymmetrical, and the choices of the civilian components had to go through the military's scrutiny. Besides holding the top positions within the SCS, the military retained control of two key ministries, the Interior, and Defence. The Hamdok executive has repeatedly clashed with the military's power networks, which are prevalent in various economic and social sectors of the country. The need to undertake structural changes inevitably threatened the privileges and interests of the SAFs, increasing friction between the civilians and military. At the core of the tensions were two closely interconnected issues: the reform of the defense and security sector, and the gradual transfer of companies and industrial conglomerates belonging to the army to the State. According to the Prime Minister, a radical reform of the army and the full institutionalization of SAF and paramilitary structures would be necessary. Hamdok considered the fragmented nature of the Sudanese security apparatus both a structural weakness and a potential source of domestic instability. The existence of several paramilitary armed groups that operate inside the country simultaneously, autonomously from the SAF structure, would therefore constitute a time-bomb. Among the paramilitary groups, the most prominent one in terms of influence and power is the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, also known as Hemeti.

Linked to the heterogeneous nature of the country's security forces is the economic power that the military enjoys in the country. During Bashir's era, the military took control of key economic sectors, managing a network of companies with a turnover of billions of U.S. dollars. Through a variety of investment and pension funds, the military has acquired control of over 250 companies in strategic sectors of the country such as gold, meat, flour, or sesame exports. Currently, the military has a predominant presence in the industrial structure of Sudan. In addition, all economic and financial assets of the military benefit from tax relief. In the two and a half years of its rule, the Hamdok executive has tried unsuccessfully to reduce these fiscal privileges and transfer ownership of many of the military's companies under public management. Military-owned assets show one of the main structural constraints of the Sudanese economy. In Sudan, an oligarchy consisting of military and civilians with patronage and personal ties to the Bashir regime has managed the public good for decades. A pattern that has contributed to worsening the country's economic status. To date, only 18% of public resources belong to the state. In recent months, despite the many pressures brought to bear by Hamdok and some international partners, including the United States, the military has repeatedly reiterated that they do not wish to relinquish ownership of these assets.

Over the last year, civil-military elites' strain matched by signs of growing sympathies towards the transitional government by the Sudanese population. The discontent was due to the poor conditions of the country's real economy. The Hamdok cabinet secured a series of international aid and investment packages. These, however, are conditioned by a structural adjustment plan. The implementation of the reform agenda introduced by the Prime Minister has had negative spillover effects on many Sudanese families, fueling malaise and anger, especially among the weaker sectors of society. A further factor that contributed to public tension towards the SCS was the lack of concrete steps forward on institutional body development. According to the 2019 agreement, the transitional government was expected to establish a legislative body within the first three months. However, on the eve of the October coup, no results had yet been achieved. After the 2019 revolution, Sudan's domestic rivalries cannot be limited only to Hamdok, al-Burhan, and Hemeti. Many people are nostalgic about Omar al-Bashir and the historic National Congress Party (NCP). Despite being banned, the NCP has survived clandestinely, becoming the reference point for those who felt excluded from the post-2019 political transition process. Among them are the Islamist components of Sudanese politics. For almost three decades, the Islamists have played a predominant role in Sudan's socio-political events with the military and Bashir's circle. Many Sudanese do not feel represented by the moderate Islamist party Umma and still follow the teachings of the historic ideologue of the Nationalist Islamist Front (NIF), Hassan al-Turabi. These groups have many dogmatic and structural affinities with the most prominent regional Islamist organization: the Muslim Brotherhood. Several times over the past two years, the Sudanese Prime Minister accused circles loyal to Bashir and Islamist groups to undermine the transition by promoting a distorted narrative of the revolution's achievements.

Analysis, assessments, and predictions

In the above scenario, the military intervention of October 25 and the consequent riots seem to mark a new turning point in the political events of Sudan. Civil society has chosen the way of civil disobedience. A few days after the events, confusion prevails throughout the country. The statements issued by al-Burhan were vague and contradictory. Regardless of future developments, the military coup in Sudan has opened a crisis in the heart of a macro-area particularly strategic for Italian and European interests. Sudan's geostrategic centrality derives from the country's close ties to three different continental contexts characterized by crisis and instability: the Sahel, the Maghreb, and the Horn of Africa. Foreseeing the course of future events in the country is very difficult. However, it is possible to sketch out some likely scenarios by analyzing the trends that have been present for several months. The general narrative of events in recent weeks has underestimated these trends. The two issues of relevance are related to the center-periphery dynamic and the role of external players. In the two years since Bashir's fall, the tendency, especially among the media, has been to portray the country's complex socio-political balances as a confrontation between two monolithic blocs.

On the one side, the military, and on the other side, the civilians. As a result, the October coup is read-only through the analytical lens of the clash between these two actors. The Sudanese socio-political picture is much more nuanced. Within the two so-called blocs, many different components promote distinctly and, in many cases, conflicting interests. In the four weeks between the foiled coup d'état in September and the military intervention in October, Sudan was crossed by a plethora of protests organized by civil society groups and movements. Protesters were primarily critical of the civilian components present within the SCS. Notably, the protesters accused the FFC coalition of not fairly representing all the different 'souls' of civil society. The FFC is a broad political coalition formed in January 2019 through an agreement between the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) and 21 other civic and political opposition groups to foster change in Sudan. After the fall of Bashir, the FFC represented Sudanese civil society in the uneasy transition process. However, the cohesiveness within the coalition has progressively faded. For several months, the SPA and some parties such as the moderate Islamist Umma movement, the Federal Gathering (FG), and the Sudanese Congress Party (SCP) had monopolized the agenda of the FFC. The country's poor economic environment increased the perception of marginality of other groups. As a result, the FFC has not been considered representative of the whole of Sudanese society for months now. Since last spring, the grassroots began blaming the FFC and Prime Minister Hamdok for failing to meet their demands and improve the living conditions of the Sudanese people. Demands for more political space and tensions brooded over the past months exploded between September and October. Many movements decided to leave the FFC. Among the movements that had claimed greater consideration within the FFC are also several former rebel groups, such as the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A).

If the civilian bloc is fragmented, the Sudanese military cannot be considered a single, cohesive body either. Several signals that emerged in the days following the al-Burhan-led coup made it clear that not everyone within the Sudanese security apparatus agreed. Different positions reflect the presence of a variety of groups and units that advance competing interests. Bashir deliberately fragmented the country's security apparatus to prevent the military from gaining too much power. The former Sudanese leader had adopted the strategy of divide and rule. He encouraged the development of paramilitary groups and fueled rivalries within the country's military structure. The most important of the paramilitary groups is undoubtedly the one led by Hemeti, the RSF. The relationship between al-Burhan and Hemeti is based on a temporary alliance of convenience. At the heart of the rivalry are old grudges and future ambitions. The military leadership has never accepted Hemeti because he is a creation of Bashir and is alien to the traditional military hierarchy. Although the institutional structure places al-Burhan above Hemeti, their actual power shows different strength ratios. Despite Hemeti's estrangement from SAF structures, the RSF leader has exploited the post-Bashir power vacuum to take control of significant financial assets owned by military companies. The tension between SAF and RSF reflects the difficult relationship between their respective leaders. It seems to be more and more that of a forced and temporary coexistence. Although Hemeti and al-Burhan have concealed their dualism until now, the recent coup d'état could change the balance and risk leading to an open rupture.

The different positions within the two blocs trace the center-periphery cleavage that has historically characterized Sudan's political events since its independence. The parties and professional associations that have monopolized the FFC are all representatives of the urban Sudanese society. Similarly, the rivalry between al-Burhan and Hemeti has a geographical dimension. It reflects the traditional struggle between the center, constituted by the 'river' elites (al-

Burhan), and the peripheries (Hemeti). Many senior SAF officers, including al-Burhan, view Hemeti and his RSF troops with distrust because they are from Darfur.

A second underestimated issue concerns the relations of the different Sudanese domestic actors with external players. Since the 2019 revolution, the so-called Arab troika - Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Saudi Arabia - has influenced the Sudanese transition process. Over the past few months, the troika's strategic choices, initially based on a shared vision of Sudan's future, have progressively diverged. The country's domestic political fault lines are a source of disagreement among the troika. Egypt immediately opted for the SAF leader as its preferred interlocutor. The mutual trust relationship between President al-Sisi and al-Burhan is based on bilateral military agreements. In the last year, it has been further reinforced by the common position taken towards Ethiopia on the GERD dam issue. Since Spring, there has been a significant convergence of security interests between Sudan and Egypt. On the contrary, Egyptian authorities regard Hemeti with great suspicion. Cairo considers the RSF chief unreliable because of Hemeti's strong ties with the previous Bashir regime. Hemeti, in these years, has operated with the full support of Abu Dhabi. The Emirates' brokerage allowed the leader of the RSF to achieve some political successes, which were crucial in ensuring him greater legitimacy and visibility inside and outside the country. Among these achievements, were the beginning of peace negotiations in Juba with rebel groups and the removal of Sudan from the U.S. list of states sponsoring terrorism. Through the mediation of the Emirates, Hemeti has intensified relations with Israel, becoming the main promoter of the normalization of relations between Khartoum and Tel Aviv. The al-Sisi belief is that Hemeti is operating as a UAE client. Finally, Riyadh, over the past year, has followed a double-track policy. On the one hand, Saudi Arabia has increased financial ties with several companies linked to Hemeti. On the other hand, the Saudi government had increased relations with the civilian government represented by Hamdok. The desire to soften its regional policy following the change in the U.S. administration has driven Riyadh's choices.

Therefore, tensions between military and civilians partly reflect regional dynamics. Egypt has revived its African projection and looks to Sudan as a key partner in its agenda. As a result, Cairo has perceived the presence of the two Gulf monarchies in the Horn of Africa as a threatening presence within what it considers its natural sphere of influence. Although it is not possible to talk about a fracture within the Troika, it is without a doubt that visions are much less aligned than a few months ago. The fallout from this discrepancy could have implications for Sudan's path in the coming months. Although the current internal chaos in the country makes it very complicated to forecast, it is possible to outline some possible developments. The first one concerns the increase of urban violence. The civil disobedience proclaimed by various movements belonging to the Sudanese civil society has led to the blocking of strategic roads and ports in the country. In the coming weeks, SAF may likely decide to increase the use of force to clear the blockades. If so, much will depend on whether the RFS chooses to support such a crackdown or not. In the past, the RSF had carried out violent raids against the people. Today, this hypothesis, although not discardable, seems more remote. Although there is no evidence of any real rift between SAFs and RSFs, the different media exposure of the two leaders in the days following the coup is quite evident. Hemeti and the RSF took a much more defiladed position than al-Burhan and the SAF. A wait-and-see choice that could allow Hemeti to retain power if not even gain power in the case that al-Burhan's coup d'état fails within a few days or weeks. At the same time, if al-Burhan's takeover succeeds, a feud between SAF and RSF for control of the country's economic assets could be triggered.

A second likely effect of the coup stems from al-Burhan's need to divert attention away from Khartoum. To mitigate the risk of a new revolution or a possible countercoup by other military groups, the SAF could seek to trigger an internal or border crisis. The greatest risk is that the center-periphery dynamic could exacerbate the various disputes in the peripheral regions that have remained dormant over the last two years. In many areas of the country far from the capital Khartoum, rebel groups that did not sign the Juba agreement are still active and have begun to mobilize. In addition to the internal crises, however, the Sudanese military could raise the level of tension with Ethiopia over the al-Fashaga territorial dispute. Al-Burhan is the main exponent of the hard-line towards Addis Ababa. Consequently, the need for a crisis combined with the strengthening of the axis with Egypt could push the Sudanese army to increase pressure on Ethiopian troops stationed in western Tigray where Eritrean battalions are also present. As a result, there could be an open confrontation between the armies of three Horn of Africa countries - Sudan, Ethiopia, and Eritrea - with Egypt in the background. This scenario would lead to an unprecedented crisis in the area, generating instability in a macro-area that is strategic for European and Italian interests.

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China's grey zone coercive strategy towards Taiwan

Introduction

In early October 2021, the Chinese Air Force carried out a long series of violations of the Taiwan air identification zone (ADIZ). These actions are part of a coercive strategy that in the long run aims to achieve the reunification of Taiwan that Beijing considers a separatist province. In the short term, however, China's coercive actions are not the prelude to a direct military attack, but part of a hybrid coercive strategy aimed at driving a wedge between Taiwan from the United States, raising the cost of cooperation between Washington and Taipei.

Responding to this type of coercive strategy is particularly problematic for both Taiwan and the United States. For the first, a response implies a process of political mobilization and a military alert that can, in the medium and long term, lead to further domestic polarization. This could further sharpen the distance between those who primarily advocates the need to maintain the democratic character of the state, such as the governing Democratic Progressive Party, and those, such as the opposition Kuomintang (KMT), who prioritize stable and economically advantageous relations with Beijing.

For the United States, exercising extended deterrence against an opponent that uses grey zone tactics is complex. This requires constant diplomatic and military attention. Furthermore, it implies the need to take on escalation risks with China, at a time when Beijing and Washington are going through a particularly tense phase of bilateral relations, characterized by numerous open fronts, such as bilateral trade, the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and cybersecurity.

Relations between Beijing and Taipei

Relations between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China (Taiwan) constitute a historically complex and politically sensitive matter. The current situation is a consequence of the events of the late 1940s. After the defeat in the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949), Chiang Kai Shek and the Kuomintang withdrew to the island of Taiwan, recently liberated from the Japanese occupation. The nationalists established an autonomous, politically authoritarian state, which continued to define itself as the Republic of China and to claim sovereignty over the entire Chinese territory. It did not recognize the legitimacy of the People's Republic of China, led by the Communist Party after 1949. The Republic of China was recognized as the legitimate government of the entire country by the United States, which also guaranteed security and protection from external threats through a military alliance.

Washington changed its position in the 1970s, after Nixon and Kissinger's trip to Beijing in 1972 and then with the diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic in 1979. Since then, most states in the international community have recognized the legitimacy of the government of Beijing, denying diplomatic recognition to Taiwan. In 1979, the US Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act, which called a possible non-peaceful solution a "grave concern" for the United States and a threat to regional peace. As a result, Washington committed to both supplying arms to Taiwan and resisting actions that endanger the security, social or economic system of the people of Taiwan (US Congress, 1979). Today, Beijing and Taipei continue to adopt the "one China policy". Both proclaim themselves the only legitimate government of the entire Chinese territory. This situation is the result of the so-called 1992 consensus, which established that the two sides accepted the principle of indivisibility of China but declared themselves in disagreement as to which of the two was the legitimate government of the country (Chen, 2017).

In 2005, China adopted the "Anti-Succession Law", which reaffirms the "one China principle" and proposes a path of unification based on the "one country / two systems" principle. In this way, on the one hand, Beijing proposes dialogue and the promotion of economic ties. On the other hand, it reaffirms its sovereignty on the island. In addition, the law defines the Taiwan issue as an internal matter, defining the possible role of other states as attempts to interfere in China’s domestic politics and as violations of China’s sovereignty. Furthermore, since 2005 Beijing has often reiterated that in the event of the proclamation of the independence of the island, the use of force would be justified to bring under control what it considers a "rebel province" (Wu, 2005).

After the democratization, the key internal cleavage in Taiwanese politics is constituted by the different positions in terms of relations with Beijing and the country's national identity. The Kuomintang (KMT) represents the continuation of the party led by Chiang Kai-shek in China during the Republican era. The same party monopolized power in Taiwan between 1949 and the 1990s. The KMT is in favor of the "one China" policy and the improvement of relations with Beijing through economic and social relations. During the presidency of Ma Ying-jeou, it also promoted "inter-party" relations between the Communist Party of China which allowed a series of contacts culminating in the meeting between Ma and Xi in 2015. These attempts of rapprochement and especially the proposal for a free trade agreement between the two sides of the strait found a strong opposition by public opinion. In 2014 students and activists promoted the Sunflower Movement, which supported the need to maintain autonomy and democracy on the island and reject any form of annexation by economic means by the PRC (Jones, 2017)

The movement fuelled support for the Democratic Progressive Party, led by Tsai Ing-wen, who was elected President in 2016 and confirmed in 2020. The DPP considers the Taiwanese identity as separate and distinct from China's and rejects hence the concept of "one China". From this point of view, the democratic system, together with the model of capitalist economic development based on technology and exports, define the identity of the country much more than historical, ethnic, and cultural ties with mainland China. Furthermore, the crackdown on democratic movements in Hong Kong between 2019 and 2021 further de-legitimized any hypothesis based on the “one state, two systems” principle, previously advocated by the KMT (Lin, 2019; Cole 2020).

The events of 2021

In 2021, relations between the two sides of the strait were defined as "the worst in the last forty years". In October, Beijing exerted considerable military pressure on Taiwan through sorties in the Taiwan Air Identification Zone (ADIZ). In the period between 1 and 4 October alone, the Taiwanese armed forces recorded 149 airstrikes, carried out by both fighters and bombers of the PLAAF. It is important to specify, however, that Taiwan's ADIZ does not correspond to Taiwan's sovereign airspace, which is a much more limited area that includes 12 nautical miles from the coast. The ADIZ is the airspace in which the authorities of a state affirm the right to require arriving planes to identify their identity. The Chinese sorties were concentrated in the southwestern area of the Taiwanese ADIZ, outside the territorial air zone.

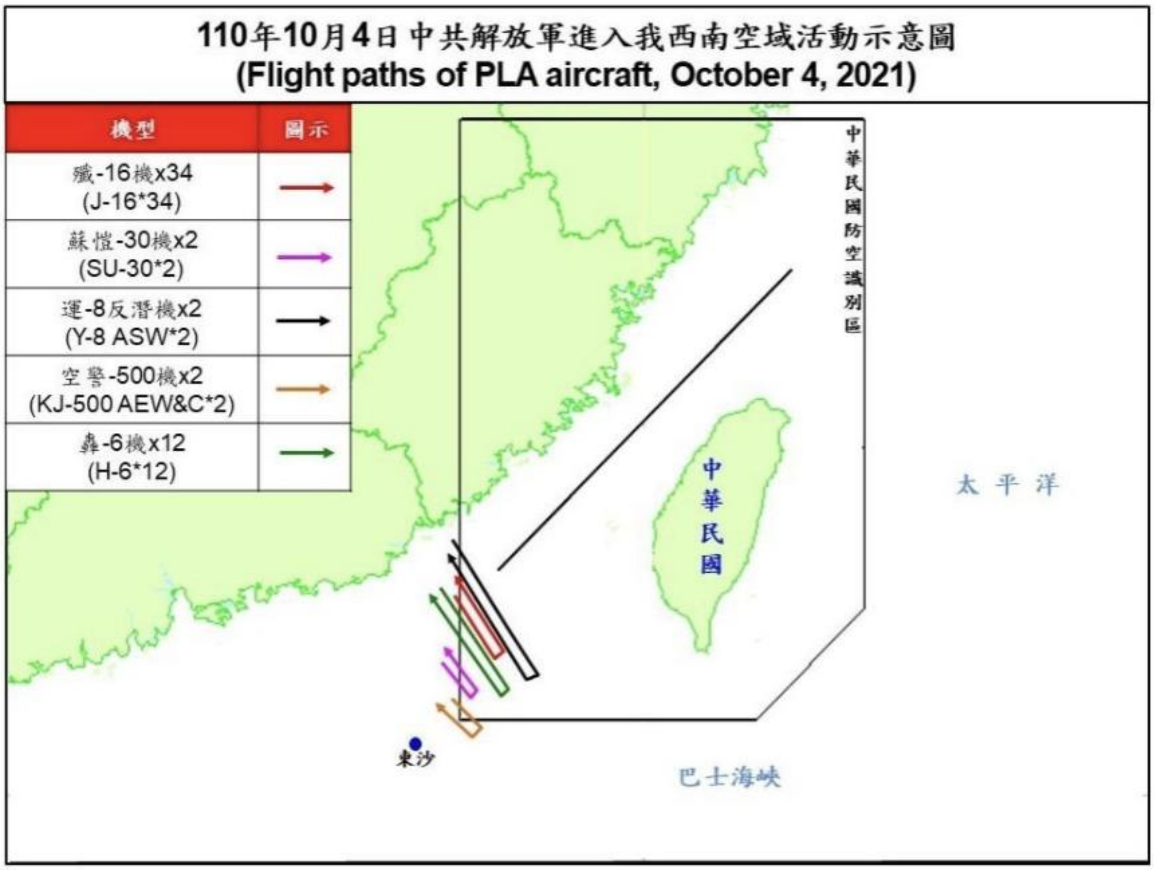

FIG. 1[1]

This caused a series of political and diplomatic relations. President Tsai Ing-wen denounced Chinese activities. She also published an essay on *Foreign Affairs*, entitled "Taiwan and the Fight for Democracy A Force for Good in the Changing International Order" (Tsai, 2021). In the essay, Tsai reaffirmed Taiwan's adherence to democratic values and describes the island as a democratic bastion threatened by Chinese coercive activities. At the same time, the Taiwanese president reassured that she will not break the existing balance, thus avoiding an explicit declaration of independence. However, she also announced that Taiwan is preparing to strengthen its capabilities to resist a Chinese attack. In early October, the Taiwanese Minister of Defence declared that China would have the military capacity to launch an invasion of the island from 2025 and that Taiwan must prepare for armed resistance. The US Department of State has described the activities as destabilizing for the region, asking Beijing to immediately stop all coercive activity (US Department of State, 2021). The Chinese Foreign Ministry immediately responded by defining the American stance as a violation of Chinese sovereignty, criticizing the arms supply to Taipei defined as a hostile act against the PRC. (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

The increase in Chinese pressure on Taiwan was produced by a series of concomitant factors. First, 1 October is Chinese national holiday, which commemorates the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, while October 10 is Taiwan's national holiday, which celebrates the Wuchang Uprising, a key moment of the Xinhai Revolution of 1911-12 which led to the end of the Qing Empire and the beginning of the republican era in China. The presence of the two dates explains the moment chosen by Beijing to raise the pressure on Taiwan but does not say much about the strategic factors

1 Figure taken from Everington, K. (2021) 56 Chinese warplanes intrude on Taiwan's ADIZ. Taiwan News 4 October https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4305785

at play. The Chinese political and military pressure in recent months can be framed in wider use of the grey zone tactics, described in the next paragraph.

