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Osservatorio Strategico 2021 Issue 6

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Osservatorio Strategico - Part One

Index

The Balkans and the Black Sea	8
Moldova: Moscow's energy diplomacy	
Matteo Bressan	
Mashreq, Gran Maghreb, Egypt and Israel	12
Iraq after the elections	
Andrea Beccaro	
Sahel, Gulf of Guinea, sub-Saharan Africa and Horn of Africa	17
Institutional feuds threaten Somalia's fragile stability	
Federico Donelli	
China, Southern and Eastern Asia and Pacific	22
The Common Prosperity campaign in China	
Matteo Dian	
Russia, Central Asia and Caucasus	28
Russia and Ukraine. General evidence of a large-scale conflict or "game of revival"?	
Sylvia Zawadzka	
Euro/Atlantic (USA-NATO-Partners)	32
NATO, Europe, and the Alliance's New Strategic Concept: incentives and obstacles on the road to a new transatlantic balance	
Gianluca Pastori	
Energy policies: interests, challenges and opportunities	39
Some developments about nuclear energy and possible implications for the European Union and Italy	
Simone Pasquazzi	
Challenges and unconventional threats	44
U.S. dependence on the network: vulnerabilities, critical issues, and weaknesses of the Network Centric Warfare (NCW)	
Claudio Bertolotti	

Osservatorio Strategico - Part Two

Index

The Balkans and the Black Sea	47
Agreement between the United States and Georgia for the containment of Russia in the Black Sea	
Matteo Bressan	
Mashreq, Gran Maghreb, Egypt and Israel	49
Libya: is the Paris conference a turning point?	
Andrea Beccaro	
Sahel, Gulf of Guinea, sub-Saharan Africa and Horn of Africa	51
Recent events in Ethiopia and Sudan threaten to escalate al-Fashaga dispute	
Federico Donelli	
China, Southern and Eastern Asia and Pacific	54
The ASEAN Summits and the US-China strategic competition	
Matteo Dian	
Russia, Central Asia and Caucasus	58
Riots in Kazakhstan. Terrorist acts or expressions of popular discontent?	
Sylwia Zawadzka	
Euro/Atlantic (USA-NATO-Partners)	61
In the quest for strategic autonomy. The ‘Strategic Compass’ and its possible impact on the relations among NATO, the European Union, and the United States	
Gianluca Pastori	
Energy policies: interests, challenges and opportunities	64
The 26th Conference of the Parties on Climate (COP26)	
Simone Pasquazzi	
Acronyms list	68

Osservatorio Strategico

Part One

Moldova: Moscow's energy diplomacy

Last October 22, the Moldovan parliament approved a 30-day state of emergency in the energy sector to try to alleviate gas shortages after the government failed to agree on a new energy deal with Russian company Gazprom.

"*We are facing a critical situation,*" Prime Minister Natalia Gavrilita told parliamentarians ahead of the Oct. 22 vote, adding that the introduction of the state of emergency "*will allow the necessary volume of natural gas to be purchased from alternative sources.*"

The measure will last until November 20 and will allow the government of Europe's poorest country to buy gas under a simplified scheme with additional funds in the face of soaring global energy prices.

Moldova's contract with Russian state-owned subsidiary Gazprom, Europe's largest natural gas supplier, expired at the end of last month.

Since 2007, Moldova has paid for Russian gas a price set on the European average for long-term contracts. In the last year of the contract, which expired on Sept. 30, it was about \$150 (130 euros) per 1,000 cubic meters.

But in recent weeks, Gazprom has started charging the current price on the gas market, about three to four times more.

Gazprom extended the contract until the end of October, raising the price to \$790 per cubic meter from \$550 last month.

According to the Russian company, this is purely a question of profitability. However, Belarus, for example, continues to receive gas at a price of around \$150 per 1,000 cubic meters. The Moldovan government has stated that it would find a price between \$200 and \$300 acceptable.

Gazprom is also demanding the repayment of \$700 million in alleged old debts.

Some experts say Moscow raised prices in retaliation against Moldova for electing pro-Western President Maia Sandu last year.

Gavrilita said that Moldovagaz, whose main shareholder is Gazprom, "*did not keep its word*" and failed to supply the required volume of gas. An accusation the latter rejected by the company.

The prime minister thanked neighbors Romania and Ukraine for gas supplies and said his country would seek supplies from EU countries.

Moldova has received a €60 million (\$70 million) grant from the European Union to deal with the energy crisis.

The country of 2.6 million people, which borders Romania and Ukraine and is a member of the EU, consumes 2.8 billion cubic meters of gas a year.



According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), Moldova is almost entirely dependent on fossil fuel and electricity imports with only 20% of its energy demand met domestically in 2018.

In addition, the country has no gas storage facilities, which makes it particularly vulnerable to geopolitical and price shocks. Disputes between Moscow and Chisinau in 2006 and 2009 left tens of thousands of Moldovan citizens without gas for several days in the winter period¹. The gas crisis in Moldova has flared up at a time when gas prices in Europe and other parts of the world have risen to record levels in recent weeks².



Europe is facing an unprecedented energy crisis. Some see it as a crisis that, if not addressed, could be comparable to the Arab oil embargo of the 1970s, with dire economic, social, and political consequences. Brent crude oil has reached a 5-year high of \$84 per barrel, while natural gas prices have risen more than 500% year-on-year, forcing a shift from gas to highly polluting coal, resulting in a slowdown in the EU's green energy transition. The post-Covid energy demand recovery, extreme weather events (unprecedented heatwaves and prolonged winters), supply chain disruptions, together with low regional and global stocks, have contributed to the current European crisis.

Although Russia does not appear to be a true market manipulator, it is well-positioned to benefit from changing market conditions as Europe seeks all gas supplies at exorbitant prices. Indeed, the gas shortage is being used by the Kremlin to promote the need for Nord Stream 2, an ambitious (and highly controversial) geostrategic move by the Kremlin to pump 55 billion cubic meters of gas directly into Germany via an undersea pipe. The project might be framed by some German producers and Russian politicians as a boon to Europe's energy security, but the reality is that the pipeline will only make the EU more dependent - and even vulnerable - to the whims of Russia's state-owned Gazprom. European leaders have been quick to claim that Russia would be using gas markets to gain approval for Nord Stream 2. Currently, Gazprom sends natural gas through Ukraine. A new pipeline would bypass the troubled country. By law, Russian energy producers must meet domestic demand before exporting, meaning that a lack of export volume could be attributed to domestic supply shortages. Today, without large nuclear, coal, and gas plants, Europe would indeed be a dark and cold place. In addition, there is a lack of energy sources for low renewable energy periods such as last year's windless summer in the UK. Low wind speeds and cloud cover are becoming more unpredictable as climate change progresses and the lack of baseload generation

¹ Tidey A., *Moldova receives first non-Russian gas delivery as it grapples with severe energy crisis*, Euronews 27/10/2021 https://www.euronews.com/2021/10/27/moldova-receives-first-non-russian-gas-delivery-as-it-grapples-with-severe-energy-crisis?utm_source=news.google.com&utm_campaign=feeds_news&utm_medium=referral

² *Moldova Declares Energy Emergency Over Gas Shortage*, Radio Free Europe, 22/10/2021 <https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-gas-prices-energy-emergency/31524783.html?lflags=mailer>

has led to the current crisis. Some of the reactions have been to purchase alternative fuels such as coal, a fuel source that produces twice the carbon emissions of natural gas. This defeats the purpose of energy transformation. Depending on Russia to bridge the energy supply gap is a risky proposition. But perhaps even more short-sighted is Europe's reluctance to work with the United States beyond short-term contracts. The refusal to engage in long-term purchase agreements has led to Europe falling behind Asia as a major U.S. destination for LNG³.

Just last October 27, Moldova received its first delivery of non-Russian gas, thanks to the supply of one million cubic meters of natural gas provided by Polish PGNiG.

Chisinau said the purchase of the sample from Poland is intended to test the ability to import gas from alternative sources.

The delivery came four days after Moldova declared a month-long state of emergency to secure gas supplies amid the crisis of rising prices.

Analysis, evaluations, and forecasts

For Moldova's Foreign Minister, Nico Popescu, the supply of Polish gas represented a historic step for Moldova, because 100% of supplies until now came from Russia. For Moldova, however, reducing Russia's influence will not be easy. In energy terms, Moldova is closely tied to Moscow both because its gas company, Moldovagaz, is owned by Gazprom and because 80% of Moldova's electricity comes from a Russian-owned power plant in Transnistria, a breakaway region of Moldova that is supported economically, politically, and militarily by Moscow.

Once in the orbit of Moscow, Moldova has recently shifted its center of gravity from Russia to the West. However, Moldova's new government has not taken a confrontational path toward the Kremlin, and both the president and other officials have repeatedly stated that Moldova is interested in maintaining normal, good relations with the Kremlin.

According to Sergiu Tofilat, former energy advisor to the President of Moldova, in the last parliamentary elections, the pro-Russian party was defeated and now a pro-Western party is in government, committed to strengthening its ties with the European Union. For Tofilat it is therefore likely that Russia has changed its approach on gas supply, thus wanting to punish the Moldovan people for voting against a pro-Russian party.

"Many suspect that the gas crisis is the Kremlin's way of expressing its disapproval, with Vladimir Putin allegedly trying to keep former Soviet countries in the Kremlin's area of influence, in the face of Moldova's desire not to remain on its knees before Moscow and react to Russian blackmail by having the opportunity to get rid of Moscow's influence." The Kremlin denies using energy as a weapon and, for Tofilat, Transnistria could prove to be a weak point for Moscow since *"Gazprom needs a gas contract with Moldova so that it can supply gas to the separatist region as well"*⁴. It is precisely because of these interconnections that Russia is unlikely to turn off the tap completely. Indeed, not only would Russian companies in Transnistria suffer, but the pro-Russian mood in the region could also sour⁵. However, Russia's state gas company Gazprom has reportedly proposed that Moldova adjust its free trade agreement with the EU and delay energy market reforms agreed with Brussels in exchange for cheaper gas supplies. Gazprom, the Financial Times reported, would advocate a delay by Moldova in implementing EU rules that require the liberalization of gas markets and would allow for greater competition. The latter scenario would negatively affect Gazprom and Moldovagaz. Moreover, Moscow would prefer Moldova to abandon the Comprehensive Free Trade Area agreement with the EU and join the Eurasian Economic Union

³ Cohen A., *Europe's Self-Inflicted Energy Crisis*, Forbes 14/10/2021 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/arielcohen/2021/10/14/europes-self-inflicted-energy-crisis/?sh=30ceda152af3>

⁴ Rosenberg S., *Moldova: Russia threatens gas supply in Europe's poorest state*, BBC 27/10/2021 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-59048894>

⁵ Verseck K., *Will Putin turn off Moldova's gas taps?* Deutsche Welle (DW) 27/10/2021 <https://www.dw.com/en/will-putin-turn-off-moldovas-gas-taps/a-59644094>

instead. What is important to highlight is that Russia has now seized on the European energy crisis to pressure Brussels to reconsider the very structure of its energy markets, which had been founded on the same ideological pillars that underpin the entire European Union, namely free trade, competition and transparency.

Market analysts have suggested that Russia is exploiting Gazprom's position as Moldova's sole supplier to put pressure on the government of Prime Minister Natalia Gavrilita.

Moldova's government fears mass unrest this winter because of gas shortages or inevitably high prices for heating and energy.

EU diplomats have urged the country not to sign a new long-term deal with the Russian company and instead find short-term solutions to get through the winter.

Dmitry Peskov, Putin's spokesman, said on Interfax that Gazprom's offer is *"carefully calibrated, clear, justified and, from a price point of view, extremely favorable to the Moldovan side,"* while Gazprom said it *"conducts negotiations with its counterparts exclusively on commercial terms, not deeming it appropriate to comment on Moldova's agreements with other suppliers."*

Industry analysts have questioned whether additional supplies from EU members will be enough to supplant Russian exports to the country of 2.6 million, while spot market costs could be prohibitive without significant subsidies⁶.

Although part of public opinion is calling for a radical break from energy dependence on Russia, the risk of a prolonged gas shortage and more expensive energy bills could make people doubt the pro-European choices outlined by the government.

The examples of the EU and Moldova show how Russia now seeks to reverse years of reform. This policy tends towards the reintroduction of long-term contracts for European consumers, seeking exemptions from competition rules for its pipelines, including Nord Stream 2, and pressuring countries like Moldova to abandon EU-backed reforms. What has happened recently in both Moldova and the EU shows that rather than increasing dependence on Russian gas, European authorities should seek to protect the current market structure and encourage further diversification of suppliers and fuels. Brussels must also launch an immediate investigation into the causes of the energy crisis and ensure that all parties who may have contributed to it are punished.

In the case of Moldova, the current crisis may turn out to be a blessing in disguise, having forced politicians to explore the possibility of buying gas from the Ukrainian and Romanian gas markets in line with European rules and practices⁷.

⁶ Foy H., Seddom M. and Shotter J., *Gazprom offered Moldova new gas deal in exchange for weaker EU ties*, Financial Times 9/10/2021 <https://www.ft.com/content/138a0815-98bd-42b8-b895-49e89b980a99>

⁷ Sabadus A., *Europe must face up to the chilling reality of Putin's energy blackmail*, Atlantic Council 25/10/2021 <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/europe-must-face-up-to-the-chilling-reality-of-putins-energy-blackmail/>

Iraq after the elections

The security situation in Iraq continues to be very worrying and alarming.

First of all, the 10th of October elections did not offer a clear victory and, instead of stabilizing the country, have created new tensions because Shiite parties linked to the PMU and Iran did not recognize the result. As a consequence, several street protests took place in Baghdad and in other Iraqi cities showing the discontent of a significant part of the Iraqi population and of armed militias that can threaten the central government.

A result of this volatile situation has been the failed attack on the Iraqi Prime Minister. In fact, on the 7th of November, Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi survived an assassination attempt against his home in the Green Zone¹. The attacks were conducted by drones launched from a site near Republic Bridge which crosses the Tigris River in Baghdad. It appears that three drones were launched, but two were shot down. Luckily, the attack did not kill the Prime minister or other people however, seven of his security personnel were injured. While soon after the attack the Prime Minister twitted asking for “calm and restraint”, this event is a very alarming sign for at least two reasons. First, it shows that Shiite militias supported by Iran using the protests after the elections can threaten the government and attack very high-profile people. Indeed, the day after the attack Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps General Esmail Qaani met with Iranian-backed militias and officials in Iraq in a bid to ease tensions between armed factions and Kadhemi². However, and this is the second reason, these militias are well-armed, and they represent a real security threat even because they are proficient in using drones since they have considerable experience against U.S. bases.

Trying to resolve the political crisis followed the October elections, on the 14th of November Iraqi politicians attempted to reach a compromise regarding the distribution of seats in the new government, however, it could be difficult to convince Al-Sadr's party because the movement had previously confirmed its insistence on forming a national majority government³.

Moreover, Iraq has other security issues. On October 11, Iraqi security forces have arrested a senior member of ISIS, Sami Jasim, who was in charge of the armed group's finances, and a deputy of slain leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, outside of the country⁴. On the 11th of November, Iraqi security forces prevented a group of people from illegally entering Iraq via Syria near the Rabia crossing in the Nineveh province. The Iraqi military used thermal cameras to detect their movements and arrested them. The Syrian border is a priority for Iraq's security, and it has been fortified with trenches, observation posts, and soldiers. Iraq works with Syria in this regard and is particularly concerned about infiltration from the Islamic State members. The Iraqi air force has also carried out airstrikes against IS in Syria in the past months⁵ and on the 15th of November it has conducted airstrikes, arguably against ISIS positions, in Salah ad-Din province in the north of the country destroying a tunnel used for smuggling weapons and other structures⁶.

¹ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/iraq-prime-minister-survives-assassination-attempt-kadhimi>.

² <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/iran-quds-force-chief-meets-iraqi-pm-baghdad>.

³ <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/iraq-proposes-provisional-government>.

⁴ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/11/iraq-arrests-isils-high-ranking-member-sami-jasim>.

⁵ <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/11/iraqi-forces-arrest-syrians-accused-trying-sneak-across-border>.

⁶ <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/11/iraqi-airstrikes-hit-terror-targets>.

Main Events in the Maghreb and Mashreq Area

Morocco

Since the summer the political tension between Morocco and Algeria has continued to increase. In November they have reached a new level when three Algerians were killed in a bombing in the border area between Mauritania and the disputed territory of Western Sahara. Algiers has immediately accused Rabat of this event but Morocco has not officially commented on the accusations. The incident underscored the risks of escalation between the two North African countries after months of deteriorating relations tied to the conflict in Western Sahara, which is 80% controlled by Morocco which considers the former Spanish colony as an integral part of its territory. However, the international community does not recognize this idea and Algeria has long hosted and supported the Polisario Front, which seeks full independence of the region. Moreover, the Polisario in November declared a three-decade ceasefire null after Moroccan forces broke up a blockade of a highway into Mauritania, which the independence movement said was built in violation of a 1991 truce⁷. While someday later, Morocco's King Mohamed VI said that Western Sahara is "not negotiable", Morocco's Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita says his country is determined to "turn the page definitively" on the Western Sahara conflict but without giving up its "legitimate rights"⁸. The region has important natural resources such as phosphate mines.

The normalization of the diplomatic situation with Israel continues, it has been announced that on December 12 Morocco's national carrier Royal Air Maroc (RAM) will start regular direct flights to Israel, linking the countries' respective capitals. Morocco's ancient Jewish community is the biggest in North Africa, with some 3,000 still living in the kingdom. A further 700,000 Israelis are descended from Moroccans and have kept strong links with the country⁹.

Algeria

In the context of the high tension with Morocco previously mentioned, Algeria ordered state energy firm Sonatrach to stop using a pipeline that traverses Morocco for gas exportation to Spain.

Italian President Sergio Mattarella on the 6th of November visited the country and called for negotiated solution for the Sahrawi people and the Western Sahara conflict. However, the economic and trade relations between Italy and Algeria were the main goals of the visit. Italy is Algeria's third-largest trading partner globally (first customer and third supplier). Algeria is Italy's first trading partner on the African continent and in the MENA area. In 2020 the value of the Italy-Algeria trade was equal to 5.83 billion euros. At the center of the visit was also the Algerian desire to arrive at a cooperation plan for the development of small and medium-sized enterprises and the strengthening of cultural, scientific, and technological cooperation. The visit also had the aim to prepare for a Business Forum in 2022¹⁰.

On November 8, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune announced that the next Arab League summit will be held in Algiers in March 2022.

Tunisia

In light of the serious economic crisis in Tunisia, the country has restarted talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) over a rescue package. The Central bank said the talks follow an official request by Prime Minister Najla Bouden Romdhane and a meeting between an IMF

⁷ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/3/three-algerians-killed-in-attack-presidency-blames-on-morocco>.

⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/10/morocco-keen-on-turning-western-sahara-page-foreign-minister>.

⁹ <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/morocco-airline-launch-direct-israel-flights>.

¹⁰ <https://formiche.net/2021/11/mattarella-algeri-eni/>.

delegation and Central Bank Governor Marouane el-Abassi about economic reforms and international assistance¹¹.

Meanwhile, the protest inside the country continues and Tunisian police have fired tear gas at protesters who refused an authority's decision to reopen a controlled landfill in the southern town of Agareb. The closing of a controlled landfill this year in Agareb caused thousands of tons of household waste to accumulate for about a month in the streets, markets, and even hospitals of Sfax, the second-largest Tunisian city¹².

Egypt

Egypt is actively supporting Damascus' return into the Arab fold. Egypt also rejected Turkey's attempts at demographic change in northern Syria. At the end of October, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said, "Egypt refuses any attempts by regional stakeholders to impose a fait accompli, whether by violating Syrian sovereignty or making demographic changes in the country." A meeting between the Egyptian and Syrian Foreign Ministry was held on September, 24 to explore how Egypt can contribute to ending the Syrian crisis and help Syria's independence and its return to the Arab fold.

On the diplomatic side, senior Israeli and Egyptian military officers met on November, 7 to discuss the increase of troops in the Sinai Peninsula. The 1979 Israel-Egypt peace treaty limits the number of troops that can be stationed on either side of the Sinai border. They may be increased if the other country signs off on additional reinforcements in a joint committee made up of senior officers from both armies. At the meeting, the Israeli side agreed to Egypt's request to increase its security presence in the Rafah area, which borders both Israel and the Gaza Strip. Israel has agreed to similar Egyptian requests multiple times over the past decade. What made this meeting unique was that it produced public statements, apparently to highlight political willingness on both sides to strengthen security ties¹³.