Pressure on Taiwan as a "grey zone" tactic

Beijing’s pressure can be described as a hybrid coercive strategy or grey zone tactic. The concept of the grey zone describes an intermediate zone between peace and war, in which a revisionist state attempts to change the status quo without generating conflict. The central features of grey zone tactics are hybridity (use of military and non-military tools), low intensity, continuity over time, and graduality (Brands, 2016; Mazarr, 2015; Cooper, 2015). Grey zone tactics are often associated with changes in the territorial status quo through fait accompli and examples of land grabbing. That is, the aggressor state takes control of a part of the territory of another state and then maintains control over it. The re-iteration of this tactic can therefore lead to variations, even significant ones, in the borders between different states (Altman, 2017; 2020). This is the case of the Chinese strategy in the South China Sea aimed at taking control of islands and atolls that are in dispute with other states such as the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia.

The grey zone tactic does not necessarily imply a change in the territorial status quo. The objective can be political but not territorial. Examples are political coercion through the adoption of a coercive wedge strategy (namely "inserting a wedge" between allies) that undermines the ability of an opposing alliance to exert extended deterrence (Crawford, 2008; Ikumikawa, 2013; Dian and Kireeva, 2021).

The Chinese strategy, as demonstrated in recent months, aims to gradually raise the political and military pressure on Taiwan, trying to test the limits of tolerance of both the Taiwanese government and the United States. As often happens with the use of hybrid strategies and the grey zone, the lack of a clear "red line" makes the exercise of deterrence much more complex. The case of Taiwan is paradigmatic in this sense. Relations between Washington and Taipei, unlike those with Tokyo and Seoul, are not governed by an alliance treaty, which specifically defines the level of American commitment to defend allies. After the Taiwan Act of 1979, bilateral relations remain defined by a situation of strategic ambiguity: there is, therefore, no automatic commitment to protect Taipei, when a promise of military assistance to help the island defend itself. This situation of ambiguity on the one hand prevents Taiwan from making excessively risky moves, motivated by a possible "assurance" provided by the commitment of the United States, such as the declaration of independence *de jure*. On the other hand, the absence of a precise commitment and an alliance between the United States and Taiwan allows China to use the tactics of the grey zone more frequently and more intensely. The continued use of political and military pressure implies risks of possible miscalculations and unwanted escalations (Chen, Wang, and Hui 2021).

Political and Strategic consequences

Beijing's long-term goal is to achieve the reunification of Taiwan. This goal is political, ideological, and strategic. From a historical and ideological point of view, it would determine the end of the division of the Chinese territory generated by the civil war, erasing the last trace of the century of humiliation, which began with the Opium Wars and ended with the establishment of the People's Republic. This would accomplish, as stated on the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China, what Xi Jinping has defined as the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation", an integral part of the "Chinese Dream" (Xi, 2021).

From a strategic point of view, the control of Taiwan would guarantee unrestricted access to the waters of the South China Sea to the Chinese Navy, as well as control of the central part of the First East Asian Chain of Islands. This would make it even more complex for the US military to continue to promote extended deterrence against its allies and partners in the region (Yoshihara, 2012).

Although several analysts speculate that Xi intends to achieve reunification by the end of his mandate (Skylar Mastro, 2021)[2], it is more likely that China's coercive strategy is not necessarily a prelude to a direct military attack. On the contrary, it should be analyzed as a coercive hybrid strategy, which pursues several objectives. First, Beijing seeks to raise the perceived cost of policies in support of Taiwan for the United States and other regional partners, thereby hoping to isolate Taipei. This "wedge strategy" would therefore be a response to the recent stances in favor of Taiwan by the US allies. In 2021 Japan, South Korea, Australia, the European Union as well as the G7 released official declarations calling for stability and peace in the strait and a peaceful resolution of disputes (Keegan and Churchman, 2021). In addition, the Defence of Japan 2021, the white paper published by the Japanese Ministry of Defence, defined Taiwan's security as important for the security of Japan (Japanese Ministry of Defence, 2021).

Secondly, Beijing, signaling its aggressive intentions, aims at raising the perceived cost of any move in the direction of a formal Taiwanese claim for independence. Finally, grey zone tactics intend to test the tolerance of both Taiwan and the United States to see what the acceptable limits on incremental change of the status quo are. The Chinese coercive strategy is never separated from the presence of positive incentives, based on economic and commercial incentives. These incentives also bet on the internal divisions in Taiwanese society.

In conclusion, the exercise of deterrence against a power employing large-scale grey zone tactics is particularly complex, because it requires the maintenance of a delicate balance. In this case, Taiwan and the United States must avoid generating unwanted escalations, leading to conflict. At the same time, they should prevent changes to the status quo that significantly change the political and strategic balance. This is particularly difficult for Washington because such a strategy requires both prolonged attention and a willingness to take risks to protect the partner country, which in this case is not part of a military alliance. For Taiwan, the need to resist constant political and military pressure could lead to an even more intense polarization of domestic politics, between autonomist positions and those who consider national and regional political and economic stability a priority. Under these conditions, both gradual but relevant changes in the status quo and unintended escalations should be considered possible outcomes.

[2] China officially lifted the limit of two terms for ruling leaders in 2018. Therefore, now it is not clear when Xi will step down from its leadership role.

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Russia-Belarus integration: State of the art

In 1995, shortly after Alexander Lukashenko's victory in the presidential election, the governments of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus signed an agreement on the Customs Union and, a month and a half later, the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbor and Cooperation[1]. Since then, there have been hundreds of official documents on deepening integration[2], however, the formal start of the project is commonly considered the signing, on April 2, 1996, of the Treaty on the Establishment of the Community of Belarus and Russia[3]. Minsk and Moscow approved a series of agreements in this direction, the main one being the Treaty on the creation of the state union of Russia and Belarus signed (December 8, 1999)[4] which, contrary to previous documents, already provided for political integration and the related creation of a common bicameral parliament, a constitution, a tribunal, a court of auditors and a single currency. After 20 years, these plans have remained on paper.

The Treaty on the State of the Union was supposed to be a temporary structure on the way to the complete unification of the two countries but the delays in signing the documents, and in the related formalities effectively blocked the process; the same is mainly attributable to the Belarusian side, Lukashenko in has been postponing binding decisions on integration issues for years, aware of the risk of a serious limitation of the already truncated sovereignty in favor of Russia. His is also an attempt to "keep his foot in both shoes" by winning European sympathies but maintaining relations of "Slavic brotherhood" with the Russian Federation. In the last year, however, following the well-known events that took place in the 2020 presidential elections and the induced migration crisis on the border with Poland, the EU no longer appears to be a possible trading partner or any other type of partner. Thus, isolated from the West and subject to sanctions[5], Minsk has less room for maneuver and can only obtain from Moscow any kind of support: financial, low-cost raw materials and other economic "benefits". In this situation, therefore, Lukashenko was, in a sense, forced to formally accept the acceleration of integration in the 28 sectors envisaged.

The joint declaration of September 10, 2021 shows that many issues still require negotiations and that, as indirectly explained by the Russian Prime Minister, Mikhail Mishustin, the program of deepening integration approved on 4 November is largely of a symbolic, declarative nature. The acceptance of the integration plan, in fact, only opens the way to the signing of over four hundred bilateral documents necessary for its implementation. Therefore, the definition of the detailed programs has been postponed in the years 2021-2023, and in some cases even postponed to 2027. The aforementioned symbolic dimension of integration is important for both Moscow and Minsk. Putin, on the eve of the parliamentary elections on September 19 and the 30th anniversary of the collapse of the USSR in December 2021, presented the completion of the first phase of integration as a success. It is also a signal that Russia will continue its efforts to integrate parts of the former USSR area in economic and military dimensions. In fact, in Kremlin politics Belarus is perceived

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[1] The agreement had a ten-year duration. *Договор о дружбе, добрососедстве и сотрудничестве между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Беларусь*. Full agreement (in russian) on: https://soyuz.by/dogovor-o-druzhbe-dobrososedstve-i-sotrudnichestve-mezhdu-rossiyskoy-federaciey-i-respublikoy-belarus

[2] *Соглашения между правительствами государств – участников СНГ* (Agreements between the governments of the states party to the CIS). List of signed agreements (in Russian): https://e-cis.info/cooperation/3748/86880/

[3] *Договор о Союзе Беларуси и России (утратилсилу в соответствии со статьей 70 часть 1 Договора о создании Союзного государства) signed by* Boris Eltsin e Alexander Lukashenka https://soyuz.by/dogovor-o-soyuze-belarusi-i-rossii-utratil-silu-v-sootvetstvii-so-statey-70-chast-1-dogovora-o-sozdanii-soyuznogo-gosudarstva

[4] Договор о создании Союзного государства https://soyuz.by/dogovor-o-sozdanii-soyuznogo-gosudarstva

[5] *Санкции Запада ускорили интеграцию России и Белоруссии, заявили в Минске (Western sanctions accelerated the integration of Russia and Belarus, Minsk said)*, Риа Новости, 04.11.2021 https://ria.ru/20211104/sanktsii-1757756112.html

mainly as a territory of strategic importance for Russian (mainly military) security, President Putin has in fact repeatedly declared his support for Lukashenko's actions in the area he deems necessary to thwart attempts of external interference in the internal affairs of both countries (e.g., the latest presidential elections in Belarus or the Navalny case in Russia). The migration crisis on the EU borders created by Minsk in an attempt to remove sanctions or, possibly, following the Turkish model, to receive financial support from the EU has clearly failed in its intent but, together with the accused West, it provides the Kremlin with a justification sufficient for a possible increase in the military presence in Belarus within the common defense space.

Military integration

After the meeting on September 9, 2021, in Moscow, followed by the declarations of friendship during the opening of the military exercise "Zapad 2021"[6], on November 4th a meeting of the High Council of the Union of Russia was held via videoconference. and Belarus. During the meeting, Alexander Lukashenko signed the decree accepting the implementation of the integration deepening program for the years 2021-2023. The document mainly concerns 28[7] previously agreed programs[8], which will ultimately have to unify the economic, social and energy policies, including the creation of a common market for gas, oil, and electricity of the two states. Commenting on the agreement concluded, Lukashenko underlined the strategic importance of the decisions taken, which will determine a "reset in the economic space of both countries", while Vladimir Putin, in a video link from Sevastopol', assured his willingness to further support the nation. Belarusian "fraternal", underlining the symbolic aspect of the signing of the agreements on National Unity Day[9]. Lukashenka also announced that Russia and Belarus will develop the potential for a joint grouping of troops.

At the meeting, a new version of the military doctrine was approved (although still without signatures) according to which it is intended to increase coordination in the area of defense policy in response to the military threat and political and economic pressure from the West. The most "secret" part of the virtual meeting and its renewal (the previous version is in 2001) was only recently announced by the Russian Defense Minister, Sergey Kuzhugetovich Shoygu who, among others, spoke about external threats such as NATO, echoing the propaganda of Lukashenko on provocations from Poland and the Baltic states. From leaked information, Russia will use nuclear weapons not only to defend itself, but also Belarus, in the event that the latter is also attacked with traditional weapons. This means that Belarus is under the Russian "nuclear umbrella".

On December 28, Lukashenko traveled to St. Petersburg to attend an informal summit of heads of CIS countries during which participants summarized the achievements of the Minsk presidency in the CIS in 2021, and exchanged views on solving common urgent problems on the day bilateral talks with Putin took place later, during which the state of the art of integration was analyzed, and so was

6 The declarations of brotherhood and friendship made during the exercise, intended to underline the importance of bilateral military cooperation, testify to the continuing military dependence on Russia, confirmed by the announcement of the creation of a "common defense space". This intent could also mean the acceptance of the possible rotating presence of Russian troops in Belarus https://structure.mil.ru/mission/practice/all/west-2021.htm http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66675

7 *Совместное заявление Председателя Правительства Российской Федерации и Премьер-министра Республики Беларусь о текущем развитии и дальнейших шагах поуглублению интеграционных процессов в рамках Союзного государства* http://government.ru/news/43234/

8 During the meeting in September 2021, it was agreed that the gas price for Belarus in 2022 would remain at the same level ($ 128.5 per 1000 m^3) and it was stated that a document on the creation of a common gas market within the state would be signed by 1 December 2023. The desire to create a common market for crude oil and petroleum products was also confirmed, as was the agreement on a common market for electricity. Putin said that by the end of 2022, Belarus will receive a loan in the amount of 600-640 million dollars. Security issues related to plans to create a "common defense space of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation" were also discussed.

9 *День народного единства* – National Unity Day - was celebrated on November 4 in the Russian Empire until 1917 and is again a national holiday since 2005. The date not only commemorates the expulsion of Poles and Lithuanians from Moscow (1612) but also celebrates the end of the period of the turbid ones.

the military cooperation for the years 2022-2023[10]. In fact, in the current year (presumably in the months of February-March) a joint exercise will be held; the same will happen in 2023, as announced by Sergey Shoygu, with the Russian-Belarusian exercise "Union Shield"[11]. In addition, Minsk has offered Moscow to continue to "set up training centers" of the Belarusian army in handling "new models of military equipment" that Belarus purchases from Russia.

Finally, making a quick point of the situation and comparing the declarations of intent with what has actually been put into practice, it is clear how much integration programs have been reduced to mostly non-binding rhetoric. Thus, if in the autumn of 2019 there was talk of building an even closer union than the European one, after two years there were neither political integration, nor single currency, nor supranational regulators left in the programs. Less ambitious goals such as a fiscal system or a unified monetary policy have also disappeared. In replacement, also given the media relevance of the event, there is the joint work on the creation of a new terrestrial detection apparatus and the flight of the Belarusian cosmonaut on the International Space Station.

Judging by Putin's detailed description of the benefits Belarus is reaping right now from the Russian gas discount, Moscow is unlikely to be ready to further increase these benefits by creating a single energy market by the end of 2023, plus the long work on integration programs and the ambiguities with their signature confirm once again, so that the internal political crisis is not undermined Lukashenko's habit of stubbornly bargaining on any matter. In this sense, a much more serious obstacle to integration is not so much the deliberate ambiguity of relations with the West as the fact that Lukashenko completely controls the country, and that the entire system of Belarusian state power is linked to him. A "Risk" that derives from internal political instability in Belarus; in fact, it is much more difficult to curb if not with a constitutional amendment and a gradual transition of power. It is no coincidence that the signing of the integration papers coincided with the adoption of a new draft of the constitution[12]. The Belarusian president also confirmed that a referendum on it will be held in February 2022. Although the text has not yet been disseminated, the desire for a new document only confirms that Lukashenko will no longer run for the presidency as it would be too risky.

In this situation, what the Kremlin has to do is to keep the transit process in a controlled and possibly pro-Russian channel, to prevent Lukashenko and the Belarusian ruling elite from starting the race to find new allies or introduce extravagant directives, which would lead to a worsening of the social security situation. This attitude could in fact exacerbate the situation inside the country and push the EU and the United States to new sanctions or frictions.

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[10] *Путин: Россия и Беларусь в 2022 году проведут совместные учения* (Putin: Russia and Belarus will conduct joint exercises in 2022) dw.com 29.12.2021 https://www.dw.com/ru/rossija-i-belarus-provedut-sovmestnye-uchenija-v-2022-godu/a-60288343

[11] *Россия и Белоруссия проведут в 2023 году масштабное учение "Щит Союза"* (Russia and Belarus will conduct the "Union Shield" large-scale exercise in 2023), The exercise takes place every four years, the latest editions took place in 2011, 2015 and 2019, therefore the planned activity for 2023 it was already included in the planning."Интерфакс", 20.10.2021 https://www.interfax.ru/world/798377

[12] *Лукашенко представили новый доработанный проект Конституции Беларуси,* (Lukashenko presented a new revised draft of the Constitution of Belarus), 04.11.2021 https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-predstavili-novyj-proekt-konstitutsii-belarusi-467839-2021/

The Russia-NATO diplomatic crisis. Its roots and possible impact on the Atlantic Alliance and the Western security system

The Russian decision to sever all diplomatic ties with the Atlantic Alliance, recalling personnel from its diplomatic mission in Brussels and withdrawing accreditation from the NATO Information Office in Moscow, represents the lowest point in bilateral relations since the spring/summer 1999 military intervention in Kosovo. Since the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis in winter 2013-14, and since what NATO labels the "illegitimate 'annexation' of Crimea" [1], NATO-Russia relations have slipped along an inclined plane. The decision to keep the NATO-Russian Council active at the ambassadorial level and above was to no avail. Despite the (often aseptically optimistic) declarations, its regular meetings simply highlighted the growing distance separating the parties. In the same years, the ups and downs in US-Russia relations did not make things easier. The expansion of NATO in Central and Eastern Europe (a move that Russia perceived as inspired by hostile sentiments) went in the same direction. While NATO refocuses its priorities toward China and strengthens its security organization profile, the deterioration of the political and military situation along its eastern borders risks relaunching the debate about its future tasks and reopening the debate among its different souls. A debate that, in the last years, seems to have found a composition but that – undercurrent – still divides the member countries between the ones that would like to find a suitable *modus vivendi* with Moscow and its political ambitions and the ones that still consider the Kremlin as the main threat to European security.