Israel

Israel and India agreed to form a task force to design a ten-year plan for defense cooperation identifying new areas of collaboration and covering defense procurement, production, and research and development. Israel is among India's top defense partners, supplying India with over \$1 billion a year in various weapons systems. Israel is India's third-biggest weapons supplier for the last five years, after Russia and France¹⁴.

Syria

In a televised statement on October 28, Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit said that Syria might be readmitted to the league during the next summit. On October 4, the Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, stressed the "importance of Syria being an active part in the Arab world." The United Arab Emirates (UAE) appears to share Egypt's view on Syria. On October 20, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, crown prince of Abu Dhabi and deputy supreme commander of the UAE armed forces, received a phone call from Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to discuss ways to develop relations and cooperation between the two countries. In August, Algerian Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra said, "My country supports the proposal of Syria's return to the Arab League. Having Syria regain its seat in the league would be a major step for Syria to return to the Arab fold"¹⁵.

¹¹ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/tunisia-resumes-talks-imf-rescue-package>.

¹² <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/9/tunisian-police-fire-tear-gas-on-protesters-at-landfill>.

¹³ <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/11/israel-agrees-more-egyptian-troops-sinai>.

¹⁴ <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/israel-india-agree-10-year-military-agreement>.

¹⁵ <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/11/egypt-intensifies-efforts-bring-syria-back-arab-fold>.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said Syria could regain its status in the Arab League and fully normalize relations if it can play its traditional role in supporting Arab regional security. Speaking at the Wilson Center, during the foreign secretary's two-day visit to Washington for the Egypt strategic dialogue with the Biden administration, Shoukry said "Syria is a very important component of Arab national security". Syria remains unstable and crippled by poverty and western sanctions, but Assad is in control of most of the country, making him a viable ally in the region despite the previous animosity between himself and Arab leaders. A major obstacle, however, is the US, which passed the Caesar Act, a piece of legislation designed to make it difficult for the Syrian government to trade with the outside world and engage in reconstruction efforts¹⁶.

On the military side, Russian forces conducted over 20 airstrikes in northern Syria on October 30 targeting the province of Idlib and Aleppo's countryside. The Russian escalation is believed to be a response to Turkish threats against the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces and possible new Turkish military operations in the area¹⁷.

Lebanon

Saudi Arabia and some Gulf Arab allies have reacted angrily to the remarks made by the information minister in a recent interview, which he had filmed before taking up his position in the cabinet. Lebanon's foreign minister said Saudi Arabia was dictating impossible terms by asking the government to reduce the role of Iran-backed Hezbollah, adding Beirut's row with Riyadh could be resolved if the kingdom agreed to a dialogue with the new Lebanese cabinet. Riyadh expelled Lebanon's ambassador, banned all imports from Lebanon, and recalled its envoy for consultations. Kuwait and Bahrain followed suit by expelling the top envoys in their capitals, while the United Arab Emirates withdrew all its diplomats from Beirut¹⁸. Gulf states are traditional aid donors to Lebanon but for several years have been increasingly dismayed by Hezbollah's expanding power¹⁹, and have so far been loathe to help rescue Lebanon from a devastating economic crisis. This crisis continues to impact Lebanon's economy and population and on November 07 the Lebanese army received 70 tons of food aid from Qatar, the fifth shipment since July. Members of Lebanon's armed forces have often had to take on additional work elsewhere, as the Lebanese pound continues to plummet against the US dollar. US President Joe Biden authorized in September an aid package worth \$47 million to be provided to the Lebanese army immediately²⁰.

Arabian Peninsula

The US State Department announced the approval on November 04 of the sale of \$650 million worth of air-to-air missiles to Saudi Arabia to help the country protect itself from drone attacks. The approval will allow the Saudis to buy up to 280 of the AIM-120C advanced medium-range missiles and related equipment. The Saudis have already been able to use the missiles to intercept unmanned aircraft that threatened both Saudi and US forces inside the country, mainly from Yemen²¹.

Iraq and Saudi Arabia agreed on November 6 to open a second border crossing between the two countries. The opening of the Arar crossing in 2020 was a first step to reopen the four border posts that were closed after the second Gulf War. However, Shiite militias in southern and central Iraq have threatened to target Saudi and Emirati investments in the country on several occasions²².

¹⁶ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/syria-can-re-enter-arab-league-if-certain-steps-met-egypt-foreign-minister>.

¹⁷ <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/russia-jets-strike-near-refugee-camps-northern-syria>.

¹⁸ <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/us-envoy-feltman-calls-sudan-reverse-coup>.

¹⁹ <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/status-quo-insurgency-hezbollah-revolutionary-stance-governmental-accountability>.

²⁰ <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/lebanese-army-receives-food-aid-qatar>.

²¹ <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/us-sell-advanced-air-air-missiles-saudi-arabia>.

²² <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/11/iraq-expands-border-crossings-saudi-arabia-boost-trade>.

At the end of October, Russia and the United Arab Emirates signed an agreement on the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes. This is not the first Russian-Emirati accord dedicated to the space sector. In 2018, Roscosmos struck an agreement with the Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Center allowing for the preparation and flight of the first UAE cosmonaut to the International Space Station. Finally, in 2019, Roscosmos, the Russian Direct Investment Fund, and investors from the UAE concluded a deal on the reconstruction of the Gagarin's Start at the Baikonur Cosmodrome. Since the adoption of the space program in 2006, the Emirates launched a nationally assembled satellite, started the long-term Mars 2117 program, sent the first astronaut to the ISS, and launched the Al-Amal probe into Mars orbit in February 2021. The problem, though, is that with the end of the ISS, Russian manned space exploration will be interrupted for at least a decade with unclear prospects for reopening. Furthermore, the widely publicized agreement on Emirati investments in Gagarin's Start, which has been undergoing modernization since 2019, is currently stalled. The UAE can only be drawn into the project by commercial motives. Emirati investors can be offered some percentage of the income from this launchpad, but the number of launches from Baikonur is currently on a downward trajectory. Moreover, the number of accidents on used Russian systems has sharply increased in recent years. This is directly reflected in the increase in insurance for the launch of Russian missiles. Russia is training cosmonauts from Saudi Arabia and is taking part in preparations for a joint manned space flight, but the details concerning this project are scarce²³.

²³ <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/11/russia-mideast-space-cooperation-still-waiting-lift>.

Institutional feuds threaten Somalia's fragile stability

Over the last few months, there have been increasing signs of domestic instability in Somalia. In spring, tensions broke out in Mogadishu due to President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, aka Farmaajo's, decision to postpone the elections and extend his mandate for two more years. More recently, a political-institutional dispute has erupted between Farmaajo and Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble. The rift between the two leading state offices highlighted the constraints of the Somali state-building process. At the same time, it underscored the relevance of the nexus between domestic political actors and external sponsors in Somalia's political affairs. The political stalemate has had implications for the complex process of the indirect election that was supposed to begin in late September. Despite the ballot eventually beginning in November, doubts regarding its regularity and its timing persist. So far, it is very complicated to make any forecasts. The current situation in Somalia threatens the already volatile stability of one of the most fragile states on the continent. Furthermore, internal struggles have favored the strengthening of the al-Shabaab terrorist organization and the emergence of the first fractures within the different groups involved in ensuring the security of the country. In the background remain traditional clan rivalries and competition among external players. For over a decade, Somali politics has been a political marketplace where third-party actors sought to gain influence by granting financial support to specific candidates or clans.

For years, Somalia has been a textbook example of a failed state. However, in the last decade, the country has partially improved its status becoming closer to the category of a weak state. This latter category implies the presence of a central government that, however, does not enjoy full authority over the whole national territory. In recent years, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) has been able to regain authority over the federal states. However, it has failed to address two issues that represent a threat to the country's territorial integrity. The first is the existence of the de-facto state of Somaliland in the northeast part of the country. The second issue is al-Shabaab's control over large regions in south-central Somalia, which poses a threat to international security as well. What makes the FGS even weaker is its inability to provide security to Somali institutions and citizens. The security of the country is ensured by the troops involved in the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM), a peacekeeping mission operated by the African Union (AU) and supported by the United Nations (UN).

The uncertain environment has made the electoral process - one of the most complex in the entire continent - even more challenging. In Somalia, since former leader Siad Barre seized power in 1969, there have not been elections with the direct popular vote. The current model is an indirect ballot with clan and tribal quotas (SDP, 2020). Nearly 30,000 delegates from the various clans are tasked with choosing the 275 MPs for the lower house, while Somalia's five state legislatures elect senators for the 54-member upper house. Then, the elected members of both parliamentary bodies vote for the President.

Less than a month before the beginning of the elaborate electoral process, internal tensions have mounted due to the rift between President Farmaajo and Prime Minister Roble. At the root of these tensions lie immediate and underlying causes. Among the former, there are opposing ideas about the management of national security agencies and the electoral process. Among the deeper causes, there are the rising ambitions of the Prime Minister. Some external patrons see his presidential nomination as an alternative to Farmaajo. The differences between the President and the Prime Minister, appointed by Farmaajo last fall, grew over the summer and remained under the radar until the end of August. Although Roble was in charge of organizing the electoral process,

Farmaajo tried to keep control over the Prime Minister's actions. The President has also tried to direct Prime Minister's agenda. At the beginning of September, the tensions exploded due to Roble's decision to dismiss the director of the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) Fahad Yasin, a man close to the President. The Prime Minister's decision comes amid speculations that have emerged around the death of a young Somali intelligence officer, Ikran Tahlil. Tahlil had worked for NISA as a cybersecurity expert. The young agent disappeared last June under mysterious circumstances about which the agency itself created a smokescreen. The victim's family has brought public attention to the case, accusing the authorities of not having investigated it properly. Subsequently, Tahlil's family reported NISA for having deliberately covered up the story. As a reaction to the media turmoil, the agency's executives released a statement blaming al-Shabaab for Tahlil's murder. However, the al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorist organization promptly refused to take responsibility for it.