A troublesome relationship: NATO and Russia in the post-Cold War

Since the beginning, the relationship between NATO and post-Soviet Russia reflected a certain level of ambiguity. Moscow's consent to Germany's reunification in 1990, after the 'velvet revolutions' of the previous years, was rooted in the belief that a general detente would have ensued. This detente, in turn, would have ended Europe's division while also considering the security needs of an imploding Soviet Union. In the following years, recalling these events, Russian leaders often mentioned a hypothetical 'promise' made by then US President George H.W. Bush (in office: 1989-93). According to this narrative, President Bush would have promised that Germany's unification and the end of the Soviet presence in Central and Eastern Europe would not have led to a NATO expansion in the region. It is still a matter of debate if President Bush made this 'promise' or not (Sarotte, 2014; Kramer and Shifrinson, 2017; Eckel, 2021). However, the documents that NATO approved in this period are generally cautious, especially when dealing with enlargement. In this perspective, see, for instance, the London declaration of July 1990[2], which laid the foundations of NATO's future relations with the countries of the former Warsaw Pact. It was only in the mid-1990s that the topic gained momentum. The 'Visegrad three' (Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland) entered NATO in 1999, while Baltic republics and the Central-Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) entered the Alliance *en masse* with a decision ratified in June 2004, during the NATO Istanbul summit.

During the 1990s, bilateral relations were equally ambiguous. At the formal level, NATO-Russia cooperation started in 1991, in the framework of the then North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC, later Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council - EAPC), and strengthened with Russia's entry in the

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1 See, e.g., the *Statement of the NATO-Ukraine Commission*, [Brussels], April 1, 2014. Online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_108499.htm [accessed: October 30, 2021].

2 *Declaration on a Transformed North Atlantic Alliance. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council ("The London Declaration"),* London, July 5-6, 1990. Online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23693.htm [accessed: October 30, 2021].

Partnership for Peace program (June 22, 1994). Moscow's search for a 'privileged' status, compared to both the other successor states and the former countries of the USSR's 'external empire', led to the signing of the 'Founding Act' (Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security, May 27, 1997[3]). On this basis, an *ad hoc* cooperation forum (the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council) was later established; however, its operation has been difficult from the start. PJC's structure, lacking headquarters and a secretariat and facing Russia with a unified NATO position, contributed to limiting its effectiveness. This state of things made its work slow and cumbersome in a moment when the political and diplomatic consequences of the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia made better coordination with the former superpower highly desirable. Disagreements on the interpretation of some key concepts of the Founding Act (first of all, the unauthorized use of force) was another element that soon led to contrasts. These contrasts culminated in a first break of the cooperation framework in Spring 1999, after the beginning of the NATO bombing on Serbia (Operation Allied Force, March 24-June 10, 1999). This break lasted until the NATO summit in Pratica di Mare (Rome, May 28, 2002), where the NATO-Russia Council was established.

Even the new forum, however, did not have an easy time. Based on the provisions of the Founding Act, integrated by the ones of the Rome declaration on NATO-Russia relations (NATO-Russia Relations: a New Quality[4]), the NRC aimed at founding the relationship between Brussels and Moscow on more equal and sounder bases "to build together a lasting and inclusive peace in the Euro-Atlantic area on the principles of democracy and cooperative security and the principle that the security of all states in the Euro-Atlantic community is indivisible". Such an aim was partially reached between 2002 and 2008 when cooperation programs were agreed upon, for instance, in the fields of peacekeeping, weapons control, counter-terrorism, struggle against narcotraffic, and theatre missile defence. In August 2008, the Russian intervention in the Georgian crisis temporarily ended these programs, which was revived during the Strasbourg-Kehl NATO summit (April 3-4, 2009) by the new Obama administration. According to the White House, reviving the NRC was part of a broader effort to redefine the US relations with Moscow ('reset'), overcoming the tensions that had marked the final years of George W. Bush's presidency. However, despite widespread media attention, 'reset' failed to materialize. Instead, due also to the deterioration of the international environment, increasingly evident contrasts emerged on a long string of topics, making more and more apparent the distance separating the parties. Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, highlighted the problem already before Barack Obama ended the first term in office (Watson, 2012).

Two different visions of security

In this perspective, the political rupture that the Ukraine crisis and the Russian annexation of Crimea produced took place in an already eroded context at both the US-Russia and NATO-Russia levels. The Alliance decided to suspend all technical cooperation programs (civilian and military) and NRC activities on April 1, 2014. The only exception was the political dialogue at the ambassadorial level and above "to allow us to exchange views, first and foremost on this crisis"[5]. In practical terms, NRC meetings restarted only in Spring 2016, but the outcomes were largely unsatisfactory. In the following years, several subjects raised the idea to revitalize the body, with the German authorities among the most active actors. However, doubts have been raised on the usefulness of this diplomatic effort. As it was noted: "the relationship [between NATO and Russia] had been de facto

3 *Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation signed in Paris, France*, May 27, 1997. Online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm [accessed: October 30, 2021].

4 *NATO-Russia Relations: A New Quality. Declaration by Heads of State and Government of NATO Member States and the Russian Federation*, Rome, May 18, 2002. Online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_19572.htm [accessed: October 30, 2021].

5 *Statement by NATO Foreign Ministers*, [Brussels], *1 April 2014*. Online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_108501.htm [accessed: October 30, 2021].

broken off seven years ago in the wake of the Ukraine crisis. Since then, NATO has fully reverted to its initial mission of deterring Russia. Meanwhile, Russian and NATO officers had very limited access to senior officials on the other side, and no serious transactions were taking place at that level. Thus, Russia-NATO relations were suspended long before they actually ceased to exist" (Trenin, 2021). In parallel, both sides tightened their stances in terms of both actions and declarations. On the Russian side, a new rearmament policy, growing activism within and outside the 'near abroad', and an increasingly critical attitude toward the existing, US-centered international order are just some of the elements that contribute to widening the gap from NATO's positions.

NATO response has been quite coherent. Together with the adoption of a set of reassurance measures to support its Central and Eastern European members, the Alliance actively strengthened its deterrence capabilities, among else activating – as part of the NATO Response Force – a very high readiness component (VJTF - NATO Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, or 'Spearhead Force') to better deal with the challenges of the new security environment of its eastern and southern borders. It was a contested decision, primarily due to the supposed 'imbalance' that NATO's new defensive posture would have produced in the Alliance's political balance. Some quarters (both in Europe and the US, too; see, e.g., Rumer and Sokolsky, 2021) also remarked that these measures, stemming from misperceptions about the true Russian aims, risked widening the gap with Moscow, jeopardizing a possible revival of dialogue and collaboration. Similar remarks apply to the European Union, strengthening the image of a divided West, unable to meet the Kremlin's challenge (Kagan, Bugayova and Cafarella, 2019; Giles and Ilves, 2021). The inauguration of the Biden administration did lead to a fundamental change. On the one hand, the White House's 'two tracks strategy' favoured the emergence of some small openings (as the Puntiun-Biden summit of June 2021 attested). Still, on the other, it refocused the differences existing between Washington and Moscow on topics like human rights, the Syrian, Libyan and Afghan crises, and the Russian efforts to aggressively meddle in the political dynamics of several Western countries (Tennis, 2020).

The fundamental problem is the distance between the two parties' visions of their respective security. The Russian authorities are increasingly engaged in reintegrating the former Soviet political space and searching for a new global projection at the international level. In this perspective, the involvement in Ukraine's affairs and the support provided to the separatist forces in Donetsk and Lugansk are just the tip of an iceberg that sees Moscow actively engaged, for instance, in Central Asia and the Caucasus. In these theatres, Moscow signed, among else, military agreements with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and struck informal cooperation deals with China, based on a 'division of labour' that leaves Moscow the political and military tasks and Beijing the economic and financial ones[6]. Against this backdrop, the Atlantic Alliance's eastward expansion is increasingly perceived as a strategic threat, especially since the most probable candidates to NATO membership are, now, countries like Ukraine and Georgia, belonging to the 'near abroad' and perceived – by Moscow – as part of Russia's security environment. In the last months, after Kyiv's demands about the possibility to access a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP), Moscow declared to consider Ukraine's NATO membership "a red line" not to cross[7]. Similar statements have been made on several occasions. Moreover, the Kremlin remarked that – independently from Kyiv's formal admission to the Atlantic Alliance – even the deployment of Western military assets in Ukraine will be considered a threat to the Russian national security and tackled with an appropriate response[8].

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6 *Russia's Recent Military Buildup in Central Asia*, CSIS - Center for Strategic & International Studies, Washington, DC, September 25, 2020. Online: https://www.csis.org/blogs/post-soviet-post/russias-recent-military-buildup-central-asia [accessed: October 30, 2021].

7 NATO Membership For Ukraine Would Be 'Red Line,' Kremlin Says, *RFE/RL - Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 17, 2021. Online: https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-ukraine-nato-red-line/31312756.html [accessed: October 30, 2021].

8 Kremlin says NATO expansion in Ukraine is a 'red line' for Putin, *Reuters*, September 27, 2021. Online: https://www.reuters.com/world/kremlin-says-nato-expansion-ukraine-crosses-red-line-putin-2021-09-27/ [accessed: October 30, 2021].

Still a divisive problem: NATO's eastward expansion

The fact that NATO's leaders did not consider Kyiv's entry into the Alliance as "imminent" (Gould, 2021a) did not affect the terms of the problem. From a Russian perspective, NATO enlargement is not a problem of 'when' but of 'if'. Brussels' vision is the opposite: NATO's door must remain open in any case. This vision was clearly stated in 1995, in the *Study on NATO Enlargement*, by affirming that: "NATO enlargement would proceed in accordance with the provisions of the various OSCE documents which confirm the sovereign right of each state to freely seek its own security arrangements, to belong or not to belong to international organisations, including treaties of alliance. No country outside the Alliance should be given a veto or droit de regard over the process and decisions"[9]. In the following years, the 'open door' principle was often reaffirmed, the last time by President Bide, in replying to Ukraine's authorities (Cook and Krasnolutska, 2021). While valid from a theoretical perspective, this principle is, nonetheless, increasingly difficult to apply. Within NATO, the members' positions have grown distant. At the same time, the idea of extending the membership to new countries faces declining favour, especially if these countries are seen as security consumers more than security producers. From this point of view, post-2004 enlargements (Croatia and Albania in 2009, Montenegro in 2017, North Macedonia in 2020) have been probably the last 'easy' ones, from both the Alliance's side and the side of its potential new members.

The risk that Moscow could see a further eastward expansion of the Alliance's borders as another provocation has been explicitly evoked. Equally, it has been explicitly evoked the risk that a further expansion could weaken, more than strengthen, NATO (O'Hanlon, 2021). Ukraine's pressing on the MAP issue highlight how uneasy are the candidates for NATO membership. Ukraine's and Georgia's membership was debated for the first time at the Bucharest summit in 2008. On that occasion, the contrasting visions of the United States and Europe produced a compromise formula, recognizing that the two countries would have been, one day, NATO members but offering no specific deadline and postponing the decision to an indefinite future[10]. However, the transformation of the strategic environment has made it increasingly troublesome to honour this promise, on the one hand fuelling the discontent of the potential members, on the other eroding NATO's credibility and engagement. A good part of Russia's challenge connects to these 'immaterial' aspects. The stalemate reached on the issue of Ukraine membership indirectly confirms how Moscow could still exert a strong influence in the 'near abroad' and how NATO faces problems in coping with the situation. In this perspective: "the real question regarding Ukraine's membership aspirations [...] is whether NATO Allies are willing and able to invest in the immense effort required to make collective defence credible", since "if NATO were to grant a MAP to Ukraine, it would have to start preparing for an unprecedented deterrence effort against Russia (Larsen, 2021).

Against this backdrop, Kyiv's efforts to comply with NATO's good governance requirements have just relative importance. It is undeniable that Ukraine still has a lot to do in different fields to reach the Alliance's targets. Among else, Kyiv should introduce effective anti-corruption programs, implement NATO procedures and standards at the operational level, and strengthen the – currently flawed – political control over the country's military. Both NATO's Secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg and US President Joe Biden repeatedly pointed out this problem. On the other hand, since 2014,

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9 *Study on NATO Enlargement*, [Brussels], September 3, 1995. Online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_24733.htm [accessed: October 30, 2021].

10 "NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO. Both nations have made valuable contributions to Alliance operations. We welcome the democratic reforms in Ukraine and Georgia and look forward to free and fair parliamentary elections in Georgia in May. MAP is the next step for Ukraine and Georgia on their direct way to membership. Today we make clear that we support these countries' applications for MAP. Therefore we will now begin a period of intensive engagement with both at a high political level to address the questions still outstanding pertaining to their MAP applications" (*Bucharest Summit Declaration. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008*, (23). Online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm [accessed: October 30, 2021]).

the Ukrainian government has actively – and somehow successfully – operated to meet Brussels' demands. The consequence is that if the lack of reforms allowed to postpone the debate on MAP until now, this dilatory strategy cannot last indefinitely. The point is even more critical considering that NATO members' positions toward Moscow are often contrasting and that aggregating enough consensus to adopt effective measures to oppose its initiatives risks is quite tricky. In present-day NATO-Russia relations, the Alliance's divisions, coupled with the economic and political influence that Moscow can exert on several European countries, represents Kremlin's main asset. In the short run, fundamental changes to this situation seem unrealistic. From a Russian perspective, putting the Atlantic Alliance under pressure seems a politically rewarding strategy at both domestic and international levels, highlighting the cleavages existing within the Alliance and shedding light on what appears to be the 'aggressive' nature of the measures that it adopts.

Analysis, evaluation, and forecasts

While not unexpected, the breakup of the NATO-Russia diplomatic dialogue put the Atlantic Alliance under stress in a delicate transition phase. The worsening of the relations with Russia risks affecting NATO's global refocusing toward the Indo-Pacific and emphasizing the existing internal division between the Central and Eastern European members and the Western European 'historical core' of the Alliance. This rift has already emerged, for instance, during the summit of the Alliances' Defence Ministers in October 2021. Worth noting, on the occasion of the meeting, the US Secretary for Defense, Lloyd Austin, paid an official visit to Romania, Ukraine and Georgia to reaffirm Washington's political and military support to three countries today considered 'the forefront' in the Western confrontation with Moscow (Gould, 2021b). However, what this support means is still to assess. Since 2104, Washington has been keeping assets in the region on a rotational basis. Still, it is unclear whether these assets will ever increase in quantity and quality or be deployed permanently, as local governments have required for some time. Moreover, despite the attention that the Pentagon formally devotes to the Black Sea region, how to protect it from possible Russian initiatives remain undefined (Demirjian, 2021). The overall impression is of widespread uncertainty. An element that – together with the apparent lack of a NATO long term strategy for the region – could invite Moscow to probe the counterpart's resolve further, fuelling the existing tension or – in the worst-case scenario – leading to a deterioration in the security situation.

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The IEA's World Energy Outlook 2021 and some general policy suggestions for Italy

In October 2021, some days after the Youth Conference on Climate held in Milan at the end of September[1], the International Energy Agency (IEA) published one of its main annual reports, the World Energy Outlook (WEO 2021). The main conclusion of the report is that the main countries of the world should give more concrete signals towards pollution limitation and the use of renewable energy sources, by negotiating more ambitious and stringent plans towards the global ecological and energy transitions decided at least starting from the Paris Climate Change Agreement (2015). The report was published a few weeks earlier than in previous years, also for providing useful guidelines to the world leaders during the COP26 conference (Glasgow, 1-12 November 2021).

The report contains data and analysis on climate-altering emissions, climate change and the energy markets, as well as trends, drivers, and future energy scenarios[2]. The World Energy Outlook argues world economy has already been becoming more eco-sustainable for several years, also thanks to the growing diffusion of electric vehicles and renewable energy plants, especially in solar and wind sectors, as well as technologies related to clean energy. However, this process is going too slowly. It needs to accelerate in order to lead CO_2 and other greenhouse gas emissions to the main goal of ecological-energy transition, i.e., carbon neutrality within 2050 (in other terms the effective capacity of 'net zero emissions', or a global temperature increase less than 2°C, that is possibly no more than 1.5°C)[3]. This goal, indicated starting from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change as the best global ecological benchmark for the mid-21st century, refers to a scenario defined by IEA as *Net Zero Emissions by 2050* (ZNE). According to the latter, in the next three decades the world should see a drastic and wide decrease in climate-altering emissions, as well as a related process of strong and widespread increase in renewable energy consumption. In addition to ZNE scenario, anticipated last May[4], in its report IEA refers to other two scenarios which outline how global energy could develop in the next decades, i.e., the *Announced Pledges Scenario* (APS) and the *Stated Policies Scenario* (SPS)[5]. The APS predicts recent commitments announced by the EU and other 50 states will make the global energy system move significantly along the path of ecological transition in the next decades. Indeed, even if missing climate neutrality by 2050, this

1 For a brief summary of the conference see the article by F. Suman at the following link: https://ilbolive.unipd.it/it/news/youth4climate-cambiamento-climatico-questione

2 The report is freely available at the webpage below: https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/ed3b983c-e2c9-401c-8633-749c3fefb375/WorldEnergyOutlook2021.pdf

3 By 'zero net emissions' we mean a situation in which for every ton of CO_2 equivalent released into the atmosphere, the same amount can actually be removed (with consequent environmental benefits).

4 https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/deebef5d-0c34-4539-9d0c-10b13d840027/NetZeroby2050-ARoadmapfortheGlobalEnergySector_CORR.pdf

5 The Report also very briefly referrers to a fourth scenario, which can be considered almost a sort of variant of the ZNE, namely the Sustainable Development Scenario (SDS), which is coherent with the main UN sustainable development goals linked to universal access to energy and major improvements in air quality, but achieving zero net emissions later than 2050, that is by 2070 (albeit with many countries and regions achieving the 'zero net goal' by 2050).

scenario is coherent with a more sustainable future[6]. Also, thanks to a doubling of investments and financing in clean energy, low-emission energy sources will provide the vast majority of energy capacity additions until 2030, with annual solar photovoltaic and wind energy increases close to 500 gigawatts (GW) within that year. Energy demand, thanks to progress in energy efficiency, will begin to stabilize around 2030. Coal consumption by that year will decrease between 10 and 20%, depending on the outcomes of the announced commitments towards decreasing coal production, including China's recent promise to stop its support for the building of coal-fired power plants overseas (which could save up to 20 gigatons of cumulative CO_2 emissions by 2050). A rapid growth in sales of electric vehicles and continuous improvements in the efficiency of their power supply will lead oil consumption, between now and 2050, and after a production peak shortly after 2025, to drop from 100 to 75 million barrels per day (the share envisaged by NZE scenario is 25 million b/d). All sectors will record drops in hydrocarbon demand and climate-altering emissions, bringing CO_2 decreases of 20% by 2030 and 40% by 2050, as well as an increase in the use of renewable energy, with electricity to be the sector most affected by such processes. However, fossil sources will supply just over 50% of world energy consumption in 2050 (vs. just over 20% in the NZE scenario); global temperature will result about 2.1°C higher than the pre-industrial levels. To bring the APS closer to the NZE, it would be necessary to fill asymmetries between the various countries with respect to the use of clean energy, but above all to increase the global reduction of emissions linked to fossil fuels, especially in the current decade.

Conversely, the Stated Policies scenario is based on measures countries have actually undertaken so far, as well as on trends regarding policies already under development. This scenario envisages an overall more eco-sustainable energy sector, sufficient to achieve an overall decrease in emissions despite a demand for electricity almost doubling between now and 2030. However, this scenario also forecasts a simultaneous growth in emissions in industrial sectors linked to the production of cement and steel, and to heavy transport. This is largely because of economic production growth in emerging markets and developing economies, also due to the construction of new and extensive infrastructures. By 2030, coal consumption would decline by about 5%, whereas in the NZE this falls by 55% within that same year. Energy consumption from fossil fuels by 2050 will see a total increase in its least polluting source, that is natural gas, but gas overall demand will still be lower than oil, even if it will be greater than that of coal. In all scenarios, the demand for natural gas will increase in the next 5 years; after 2025, its trend will differ depending on the different scenarios. Then, in the ZNE scenario, gas consumption will be larger than those of oil and coal within 2050, while in the APS it will be higher than coal consumption, but lower than oil (despite gas demand and oil demand will be quite similar by 2050); however, world pollution will remain very close to current levels, with fossil fuels accounting for well over 60% of total energy consumption. At the end of the century, global average temperatures will be around 2.6°C above pre-industrial levels.