The Tahlil case has shaken the Somali public generating pressure on the executive. The public's suspicions have turned towards the intelligence agency, which many believe was responsible for the agent's death. Faced with the demand for an internal investigation, Farmaajo opted not to intervene. The Prime Minister, instead, first criticized the behavior of the agency's executives and then decided to suspend Director Yasin from office. Roble also opened an investigation led directly by Attorney General Suleyman Mohamed. The President reacted to Roble's actions by convening an emergency session of the National Security Council. During the meeting, Farmaajo renewed support for Yasin, reappointing him to his post at the top of NISA. The President's action exposed an institutional short-circuit. According to the Constitution, the President is responsible for appointing the NISA director, but the Prime Minister and the cabinet can suspend and remove the Director from office. Consequently, they both have acted within the prerogatives of their institutional roles. In the hours that followed the meeting, tensions between the Prime Minister and the President escalated. Roble accused Farmaajo of obstructing justice and decided to appoint a new Minister of Internal Security who, formally, is the person in charge of all Somali security agencies, including NISA. The skirmish between the country's two main institutional offices had a domino effect on various government bodies, including the state media. For several days there were two NISA directors and two security Ministers, one appointed by the President, the other by the PM. The overlapping appointments exacerbated institutional chaos. The strained atmosphere almost degenerated into a firefight when Duufaan troops, trained in Eritrea and close to the Presidency, reached the NISA headquarters. Danab troops, trained by US forces and close to the Prime Minister, were deployed outside the building. The situation returned to normality only after several weeks of constant mediation. Following a long bargain, Yasin remained in place while Roble appointed the Minister of Security.

Analysis, assessments, and predictions

The institutional crisis showed how Somali politics still revolved around individual political figures. Behind them, there are the grassroots of local support, clan and tribal, and the external sponsors that back them. The fall crisis involved three crucial figures for the future political vicissitudes of the country: Farmaajo, Roble, and Yasin. Although the President and the Prime Minister have always denied so, the political differences and the tension among them have increased over the past months. At first, the balance of power was biased toward the President. However, since last spring, things have changed. The Prime Minister's position gained strength following April political crisis when federal states militia and clan groups reached Mogadishu to challenge the President's decision to extend his mandate. The groups were armed and ready to back up their demands with force. In that circumstance, Roble proved himself to be a skilled diplomat and an experienced mediator, managing to defuse the risk of a new civil war thanks to his efforts to balance

the interests of all the actors involved. On the one hand, the Prime Minister persuaded the President to forego the extension of his mandate. On the other hand, Roble opened talks with regional states and presidential candidates, finding consensus on a new electoral road map, known as the May 27 electoral agreement. Roble exploited the tensions of last April to create a network of domestic and international links and succeeded in emancipating himself from Farmaajo's shadow. All Somali political stakeholders such as clans, public opinion, civil society, security forces, regional states, and extra-regional actors, have shown appreciation for the Prime Minister's skills as a mediator. As Roble's position became stronger, thanks to his growing domestic consensus and the credit he gained in the eyes of the clans, he embarked on a political agenda that was increasingly autonomous from the one of the President. This is particularly true for foreign policy.

The Prime Minister's visit to Kenya was intended to pave the way for a possible detente in relations with the neighboring country. Relations between the two countries are tenser due to the maritime border dispute and the alleged support provided by Nairobi to rebel groups active in the Somali district of Gedo. After he visited Kenya, Roble conducted another important diplomatic trip to Egypt. A few days before the Tahlil case outbreak, the Prime Minister had scheduled bilateral meetings in some key states for Somali politics such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. The Prime Minister's diplomatic initiatives were perceived as an open challenge by Farmaajo. The President had given instructions to all government members to not promote any foreign policy initiative during the pre-election transition phase.

The September crisis further damaged Farmaajo's domestic and international image. The President's reputation is falling due to his increasingly autocratic methods. Roble has always expressed support for Farmaajo's presidential run for re-election. However, indicators show that the Prime Minister had begun to harbor growing political ambitions even before the September crisis. Diplomatic visits and meetings with representatives of foreign countries allowed Roble to introduce himself to international partners. His activism has been seen as a threat by Farmaajo, who fears losing important foreign patrons. Roble's open challenge to Fahad Yasin, one of Somalia's most powerful men, must also be understood considering the struggle to gain internal and external support. Yasin, a former member of *Al-Itihaad al-Islamiya* (AIAI), a group linked to the short-lived political experience of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), has served as the watchdog for Qatari interests in Somalia. Yasin acted as Doha's broker in the 2009, 2012, and 2017 Somali elections. In 2017, Yasin allegedly contributed to Farmaajo's victory by distributing approximately 10 million U.S. dollars to secure the votes of many delegates. Since then, Yasin has seen his influence rapidly increasing within the state apparatus and Villa Somalia, until his appointment in 2019 as director of NISA. In addition to enjoying great influence over Farmaajo, Yasin has maintained his network of contacts with former ICU figures, some of whom are now prominent figures within al-Shabaab. Yasin's ambiguous link with the Somali terrorist group has aroused mistrust by the United States, which remains NISA's main financier. The relevance of Tahlil's case stems from the dense web of relationships existing among Qatar, Yasin, Farmaajo, and Eritrea. The young Somali intelligence officer was probably aware of the transfer of almost 5000 Somali recruits to Eritrea. The deployment of Somali troops is part of the cooperation agreement between Mogadishu and Asmara for the training of Somali troops and special forces (Dufaan). However, Somali soldiers sent to Eritrea would be engaged in the conflict in Tigray. According to rumors, the entire operation was financed by Doha, including compensation received by the families of the soldiers who died during the alleged engagement (Sheikh, 2021).

Despite the weaknesses that emerged with the institutional crisis, the President's position still appears to be solid, thanks to the electoral model. The Somali indirect system grants clan ties and patronage a preponderant role in the political arena. Candidates who enjoy a tight tribal network and can, at the same time, count on substantial foreign financial aid are to be considered favorites.

Roble has exploited the crisis with the President to test the waters with clan leaders and Somali political circles such as the Council of Presidential Candidates, led by former President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed. The Council took the Prime Minister's side in the dispute with Farmaajo. The PM enjoys the sympathy of a large part of Farmaajo's constituency, including several important Somali clans. At the same time, the Prime Minister is also appreciated by the President's opponents. The greatest uncertainties reside in the behavior of the external patrons that have supported Farmaajo in recent years, such as Qatar and Turkey. Now, if Qatar's support for the Farmaajo-Yasin duo remains firm, Turkey has chosen to diversify it, approaching alternative candidates such as former premier Ali Khaire. Roble could therefore become a viable option for Ankara as well, especially considering the detente in relations with other Gulf players, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

In the scenario outlined above, those who have benefited most from the electoral crisis and the institutional crisis have been al-Shabaab. The political tensions and the crisis within NISA have diverted public resources from the fight against the terrorist organization. Therefore, al-Shabaab has regained control of territories, especially in central Somalia. Other factors that have reduced the efficiency of countering the terrorist organization include the downsizing of the Ethiopian commitment to AMISOM due to the crisis in Tigray and constraints due to the heterogeneous composition of the Somali security apparatus. The presence of a variety of uncoordinated special forces denotes a significant weakness in countering al-Shabaab's activism. Besides the Danab and Dufaan, there are forces trained by Turkey (Haramad, Gorgog) and those trained by Carabinieri (Darwish). This vulnerability has prompted some militias, such as Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama (ASWJ)¹ in the federal state of Galmudug, to take action to protect cities from raids conducted by the terrorist group. However, the central authorities in Mogadishu and the federal state authorities have perceived the choice of the Sufi militia as a threat².

The presence of different special forces and their lack of coordination is a potential danger to the stability of the country. The growing trend shows how the various special forces are becoming closer to specific political figures or clans. The greatest risk is that, in case of high tensions and a new civil war, the troops may decide to take sides instead of ensuring order and reaffirming state authority, becoming destabilizing actors themselves.

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¹ Despite sharing the same name and acronym (ASWJ), there is no relationship to the Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama group operating in Mozambique. On this topic, see Instant Study area 5/2021, no. 5.

² See Instant Study area 5/2021, no. 7.

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The Common Prosperity campaign in China

Introduction

In 2021 Xi Jinping and the Chinese leadership promoted the campaign for "Common Prosperity". This campaign is described as the most recent step in the process of theoretical and ideological elaboration of Xi's leadership and is described as a new phase of "socialist modernization", following the achievement of a "moderately prosperous society".

From an economic and political point of view, the campaign aims at achieving different objectives. The first is to reduce the economic inequalities that have emerged in recent decades. The Chinese government is expected to adopt a series of macroeconomic reforms aimed at reducing the regressive effects of the tax system, improving working conditions in some productive sectors, restructuring some elements of welfare. This dimension is associated with an aspect of social censorship, which seeks to reduce the perception of inequality by the Chinese population. As a consequence, the Party has targeted celebrities and the entertainment world, accused of leading an immoral and excessively luxurious lifestyle.

The second objective is to reaffirm the control of the state and the Party over the most advanced sectors of the economy, in particular the high technology, telecommunications, and internet sectors. In this case, the goal is both to consolidate the political ability to steer investments towards strategic sectors. Sectors such as artificial intelligence, facial recognition, self-driving vehicles, and cybersecurity are considered functional to present and future economic and geopolitical competition.

Finally, the campaign for common prosperity has coincided with a punitive attitude towards entrepreneurs and financial groups who have expressed criticisms of political power or have attempted to expand their influence in areas, such as credit, which the state prefers controlling directly.

The concept of Common Prosperity

On August 17, 2021, during the meeting of the Central Committee on Economy and Finance, Xi Jinping announced that "common prosperity" would become the new fundamental objective of Chinese economic policy. Following Xi's announcement, the same committee stated that individuals with excessively high incomes would be called upon to contribute more to the well-being of society.

This announcement was anticipated by an article signed by Xi himself in *Quishi*, the official journal dedicated to theoretical elaborations and ideology of the Chinese Communist Party. In the article, Xi defines common prosperity as a fundamental political and economic goal. Furthermore, common prosperity is placed at the heart of the new Chinese economic development philosophy for the fourteenth five-year plan (2021-2025) (Xi, 2021). The article claims that China has achieved the status of a "moderately prosperous society". From now on, the country can focus on the full development of "socialist modernization". To do this, Xi Jinping argues that the idea that "someone can get rich before others" advocated by Deng Xiaoping when launching the coastal development plan and special economic zones can be revised. According to the article, the new development philosophy should place less emphasis on quantitative GDP growth and competition between provinces, while focusing on quality, inclusion, social stability, and environmental protection. It is argued that growing inequalities between social classes, regions, and between cities and countryside could undermine the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party and the very existence of the People's Republic, which could enter a phase of decline similar to that which has characterized the Soviet Union.

The new phase of development is described as based on policies focused on the welfare of the people. In particular, the article stresses the need to overcome the development model based on exports, which has characterized the last few decades, to increase domestic consumption and the purchasing power of families. Furthermore, the volatility of capital, interruptions to production chains, the instability of the international geopolitical framework, and the pandemic, are cited as factors of instability that make the transition to an economy in which internal consumption plays a fundamental role even more urgent.

As it happened previously with other concepts such as the Chinese Dream, Community of Common Destiny, or even the Belt and Road Initiative, the concept of common prosperity has not been immediately defined precisely nor were its implications in terms of public policies. This prompted a series of subsequent comments from Party officials to introduce some further elements of clarification. Chinese authorities have tried to reassure foreign investors, arguing that the new campaign does not represent a return to the Maoist past, nor a complete reversal of the role of the market in the Chinese economic system. For example, Han Wenxiu, deputy executive director of the Central Committee's Office for Financial and Economic Affairs, made it clear by *Global Times* that the policy of common prosperity is not meant to "kill the rich to give to the poor", but rather to "expand the cake and divide it more fairly" (*Global Times*, 2021). Shortly after *Xinhua* defined common prosperity as "a basic requirement of socialism". However, the same *Xinhua* also clarified that "common prosperity does not translate into egalitarianism or repression of the richest" (*Xinhua*, 2021). On 8 September, the *People's Daily* continued its attempt to reassure markets and investors, arguing that the process of opening up China continues, with new efforts to ensure transparency and stability and policies in favor of the middle class (*People's Daily*, 2021).

The official position of the Party and the government is still not entirely clear. However, in practice, the common prosperity policy appears to be characterized by three main dimensions: fiscal, political, and cultural.

The fiscal dimension

Contemporary China is characterized by high levels of economic inequality. The Gini coefficient, a statistical measure that expresses the distribution of income, is 0.48, similar to the United States. In this situation, 31% of the country's wealth is held by the richest 1%. In addition, there are over a thousand billionaires (in US dollars) in the country.

The Chinese tax system has generated a further increase in inequality. Income taxes make up only 4% of tax revenues, compared to 20% of the average for OECD countries. Additionally, capital gains remain largely untaxed. Furthermore, in the Chinese system, taxation on consumption (the equivalent of VAT) plays a central role in the overall tax revenue. This generates a taxation system with regressive effects (Lin, 2020; Kim, Wang, and Park, 2021). Moreover, in the coming decades, China will be significantly affected by a deterioration in the demographic balance, a long-term effect of the one-child policy adopted in the 1980s. This generated the need to find additional resources for welfare policies and the health care system.

In this sense, the most intuitive political response would be a macro-economic policy in favor of lower- and middle-class incomes, associated with a generalized increase in wages. This policy could be financed by a rethinking of the tax system based on progressive taxation and shifting the burden of taxation to higher incomes. This would favor the growth of consumption, which continues to remain very low compared to other developed countries. Other measures such as the expansion of investments in primary and secondary education and the abolition of the *hukou*, the provincial registration system, would favor the increase in wages, encouraging geographical mobility. To date, about 120 million Chinese citizens work in a province other than that of residence. This prevents regular access to welfare services (Chan, 2018).

Xi Jinping promoted the concept of "dual circulation", which envisages that future Chinese development will be based both on exports and on the growth of domestic consumption. However, the country's economic authorities are cautious in this regard, for several reasons. First, allowing a rapid rise in wages could hurt the country's competitiveness in global markets. Secondly, measures such as the abolition of the *hukou*, although functional to an increase in internal consumption and more equitable and efficient access to welfare services, would lead to an increase in internal demographic and economic imbalances. These imbalances in turn represent one of the more pressing social problems for the country. For this reason, the government seems willing to promote some pilot measures, to be tested in a small number of provinces and cities, and then gradually expand the implementation on the national territory. The first measure is likely to be the introduction of a tax on real estate properties, previously absent, it will be the first step towards an overall rethinking of the tax system, inspired by criteria of greater efficiency and equity (Chen, 2021).

The political dimension.

The campaign for common prosperity is not only constituted by macro-economic policies, but also of the will to reaffirm the control of the state and the Party over the economic system. The first goal is to prevent tycoons from accumulating excessive economic power. This could lead them to seek forms of political and social influence beyond the control of the party. Examples of increasingly influential tycoons are Jack Ma, founder, and owner of the e-commerce company Alibaba, Colin Huang, owner of Pinduoduo, an e-commerce company in the food sector, and Pony Ma, founder of Tencent¹. The campaign for common prosperity has induced, most tycoons to make very large donations and to finance extensive welfare projects. For example, Alibaba has donated 100 billion renminbi (15 billion dollars) to projects that fall within the scope of the common prosperity policy. This was followed by similar commitments from other giants in the technology and e-commerce sectors such as Tencent, Meituan, and Xiaomi. Furthermore, Chinese tycoons have been asked to keep a low profile, avoiding both an excessive display of their wealth and a too-close relationship with international media and foreign public figures. A paradigmatic example is the founder of Alibaba, Jack Ma, known for his extravagant style and for having accused the Chinese regulatory system in the financial sector of backwardness and inadequacy. He disappeared from the public eye for three months, between late 2020 and early 2021. His appearances in the following months were marked by a much more moderate style and open support for the new course of common prosperity (Murayama, 2021)

In addition, the Party has promoted a series of new rules that more strictly regulate labor relations in the "gig economy" and in the technology sector. On the one hand, measures have been implemented to protect workers and limit the monopoly power of some companies. On the other hand, the Party has also adopted policies aimed at reasserting its control over the economy. In this sense, common prosperity is in continuity with the process of *guonjin mintui* (advancement of the state, withdrawal of the market) which began with the reaction to the global financial crisis of 2008 and with the consolidation of the development model of "state capitalism" (Eaton, 2016; Eaton and Leutert, 2021). The key sector in this sense is banking. Jack Ma's Ant Group, a leading company in the digital payments sector, promoted various initiatives that allowed it to conquer an important slice of the market in the financing and mortgage sector. The government's response was to split Ant Group into two separate companies, cutting any connection between loans and digital payments. In addition, the financing sector has been equated with the traditional banking sector, which is subject to intense regulation. In this case, the Party intended to reaffirm political control over the corporate financing system, based on the centrality of the large state banks (Chen, 2021).

¹ Tencent is a conglomerate active on the internet and telecommunications sector. The company controls WeChat application with social networking function, electronic payments, and messaging

Another important element of the attempt to reaffirm political control over large Chinese companies is to direct their economic and technological resources towards strategic objectives, which reflect the "Made in China 2025" agenda. Among these, Artificial Intelligence, microchips, semiconductors, biotechnologies, cyber-security, electric vehicles, facial recognition are considered the most important (Zengleine Holzmänn, 2019).

The cultural dimension

The campaign for common prosperity also has a cultural side. The most discussed measures in this sense are those aimed at limiting access to video games and other forms of online entertainment, accused of being the "opium of the new generations". Furthermore, the government has targeted alleged excesses of pop culture. Measures have been taken to limit the influence of pop stars and show business personalities on the younger generations. Those considered inclined to make an excessive display of their wealth and their luxurious lifestyle, or excessively "feminine" male figures have come under intense scrutiny. Some examples are actresses Fan Bingbing and Zheng Shuan, accused of tax frauds, and singer Kris Wu, accused of harassment, or actor Zhang Zhehan, accused of being a traitor for having visited the Yasukuni shrine in Tokyo². These are just a few examples of Chinese public figures who have faced serious allegations that severely limited their career and income and, in some cases, even led to detention. In most cases, the government has completely blacked out its internet presence (Crossley, 2021).

The reasons for this crackdown on pop culture and show business stars are manifold. First, there is an effort to moderate the perception of economic inequality between the ordinary population and the "new rich". In addition, there is a willingness to maintain the ability to limit forms of behavior that are considered immoral. More generally, there is an attempt by the government and the Communist Party to maintain forms of control over popular culture.

The consequences of the Common Prosperity campaign

The campaign of Common Prosperity, promoted by Xi Jinping, has as its basic objective that of consolidating the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party towards the population. Macroeconomic measures aimed at moderating inequality respond to a latent but increasingly substantial demand for a rebalancing of the Chinese growth model and tax system, which have favored the emergence of vast inequalities, both between different social classes and between different areas of the country. Some of the regulatory measures respond to legitimate needs to avoid the creation of monopolies with excessive market power. Furthermore, some interventions could lead to an improvement of the conditions of millions of workers, both in the manufacturing sector and in the gig economy and distribution. Furthermore, some of these measures could be functional to the transition from the development model based on exports to a model-driven by services and internal consumption.

The campaign for common prosperity, however, cannot be considered only a maneuver to rebalance the Chinese economic system, in favor of workers and consumers. The element of political control over the economy is central. In this sense, strengthening control over strategic sectors of the economy and the effort to promote strategic sectors in high technology are the most relevant objectives.

More generally, the crackdown against celebrities and tycoons reveals the desire to reaffirm political control over society. From this point of view, more than the desire to impose a nostalgic

² Yasukuni Shrine celebrates the souls of soldiers who fell in war during the Showa era (1923-1991). Among these were the soldiers who fought in China between 1937 and 1945, including numerous officers who were later found to be class A criminals by the Tokyo International Tribunal. In general, Yasukuni is considered the symbol of Japanese conservative revisionism and is the subject of criticism of Chinese nationalism. On this point Seraphim, 2006

socialist morality, the most significant element seems to be the desire to prevent the development of autonomous power groups, capable of mobilizing consensus towards instances not controlled by the Party.

In the short run, the campaign for common prosperity could generate a series of quite significant economic costs. All the sectors involved generating an increasingly important economic return. Most groups in the technology sector and the entertainment industry have suffered heavy losses in terms of capitalization and revenues. In addition, international investors have begun to incorporate greater "country risk" related to political conditions in China into their investment calculations. This leads to greater caution associated with long-term investments in Chinese markets. These costs do not seem to particularly scare Xi Jinping and the Chinese government, which seems firmly determined to pursue both fundamental pillars linked to "common prosperity", that is to moderate inequalities and their political effects, and to reaffirm the ability of the state to direct the choices of the economic system.

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Russia and Ukraine. General evidence of a large-scale conflict or "game of revival"?

Much has been said, in recent months, of a possible armed conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, forgetting however that the war in this country has been ongoing since 2014 with a civilian and military death toll that is currently hovering around 41,000-44,000, according to data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)¹. It would perhaps be appropriate, in this sense, to speak of a possible worsening of the conflict rather than the Russian invasion.