The differences between the World Energy Outlook scenarios are quite substantial, highlighting in IEA's view the need for more ambitious commitments in order to reach the parameters of 'zero net emissions' by the middle of the 21st century. According to the report, investments in clean energy projects and infrastructures should triple over the next decade. About 70% of that additional spending should concern emerging and developing economies, where funding is scarce,

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6 Several of such commitments were announced by world leaders, also in view of the COP 26, during the first seven months of the current year, at the domestic and international levels as well (e.g. at the Leaders Summit on Climate last April, or the G-20 on Climate, Environment and Energy last July), also with the aim to find a common date for globally phasing out coal and bringing temperature increase to no more than exactly 1.5°C by 2050 (the previous official goal, established by article 2.1 of the Paris Agreement on climate of 2015, speaks of 1.5°/2°C within 2050). To accelerate energy transition, the EU, for its part, has announced several prospective actions, among which that it intends to amend its Renewable Energy Directive, bringing the share of renewables in its energy consumption to 40% by 2030, whereas the share previously set was 32% (while the effective share in 2020 was close to 20%). For a list of new commitments announced by countries on the path of energy transition, as well as measures and policies they already undertook, cf. World Energy Outlook 2021, pp. 339 - 349.

and capital can be up to seven times more expensive than in advanced economies. There is the looming risk of further turmoil for global energy markets, with uncertainties setting the stage for a period of future volatility; that said, greater and faster investment in energy needs, particularly in clean energy sources, technologies, and markets, would greatly improve expectations. The measures to be taken would be less onerous and difficult than one might think. In fact, more than 40% of the necessary reductions would come from technically feasible and already economically sustainable initiatives, regarding improvement of energy efficiency, limitation of gas leaks as well as wind and solar plants installation where electricity generation technologies are comparatively more competitive. Moreover, economic and employment opportunities would also be created. In the ZNE scenario, these effects would lead, by 2030, to an increase in employment for about 26 million workers in clean energy related sectors (i.e., the double of how estimated in APS). A thriving market for wind turbines, solar panels, lithium-ion batteries, electrolyzes and fuel cells could develop a market up to 1 trillion US dollars per year by 2050, roughly comparable in size to the current oil market. Even in a much more electrified energy system, there would still remain wide opportunities for fuel suppliers to produce and supply low-carbon gases. The International Energy agency does not exclude that a rapid and decisive change of pace in the ecological and energy transitions could lead to possible imbalances and undesired consequences in many areas, including for example trade in energy-intensive goods, or international investments and finance. However, according to the Agency, these difficulties can be overcome through the adoption of a strong multilateral effort to reduce divergences and conflicts in the international system[7].

Assessment and forecasting

Based on the current international levels of climate-altering emissions, fossil sources consumption and the exploitation of renewable energy, achieving 'climate neutrality' by 2050 as claimed by the IEA seems objectively very difficult. Just to mention only a few data[8], between 2020 and 2050 CO_2 emissions should drop at a ten-year average equal to twice as much as they increased on average in the decades between 2000 and 2020[9]; furthermore, although they have grown considerably, especially in the last 2 or 3 decades, renewable sources currently represent just under 30% of global electricity consumption and just over 12% of total energy consumption, when to be consistent with a 'net zero emissions' scenario by 2050 they should reach that same year approximately 70% of electricity consumption[10] and over 60% of energy consumption (whereas oil, coal and gas still represent over 80% of world energy use and more than 60% of global electricity generation[11]). We must also consider obstacles related to 'energy gap' factors, that given the current system it would be very difficult to start reducing through a strong reduction in climate-altering emissions and a simultaneous increase in renewable energy. In this regard, almost 1 billion people still lack access to electricity, while half of the world does not have sufficient energy consumption, while many developing countries have an annual per capita electricity consumption of less than 1000 KW/hour, a value almost 5 times lower than advanced states, such as Italy[12]. In addition, the significant Covid-19 contraction led to an increase in demand that found the energy markets at least partially unprepared in terms of supply capacity; this in recent months did contribute to increase raw

7 See World Energy Outlook 2021, *passim*.
8 On data, trends and countertrends of energy transition please also refer to two related articles on issue 01, 2021, of the Strategic Observatory, freely available at the following webpage: https://www.difesa.it/SMD_/CASD/IM/CeMiSS/Pubblicazioni/OsservatorioStrategico/2021/Pagine/Osservatorio_Strategico_01_2021.aspx
9 According to the World Energy Outlook 2021, CO_2 emissions would have grown by over 10 Gigatons between 2000 and 2020, when between now and 2050 they should drop by about 30 Gigatons.
10 Ibidem, pp. 20, 33 e 39; see also the British Petroleum data based estimates by P. Luca (2021), at the link below: https://grafici.altervista.org/consumo-di-energia-primaria-per-fonte-nellunione-europea-e-nel-mondo/
11 Ibidem; https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/electricity-prod-source-stacked
12 Data from FISE Assoambiente (2021): https://www.la7.it/coffee-break/rivedila7/coffee-break-16-10-2021-403103

materials prices and therefore the costs of fuels and energy bills, with subsequent pressures for an increase in production[13] − that the current world energy system can inevitably achieve more in terms of fossil fuels than in renewables (provided that in the coming years, new investments, in the former and especially the latter, could be limited by profitability problems).

Also thinking about the production pressures currently underway in several emerging and developing countries, a few days after the publication of the IEA report the US special envoy for climate, John Kerry, expressly considered possible in the short run it will not be feasible to reduce the gaps between the US, EU, Canada and Japan, that is to say relatively well performing actors in terms of energy and ecological transitions, and players that can be considered as less ecologically advanced in the energy domain[14]. Among the latters we can mention: China, the greatest CO_2 emissions producer in the world, which has huge domestic investments in coal-fired power plants; Russia, which still has a vast potential in hydrocarbon sources (for example in its Arctic areas); India, whose growth is still heavily dependent on CO_2 emissions; finally, one the world's leading oil producer, that is Saudi Arabia, which has recently announced it will reach climate neutrality not earlier than 2060[15].

It is also interesting to note that on 11 October 2021, it was announced 10 EU states, including France, have drawn up and signed a document in support of nuclear energy investments. The latter would indeed be a strategic tool to make energy greener, both in Europe and globally[16]. After all, though Brussels still tends (as several European countries do) not to consider it among clean energy sources, it is also true nuclear energy is instead considered as such by other international institutions, including the UN and IEA, whose World Energy Outlook 2021 includes it, albeit less than renewables and not without adequate environmental and safety prerequisites, among the forms of energy which can be used to reduce the use of fossil fuels and thus bring more sustainable global energy mixes. In the 'Net Zero Emissions' scenario, nuclear energy is equal to 11-12% of world energy consumption in 2050 (the current share is 4.3%)[17].

Now, while indicating the *net zero emissions* target will probably not be reached by 2050, the framework outlined above does not seem to question the transition to an energy system where, in about three decades, the ratio between fossil sources and renewables is in any case expected to become, if not inverse to the current level, clearly more affected by the second than today (as also indicated by other authoritative international sources, including the World Energy Council, the International Renewable Energy Agency and the UN International Panel on Climate Change). At the

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[13] The increases in question, mainly related to natural gas, would also be related, to some extent and at least in the EU context, to relevant storage issues, higher temperatures than usual in late winter 2021 and the costs for CO_2 emissions production permissions, indirectly also connected to attempts to favor a greater use of renewables. However, starting from this last figure, as well as the costs for the use of renewables, to attribute these increases to energy transition, would be partially misleading. On energy costs recent increases in the Italian context, moreover partly calmed by specific government measures, please refer to the following press release from the Regulatory Agency for Energy and the Environment: https://www.arera.it/it/com_stampa/21/210701.htm ; on the nexus between ecological transition and energy costs see also the following links: https://greenreport.it/news/energia/iea-impreciso-e-fuorviante-attribuire-la-responsabilita-dellaumento-delle-bollette-alla-transizione-verso-lenergia-pulita/ ; https://www.startmag.it/energia/quote-co2-prezzo-energia-elettrica-bollette/#:~:text=Il%20prezzo%20unitario%20di%20aggiudicazione,7%20euro%20del%20secondo%20trimestre%E2%80%9D.

[14] On Kerry's position and declarations please see the articles freely available at the following websites:
https://www.themeditelegraph.com/it/green-and-tech/technology/2021/10/14/news/clima-kerry-frena-l-entusiasmo-su-cop26-potremmo-mancare-l-obiettivo-1.40810009
https://www.askanews.it/esteri/2021/10/14/clima-kerry-cop26-di-glasgow-potrebbe-mancare-lobiettivo-pn_20211014_00076/
https://www.avvenire.it/mondo/pagine/verso-glas
https://tg24.sky.it/ambiente/2021/10/01/kerry-a-skytg24-siamo-in-ritardo-sugli-impegni-per-la-cop26

[15] https://www.reuters.com/business/cop/saudi-arabia-worlds-biggest-oil-exporter-unveil-green-goals-2021-10-23/

[16] In addition to France, the document was signed by Romania, Chezc Republic, Finland, Slovakia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Poland and Hungary: https://www.corriere.it/economia/21_ottobre_11/nucleare-francia-altri-9-paesi-ue-lanciano-appello-energia-pulita-ne-abbiamo-bisogno-06d27590-2a6d-11ec-94aa-f0ac72755abe.shtml

[17] World Energy Outlook 2021, *passim*.

political level, the goals of the Paris Agreement and subsequent international conferences on climate were confirmed by the G20 held in Rome, on 30 and 31 October, 2021[18]. Although to varying degrees, energy transition will therefore concern a growing hybrid energy system, where fossil fuels and renewables will inevitably coexist (though showing opposite trends), with the formers that could see a greater comparative relevance of natural gas − perhaps one of the most noteworthy aspects of the whole transition process, at least in the medium term.

That said, Italy should continue, in line with commitments adopted at national and international levels even before COP26[19], on the path already undertaken for several years towards reducing climate-altering emissions and greater exploitation of renewable energy (I will deal with Italy should or should not consider the adoption of nuclear energy in the next issue of the Strategic Observatory)[20]. This not only not to slow down progresses already made, though not easily, in such areas, but also to have future lower constraints in terms of dependence on foreign energy supplies. In this regard, the most recent National Energy Situation, published in the summer of 2021 by the Ministry of Ecological Transition, estimates Italian net energy imports are equal to 73.4% of gross domestic available energy, and they are largely made up of crude oil and gas[21]. The respective markets, more or less periodically, may be subject to significant volatility and fluctuations in prices, as well as political risk phenomena capable of affecting our supplies[22]. Although very gradually, a greater use of renewables could decrease exposure to these risks. This could happen certainly through greater domestic production, but also a strengthening of energy interdependencies which, while not forgetting the Greater Mediterranean area and its southern shores, be focused on European Union territories (where in the Spring of 2021 a huge lithium deposit was discovered in Germany[23]). After all the EU, also urged by the need for common solutions to problems related to energy prices, at its summits of the 21st, 22nd and 26th of October 2021, seemed to push for greater

[18] Albeit this occurred with a few new provisions, including the indication of the end of 2021 as the deadline for international funding to coal-fired power plants, as well as the goal of collectively planting 1,000 billion trees in the future. For a summary and the whole text of the final declaration of the summit please refer to the following link: https://www.quotidiano.net/politica/ordo-clima-g20-1.6981532

[19] E.g., Paris Agreement on Climate (2015), EU Green Deal (2019), EU Climate Law (2021), Integrated National Plan on Energy and Climate (2020), Italian Long-Term Strategy on the Reduction of Greenhouse gases (2021) and, more recently, National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR, 2021): https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/PNRR.pdf

[20] In Italy, renewable energies represent about 20% of energy total consumption, while energy that Italy does not import, but produces within its borders, that is approximately 25% of its domestic consumption, is just over two thirds coming from renewables (this share is above the respective EU average). In the first half of 2021, renewables met 38.5% of Italian electricity demand (the corresponding EU 2020 share was 38%); the most used renewable source is hydroelectric (39.9%), followed by photovoltaic (22.2%), wind (18.1%), bioenergy (15.3%) and geothermal (4.6%). Italy's per-capita $CO_{2eq.}$ emissions decreased by more than 25% between 2008 and 2019 (in the EU by 20%); the overall national aggregate share fell by 142 million tons CO_{2eq} between 1990 and 2020 (while most recent related program, announced in the PNRR, planned a decrease of 147 Mt CO2eq by 2030). On the state of renewables in Italy see: https://dgsaie.mise.gov.it/pub/sen/relazioni/relazione_annuale_situazione_energetica_nazionale_dati_2020.pdf
https://www.qualenergia.it/articoli/rinnovabili-primo-semestre-38-5-percento-su-domanda-elettrica/
On emissions in Italy see the following links: https://ilbolive.unipd.it/it/news/transizione-energetica-PNRR
https://www.isprambiente.gov.it/it/news/emissioni-gas-serra-nel-2020-stimata-riduzione-del-9-8-rispetto-al-2019

[21] Italy's main oil suppliers are Azerbaijan (19.9%), Iraq (17.3%), Saudi Arabia (13.2%), Russia (11.1%), Libya (6.9%), Kazakhstan (6.9%) and Nigeria (5.4%). Italy's main gas suppliers are Russia (42.9%), Algeria (22.7%), Northern Europe (11.5%, from Holland but above all Norway), Libya (6.7%) and Qatar (10.4%) − which contributes, together with other countries, including the US, with significant shares imported by ship as liquefied natural gas (LNG). See pages 10, 157 and 164 of the document downloadable at the following link: https://dgsaie.mise.gov.it/pub/sen/relazioni/relazione_annuale_situazione_energetica_nazionale_dati_2020.pdf

[22] Think of the challenging relations between Russia and Ukraine, or what happened in North Africa and the Middle East during the Arab springs, when Italy had to leverage on its storage and diversification chances in external procurement in order to avoid possible supply crises.

[23] https://chargedevs.com/newswire/german-firms-plan-to-exploit-massive-lithium-deposits-beneath-the-rhine/
https://www.unav.edu/web/global-affairs/the-battery-race-surfacing-geothermal-lithium-trapped-below-the-rhine-river

energy security and environment cooperation between Member States[24]. This general common posture also emerged during the G20 held in Rome at the end of last October, when the EU did find new agreements with Washington to bring an overall supply of steel and aluminum sustainable in terms of CO_2 emissions, as well as able to decrease the limitations introduced by the Trump administration to the related European exports in the US[25].

As also indicated by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021), in such framework Italy needs measures capable of reducing bureaucratic, fiscal, economic, and technological limits and disincentives towards renewables. Every relevant player, in both the public and private sectors, as well as the population, will have to play a role, including the Italian military. In fact, on the one hand the latter will very likely continue in the short and medium term to see among its tasks the protection of hydrocarbon supply, in general and for Italy (among others, think of scenarios such as the Gulf of Guinea, the Strait of Hormuz, Iraq and Libya); on the other, it is also true in the medium and long term it will presumably have growing chances for supporting, if not stimulating, a partial Italian disengagement, in terms of oil & gas production and import, from unstable areas. Provided this can be done only when not reducing the martial capacity of the country, the Italian military could contribute to more or less progressive shifts towards clean energy sources lowering the environmental impact of Italian economic and military activities, while reducing the chances Italian foreign energy policy be involved in areas with very high levels of geopolitical risk[26]. All this, moreover, seems quite consistent with the Energy Strategy the Italian Ministry of Defense released in 2019, which seems to consider very seriously, albeit with the aim of not diminishing Italian military operational capabilities, and in line with an emerging trend in both the US[27] and NATO[28], Armed Forces reduce climate-altering emissions and thus the use of fossil sources, as well as increase the use of renewable energy sources[29]. In this sense, Italy could also leverage on its National Military Research Plans (PNRM)[30], which can be a valid tool for deepening, in terms of operational or applied research, possible useful eco-sustainable links between national energy policy and military policy. All this also in light of the dual use potential of alternative energy, and the relevant related consequences in terms of possible research for technological innovation, which is something could trigger growing strategic partnerships among the private sector, public institutions, and academia[31].

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24 A summary is here: https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/consiglio-europeo-caso-polonia-tiene-banco-tensioni-stato-diritto-AEUSgZr ;
see also: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/52640/20211022-euco-conclusions-it.pdf ;
https://www.consilium.europa.eu/it/meetings/tte/2021/10/26/#

25 https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/u-s-e-u-reach-deal-steel-aluminum-tariffs-going-n1282800

26 After all, although subordinated to political authority, the military is in our view an 'actor' rather than a 'tool'.

27 For examples and relevant reflections, in particular concerning applications involving hydrogen, including the 'green' type (that is the least polluting), please refer to the following sources:
https://fuelcellsworks.com/news/u-s-army-develops-stealthy-hydrogen-fuel-cell-powered-tanks/
https://www.hydrogen.energy.gov/pdfs/htac_mar19_07_centeck.pdf
https://www.cnbc.com/2021/06/21/by-land-sea-and-air-gm-to-expand-fuel-cell-business-beyond-evs.html
https://www.difesa.it/SMD_/CASD/IM/CeMiSS/DocumentiVis/Rcerche_da_pubblicare/Pubblicate_nel_2020/AP_SME_02.pdf
https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2021/01/07/need-green-hydrogen/

28 For example, in June 2021, in Brussels, a meeting of the Atlantic Council affirmed NATO has the will to reduce emissions related to its structures, activities, vehicles and operations, identifying climate change as a multiplier of insecurity and planning to enhance the integration of eco-sustainable energy sources in its energy supply: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm?selectedLocale=en

29 The text of the Defense Energy Strategy (SED) is freely downloadable on the web page below:
https://www.difesa.it/Content/Struttura_progetto_energia/Pagine/default.aspx

30 They are managed by the Italian Secretariat General of Defence:
https://www.difesa.it/SGD-DNA/Staff/Reparti/V/Pagine/LaRicercaInnovazione.aspx

31 For a relevant example, concerning the US system, cf. the report at the following link:
https://www2.itif.org/2019-clean-energy-dividend.pdf

The repercussions of COVID-19 pandemic on the security of 5+5 countries (West Mediterranean area)

As reported in the recent research document edited by the CEMRES within the "5+5 Defense Initiative" and presented to the "5+5" Defense Ministry on the 15th of December 2021[1], Pandemics are a major problem worldwide and a serious threat to sustainable development. Their impacts are diverse: loss of life and disease can also cause social and economic disruption and capability loss to provide services. In an increasingly integrated world economy built on networks of global supply chains, pandemics in one country can easily affect others.

An epidemic is a new disease that usually spreads within national boundaries. A Pandemic is an epidemic that spreads worldwide, crossing international boundaries affecting a very large number of people. The outbreak of such a disease is caused by a virus that is new to mankind for which the human body is not immune. Viruses that are found in animals sometimes when transmitted to the human body mutate and become harmful causing deaths.

Pandemics are not the mere field of public health but a social issue and global security issue. It impacts on economic, social, and political conditions of the countries where it spreads. The movement of people from one region to another is highly restricted on account of the transmission of the virus and therefore the social life of citizens gets badly affected. When economic activities are shut down, a country faces a deficit in funds needed to meet the needs of people. The Lockdown of a city or entire state curtails development and so builds up the pressure on the governments. A country needs to be well equipped with medical infrastructure to sail through a pandemic situation.