In addition to the victims and injured figures, the country is facing a serious social and demographic situation. The management of the occupied territories of the Donetsk and Lugansk² oblasts have completely escaped the control of the Ukrainian authorities and, due to the armed conflict, there have been population movements in search of safe havens as well as changes in the social structure. Emigration from the aforementioned territories takes place mainly in the direction of Russia. According to Russian sources, from 29 April 2019, with the signing of the decree *"On the definition, for humanitarian purposes, of the category of persons authorized to apply for Russian citizenship in a simplified way"*³ - which establishes a simplified procedure for obtaining Russian citizenship for the residents of Donetsk and Lugansk - to date, around 500,000 people have obtained citizenship and took part, in addition, in the elections held on last September to the Russian Federation State Duma⁴. The migration route of the other areas of the country, on the other hand, is directed towards the West. In particular, Poland (in consideration of geographical, linguistic, and cultural proximity as well as its EU membership) registered, as of December 2021, about 300 thousand Ukrainians with regular residence permits⁵. The Ukrainian Ministry of Social Policy has registered nearly 1.5 million refugees from Donbas in other areas of the country, mainly elderly people for whom registration in the areas controlled by the Ukrainian government as a condition for receiving Ukrainian pensions. Independent estimates currently indicate 2-2.5 million people who remain in areas of the so-called republics, although the exact number is not known⁶.

In this context coming very close to a humanitarian crisis, the "war of nerves" takes place. It is made up of accusations and denials but also the dissemination of false information, instrumental to one or the other party in question. Thus, at the beginning of November, the Ukrainian Ministry of

¹ OHCHR estimates the total number of conflict-related casualties in Ukraine (from 14 April 2014 to 15 February 2020) to be 41,000–44,000: 13,000-13,200 killed (at least 3,350 civilians, an estimated 4,100 Ukrainian forces and an estimated 5,650 members of armed groups¹⁷); and 29,000-31,000 injured (approximately 7,000–9,000 civilians, 9,500–10,500 Ukrainian forces and 12,500-13,500 members of armed groups). OHCHR official page, data are updated at February 15, 2020 https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/UA/29thReportUkraine_EN.pdf; <https://ukraine-un.org/en/151093-conflict-related-civilian-casualties-ukraine-8-october-2021>

² The areas make up about 2.6% of the country's territory and, according to estimates by the State Statistical Service of Ukraine; in 2014 they were inhabited by 3.9 million people (about 8.6% of the total population).

³ Указ об определении в гуманитарных целях категорий лиц, имеющих право обратиться с заявлениями о приеме в гражданство России в упрощенном порядке dated April 29, 2019. See in particular Article 1 which defines the geographical areas affected by the decree. Official page of the President of the Russian Federation <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/news/60358>

⁴ Турчак: полмиллиона граждан РФ в Донбассе смогут участвовать в выборах 2021 года (Turchak: half a million Russian citizens in Donbas will be able to participate in the 2021 elections), TASS, 10.05.2021 <https://tass.ru/politika/11334275>

⁵ 300 tys. obywateli Ukrainy z ważnymi kartami pobytu (300 thousand Ukrainian citizens with regular residence permits). In addition to the 300,000 regular citizens, there are many illegal immigrants, therefore the number is far higher than the official figures. Official page of the Office for Foreigners (Urząd Cudzoziemców) 13.12.2021 <https://udsc.prowly.com/168246-300-tys-obywateli-ukrainy-z-waznymi-kartami-pobytu>

⁶ Sytuacja społeczna na okupowanych terytoriach Donbasu (The social situation in the occupied territories of Donbas), Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych-PISM, report n.233 / 19.11.2020 https://www.pism.pl/publikacje/Sytuacja_spoleczna_na_okupowanych_terytoriach_Donbasu

Defense through the spokesman of the Operational Information Center (*Центр оперативного інформування*), Colonel Leonid Matyukhin, officially denied⁷ the increase in the Russian presence near the border with Ukraine, speaking openly about the strategy of tension⁸ and dissemination of false information (especially on the mass media and social networks) as an element of special informational and psychological actions planned in the context of the movement of Russian troops. It is interesting, however, that the Russians, through the spokeswoman Mariya Zakharova, also denied⁹, after a few days, what was reported by Politico¹⁰ and the Washington Post. At the beginning of December¹¹, however, according to the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, unusual movements of men (a concentration of about 90 thousand people, with the aim, as stated in the statement, "to maintain tension in the region"), supplies of fuel and ammunition in border areas were recorded. Recently, Ukrainians have also noticed the proliferation of heavy military equipment, including tanks and 122mm self-propelled tanks but, again, such movements are nothing new. From the point of view of Kyiv, nothing new is happening and the Ukrainian government is trying to mitigate the news reported by the media. The possibility of large-scale armed conflict is scaled back, and reassuring messages are sent to the population implying that this war is meaningless, mainly for Russia. However, it is important to underline how the events of recent months, especially at the political and diplomatic level, have penalized Russia-NATO relations: starting with the closure of the Russian mission at the NATO headquarters in Brussels and the NATO office in Moscow, to continue with a series of statements by Russian politicians dissatisfied with Ukraine's rapprochement with NATO. Thus, on 11 October, the *Kommersant* newspaper published an article¹² by Dmitry Medvedev, vice president of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, in which he harshly criticized the Ukrainian authorities. In addition, Russian President Vladimir Putin, speaking at the Valdai Forum¹³, expressed concern about the "military development of Ukraine by NATO". The fact that Kyiv's accession to the Alliance "threatens Russia's national interests and may push it to take active measures" is a fact, as Dmitry Peskov stated on the France5 TV channel. Russian troops on the Ukrainian border could therefore be an attempt to send a signal to Kyiv and NATO. Meanwhile, against the backdrop of a stagnant diplomatic process to resolve the crisis in Donbas, the situation in eastern Ukraine has worsened considerably. Therefore, in September and October, both Kyiv and representatives of pro-Russian separatist groups made mutual accusations of violating the ceasefire. Added to this is the

⁷ *Українська розвідка спростовує нарощування російських сил на кордоні (L'intelligence ucraïna nega l'accumulo di forze russe al confine)*. Il Ministero riporta "За даними Головного управління розвідки Міністерства оборони України, станом на 1 листопада 2021 року додаткове перекидання російських підрозділів, озброєння та військової техніки до державного кордону з Україною не зафіксовано" (According to the Chief Intelligence Directorate of the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, as of November 1, 2021, no further transfers of Russian units, weapons and military equipment to the state border with Ukraine have been recorded), official page of the Ministry of Ukrainian Defense (in Ukrainian), 01.11.2021 <https://mil.in.ua/uk/news/ukrayinska-rozvidka-sprostovuye-naroshhuvannya-rosijskyh-syl-na-kordoni/>

⁸ *Росія концентрує свої війська на кордоні з Україною – The Washington Post* (Russia is concentrating its forces on the border with Ukraine - The Washington Post) 31.10.2021 <https://mil.in.ua/uk/news/rosiya-kontsentruye-svoyi-vijska-na-kordoni-z-ukrayinoyu-the-washington-post/>

⁹ *Москва опровергла сообщения СМИ о стягивании войск к границе с Украиной* (Moscow denied information from the media about the movement of troops on the Ukrainian border), dw.com, 03.11.2021 <https://www.dw.com/ru/moskva-oproverгла-soobshheniya-smi-o-stjagivanii-vojsk-k-granice-s-ukrainoj/a-59709190>

¹⁰ *Politico опубликовал спутниковые снимки войск РФ вблизи Украины* (Politico has published satellite images of armed forces of the Russian Federation near Ukraine), dw.com, 03.11.2021 <https://www.dw.com/ru/amerikanskije-smi-soobshhili-o-narashhivanii-vojsk-rf-u-granicy-s-ukrainoj/a-59693633>

¹¹ *Реагування на нарощування збройних сил Росії поблизу України* (In response to the rise of the Russian military near Ukraine), International Crisis Group, 08.12.2021 <https://www.crisisgroup.org/uk/europe-central-asia/eastern-europe/ukraine/b092-responding-russias-new-military-buildup-near-ukraine>

¹² *Почему бессмысленны контакты с нынешним украинским руководством. Пять коротких полемических тезисов*, (Because contacts with the current Ukrainian leadership are meaningless. Five brief controversial theses). «Коммерсантъ», 11.10.2021 <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5028300>

¹³ *Комментарий: Путин - последний солдат холодной войны* (Comment: Putin is the last soldier of the Cold War) DW 03.05.2021 <https://www.dw.com/ru/kommentarij-putin-poslednij-soldat-holodnoj-vojny/a-57409573>

confirmation, by the OSCE special monitoring mission, of an increase of about one-third, in the first weeks of September 2021, in the number of bombings compared to August of the same year. Another exacerbation was outlined by the end of October, after the use by the Ukrainian armed forces of the Bayraktar drones¹⁴ (the Minsk agreements prohibit their use by the warring parties) purchased by Turkey to destroy the howitzer of the forces of the Donetsk People's Republic.

Another issue is the tension in eastern Ukraine, i.e., on the border with annexed Crimea where, in light of the growing tension, the Ukrainian armed forces, the General Staff, and the services, do not rule out the outbreak of a small-scale clash, provoked by Russia. In this regard, the question is directly connected with what is happening in the Russian training ranges. In fact, on December 1 the new military academic year began (in Russia, it starts on December 1 and ends on November 30) with the various activities¹⁵, during this period the soldiers are sent to the training ranges located throughout the territory of the Federation, where they will have their combat training. In the winter season also begin the exercises, in which about 50,000 will be involved. Among the military districts in which the aforementioned activities are carried out are the Southern Military District (which includes Crimea) and the Western District (bordering Ukraine, Belarus, Finland, but also Poland and the Baltic States, plus its exclave of Kaliningrad). The intensification of the exercises could therefore be understood in two senses, namely, the "bugbear" of preparing an attack on Ukraine or, simply, a show of strength in which the political element has a strong value. Finally, the most plausible interpretation could be the military one, that is, we are simply talking about exercises which, moreover, given the lack of internal mobilization, do not seem to cause particular concern in the Zelensky government. On the other hand, this tranquility could be the expression of a conscious attitude, capable of hindering Russian military action according to the postulate "there is no provocation induced by the West, if there were, the country would act". The ostentation of Oblomov's inertia¹⁶ is therefore a defensive weapon.

The current situation is also a foreign policy topic that is being used by the respective political forces to increase the security of the country. The "security" issue, however, is linked above all to the aid that the country has received, receives, and will receive from NATO countries but, above all, from the United States. The US National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022 provides for the current year an allocation of 300mln \$¹⁷ for the Ukrainian Security Assistance Initiative, 4bn \$ for the European Defense Initiative and proposes, and 150mln \$ for Baltic Security Cooperation. Lawmakers also omitted an amendment that would ban Americans from buying Russian sovereign debt¹⁸. The bill was released shortly after videoconference talks about Ukraine by the presidents of the United States and the Russian Federation (December 7, 2021).

¹⁴ *Delivery of Turkish drones to Ukraine continue as planned*. Official, Hürriyet Daily News, 06.12.2021 <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/delivery-of-turkish-drones-to-ukraine-continue-as-planned-official-169867>

¹⁵ *В Вооруженных Силах России стартовал новый учебный год* (A new academic year in the Russian Armed Forces has begun), official page of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12396502@egNews

¹⁶ Oblomov is the protagonist of the novel of the same name by Ivan Aleksandrovič Gončarov (1812-1891). Published in 1859, it describes the young man pervaded by laziness and inertia. The character entered the collective imagination as the embodiment of these characteristics.

¹⁷ *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022, SEC. 1233. Modification and Extension of Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative*. <https://www.congress.gov/bills/117/congress/house-bills/4350/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22national+defense+authorization+act%22%5D%7D&r=1&s=2>
In section 1234, US assistance to the country in filling gaps related to integrated air and missile defense is noteworthy: Sec. 1234. Report On Options For Assisting The Government Of Ukraine In Addressing Integrated Air And Missile Defense Gaps. (a) Sense of Congress.--It is the sense of Congress that-- (1) the United States remains a steadfast partner of Ukraine; and (2) it is in the United States national security interest assist the Government of Ukraine in countering Russian military aggression. (b) Report.--Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Defense shall submit to the congressional defense committees a report on options for how the United States could support the Government of Ukraine in addressing integrated air and missile defense gaps. Such report shall include options for the **foreign military sale of United States systems or the transfer of existing systems that are not being allocated through global force management**.

¹⁸ *US Defense Bill Includes \$300 Million for Ukraine, Support for Taiwan*, Voice of America (VOA), 07.12.2021

The question is whether this aid will meet Ukrainians' expectations of delivering equipment that could significantly damage the Russian military's potential combat activities. This is the transfer, purchase, or financing of anti-aircraft defense systems, fighter fighters, or the equipment of Ukrainian Navy ships with anti-ship missiles. However, Moscow has drawn a clear "red line": should the Ukrainians get such help from the West, Russia should respond adequately, and the answer could involve a greater deployment of forces in Ukraine or Belarus¹⁹.

Many of the aforementioned topics were discussed during the videoconference²⁰ held on December 7, 2021, between Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden. The US also warned Putin that if Russia chooses a solution involving the use of force resulting in an escalation of the conflict in Ukraine or where there is an invasion of Russian troops in the country, then Russia would be subject to economic sanctions from the United States and allied countries, an increase in military support for Ukraine and, above all, a greater presence of US forces on NATO's eastern flank. The parties, however, have agreed to pursue the dialogue at the political and diplomatic level in the envisaged forums. Putin, on the other hand, reiterated his requests relating to Ukraine or compliance with the Minsk agreements²¹ (which mainly concern political aspects such as, for example, the organization of elections in the Donbas or, more generally, compliance with all activities sabotaged by the Ukrainian government); the guarantee that NATO will not expand east (that is, that Ukraine will not enter the Atlantic Alliance as an active member), and that no offensive weapons will be placed in the proximity of Russia. Putin's demands are essentially the mirror image of Biden's warnings. The Russian president also reiterated his expectations regarding the continuation of the dialogue with the United States on cybersecurity, strategic stability, and ways to continue this dialogue.

The US side intends that these talks prevent Russia from further aggressive actions against Ukraine, especially in the case of large-scale invasions of Donbas and Lugansk. From the Russian point of view, on the other hand, Putin managed, through the alleged threat of the outbreak of the conflict, to draw attention to himself to take the dialogue to a different level by reaffirming the postulates regarding Ukraine and European security. What is conceivable is that neither the Russian side will stop its aggressive activities in Ukraine, nor rather, it will not withdraw its troops from Ukraine nor the Allies, or rather the United States, will not reduce its activity in Ukraine. In the event of an escalation of the conflict, however, it will only be limited clashes, and it is highly unlikely that the Russians will decide to attack Ukraine and turn the conflict into a large-scale one.

¹⁹ *Украина проводит масштабную спецоперацию на границе с Беларусью (Ukraine conducts a large-scale special operation on the border with Belarus)* <https://www.dw.com/ru/ukraina-i-rf-provodjat-uchenija-na-fone-obostrenija-situacii-mezhdu-dvumja-stranami/a-59920104>

²⁰ *Встреча с Президентом США Джоозефом Байденом (Meeting with US President Joe Biden)*, official page of the Russian President, 07.12.2021 <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67315>; 'Greetings, Mr. President': Biden and Putin Hold 2-Hour Virtual Summit, *The New York Times*, 07.12.2021 <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/07/us/politics/biden-putin-ukraine-summit.html>

²¹ *Protocol on the results of consultations of the Trilateral Contact Group (Minsk Agreement)*. Full document is available on: <https://peacemaker.un.org/UA-ceasefire-2014>

NATO, Europe, and the Alliance's New Strategic Concept: incentives and obstacles on the road to a new transatlantic balance

In the wake of the #NATO2030 reflection exercise (the outcomes of which were released in late 2020 and early 2021) and following the conclusions of the Brussels Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Alliance's member countries (June 14, 2021), the attention of NATO members has returned to the issue of the new Strategic Concept. In June 2021, the Brussels summit final communiqué explicitly invited the Secretary-General to lead the process of drawing up this document¹, which will be approved during the Alliance summit in Madrid on June 29-30, 2022². The adoption of a new Strategic Concept is an important step. With the end of the Cold War, the Strategic Concept has established itself as the document that adapts the provisions of the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty to the needs of a changing international scene. At the same time, its approval has become an opportunity to take stock of the development of the Alliance's day-by-day activity and assess how its balance of power has shifted. Since adopting the current Strategic Concept at the Lisbon Summit in 2010, many things have changed. In the same period, there were many calls to review its pillars. However, it is unlikely that the document to be approved in Madrid will satisfy everyone beyond the formal consensus it will receive. More likely, it will attempt a problematic mediation between US and European priorities and -- within the latter -- between those of the 'historical allies' of Western Europe and those of a Central-Eastern bloc whose political and military importance considerably increased after the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis in 2013-14.

The central role of the Strategic Concept in post-Cold War NATO

With the end of the Cold War, the Strategic Concept underwent significant changes compared to previous years, gaining new visibility, and occupying a central place in the life of the Atlantic Alliance. From an essentially military document, it has increased its political profile. In contrast, on the practical level, it has emphasized its traits of a tool for adapting the Alliance's tasks to the needs of a quickly changing international scenario. These trends are already evident in the Strategic Concept adopted in 1991 at the Rome summit (7-8 November), which defines the basis for future relations with the Soviet Union and the former Warsaw Pact countries and which foreshadows the possibility of a new out-of-area commitment for NATO alongside the defence of member states' territory³. The documents approved in Washington in 1999⁴ and Lisbon in 2010⁵ have continued along this path, gradually extending the Alliance's tasks and range of action, and showing increasing attention to areas of intervention that are not strictly military, such as energy security or human

¹ *Brussels Summit Communiqué. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels 14 June 2021*, Online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm [accessed: November 19, 2021].

² *NATO has announced that Spain will host its next summit in 2022*, June 14, 2021. Online: <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/lang/en/presidente/news/Paginas/2021/20210614nato-summit.aspx> [accessed: November 19, 2021]; *NATO Secretary General visit Spain to prepare Madrid Summit*, October 8, 2021. Online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_187309.htm?selectedLocale=en [accessed: November 19, 2021].

³ *The Alliance's New Strategic Concept, agreed by the Heads of State and Government participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council, Rome, November 7-8, 1991*. Online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm [accessed: November 19, 2021].

⁴ *The Alliance's Strategic Concept. Approved by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington D.C., April 24, 1999*. Online: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_27433.htm [accessed: November 19, 2021].

⁵ *Active Engagement, Modern Defence. Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Adopted by Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Lisbon, 19-20 November 2010*. Online: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_publications/20120214_strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf [accessed: November 19, 2021].

security. In this way, the various Strategic Concepts have accompanied the gradual transition of the Atlantic Alliance from a 'simple' political-military alliance to a more ambitious security organization, which operates in different fields and (also thanks to the network of its partnerships) in different theatres (de Leonardis, 2011). It has not been a linear process. In several cases (e.g., that of the so-called 'non-article-five operations'), the formalization of the commitment came after the start of the practice. In the same way, partnerships acquired formal relevance only after the lessons of the ISAF experience had shown the merits of the 'NATO+' format.

Above all, the process that led to elaborating the different Strategic Concepts highlighted the growing divisions within the Alliance. The development of a document like the Strategic Concept necessarily implies a certain degree of mediation. However, the enlargement process that NATO has undergone since 1999 has made this exercise increasingly complex, widening the range of stakeholders, differentiating the priorities to be pursued and confronting the organization with new needs to be considered. The consensual nature of the document (reflecting the Alliance's *modus operandi*) and the growing complexity of the international system have moved in the same direction, widening the spectrum of risks and threats to be addressed and fueling a parallel redefinition of the very idea of security. The shift of NATO's center of gravity to the East and the 'rediscovery' of Russia's role as a competitor were perhaps the events that most pushed in this direction. Another element was the emergence of widespread fatigue over an Afghan commitment, the value of which seemed to have become increasingly unclear. With the passing of time, members -- and NATO itself -- seem to have found it increasingly difficult to define an order of priority for possible commitments. These facts help to explain, among other things, the time that separates the 1999 Strategic Concept (which takes up the guidelines defined in Rome, albeit in a broader sense) from the 2010 Strategic Concept. This Concept, in its turn, was a quantum leap since -- while not affecting the Alliance's core business, viz., the defence of the transatlantic area -- it outlined a more 'global' and 'political' NATO in its approach to security issues.