A new strain of virus causes the disease COVID-19 which is similar to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Symptoms of the disease include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. In more severe cases, the infection can cause pneumonia or breathing difficulties (World Health Organization). The outbreak of the disease was first reported in Wuhan, Hubei province, China in December 2019. WHO (World Health Organization) declared on 30th January 2020, the outbreak of PHEC (Public Health Emergency Concern), and on 12th February 2020, the disease was named COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019). In a span of 30 days, COVID-19 spread rapidly to the entire country with an increase in a number of confirmed cases where the first few were from Wuhan, Hubei, China which is also the possible point of origin of COVID-19 and later cases were through transmission from one person to another "7". As per the WHO's situation report on 13th March 2020, the disease has spread in more than 100 countries of the world and among them, the most affected are the USA, Italy, Spain, Germany, China, France, and Turkey. To check the spread of pandemics many countries including region of Mediterranean countries took certain measures such as lockdown of cities, screening mechanisms at airports to detect symptomatic people, and keeping them in isolation for 14 days to test them for the virus.

The COVID-19 outbreak represents the worst pandemic experienced by nearly all people currently living and has had severe medical, social, and economic tolls worldwide. On a global scale, as of December 6, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) published statistics of 267.865.289 infected patients and 5.285.888 deaths worldwide. As a part of the globe, both Mediterranean shores have experienced several difficulties during spreading stages of COVID-19.

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1 AA.VV. editor Salem Shanbr (2021), *The repercussions of natural disaster, epidemics and pandemics on the security of 5 + 5 countries: "means of cooperation and mutual support*, CEMRES, Tunis.

Covid-19 impact on the Southern shore of 5+5 space

The Southern shore of the 5+5 was not spared from the harmful effects of the pandemics. Most countries tackled successfully the impact of the first wave but second and third waves have been more aggressive. Despite this fact, the number of cases and fatalities are lower than in the Northern shore as the following table shows:

State	*Confirmed Cases*	*Number of deaths*
Algeria	128,725	3,595
Libya	185,776	3,126
Mauritania	19,494	364
Morocco	519,108	9,143
Tunisia	345,474	12,654

***Table 1**: Confirmed COVID-19 cases & deaths in the Maghreb*

(**source: Africa CDC & African Union June 2021**)

The countries more affected by the pandemic have been Morocco and Tunisia while Mauritania has less number of cases and deaths. Nonetheless, governments were obliged to put in place restrictive measures to counter the spread of the pandemic like lockdown, borders and schools closures among others.

The economies in the Maghreb region have experienced hardship as a consequence of COVID-19 pandemic. The real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in the Maghreb region decreased by 8.8 in 2020 according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2021). All Maghrebian countries experienced a decline in real GDP growth in 2020: Algeria (-6%), Libya (-59.7%), Mauritania (-2.2%), Morocco (-7%) and Tunisia (-8.8%). Low tourism and decline in remittances are factors that impact most of economies together with the historical collapse of the demand in oil markets which harm the oil exporter countries. In the case of Libya, whose economy has been suffering from political conflicts since 2011, the pandemic impact has exacerbated economic and social problems. Hydrocarbon sector is the main contributor to the GDP and the oil price depression led to an unprecedented slump in export revenues.

The prospects of GDP growth for the Maghreb region in the medium term, an increase of 14.7 % and 3.3% in 2021 and 2022 respectively, are positive but the ability to reach previous levels of growth and employment will depend on the recovery of the world economy, especially the EU economies, and the evolution of tourism and hydrocarbon demand. The high rate of unemployment among youngsters remains and seems to be one of the threats to social peace. The health crisis has increased the need for funding to counter budget deficit, e.g. the IMF provided USD 753 M to Tunisia in April 2020.

Economic prospects by country are positive too according to IMF (2021): Algeria (2.9%), Libya (131%), Mauritania (3.1%), Morocco (4.5%) and Tunisia (3.8%). Despite these figures, Maghrebian countries will need new economic models to solve traditional economic problems and to adapt to the post-COVID-19 global stage as the rest of the World economies. That is the real challenge in the long term for the Maghreb region.

Covid-19 impact on the Northern shore of 5+5 space.

The COVID-19 pandemic has generated a multi-layered and multidimensional impact across all five countries on the Northern shore of 5+5 space. Given its unprecedented global reach and impact, it has posed considerable challenges to national authorities and heightened previous fragilities across the board, thus requiring coordinated multi-country policy responses (Greer, S.L.et al,2020). Its accumulated effects, however, have not been restricted to the hotspots of intensity or severity that had been initially identified. Indeed, while Italy was first reported as one of the main epicenters for the entire international community, with Spain assuming a key prominence soon afterwards due to spiking numbers, the aggregated statistics have since then reflected the proportionally different sizes and populations of France, Italy, Malta, Portugal, and Spain, while still affecting each country accordingly.

Fatalities and infection cases provide the most immediate and glaring depiction of the human cost inherent to this pandemic. By the end of April 2021, France had reached a total of 5.37 million infection cases and 102,000 fatalities; Italy a total of 3.9 million infection cases and 117,997 fatalities; Spain a total of 3.44 million infection cases and 77,000 fatalities; Portugal a total of 832,000 infection cases and 16,952 fatalities; and Malta a total of 30,063 infections cases and 411 fatalities. These numbers remain understandably provisional as the crisis is spreading all over the world, continuing to put a condition of high stress on national public health services and capacities with consecutive waves of spikes in infection rates. Regardless, when combined, the Northern shore of the 5+5 space has already totalized over 13.6 million cases of infection and over 314,000 fatalities so far.

The pandemic also took its sizeable toll at a political level. This is best represented by the delay or postponement of several electoral acts in three of the five countries under analysis due to the risk of further contagion through the concentration of large gatherings. In France, for instance, the second round of local elections originally scheduled for 22 March 2020 was moved to 28 June 2020. Italy, for its part, witnessed the postponement of a national referendum in addition to numerous regional and local elections. Regional elections in Spain, namely in Euskadi/Basque and Galicia, originally scheduled for 5 April 2020, were also pushed back to 12 July 2020.

However, political impact can also be assessed in terms of growing levels of Euroscepticism, given the interconnection between the five countries responses and the collective approach promoted by the European Union (EU) to tackle the pandemic. Italy, in particular, stood out early on with polls crediting 55% of the population to deem EU support to Italy during the COVID-19 crisis as “inadequate” (Fontana, O, 2020). Successive problems with the vaccination roll-out since early 2021 have equally contributed to a widespread blame for the logistic problems on multiple shipment shortcomings, thus leading to an overall decrease in approval of the EU's performance in all five countries (Eurobarometer 2021). Generalized loss of public confidence in institutions and leadership alike has therefore emerged as a key consequence across this particular space.

The overall economic impact has also been extremely severe, with full ramifications still unaccounted for. Spain’s GDP shrank 10.8% in 2020, the deepest recession in 80 years and the harshest in Europe, while unemployment rose to 16.2% (Chislett 2021). Meanwhile, Portugal’s GDP contracted 7.6% due to a significant decline in domestic demand as well as in private consumption, but also owed to the intense reductions in exports and imports of goods and services, with a special focus on tourism (INE 2021). Likewise, France, witnessed a contraction of nearly 9%, with the government launching comprehensive fiscal plans for 2020–22, totaling about 26% of the GDP in emergency and recovery measures (IMF 2021). The Maltese economy also likely recorded an unprecedented contraction 6.6% in 2020 (CBM 2020). Moreover, shared outlooks for recovery have been consistently pushed back in light of the lingering effects of the pandemic worldwide.

Finally, all five countries are also currently experiencing some measure of social tensions, placing public services under stress as well as elevating the political costs of omission and inefficiency, while at the same time giving room to more extreme views to take hold throughout the fringes of each society and further heightening the overall perception of crisis in the Northern shore of the 5+5 space.

Epidemics and Covid-19 impact on the neighboring space (Sahel)

The Sahel region has been less hit by COVID-19 pandemic than other regions in the world. According to the uncertain figures provided by some international organizations, COVID-19 cases and fatalities across the Sahel are relatively low. By the end of November 2020 there were 17,891 cases and 551 deaths caused following the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The latest figures reported by the same organization the 1st of June 201 for the G5 Sahel are the following:

State	*Confirmed Cases*	*Number of deaths*
Burkina Faso	13,431	166
Chad	4,929	173
Mali	14,265	----
Mauritania	19,494	463
Niger	5,410	517

***Table 2**: Confirmed COVID-19 cases & deaths in the Sahel*

(**source: Africa CDC & African Union June 2021**)

The above table shows an increase in the number of cases (57,519) and fatalities (1,511) occurred in the third pandemic phase. The World Health Organization (WHO) pointed out that the mortality in critically ill patients with COVID-19 is higher in African countries and particularly the Sahel region shows case fatality ratios higher than the global ones.

The evolution of the pandemic and its socio-economic impact is cause of major concern among international community. The fragility of most Sahelian states and the deteriorated human life conditions are challenged by the pandemic. COVID-19 pandemic has become an extra-exogenous factor to exacerbate the traditional evils of the region: lack of good governance, poverty, difficult access to public services (health care, education) and insecurity.

	Burkina Faso	**Chad**	**Mali**	**Mauritania**	**Niger**
Original 2020 forecast	5.8%	3.2%	6.3%	5%	6%
COVID-19 2020 adjusted	-0.8%	-0.9%	-2.2%	-2%	1.2%
2021 projections	4.3%	1.8%	3.1%	4%	2.9%

***Table 3**: Adjusted economic growth forecast for G5 Sahel*

(**source: IMF World Economic Outlook (April 2020 & April 2021)**)

Economic grow in the G5 Sahel has been seriously affected in 2020 as the above table shows. Food security is threatened by the impact of the pandemic in the agricultural sector by reducing inputs access and labor. The increasing number of displaced people as well as their live conditions is cause of inter-communal conflicts. According to Save the Children 2021, 13 million children are out of school due to increasing insecurity. The UN Secretary General, António Guterres warned in May 2020 that terrorist groups were taking advantage of the Covid-19 pandemic to intensify their attacks and to challenge state authority in the Sahel.

Repercussion on 5+5 space security

The Southern Mediterranean region is facing governance, socio-economic, climate, environmental and security challenges, many of which result from global trends and call for joint action by the "5+5 countries". Protracted conflicts in the Mediterranean region continue to inflict terrible human suffering, trigger significant forced displacement, weigh heavily on the economic and social prospects of entire societies, especially for countries hosting large refugee populations, and intensify geopolitical competition and outside interference[2]. The Covid-19 pandemic is having a tremendous impact on these societies [3].

The urgency of addressing these challenges is further reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has illustrated starkly shared vulnerabilities[4].

Major security threats such as terrorism, hybrid threats as well as cybercrime and organized crime, including the trade of illegal firearms, drug trafficking, human trafficking and money laundering are key challenges[5].

Radicalism and violent extremism

Analysis and studies evidence on the potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and response on violent extremist recruitment and radicalization. There are evidences identified on the impact of disasters on radicalization and violent extremism.

The impact of COVID-19 on radicalization will play out differently over short-, medium- and long-term frames[6].

The short term impacts

The short term impacts of COVID-19 on radicalization and violent extremism are multifaceted and complex, these result from the immediate impact of response to the pandemic. These include social distancing and restrictions.

Such responses have been seized on by radical ideologues to validate their world views. Further to this, the failure or inability of government to reach certain areas or groups may lead to a void in which violent extremists may step in. In brief[7]:

a. Governance vacuums may emerge and be filled by extremist groups as national resources are stretched and the capacity to govern is challenged;
b. The pandemic may be used to validate particular world views i.e. the decadence of the west, the corruption of big government;
c. The pandemic may provide a context in which opportunistic attacks are planned and accelerationist seek to act;
d. Social restrictions may provide a captive audience ripe for radicalization. It is important to note that radicalization is a multi-stage phenomena and individuals must usually already be receptive to extremist messaging.

The medium term impacts

The medium term impacts of COVID-19 are likely to be influenced by the broader impact of the pandemic i.e. how government responses are perceived, the fall out of said responses as well

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2 European Commission (2021). *Joint communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European economic and social committee and the Committee of the Regions*, 9 February 2021. In https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52021JC0002&rid=2.
3 PAM (2021). *Covid-19 Pandemic and Food Security in the PAM region*. In https://www.pam.int/welcome.asp?m=news&id=904.
4 European Commission (2021). *Cit.*
5 *Ibidem.*
6 Avis W. (2020). *The COVID-19 pandemic and response on violent extremist recruitment and radicalisation*, H4D, Helpdesk Report, University of Birmingham. In https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/808_COVID19%20_and_Violent_Extremism.pdf.
7 *Ibidem*.

as the broader socio-economic impacts. As such radical ideologies may be provided with a space and audience to propose violent extremism. In brief[8]:

a. The pandemic may result in declining international collaboration as nations seek to fund responses to COVID-19 at the expense of other areas;
b. Countries may face challenges in providing services, this may provide a void into which extremist groups can move;
c. Tensions may be created between groups as government response are perceived to be unequal;
d. The crisis may result in deepening inequalities if the socio-economic impacts are significant.

Longer term impacts

The longer term impacts are harder to discern, and will play out over months and years. It is clear that how governments respond to the initial crisis will reverberate over the medium to long term. In particular decisions regarding how to respond have the potential to entrench inequalities or alienate particular areas and groups. If the pandemic leads to a sustained economic crisis at national or international level – cooperation across borders may be reduced allowing radical ideologies to proliferate[9].

Terrorism

Terrorism and its financing, radicalization, violent extremism, and the phenomenon of Foreign Terrorist Fighters occur on and affect both shores of the Mediterranean and are often interlinked[10].

As the novel COVID-19 was spreading like a bushfire, the pandemic couldn't go unnoticed by the media apparatus of jihadi groups like the so-called terror group *Islamic State* (IS) or al-Qaeda (AQ). During the Covid-19 emergency and the attacks which took place in Europe and in North Africa, Islamic State and al-Qaeda carried out online terrorist propaganda activities, recalling how dynamic terrorism associated with the so-called Islamic State and al-Qaeda remains, especially through the Internet. In particular, the IS confirmed its aggressive narrative, identifying the Coronavirus as a "soldier of Allah". An ally, set out to punish the "infidels", above all the military and police forces[11], currently preoccupied in dealing with the pandemic and the extra security measures involved. They perceive this as an opportunity to engage in attacks and "spread (…) chaos and agitation"[12].

Irregular migration, migrant smuggling and human trafficking in the time of COVID-19[13]

Migration is a global phenomenon that requires joint responses, solidarity and global responsibility sharing. Irregular migration brings challenges, also by further increasing the economic power and destabilizing influence of criminal networks[14].

The economic consequences will significantly impact peoples' desire and ability to migrate, as well as the incentive and opportunities for criminals to profit from illegal migration which is also expected to increase.

Migrant smuggling and human trafficking are particularly affected by geo-political and socio-economic factors which vary greatly by region and in the ways they drive vulnerable communities in those regions to migrate. The COVID-19 pandemic is, and will continue, influencing these factors

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8 *Ibidem*.
9 *Ibidem*.
10 *Ibidem*.
11 Bertolotti C. (2021), *Introduction: terrorism at the time of Covid-19*, in #ReaCT2021 – 2nd Report on Radicalization and Counter Terrorism, START InSight & Formiche. In https://www.startinsight.eu/en/react2021-2report-en/.
12 Van Ostaeyen P. (2020). The Islamic State and Coronavirus, Time for a Comeback? ISPI, Milan. In https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/islamic-state-and-coronavirus-time-comeback-26166.
13 INTERPOL (2020). *COVID-19 impact on migrant smuggling and human trafficking*, 11 June 2020. In https://www.interpol.int/News-and-Events/News/2020/COVID-19-impact-on-migrant-smuggling-and-human-trafficking.
14 European Commission (2021). *Cit*.

across the globe. Furthermore COVID-19, and measures being taken by countries to control its spread, are impacting crime around the world, including migrant smuggling and human trafficking.

European countries, the most frequent destination for irregular migration and migrant smuggling, have been amongst the most heavily impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak. Migrants have not been discouraged from reaching, or attempting to reach, these destinations despite the risks of contagion.

Most African countries have implemented travel restrictions to prevent the spread of COVID - 19, however, these have not been sufficient to dissuade smugglers or migrants in certain regions.

Migrants are still arriving in smuggling hubs in the Sahel region: it is almost certain that attempts to migrate to Europe will continue in spite of the pandemic. With access to desired destinations being increasingly difficult, smuggling networks will be likely seeking new means of entry and charging premium prices for their so-called services.

- Alternative, and potentially more dangerous, maritime routes will continue to be explored;
- Increased militia activity in Libya likely to see an increase in smuggling activities;
- Increased demand, and higher prices, for smuggling activities expected in response to greater difficulty to enter destination countries.

Migrants departing mainly from Western Sahara, in 2020, have continued to arrive in the Spanish Canary Islands along the highly perilous Atlantic route in unseaworthy vessels.

Migrants departing mainly from sub-Sahara, in 2021, have increased they arrival in Italy along the Central Mediterranean route departing mainly from Tunisia and Libya.

Analysis, assessment, forecast

In terms of security and stability, the COVID-19 pandemic has made the pre-existing problematic situation more critical.

In this challenging scenario, “5+5 countries” need to develop further its partnership on security matters with its neighbouring countries, as well as enhancing operational cooperation, including for maritime security and coastguard cooperation. Such partnerships should be tailor-made, correspond to respective needs and enjoy high-level political support in order to guarantee concrete results. Cooperation with regional and international organizations is also vital.

Regarding irregular migrations

It is required that the “5+5 countries” will significantly step up common efforts to combat trafficking and fight the criminal networks behind migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings. Strengthening migration and asylum governance including border management capacity is a key element. Cooperation at the regional and multilateral level should be explored further, including through triangular and south-south cooperation, since some southern Mediterranean partners are origin, transit and destination countries.

Regarding terrorism and radicalism

Recent attacks have underscored the need to deepen high level strategic dialogues on counterterrorism. Building on existing cooperation, notably on law enforcement, it is needed to step up efforts to prevent radicalization, including deepening interreligious and intercultural dialogues, and building capacity to address violent extremism, online recruitment, preventing of dissemination of terrorist content online.

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Osservatorio Strategico

Part Two

The 60th anniversary of the first conference of the Non-aligned Movement

A two-day summit was held on 11 October in Belgrade to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the first conference of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), established to create a third bloc in a world polarized by the East-West Cold War.

At the meeting, hosted by Serbia, delegations from over 105 countries and nine international organizations delivered.

On the first day, some leaders criticized the hoarding of COVID-19 vaccines by wealthier Western countries, calling for more solidarity and fairer distribution.

President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, presiding over the summit via a video link, focused his introductory speech, among other things, on the global response to the COVID pandemic and dissatisfaction with the way some rich countries have grabbed vaccines, calling it "vaccine nationalism".

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said the challenges the world has faced since the founding of the Non-Aligned Movement have been and have even been earned.

Marsudi stated that one of the principles of the Movement is equality between all states and nations and, as already stated by Aliyev, that "access to coronavirus vaccines must be more equitable and that everyone needs to collaborate it is about pandemic and climate change”.

The United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, highlighted, through a video message, how the gathering in Belgrade took place at a time of exceptional global challenges and stated that the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries still has an important role to play in the world.

Guterres recalled efforts to "long try to push through the global vaccination plan" and added that the deaths of huge numbers of people from COVID were mainly caused by the unequal distribution of vaccines. The secretary-general also recalled the problems of the modern world, primarily climate change, pollution, and job losses. Milorad Dodik, the Serbian member of the tripartite presidency of Bosnia, present at the summit, accused the West of imposing unrealistic solutions on Bosnia, declaring that "Bosnia and Herzegovina is under the protectorate of the United States, Japan, Canada, and other European countries, united to impose their solutions on the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their misunderstanding and interference in the internal affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region, as well as the double standards applied in the 1990s and even today, have brought BiH to the brink of disintegration. "

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, speaking at the summit, conveyed a message from President Vladimir Putin, in which he spoke a lot about the role of the Non-Aligned Movement in consistently pursuing the principle of equality of states, respecting the sovereignty and legitimate interests and in supporting a constructive multilateral dialogue according to the United Nations Charter. "We hope that our observer status in the NAM will help all coordinated efforts that will benefit the democratization of international relations," Lavrov said after reading Putin's letter[1].

The Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, also took part in the commemorative event in Belgrade.

Before the Belgrade Summit, the Non-Aligned Movement, which has 120 members, was hosted by Azerbaijan in 2019 in the capital Baku[2].

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1 *Non-aligned summit opens in Belgrade with call for multilateralism amid pandemic*, Xinhua 12/10/2021 http://www.news.cn/english/2021-10/12/c_1310239870.htm

2 Ozturk T., *Serbia to host Non-Aligned Movement Summit on Monday*, Anadolu Agency 10/10/2021 https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/serbia-to-host-non-aligned-movement-summit-on-monday/2388220

The first conference took place in 1961 in Belgrade, in the era of decolonization of many African and Asian countries under the leadership of Yugoslav President Josip Tito, Egyptian President Abdel Nasser, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, and other leaders. The Movement enabled Tito to become a respected statesman around the world and was called a third bloc, formed alongside the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War[3].

Starting in the 1970s and after Tito's death in 1980 and the collapse of communism, it lost much of its relevance and influence.

The summit of the Non-Aligned Movement was held simultaneously (11-14 October) with the International Arms Fair "Partner 2021", to revive the Serbian defense industry[4].

During Partner 2021, the Serbian defense industry Yugoimport presented its latest Lazar III A1 armored vehicle equipped with the latest Russian combat modules.

The Lazar III combat vehicle developed by Yugoimport is in service with the Serbian army and the interior ministry. Its standard configuration includes a Serbian-made remote-controlled combat module with a 12.7-mm large-caliber machine gun. The new vehicle modification presented at the Partner Arms Show 2021 is the first heavily armed Lazar III A1 version. A source from the Serbian defense industry told TASS that the latest Russian modules fitted to the Lazar III armored vehicle will increase the vehicle's export potential.

The latest modules fitted to the Lazar III combat vehicle were developed by the Russian-based Burevestnik Central Research Institute. The 32V01 unmanned combat module was first presented at the IDEX International Arms Fair in Abu Dhabi in the UAE in 2015[5].

3 Dragojlo S., *Belgrade Non-Aligned Summit Condemns West's 'Vaccination Nationalism'*, Balkan Insight 11/10/2021 https://balkaninsight.com/2021/10/11/belgrade-non-aligned-summit-condemns-wests-vaccination-nationalism/

4 *Analyst: Idea to restore Serbia's defence industry's position on former Yugoslav markets,* Euractiv 13/10/2021 https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/analyst-idea-to-restore-serbias-defence-industrys-position-on-former-yugoslav-markets/

5 *Serbia outfits its armor with Russia's latest combat modules to boost firepower*, TASS 12/10/2021 https://tass.com/defense/1348471

The Situation in Libya ahead of December Elections

The Libyan presidential elections are coming, and it is important to better understand the security and political situation in the country.

Libya is beset by violence, civil war, political instability, economic crisis, internal division since the Western intervention in 2011 when the former leader Gaddafi was toppled. Since then, the international community, local, regional, and international actors devised and implemented different strategies to stabilize the country and re-create a unity of government. Yet, no one of such strategies succeeded and even the next elections will likely produce the same result.

While the security situation has improved in the last months, it remains volatile and uncertain. For example, on the 17th of October two employees of the National Oil Corporation (NOC) were kidnapped after leaving work in the capital Tripoli. On the 25th, the Zawiya Oil Refinery was severely damaged as a result of skirmishes by armed groups in the vicinity of the complex. Moreover, the fact that several militias are operating inside Libya denying to the central government the *monopoly* on the legitimated use of physical force is one of the most crucial issues for the future and one that the elections will not consider or will be able to resolve.

In light of this, one of the most important problems is the presence in Libya of different external actors and their "mercenaries". Indeed, Russia is using the contractors of the Wagner group to support the East forces of General Haftar, while Turkey has sent in Libya both its soldiers and fighters from Syria to support the government in Tripoli. The United Nations estimates 20,000 mercenaries and foreign fighters deployed in the country. The UN and the entire international community have always said that the first step to stabilize Libya is the withdrawal of such militias. Two months before the election, do these irregular groups withdraw or at least reduced their numbers/capabilities? The answer is no.

On the 3rd of October Libyan Foreign Minister Najla al-Mangoush indeed announced a "very modest start" to the withdrawal of foreign fighters, but it was a too modest step to influence the situation. Some days later the United Nations mission mediating between the rivals said a 10-member joint military commission, with five representatives from each side, (JMC 5+5) inked a "gradual and balanced" withdrawal deal[1]. The JMC 5+5 met again on the 30th of October in Cairo "to develop an implementation plan and mechanism for the gradual, balanced, and sequenced departure of all mercenaries, foreign fighters, and foreign forces, through consultations and negotiations with Libya's neighbors and other international partners"[2]. The deal also calls for the deployment of UN observers to monitor the ceasefire before the implementation of the withdrawal plan. The first group (60 members) of international ceasefire monitors arrived in Tripoli on the 23rd of October. Their goals are to monitor the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and the exit of mercenaries and foreign forces from Libyan territory. The observers are unarmed civilians from several countries of the African Union and the European Union, but excluded nationalities of the countries interfering in the Libyan affairs[3].

Turkey has withdrawn a limited number of Syrian mercenaries from Libya over the past weeks as a result of the normalization talks with Egypt last month. As *Al-Monitor* reported, Turkey pulled

1 https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/9/libyan-rivals-sign-initial-deal-on-pullout-of-mercenaries.
2 https://www.libyaherald.com/2021/10/30/unsmil-hopes-cairo-55-jmc-meeting-will-lead-to-first-steps-of-withdrawal-of-foreign-forces-and-mercenaries/.
3 https://www.libyaherald.com/2021/10/23/first-group-of-60-members-of-ceasefire-monitors-arrives-in-tripoli-55-jmc-member/.

Syrian mercenaries stationed in Misrata and Tripoli, around 800, out of the country on three separate flights over the past two months. However, it has been reported that some 200 new Syrian fighters were sent to Libya within the same time frame[4]. Meanwhile, it remains unknown whether Russia has pulled out mercenaries.

While the Russian private military contractor Wagner is relatively famous and known, the Turkish company SADAT is less studied. SADAT[5] is a private company but with strong links with Ankara and it is a facilitator between Ankara and Syrian proxy fighters, complementing the efforts of the Turkish military and security services. Therefore, the company depends on the state, and Erdogan, favor and this constrains its autonomy and entrepreneurialism. Not only is SADAT supporting Turkish military and proxy forces (in Syria, Libya, Africa, and Nagorno-Karabakh), but there is also likely a nexus between SADAT and Turkey’s national intelligence organization. According to its website, the firm boasts to be “the first and the only company in Turkey, that internationally provides consultancy and military training services at the international defense and interior security sector.” SADAT promotes itself as a military enterpriser, advertising consultancy services, conventional, unconventional, and special forces training, and ordinance and maintenance expertise. Recently, the U.S. Africa Command estimated that several dozen military trainers from SADAT were deployed to Tripoli to train both GNA-aligned militias and 5,000 Syrian fighters. However, the company is probably operating in the country since 2013.

The continuing presence of this kind of actor is a worrying signal for the future of Libya, even though the election would be a success. But can the elections be a true turning point? Unfortunately, the answer is probably no.

In addition to what we have said in the previous paragraph about the security situation and the deep involvement of external actors with different and conflicting interests, it is fair to say that the presidential elections will more probably photograph and solidify the current division between Libyan society and politics than draw a possible political solution.

Leaving aside many hurdles still to be overcome, including agreeing upon a proper legislative and constitutional framework and the technical and logistical preparations for the registration of candidates, which will open next month, previous examples in Libya, but also elsewhere in Iraq and Afghanistan, show that the elections have not served post-Gaddafi Libya well thus far. For instance, the Government of National Unity (GNU) should have served as a consensus body, but the current and deep division of the country demonstrates its failure. With regional and political divisions so entrenched, it is difficult to see how a new president will be able to transcend the divide and prove acceptable to all.

Although his ill-fated 2019-2020 campaign against Tripoli, Haftar has a broader backing in the east than Aquila Saleh, he will struggle to win votes beyond Cyrenaica and some parts of the south, and for sure he will not get any support from the west where the vast bulk of Libya’s population lives. However, this numerical advantage cannot be enough for Tripolitanian candidates because they are split between a handful of political leaders. Former interior minister, Fathi Bashagha, is popular among certain western factions, but he is opposed by some powerful armed groups. Ahmed Meitig is a businessman with a certain degree of popularity in the west, but he is part of the pro-Turkey, pro-revolutionary camp that has ruled Libya since 2014 and deliberately marginalized the east[6]. Bengasi has always opposed any Turkish intervention and interests in Libya.

Therefore, the election will not overcome the fundamental problem facing Libya: namely, that the west and the east are operating in separate orbits and the deep-rooted issues that have been at

4 https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/10/turkey-sends-mixed-signals-over-syrian-mercenaries-libya.
5 https://warontherocks.com/2021/10/making-sense-of-sadat-turkeys-private-military-company/.
6 https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/libya-elections-hope-heal-country-make-worse.

the heart of the conflict since the beginning have yet to be resolved. The most likely after-election scenario is that any winner candidate will not be able to break into the other half of the country that will continue to oppose the political agenda of the winner half. Both Tripoli and Bengasi are supported by regional and international actors (Turkey, Russia, Egypt to name just a few) who are not intending to reduce their influence without something in return. Moreover, the international community's call to withdraw foreign troops or to compose the political division between the two capitals are empty words without a real presence in the country and the disarmament of local militias.

From low-intensity domestic insurgency to new global jihadist scenario: what is the future for Cabo Delgado?

For several weeks now, troops from Mozambique, Rwanda, and the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) have gained ground over the Islamist insurgents in the country's northern region. Since the outbreak of the insurgency in 2017, the trend seems to be in favor of the security forces. However, many doubts remain about the future security of the Cabo Delgado region and with it of the large multinational hydrocarbon companies' investments. The resilient strategy of the Islamist group Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jamaah (ASWJ) will lead to a change in the conflict dynamics.

The insurgency in Mozambique can be defined as a low-intensity civil war that threatens the local population and the interests of foreign companies. The revolt in the Cabo Delgado region in northern Mozambique has long remained out of the international spotlight. For a few years, the clashes in the region were dismissed as a local insurgency. International perception and interest changed in March when the ASWJ group took possession of the coastal city of Palma. Palma is not only a strategic port for the control of the area but is also the center of oil and gas operations. The fate of Mozambique's poorest region changed in 2010 when the American company Anadarko discovered a gas reserve not far from the Rovuma River Bay. The subsequent explorations brought to light the second-largest gas reserve in Africa. The French company Total was one of the most active and has launched the development of a gas liquefaction plant with an investment of over 20 billion USD. The arrival of the world's leading companies in the hydrocarbon sector, including the Italian ENI, has generated many expectations in the local population. However, the central government did not distribute the resources gained from the gas concessions throughout the region. The communities of Cabo Delgado remained in conditions of degrading and extreme poverty. In this context of marginality, Islam emerged as the answer (Pirio et al., 2019).

In 2017, some members of a Muslim religious sect established in the early 2000s by the followers of Kenyan Sheikh Aboud Rogo Mohammed launched attacks on military and police installations in the region. At the root of the ASWJ actions was the desire to establish a more egalitarian and fair society. The group won the hearts of those marginalized by the Maputo government (Bonate, 2018). The movement, known locally as al-Shabaab[1] (the youth) or Swahili Sunna, grew rapidly, developing attack capabilities and exploiting the weaknesses and corruption of the Mozambican security apparatus. Like other African faith-based movements, the ASWJ began as a local phenomenon that became radicalized (Matsinhe and Valoi, 2019). Several radical preachers from Tanzania, such as Sheik Hassan, capitalized on the malaise of the youth by presenting the path of jihad as the solution. The group had established a heterogeneous recruitment network involving marriage ties, informal networks of friends, madrassas, mosques, informal trading businesses, and community-based Muslim youth associations (Saide Habibe et al., 2019). The group has funded itself through extortion, kidnapping, and illegal trafficking. The ASWJ proclaimed its ties to the Islamic State (IS) and its offshoot, the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP), in 2019. However, there are many doubts about the real influence of IS on the movement. Some analysts believe that IS hijacked the insurgency by assuming control and its direction of it (Columbo, 2020). Others, by contrast, are convinced that the leadership is local and the link to IS was functional to the need for

[1] Despite the name and Somali nationality of a few of its members, the ASWJ has no established ties to Somali al-Shabaab.

propaganda and publicity. The Mozambican insurgents thus constitute an armed group with local motivations and command structures. Propaganda invokes themes common to global and regional jihadism, such as fighting a *kefir* (non-believer), identified with the Maputo government.

Since the beginning of the attacks, the Maputo government led by President Filipi Nyusi has appeared weak and at the mercy of events. The Mozambican authorities undertook several counter-insurgency operations both by the state's security forces and by relying on foreign contractors such as Wagner (Russia) and Dick Advisory Group (South Africa). Although the nearly twelve thousand troops, including local forces and contractors, were regularly defeated on the ground, Nyusi hesitated for a long time before asking for help from outside forces. Since 2020 conflict has rapidly expanded to involve six regional districts, threatening the activities of foreign companies. Local security forces proved to be ill-trained and poorly equipped to counter the advance of the Islamist group. In addition, the rivalry between the Defense and Interior Ministries and widespread corruption within them have contributed to further weakening Mozambique's defenses. Finally, in March 2021, ASWJ reached Palma, forcing President Nyusi to require military aid from the Southern African Development Community (SADC). SADC has launched a mission (SAMIM) with the deployment in July of 3,000 soldiers belonging to various member states, including Angola and South Africa. Simultaneously, however, Nyusi has established bilateral agreements with countries less linked to the region, such as Rwanda and Portugal. The former sent a contingent of 1,000 soldiers, enhancing Kigali's image as a continental cop. Portugal, on the other hand, promoted the European Union Training Mission (EUTM). The European mission began in September to train Mozambican special forces and navy in counter-terrorism. Despite no shortage of misunderstandings due mainly to Rwanda's involvement, regular troops halted the ASWJ advance and reoccupied some areas in the region.

The insurgency's toll since 2017 has resulted in over 3,000 casualties, half of them civilians, and 600,000 people displaced. As Mozambican, SADC, and Rwandan security forces increase their presence, the ASWJ is moving into the southern districts of the region. The rising counter to Islamist operations has triggered a new transformation of the group. Already in the past, the group has shown great resilience by changing its strategy and attack tactics. In a short time, the ASWJ went from brief raids with very blunt weapons to large-scale targeted attacks. In recent weeks, security forces have defused several homemade ammonium nitrate bombs. The discoveries are proof that the group is increasing the use and know-how of Improvised Explosive Device (IEDs), intending to develop techniques of guerrilla warfare and urban terrorism. In the current scenario, Islamist forces are likely to forgo large-scale operations in the coming weeks by promoting asymmetric actions in still uninvolved urban centers such as Mueda and Pemba. At the same time, the involvement of foreign troops internationalized the conflict. Such development, coupled with Western interests in the area, could attract fighters from other continent countries, turning Cabo Delgado into a new arena of the global jihadist struggle.

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Inter-Korean relations in 2021 and Moon Jae-in's legacy

The legacy of Moon Jae-in

In June 2021, South Korean President Moon Jae-in granted an interview to Time magazine. The article closes with a particularly striking sentence: "Moon's true legacy might be a grim realization that if he could not fix things, perhaps nobody can." (Campbell, 2021). During the Moon presidency, several favorable conditions generated the opportunity for significant progress towards the pacification of the Korean peninsula. Despite these conditions, to date the negotiation process started at the beginning of 2018 is in a stalemate. Today, no new significant steps forward are in sight, at least in the short and medium-term.

Moon was the contemporary leader who, due to his ideological inclination and personal history, was best suited to make a decisive change in inter-Korean relations. Although the President was born near Busan, his parents were originally from Hamhung, the second-largest city in North Korea. After the Korean War, they were welcomed as refugees in South Korea. Moon is also the expression of the "386 generation", composed of activists who under the leadership of Kim Dae-jung fought against the dictatorship and led the democratization process in the 80s. Finally, in the early 2000s, Moon, as President Roh Moo-hyun's chief of staff, organized the second inter-Korean summit in 2007.

The will to achieve peace between the two Koreas inspired Moon's approach to foreign policy. However, Moon wasn't just an idealist. On the contrary, he understood the need to reconcile his ideological inclination with the strategic reality of the region. He put into question one of the assumptions of previous progressive governments: considering the progress of inter-Korean relations as antithetical to the solidity of the alliance with the United States. Moon considered acting in concert with Washington as a prerequisite for stable progress with Pyongyang. From this point of view, the Trump presidency generated some conditions favorable to Moon's policy, although the bilateral relationship was not without problems. In 2017, the first year of his mandate, Trump promoted a very aggressive policy towards Pyongyang, going so far as to promise "fire and fury" and threaten preventive intervention. Furthermore, the Trump administration destabilized the bilateral relationship both through the imposition of tariffs on Seoul and by opening a long dispute over the issue of host nation support.[1] Nonetheless, Trump's willingness to break with the tradition of American foreign policy and his desire to change relations with North Korea opened an unexpected window of opportunity for Moon who could promote a radical and fast-paced approach than would not have been accepted by other US administrations.

Moon met with Kim Jong-un in the demilitarized zone twice in April and May 2018. Moreover, he traveled to Pyongyang in September 2018. Diplomacy between the two Koreas followed a parallel path to that between Pyongyang and Washington, which culminated in the two summits between Trump and Kim Jong-un, in June 2018 in Singapore and March 2019 in Hanoi. Despite efforts made by Moon, the cycle of detente with Pyongyang stalled after the Hanoi summit in 2019. The Covid-19 pandemic then made it impossible to resume negotiations. In 2020, North Korea cut off

[1] Host nation support funds are the contributions of the host country to finance the costs of American military bases. Trump asked to increase the sum paid by South Korea from $ 1 billion to $ 5 billion. The dispute was then closed in 2021 when the Biden administration signed a new agreement that led to an increase of about 20% in the South Korean contribution.

communications and dismantled the Joint Liaison Office and the Kaesong manufacturing district.[2] The crucial disagreement regards the different interpretations of denuclearization by the US and North Korea. The United States continues to view complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization (CVID) as a necessary objective for negotiations. North Korea insists on the denuclearization of the peninsula, namely the termination of the US-South Korea alliance and the withdrawal of American troops from the peninsula. Furthermore, Pyongyang considers the cessation of sanctions as a prerequisite for significant progress on the nuclear front.

The Biden administration during its first year in office did not put the Korean question at the center of its foreign policy priorities. The "strategic competition" with China, strengthening alliances in the region, climate change, and the exit from the pandemic are Washington’s most urgent priorities. Additionally, Moon's mandate will end with the presidential election in March.[3] Consequently, the window of opportunity for Moon to reach a further breakthrough with North Korea seems now definitively closed.

North Korea's missile and nuclear program in 2021

In 2021, the Pyongyang regime continued to expand its nuclear program and missile systems to develop an effective deterrent against a pre-emptive strike by the United States and South Korea. In 2021, the number of tests was lower compared to 2022 as well as previous years, except for 2018, the year in which negotiations with the United States took place. However, in 2021, North Korea made some significant steps on the technological front. The most important is probably the ability to launch submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). This capacity is important because it increases the chance of surviving a first pre-emptive strike and launching a counter-offensive. The missiles tested by the North Korean submarines belong to the KN-23 type, with a range between 400 and 500 km and capable of carrying nuclear warheads. Furthermore, the KN-23s are particularly difficult to intercept because they can use a quasi-ballistic trajectory (they can avoid a complete exit from the atmosphere) and they can maneuver, avoiding a predictable trajectory in the descent phase (Missile Threat, 2021). The KN-23 itself was also tested as a “rail-based launched system” in September. The initiative to place the launch systems on a train is simple but significant, as it allows to hide the launch systems inside railway tunnels and to deploy the missiles only in the launch phase. It also makes it easier to hide launch systems within apparently civilian use infrastructures. This development also increases the ability to withstand a pre-emptive strike and improves North Korean deterrence (Van Diepen, 2021a).

In September, Pyongyang also tested a long-range cruise missile with a range of 1500 km. This further complicates the possibility of effectively using missile defense in a conflict on the peninsula. This missile is much more maneuverable than ballistic missiles and flies at a much lower altitude, making interception attempts very difficult. During the summer, the North Korean military also tested the KN-06 SAM (anti-aircraft missile) system. This system is very similar to the Russian S-300s and HQ-9s. This suggests that North Korea has acquired Russian or Chinese technology through voluntary transfer or espionage.

Finally, North Korea tested the Hwasong 8, an intermediate-range missile (IRBM), equipped with a hypersonic glide vehicle (HGV). This system allows for superior maneuvering capability for the missile, which would therefore be even more difficult to intercept by the anti-missile defense systems deployed by the United States, South Korea, and Japan. However, this system is very

[2] The Kaesong Industrial District was home of production plants financed by entrepreneurs from South Korean and operated by laborers from the North. It was opened in 2003 and closed in 2016. It hosted up to 120 companies from the South and up to 50,000 workers from the North. The Liaison Office was erected to host bilateral contacts in 2018 and was dismantled in 2020.

[3] The South Korean constitution establishes that the President of the Republic cannot be elected for a second mandate.

complex and will most likely occupy only a fraction of the inventory of IRBM-type missiles in the North Korean arsenal (Van Diepen, 2021b).

These developments, although they have not attracted the same political attention and have not been seen as strategic breakthroughs as nuclear tests or ICBM missile tests, are important steps towards North Korea's goal of increasing the deterrent potential of its arsenal.

The 2022 elections and the future of inter-Korean relations

The future of inter-Korean relations is strongly linked to the outcome of the South Korean presidential elections in 2022. Lee Jae-myung, now governor of the province of Gyeonggi, won the primary for the Democratic Party. Lee Jae-myung prevailed in the primary elections against the current Prime Minister, Lee Nak-yon. The latter lost much of his support among progressive voters when he spoke in favor of a possible pardon to be granted to former presidents Park Guen-hye and Lee Myung-bak, both in prison for corruption scandals.

Lee Jae-myung articulated his position on relations with Pyongyang in a document entitled "Unification and Diplomacy Initiative in the Era of Great Transformation". The document argues that currently, a "grand bargain" aimed at solving the division of the Korean peninsula is not possible. However, Seoul should focus on practical and incremental measures aimed at solving concrete problems and improving mutual trust. The document also argues that South Korea should not feel forced to choose between China and the United States but can opt for a policy of pragmatic cooperation with both (Ahn, 2021).

The conservative political front went through a long period of crisis following the corruption scandals that led to Park Geun-hye's resignation. Conservatives have reorganized themselves, establishing a new party, the People's Power Party. The party is led by the emerging leader Lee Jun-seok, who, at 36 years of age, is still too young to run for President. The PPP has tried to craft a more moderate and inclusive image to attract the votes of centrists, particularly among young people and males, who opposed the inclusive gender policies promoted by Moon. The PPP sought to capitalize on the Moon government's decline in popularity over the past year. The stall in the negotiations with North Korea, the uncertain management of the vaccination campaign, as well as several alleged episodes of corruption, linked to prominent personalities such as the Minister of Justice Cho Kuk, badly damaged the popularity of the currently governing Democratic Party.

Conservatives are generally skeptical of dialogue with North Korea. Furthermore, they accuse progressives of seeking a policy of strategic ambiguity between China and the United States. Moon worked to strengthen the alliance with Washington by expanding cooperation into new areas such as value chains, 5G, and artificial intelligence. Furthermore, the New Southern Policy is entirely consistent with the priorities of the US Free and Open Indo Pacific Strategy. However, conservatives would likely move even more decisively in expanding security cooperation with Washington, through initiatives such as participation in the Quad or even hosting tactical nuclear weapons on South Korean soil.

To date, the PPP has not yet nominated the party's candidate. Yoon Seok-youl, one of the favorites for the nomination, was the protagonist of several missteps. The most damaging are those associated with his statements praising the dictator Chun Doo-hwan, who was responsible for the suppression of the 1980 Gwangju uprising as well as of a decade of political repression between 1979 and 1988 (Kim, 2021).

Conclusion

With the end of the Moon presidency, a period in which South Korea has made a resolute attempt to promote a stable and lasting peace on the Korean peninsula comes to an end. Moon Jae-in was probably the most suitable person for this task, due to its political biography and willingness to find a synthesis between strategic and political constraints and ideological objectives. Nevertheless, fundamental divergences such as incompatible definitions of de-nuclearization blocked progress both in inter-Korean relations and between Washington and Pyongyang. The pandemic then prevented any further direct contact between 2020 and 2021. Over the past year, North Korea has made further progress in building an increasingly complex and survivable nuclear deterrent. Furthermore, the window of opportunity opened by the Trump administration seems to have closed, as Biden seems much more inclined to a gradual and cautious approach.

Finally, the 2022 elections in South Korea will determine the future direction of Seoul's government. Progressive candidate Lee could try to follow Moon's footsteps, but probably he would adopt a more pragmatic and gradualist approach. Conversely, a conservative presidency could lead to a sharp deterioration in inter-Korean relations.

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Over six years of Russian presence in Syria. What are the lessons learned for the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation?

In October 2011, armed opposition to the government of Bashar al-Assad emerged in northern Syria in Idlib. After 10 years of war, the city and its surroundings are the last line of defense of the "anti-al-Assad groups", which, with the support of Turkey[1], continue to declare their willingness to fight the government of Damascus, which is instead supported by Russia. Syria is currently divided into three control zones which include government-controlled areas (see Fig. 1) (western, central, and eastern Syria), the territory supported by Turkey, and subordinated to the Syrian opposition (along the border in the north-west and north of the country) and the north-east region, which is governed by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria and its military alliance, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which uses the support of the United States and many of its allies, members of the global coalition opposing the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS).

Russia officially intervened in Syria following the approval of the use of troops by the Council of the Russian Federation on the 30th of September 2015[2]; on the same day, the air force began to launch the first attacks on the positions of the Islamic terrorists. As explained at the time by the head of the presidential administration, Sergey Ivanov, the operation had an exclusively aerial character, aimed against the militants of the Islamic State group, the introduction of land forces into the country was therefore out of the question. The active phase of the Russian presence, probably bearing the stigma of the ten-year war in Afghanistan (1979-1989), ended on the 11th of December 2017, with Russian casualties, due to the Syrian military operation since the 30th of September 2015, amounting to 112 people[3] as of March 2021, the same figure as in September 2018. This amount is surprisingly high, considering that officially Russia is only involved in air warfare. However, Moscow maintained the airbase at Khmeimim, where the 555th air group[4] is deployed, and the naval logistics center in the port of Tartus. In December 2019, Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov, who oversees the defense industry, said that over the next four years it plans to invest $ 500 million[5] in the modernization of Tartus, which has been handed over to the Russian prime minister's leadership.

From a tactical point of view, Russia can be considered one of the beneficiaries of the conflict, the successful military operation carried out, however with a relatively low budget (the exact figure does not appear in the official documents nor was it disseminated by the media, at the beginning of the mission it was talking about 56 million rubles a day, about 1.7 million €[6]), quickly transformed

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1 *Turkish-Russian Relations in Light of Recent Conflicts. Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh.* 04.08.2021 https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2021RP05/

2 *Совет Федерации дал согласие президенту России на использование ВС РФ в Сирии. Россия в Сирии будет использовать исключительно ВВС, заявил глава администрации президента РФ Сергей Иванов* (The Federation Council gave its consent to the President of Russia for the use of the RF Armed Forces in Syria. Russia in Syria will use exclusively the Air Force, said the head of the presidential administration Sergei Ivanov) https://tass.ru/politika/2302922

3 *Потери ВС России в Сирии составили 112 человек. Глава комитета Совета Федерации по обороне и безопасности Виктор Бондарев в сентябре 2018 года приводил те же цифры* (The losses of the Russian Armed Forces in Syria amounted to 112 people. The head of the Federation Council Committee on Defense and Security Viktor Bondarev in September 2018 cited the same figures.). TASS, 15.03.2021 https://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/10903039

4 As of 2018, it includes 28 Russian Aerospace Forces fighter jets (seven Su-24M, five Su-25, four Su-30SM, five Su-34, six Su-35 and Su-57) and ten transport aircraft and specials (three Il-76MD, two Tu-154M, Il-62, Il-22, A-50U, An-72, An-26) and nine helicopters. https://www.rbc.ru/politics/15/03/2021/604753db9a794749c12f6ebe

5 *Борисов сообщил об инвестировании $500 млн в модернизацию сирийского порта Тартус*. (Borisov announced investing $ 500 million in the modernization of the Syrian port of Tartus), 18.12.2019 https://vpk.name/news/357306_borisov_soobshil_ob_investirovanii_500_mln_v_modernizaciyu_siriiskogo_porta_tartus.html

6 *Россия не уйдет из Сирии. Эксперты об итогах пяти лет военной операции (*Russia will not leave Syria. Experts on the results of five years of military operation), DW.com 30.09.2020. https://www.dw.com/ru/rossija-ne-ujdet-iz-sirii-jeksperty-ob-itogah-voennoj-operacii/a-55092438

Moscow into a key external player in the Syrian Civil War. The Russian military presence in Syria was not only a test-bed for the Russian armed forces but also a "land of opportunity" it gave the possibility to provide training in the field to the personnel involved, thus allowing them to acquire valuable experiences in difficult fighting conditions in the Middle East region. Employees will now be able to transfer what they have learned to their units across the country.

The Russian approach to the Syrian operation undoubtedly had, at least in the first phase, a pragmatic imprint capable, at least on paper, of fighting the Islamic State, but in fact, saving the government of Bashar al-Assad - and, in this last aspect, the Russian forces have reported a great strategic success - as well as to guarantee and protect their influence in the region or the placement of military bases in Syria (with the relative increase in operational capabilities) but, above all to increase their own weight as an external actor in the Middle East.

The mission in Syria served not only to train military personnel in a "war" scenario but also to verify the functioning of the logistics chain[7], making changes where needed but, above all, to test the real capabilities of the armaments industry, whose representatives have also been sent, in alternation, to the country and the ability to support strategic objectives in other countries of the world, in line with the strategic interests of the Kremlin. The Russian side tried to create a specific test-bed in combat conditions on Syrian soil, but also to absorb the war experiences as widely as possible for a broader development of the country's military potential. Thus, during a meeting[8] with employees of the Rostvertol civil and military helicopter manufacturing complex, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu confirmed that the Russian military has experimented with over 320 types of different types of weapon systems as part of the operation in Syria. As stated by the Minister, the implementation of this type of aircraft was necessary because they needed an armament that allowed the operation of short-range anti-aircraft systems and MANPADS-class portable anti-aircraft missile systems from out of range. “Today we have such weapons. And this thanks to the operation in Syria, thanks to you, to those who are engaged in this”, he added[9].

The Syrian shooting range proved valid to understand that a large percentage of Russian weapons did not meet the requirements of the modern battlefield, which triggered the modernization of the equipment; thus, the "Uranium-9" combat robot, has not yet been recognized as completely ready for use. But Syria is not just a turn to propaganda signals to strengthen and accelerate modernization, but an equally important benchmark for analyzing what is not working effectively in the Russian military and decision-making circles. It is particularly important if we want to consider future security challenges generated directly by the policies of the decision-makers currently ruling in Russia and by the military apparatus that supports their political decisions.

As Mason Clark reports in his study of the lessons learned from the military presence in Syria[10], an important transformation is also the further development of the National Defense Control Center which could lead to a strengthening of the position of the Ministry of Defense in terms of support for the military activities by other departments. Such cooperation would also allow for the creation of a data and information exchange center for strategic level operations, thereby allowing commanders to have a more unified operating environment. While on the one hand, it would allow for more trained civilian and military personnel, on the other, if it required the presence of different actors, it could also block the decision-making system in times of crisis

The mission was also useful for testing the modus operandi of the Russian-Syrian coalition, in this case, however, at least at the beginning, the Syrian Arab army was overestimated by the Russian

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7 Ibidem

8 *Шойгу рассказал о влиянии операции в Сирии на развитие вооружения* (Shoigu spoke about the impact of the operation in Syria on the development of weapons), 14.07.2021 https://ria.ru/20210714/oruzhie-1741295453.html

9 Ibidem

10 Mason Clark, “*The Russian military lessons learned in Syria*”, Institute for the Study of War, January 2021. https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/The%20Russian%20Military%E2%80%99s%20Lessons%20Learned%20in%20Syria_0.pdf

commanders not only in terms of training but also of the ability to use the equipment. The Russian contingent, therefore, had to assume, not only a consultative, training, and supportive role, but also a tactical one.

Ultimately, what can be put into practice so that Syria can become a model of standardization? Stripped of the propaganda to be fed to the media and the national and international audience, the Russians are well aware of the uniqueness of the Syrian operation, which has also fallen into an equally specific international context. At the same time, it cannot be said that there has been some kind of revolution in military matters in Russia. Syria has certainly given a positive input in "raising the morale of the troops" from the Afghan-Chechen stigma in shipping activities. However, the more interesting question is how deep the Syrian experience will penetrate, given its specificity and the growing problems associated with a complex framework of army funding in the coming years.

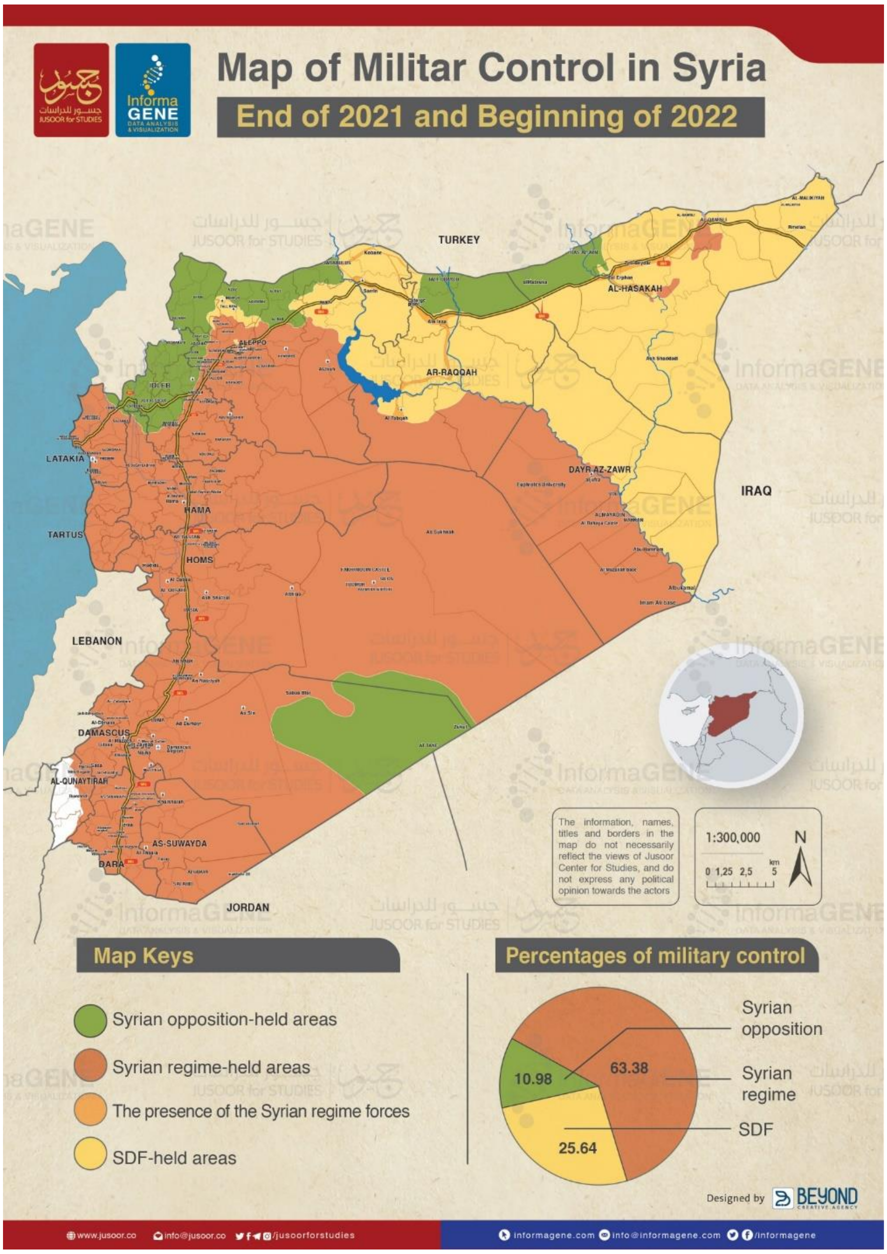

Fig.1. Jusoor Independent and specialized institution in the version information, studies and research.
https://jusoor.co/details/Map-of-Military-Control-in-Syria--End-of-2021-and-Beginning-of-2022/998/en

The recent developments in the field of hypersonic weapons: US threat perception and their possible impact on Washington-Moscow-Beijing relations

The test that the People's Republic of China would have carried out last August, launching in the earth's orbit a nuclear-capable Hypersonic Glide Vehicle (HGV) (Sevastopulo and Hille, 2021), revived the debate on this class of weapons. The subsequent successful launch of a Russian *Tsirkon* hypersonic missile from a submarine in early October (Ilyushina, 2021) made this debate even more urgent. For several years, the United States, Russia, China, and a long list of other powers have been working – individually or collectively – to develop these new capabilities. Despite recent studies casting doubt on hypersonic weapons' actual military value (Roathen, 2021; Tracy, 2021), appropriations are increasing in the US and abroad. The major international players' activism is also increasing, both to develop adequate offensive capabilities and to counter the initiatives of potential competitors. Russia currently owns the largest and most differentiated hypersonic bouquet among the leading players, with a triad based on the *Avangard* HGV/SS-19 ICBM, the 3M22 *Tsirkon* hypersonic missile, and the *Kinzhal* air-launched missile[1]. While the actual impact of this state of things is still difficult to assess, Moscow's perceived superiority has grown a source of concern at the Pentagon. Two elements mainly contribute to making the scenario more worrisome. On the one hand, the outcome of the most recent Russian tests (before the October test, in July, *Tsirkon* was already launched – seemingly with success – from a surface ship; see Ebert 2021), on the other, the possible emerging of a potential 'hypersonic gap' with Beijing.

The majority of analyst comments are cautious. To begin with, it appears unlikely that the Chinese test, even if confirmed, will spark a new arms race. Furthermore, despite the operational peculiarities of these weapons, the deployment of hypersonic assets appeared to have no effect on the logic of the traditional deterrence mechanism (Judson, 2021; Friedman, 2021). However, the reactions of the US political and military elites seem more concerned. In the past years, several Congressmen and military leaders leveraged the 'hypersonic gap' to support the need for more significant investments in this sector (see, e.g., Cho, 2020). For example, between fiscal years 2020-21 and 2021-22, the Department of Defense's requests to Congress for hypersonic weapons programs grew from 3.2 to 3.8 billion dollars; in the same period, the requests for hypersonic defense programs grew from 206.8 to 247.9 million dollars. In 2020, Congress also sanctioned the establishment of a new Joint Hypersonics Transition Office to "develop and implement an integrated science and technology roadmap for hypersonics" and to "establish a university consortium for hypersonic research and workforce development" in support of DoD efforts in these fields (Sayler, 2021). Finally, the US armed forces have started testing several hypersonic technologies and components, starting from the so-called c.d. 'Common Hypersonic Glide Body' (C-HGB), which should provide the common platform of the future Army's and Navy's HGVs (Pastori, 2020).

The outcomes have not always been fully satisfactory. At the end of September, the Raytheon-Grumman consortium held the first successful test of a HAWC prototype (Hypersonic Air-breathing Weapon Concept) (Stone, 2021). On the other hand, between April and October, the US programs underwent at least two setbacks (Lieberman, 2021). While considered physiological and valuable for completing the respective programs, these setbacks raised concerns, especially vis-a-vis China's successes. In any case, in the following weeks, the Department of Defense confirmed that the first US hypersonic assets would be deployed in a short time, very probably the air-launched AGM-183A

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[1] Strictly speaking, *Kinzhal* is not a hypersonic weapon; however, its technical and operational features made it comparable – as a threat – to the other elements of the 'triad.'

ARRW missile (Air-Launched Rapid Response Weapon). On the same occasion, it announced the willingness to pursue a more active strategy, developing several programs in parallel and increasing the efforts to speed up the transition from R&D to acquisition and deployment to better contrast the initiatives of the country's potential competitors (Magnuson, 2021). The financial resources should not be a problem due to the attention that the Biden administration places on China as a US systemic rival and the concern that the President expressed regarding the progress of Beijing's hypersonic program. Instead, the main doubts regard the overlapping of the different projects. On the one hand, overlapping solutions can encourage competition between them. On the other hand, it may result in duplication and increased costs, as well as fuel inter-service rivalry, which has already had negative consequences in other industries (Gunzinger, 2021). Beijing opted to keep a low profile. The Chinese authorities denied that the test mentioned by the *Financial Times* had a military relevance and spoke about a "civilian reusable vehicle"[2]. The press, for its part, criticized what it called the US's "excessive attention" to China's hypersonic capabilities, as well as the "double standard" that Washington applies to its own and other countries' hypersonic activities (Liu Xuanzun, 2021). Even in the US, the issue of a possible Chinese test and its implications for national security has sparked debate. Together with the doubts on hypersonic weapons' actual military value, the most prominent bone of contention is the potentially negative consequences of a contentment strategy based only on a confrontation[3]. A possible alternative would be engaging Beijing (but also Moscow) in a dialogue about a credible arms control regime, an option that, until now, the Chinese authority did not regard with a particular interest. Now, Washington has no real levers to attract Beijing to the negotiating table; neither does Beijing seems willing to start a process that could limit its room for manoeuvre when the priority appears the qualitative and quantitative strengthening of its national armed forces. However, the opening of a dialogue on an equal basis with the United States and Russia on a sensitive issue like hypersonic weapons could mean reaching the international standing that China is still seeking and actively contributing to setting the rule of a game with many players and high risk of uncontrolled proliferation.

[2] China denies report of hypersonic missile test, says tested space vehicle, *Reuters*, October 18, 2021. Online: https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-disputes-report-hypersonic-missile-test-says-tested-space-vehicle-2021-10-18/ [accessed: October 30, 2021].

[3] We need a hypersonic weapons reality check. And talks with China and Russia, *The Washington Post*, October 20, 2021. Online: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/10/20/we-need-hypersonic-weapons-reality-check-talks-with-china-russia/ [accessed: October 30, 2021].

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Critical minerals, rare earth metals and energy transition according to IEA

More or less simultaneously with a reduction in climate-altering emissions and a growth in renewable energies, in its latest World Energy Outlook, published in October 2021, the International Energy Agency (IEA) also forecasts a general increase in demand for critical minerals, though by elaborating different possible growth trends. Taking up and summarizing, albeit with a few slight updates, its report *The Role of Critical Minerals in Clean Energy Transitions*, published in May 2021, IEA argues greater exploitation in clean energies will inevitably require greater amounts of minerals used for power grids, batteries, electric vehicles and technologies and plants based on renewable sources, such as wind and solar energy (hydro-electric energy, biomass and nuclear will not affect very much this process, since their mineral need is comparatively lower[1]). After all, in the last 10 years the renewable share of additional electrical capacity installed annually has grown considerably. Since 2010, the amount of minerals needed for an energy generation unit has already risen by 50%.

Due to a much more electrified energy system, minerals such as lithium ('white gold'), cobalt ('blue gold'), nickel, manganese, and graphite, essential for batteries, will see in future decades their demand growing at a very high intensity. The same can be said for 'rare earth metals', that is a group of 17 chemical elements from the periodic table, namely scandium, yttrium and 15 'lanthanides'[2], whose high strategic relevance is related to recent extraction and technological improvements, which are making their use significantly grow in a number of important applications (including magnets, wind turbines, electric motors and components for hybrid vehicles, superconductors, catalysts, micro-components, optical fibers, optoelectronic instruments, etc.). After all, an energy system mainly powered by clean energy technologies is very different from a system largely based on hydrocarbons. An electric car, for example, can require 6 times more minerals than a conventional car, while an onshore wind power plant up to 9 times the mineral resources used for a gas power plant. According to IEA, even if states failed to comply with several pledges announced over the last year to accelerate global energy transition, the demand for critical minerals related to clean energy technologies would triple by 2050. If they accelerated on the path of the transition, they would make such demand 4 times higher by 2040. In order to achieve the goal of global climate neutrality by 2050 ('net zero emissions scenario'), critical minerals demand should increase, within that same year, up to 6 times the current level.

In this scenario, where clean energy technologies emerge as the main demand segment for many minerals, the demand of critical minerals for electric vehicles and batteries would increase more than 50 times by 2050, while the expansion of power grids would bring, within the same year, strong and rapid increases in copper and aluminum demands. Lithium would be the critical mineral to record the most significant growth, with its demand up to about 100 times higher between now and 2050. Requests for cobalt, nickel and graphite would also increase very quickly (for an expected demand estimated to increase by 20 to 25 times within 2040). Technologies that generate clean energy would be destined for 40% of all copper and all rare earths extracted in the world, 60% - 70% of all nickel and all cobalt and almost 90% of lithium. Copper would see an estimated increase of about 14 million tons by 2050 (or more than double the current level), for a 60% expansion of its market. In the sector of electric vehicles and related storage systems, the demand for minerals by

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1 See also the article by S. Liggieri (2021), available at the following website: https://www.energiaincomune.com/2021/05/05/il-ruolo-dei-minerali-critici-nella-transizione-energetica-lo-studio-iea/

2 That is lanthanum, cerium, praseodymium, neodymium, samarium, europium, gadolinium, terbium, dysprosium, holmium, erbium, thulium, ytterbium, lutetium, promethium. Scandium and yttrium are generally found in the same mineral deposits of lanthanoids, whose properties are similar to the those of the formers.

2040 would be 30 times higher than the current value, with lithium (already largely destined for electric transport and batteries) to record the greatest demand (equal to about 40 times that of today), followed by graphite, cobalt, and nickel (with the last one that would see its greatest use in the sector in question). Moreover, like that of zirconium, the use of nickel will also increase due to its consumption for electrolyzes linked to a growing use of hydrogen (which will also lead to increases in the requests for platinum metals for cells fuel).

Even rare earths will be much more requested; estimates of related demand growth to 2040 are included between 3 and 7 times the current levels − depending on the choices that will be made regarding wind turbines.

The International Energy Agency believes such a consistent growth in minerals demand may not correspond to a sufficient availability of raw materials, with several consequent criticalities. In a scenario consistent with the achievement of the 2050 climate targets, the supply deriving from operating and prospective mines should double compared to the current level, while the supply of copper could be, in 2030, at least 20% lower than how required to meet all the respective demands. Already within that year, insufficient quantities of materials necessary for the transition would risk delaying it, raising the costs of copper and aluminum, and minerals for the construction of photovoltaic plates, such as silver, as well as rare earths for wind turbines, such as neodymium and dysprosium. Moreover, today the mechanisms for international energy security are set up to try to contain and limit the effects of prices and market instability mainly in the *oil&gas* sector, but not to address price volatility or sharp drops in minerals supply. Another aspect of potential vulnerability related to critical minerals concerns their highly concentrated rate of extraction. For example, the production of lithium, cobalt and rare earths is mainly due, respectively, to Australia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and China, which together hold approximately 75% of the total production. And in some cases, a single country alone is responsible for about half of the global extraction of a single mineral. Many mineral deposits are then found in sites subject to climatic risks, which more or less periodically can decrease supply continuity. Over 50% of lithium and copper production tend to be concentrated in areas with high levels of water stress, while some of the main mining areas of the world would be subject to heat waves and floods, for example in Africa, China and Australia (together with the 'lithium triangle' in Latin America, the latter provides the EU with the bulk of its lithium imports[3]).

IEA estimates that electric vehicle batteries could end their life cycle by 2030, and that by 2040 the recycling capacities of copper, lithium, nickel, and cobalt from spent batteries could reduce the need to extract these materials of about 10%; however, this level may not be sufficient.

Also due to potential vulnerabilities and uncertainties regarding critical minerals, the ecological-energy transition does therefore imply several economic and geopolitical risks[4]. For this reason, according to IEA, it is necessary world leaders think seriously about how to deal with any possible critical issues regarding minerals and rare earths. This is also to avoid that resources such as lithium and cobalt begin to stimulate harsh dynamics of competition and confrontation, similar to those for decades have concerned, and still concern, fossil fuels. Among other things, the Agency suggests strengthening research activities aimed at improving exploration and extraction-production capacities, but also the recycling of components used in renewable technologies, investing in all aspects of circular economy to learn how to recover and (re)use as many materials as possible[5].

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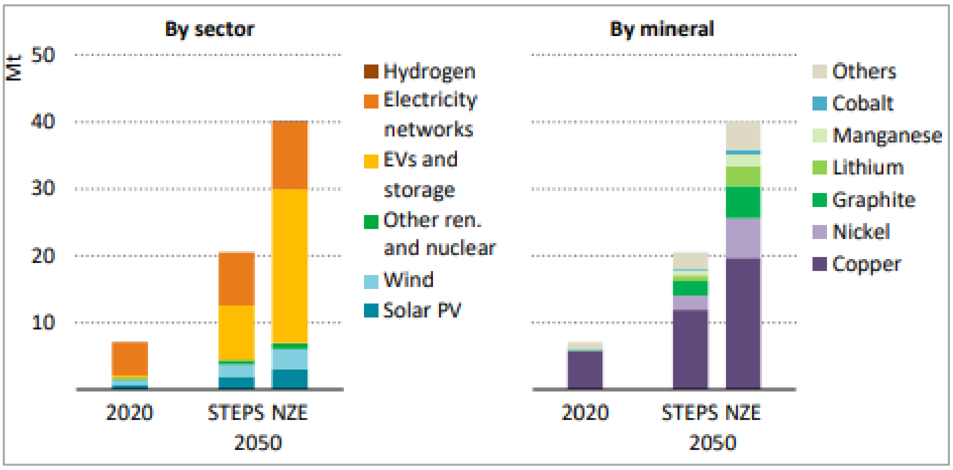
3 The lithium triangle is an eastern area of South America covering some territories of Argentina, Bolivia and Chile.

4 On this point please also refer to S. Kalantzakos, *The Race for Critical Minerals in an Era of Geopolitical Realignments*, in «The International Spectator», vol. 55 (2020), issue 3, pp. 1-16: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03932729.2020.1786926

5 On IEA's forecasts on critical minerals and rare earth metals see *World Energy Outlook 2021*, pp. 271 – 277, freely available at the link below: https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/888004cf-1a38-4716-9e0c-3b0e3fdbf609/WorldEnergyOutlook2021.pdf ; please also refer to IEA report titled *The Role of Critical Minerals in Clean Energy Transitions*, freely available at the following webiste: https://www.iea.org/reports/the-role-of-critical-minerals-in-clean-energy-transitions

Now, regardless of the accuracy of IEA's estimates on the growing use of critical minerals, which at least in part could be affected by mistakes and overestimates[6], such indications, although rather general and not very detailed, do not seem implausible (at least assuming that demand for critical minerals in the next decades will in any case increase). Therefore, the main countries in the world will have to stimulate increasingly effective initiatives in order to enhance research projects aimed at technological innovation in the fields of critical minerals and renewable energy. This is, evidently, even if by no means we can be certain such research will produce, as recently observed by the Spanish physicist Antonio Turiel, the hoped-for results.[7] Moreover, at the EU level, IEA's forecasts on critical minerals could stimulate, at least theoretically, an increase in initiatives aimed at energy integration, autonomy and resilience[8], for example through partnerships and cooperation sharing technologies and know-how, as well as raw materials, including critical minerals and rare earth elements. This should be done also in light of recent geological estimates in Central Europe[9]. As in digital revolution, in energy transition Europe should move with more unity than in the past; to do the contrary might mean it will fail the energy transition challenge.

Fig. 1 – *Critical minerals demand growth(s), 2020 − 2050 (million tons) **



** STEPS 2050: energy transition is based on current stated policies*
NZE 2050: transition is faster than STEPS, bringing climate neutrality within 2050
EVs stands for 'electric vehicles', while 'other renewables and nuclear' does not include steel and aluminum. Cfr. World Energy Outlook 2021, p. 272.

[6] On this issue see the article by A. Turiel, at the following webpage: https://crashoil.blogspot.com/2021/10/world-energy-outlook-2021-aqui-tienen.html?m=1 (for the Italian translation see: https://www.orazero.org/world-energy-outlook-2021-il-disastro-che-sta-arrivando/)

[7] Ibidem.

[8] For further information on the initiatives already undertaken, see the data available from the link below: https://ec.europa.eu/energy/home_en ; see also the following link: http://documenti.camera.it/leg18/dossier/pdf/ES0266.pdf?_1626156885554 (pp. 8 – 14).

[9] According to news announced in late Spring 2021, recent geological estimates in the Black Forest, in Southwestern Germany, Upper Rhine valley, assessed a huge lithium deposit, about 300 km long and 40 km wide (with a quantity of lithium which would be enough for producing about 400 million electric cars). In Europe we also have a rich lithium deposit in the north of Portugal, but that in Germany could be, if this will be confirmed by its first exploitation plans, one of the largest in the world and, at the same time, an important resource for the *European industrial strategy*, outlined in a document published last May. For further details, see the article by F. Suman (2021) at the following website: https://ilbolive.unipd.it/it/news/minerali-critici-transizione-energetica ; see also the links below:
https://chargedevs.com/newswire/german-firms-plan-to-exploit-massive-lithium-deposits-beneath-the-rhine/
https://www.unav.edu/web/global-affairs/the-battery-race-surfacing-geothermal-lithium-trapped-below-the-rhine-river

The repercussions of natural disasters, epidemics and pandemics on the security of "5+5" Countries (West Mediterranean area): means of cooperation and mutual support. The results of the international research group

As reported in the recent research document edited by the CEMRES within the "5+5 Defense Initiative" and presented to the "5+5" Defense Ministry on the 15th of December 2021,[1] the repercussions of natural disasters, epidemics and pandemics on the security of 5+5 Countries are concern for States.

The "5+5 Initiative" is a defense and security forum established at the end of 2004. Ten western Mediterranean countries: Algeria, France, Italy, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Portugal, Spain and Tunisia participate to this initiative. The goal of the "5+5 Initiative" is to improve, through practical activities and through the exchange of ideas and experiences, mutual understanding and confidence in dealing with problems of security in the area of interest.

The author of the present synthesis is the Senior researcher as Italian representative at the "5+5 Defense Initiative" international research group which include one researcher per each country. The research group is aimed to provide the 5+5 Defense Ministers with an instrument of thinking, analysis and forecasting, allowing them explore any issue related to the Western Mediterranean, aiming at reinforcing the common act of the partners, to facilitate the development of a new conception for regional security. CEMRES, provides to experts and researchers from Europe and the Maghreb a space to exchange experiences and works on solutions to common security problems, to contribute towards the strengthening of confidence-building measures by producing an objective research activity, highlighting the real causes of insecurity and the key issues and strategic challenges facing the Western Mediterranean.

A key challenge for the governments (societies) is how to respond to natural disasters and emergencies in ways that foster a fair and sustainable outcome that builds resilience, respect human rights, and foster economic, social, and cultural well-being in reasonable timeframes and at reasonable costs.

Disasters take various forms ranging from natural disasters, such as windstorms, wildfire to man-made disasters, such as workplace violence which happens far too frequently. No matter what type of disaster befalls individuals, organizations, or countries, the results are typically the same, i.e., substantial loss of life, assets, productivity, and security threatening.

While the Covid-19 outbreak is making an impact at a global scale, the collective response to the pandemic becomes the key to, evaluating current measures, and formulating future predictions. Intervention to address disasters has evolved through time into a complex policy subsystem, and disaster policy is implemented through a set of functions known as emergency management and response. Modern approaches to emergency management and response involve multidimensional efforts to reduce our vulnerability to hazards; to diminish the impact of disasters; and to prepare for, respond to, and recover from those that occur.

The mandate of the research team provided by 5+5 nations was to deliver an academic study highlighting the repercussions of natural disasters, epidemics on the security of 5 + 5 countries: "means of cooperation and mutual support".

[1] AA.VV. editor Salem Shanbr (2021), *The repercussions of natural disaster, epidemics and pandemics on the security of 5 + 5 countries: "means of cooperation and mutual support*, CEMRES, Tunis.

Consequently, two main axes were identified and addressed by the analysis of the repercussions on 5+5 space security, and collective response, of relevant issues.

The report offers conclusions from each axis and a dedicated chapter with a synthesis of recommendations in terms of cooperation, in the “5 + 5” space, from which the following should be stressed:

- Creation of a 5+5 early warning center to promote the exchange of experience and expertise;
- Encourage to support cooperation, coordination, and exchange of information between 5+5 countries;
- Develop instructional and awareness material that can be translated and used in national initiatives;
- Promote training and exercises initiatives;
- Promote scientific research projects;
- Promote Lessons Learned capabilities;
- Support the development of [disasters/epidemics] Emergency Response Plans.

From this research study, other recommendations can be elicited at the national level and further research initiatives may be pursued from the extensive bibliography that was used or topics that were not thoroughly addressed.

Acronyms list

ASWJ: Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jamaah

AU: African Union

EUTM: European Union Training Mission

FFC: Forces for Freedom and Change

FG: Federal Gathering

IED: Improvised Explosive Device

IS: Islamic State

ISCAP: Islamic State Central Africa Province

NCP: National Congress Party

NIF: Nationalist Islamist Front

RSF: Rapid Support Forces

SADC: Southern African Development Community

SAF: Sudanese Army Forces

SAMIM: Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique

SCP: Sudanese Congress Party

SCS: Sovereignty Council of Sudan

SLM/A: Sudan Liberation Movement/Army

SPA: Sudanese Professionals Association

The “Osservatorio Strategico” is a survey that collects, analyses and reports developed by the Defense Research and Analysis Institute (IRAD), carried out by specialized researchers.

The areas of interest monitored in 2021 are:

- The Balkans and the Black Sea;
- Mashreq, Gran Maghreb, Egypt and Israel;
- Sahel, Gulf of Guinea, sub-Saharan Africa and Horn of Africa;
- China, Southern and Eastern Asia and Pacific;
- Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa;
- Persian Gulf;
- Euro/Atlantic (USA-NATO-Partners);
- Energy policies: interests, challenges and opportunities;
- Challenges and unconventional threats.

The heart of the “Osservatorio Strategico” consists of the scripts regarding the individual areas, divided into critical analyses and forecasts.

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