Something similar applies to what will be the next Strategic Concept. Since the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis, several quarters have called to rethink the posture of a NATO that was strongly out-of-area oriented and that -- after the Pratica di Mare summit (May 18, 2002) -- was actively engaged in cooperation with Moscow (Croft, 2015). With the end of ISAF and the deterioration of relations with Russia, this demand has gained strength. However, the international context (especially the worsening of Europe-US relations under the Trump administration) was a critical restraining factor. Equally important was the restraining effect of the divisions within the Alliance, particularly those between members from Central and Eastern Europe and those of the 'southern front'. In this context, the chronological coincidence of a powerful Russian thrust in the East and heavy migratory pressure in the South spurred tensions between members and accentuated divisions that only found an (albeit partial) settlement after the 'rebalancing' decided at the Warsaw summit in 2016 (Lesser, 2016). Even on the eve of the seventieth-anniversary summit (London, 3-4 December 2019), therefore, the "appetite for revision" was generally low: As was noted at the time: "There are two basic arguments against initiating work on a new [Strategic] Concept. The first is that opening a drafting exercise in NATO would open 'Pandora's box' and expose, or even aggravate, rather than heal, existing rifts within the Alliance. The second is that NATO needs to maintain a significant degree of strategic flexibility given it is in the process of adapting to new threats, primarily those from Russia. Consequently, [...] summit communiqués provide sufficient direction [...], making the Strategic Concept less important" (Kulesa and Wieslander, 2019).

The new Strategic Concept and the challenge of the European military identity

The effect of these dynamics has been to postpone the problem until more favorable times. The outcome of the US presidential elections and the installation of Joe Biden in the White House

was an important step. Equally important was the dissemination of the results of the #NATO2030 exercise, which are likely to form the backbone of the new Strategic Concept. The report of the Reflection Group co-chaired by former German Defence Minister Thomas de Maizière and former US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Wess Mitchell follows, in fact, the same 'political' and 'global' lines as the current Concept⁶. Paradoxically, even the COVID-19 pandemic, if on the one hand, it has strengthened the chauvinist and Eurosceptic tendencies of some Alliance members, on the other hand, it has contributed to overshadowing the contrasts in the field of security and defence. From this perspective, the decision that has been taken at the Brussels summit, more than recognizing that the review process cannot be postponed, recognize the (relative) normalisation of relations within the Alliance. Such recognition does not mean the end of tensions. On the contrary, after the moment of maximum convergence represented by the NATO summit in Brussels, the positions of Europe and the United States began to diverge again. In the same way, the debate around the so-called 'EU Strategic Compass' has highlighted how -- within the EU (but, in general, among the European NATO allies) -- there are also profound differences concerning the role that Washington should assume in the security of the Old Continent and what its relations with a possible European security identity should be (Pollet, 2021).

In presenting the 'Strategic Compass', the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, explicitly referred to the principle of the indivisibility of transatlantic security. In his speech, he remarked that "[t]o increase the military capabilities of the European Union is a way of increasing and reinforcing the global security, the transatlantic link in complementarity with NATO". However, he also noted that "if something complements another thing, it means they are not the same thing. In complementarity to NATO means that the European Union not only has Member States who are members of NATO, but [it] has the ambition to build a Common Security and Defence Policy to use its capacities alone, when necessary, and together, where possible"⁷. A 'middle way' that, if, on the one hand, meets the demands of those who see in a greater European strategic autonomy the instrument to rebalance the relationship with Washington, on the other hand, does not completely allay the fears of those who see, behind it, the dangerous effort to 'decouple' US and European security. The Biden administration's choice to support the European desire to raise its military profile and the President's 'blessing' of the initiatives that the Union has taken in this field⁸ could limit these fears, especially if supported by a strengthening of the US military presence. The recent growth of the US military presence in Germany went in this direction. In announcing their deployment, Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin explicitly remarked how these new troops would have "strengthen[ed] deterrence and defence in Europe [...] augment[ed] our existing abilities to prevent conflict and, if necessary, fight and win [...] improve[d] our ability to surge forces at a moment's notice to defend our allies" (Erlanger, Eddy and Cooper, 2021).

However, the question remains open, also considering the mistrust expressed by some Countries for a commitment considered more formal than substantial. Once again, it will be a matter of finding, within NATO, an acceptable balance between the security needs (and perceptions) of the

⁶ *NATO 2030: United for a New Era. Analysis and recommendations of the Reflection Group appointed by the NATO Secretary General*, [Brussels], November 25, 2020. Online: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf [accessed: November 19, 2021].

⁷ *Foreign Affairs Council (Defence): Remarks by the High Representative Josep Borrell at the press conference*, Brussels, November 16, 2021. Online: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/107358/foreign-affairs-council-defence-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-press-conference_en [accessed: November 19, 2021].

⁸ Recently, see. *Joint Statement on the Phone Call between President Biden and President Macron*, September 22, 2021. Online: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/22/joint-statement-on-the-phone-call-between-president-biden-and-president-macron/> [accessed: November 19, 2021], and *United States-France Joint Statement*, October 29, 2021. Online: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/10/29/united-states-france-joint-statement/> [accessed: November 19, 2021].

different actors, also in light of what are the ambitions of Europe. All this is on the assumption that, in the foreseeable future, the continent's military security will continue to depend on NATO and the direct or indirect involvement of the United States, and that -- on this basis -- the issue of burden-sharing will continue to play a central role in shaping the relations between the two sides of the Atlantic. Despite the efforts made by the European allies to achieve the Celtic Manor objectives and despite the Biden administration's willingness to tone down the polemics compared to those held by the Trump administration, the problem of the gap -- in terms of military spending -- between the United States and the other NATO members is, therefore, destined to remain. At the same time (and unless European procurement policies are likely to accelerate), this seems destined to be accompanied by a growing gap in terms of capabilities: a gap which, according to some authors, would make Europe unable to provide for its security in the event of US disengagement (Meijer and Brooks, 2021). This issue was raised by the European leaders themselves in the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence presented in November last year (Brzozowski, 2020). On the other hand, the increase in commitments and operational theatres (of which the extension of NATO responsibilities to cyberspace is just one single example) could -- lacking coordinated actions -- reinforce this trend, laying the foundations for new imbalances within the Alliance.

Russia and China: between strategic autonomy and transatlantic solidarity

One of the pivots of the new Strategic Concept is the changing international role of Russia and China. The need to respond adequately to the challenge posed by Beijing's growing international profile and the need to redefine relations with a Russia that is no longer an interlocutor of the Alliance are, in fact, two of the reasons behind the process of revising the 2010 Concept. On these issues, too, the position of Alliance members is widely differentiated. In the case of Russia, the fears of the Central and Eastern European allies go hand in hand with the more open stance of the Western allies, who are inclined to adopt forms of 'critical dialogue' with Moscow in areas of common interest⁹. This divergence of views has already been expressed, in recent years, within the European Union (e.g., Siebold, Emmott and Baczynska, 2021). Equally, it is also likely to be mirrored in the process that will lead to the document being adopted in Madrid. At the October summit of defence ministers, the Alliance adopted a new Concept for the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area to contain possible Russian initiatives along its eastern borders, with particular attention to the Baltic and the Black Sea theatres. According to NATO sources, the document shifted the Alliance's approach for the first time from defending against isolated geographical threats from one direction to defending against multiple threats from multiple directions. At the same time, it emphasized the need for multi-domain action to more effectively counter '21st-century challenges' like cyberattacks, hybrid warfare, hypersonic missiles, or automated weapons (Tigner, 2021).

Given the Atlantic Alliance's increasing focus on this kind of threat, the same approach may also be applied in the new Strategic Concept. The choice of the US armed forces to embrace the multi-domain approach to the battlefield could favor this process¹⁰. On the other hand, the extension of this logic to the NATO context would risk clashing with the allies' different degrees of technological development, favoring a Russian strategy based on exploiting NATO's inability to coordinate and integrate the various elements of its defence system. In this perspective, "the lingering concern is

⁹ See, e.g., European Commission - High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council on EU-Russia relations - Push Back, Constrain and Engage*, Brussels, June 16, 2021. Online: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/joint-communication-eu-russia-relations.pdf> [accessed: November 19, 2021].

¹⁰ *The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, [Fort Eustis, VA], December 6, 2018. Online: <https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2021/02/26/b45372c1/20181206-tp525-3-1-the-us-army-in-mdo-2028-final.pdf> [accessed: November 19, 2021].

how a further technologically advanced and doctrinally complex U.S. force can get the leverage embedded in these advances [the adoption of the multi-domain approach] if the initial fight occurs in an operational environment where the rapidly mobilized East-European NATO forces are two technological generations behind" (Kallberg, 2021). Once again, the matter is the quantitative and qualitative gap existing between the United States and Europe in terms of military resources and capabilities. The matter is also how to manage future relations with Russia in a context where the military dimension is only one part of a broader problem. In this regard, the need to develop a more differentiated approach to the Russian challenge has been raised, to consider how "[c]ertain developments, including some driven by NATO members and partners, are perceived as a threat by Moscow", and how "NATO and the 'West' should come to acknowledge that some Russian concerns [...] cannot simply be discarded as invalid" (Kunz, 2021).

The question of how to approach China is somewhat similar. In this case, the European allies are also divided, with the Central-Eastern ones more open than the Western ones to Beijing's requests and with the United States holding an Alliance's line only partially shared on the other side of the Atlantic (Herszenhorn and Momtaz, 2021). The Secretary-General acknowledged that the theme of relations with China would occupy an essential part of the new Strategic Concept (Vanttinen, 2021). However, the problem of how the Alliance should manage the 'Chinese challenge' remains open, also due to Beijing and the NATO countries' shared interests in the global sphere (Bloch and Goldgeier, 2021). Furthermore, it has been noted that -- given the possible nature of the Chinese threat -- the EU instruments could be a valuable complement to those of NATO, especially regarding resilience, critical infrastructures (such as telecommunications) and the field at the intersection between industry and security (Pallanch and Yanan Zhang, 2021). It is another point of view from which the opportunity of an 'open' and inclusive Strategic Concept seems to emerge. On the other hand, as in the case of relations with Russia, the allies seem to struggle to 'speak with one voice'. This fragility is an asset that Beijing has already tried to exploit. For the Chinese authorities, the best option is that Europe continues to collaborate with China, balancing the United States. In this sense, as President Xi Jinping said in a telephone conversation with the then German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, the People's Republic's wish remains that "the EU [make] correct judgment independently and truly achieve strategic autonomy" (Legarda, 2021)¹¹.

Analysis, evaluation, and forecasts

There are many issues that NATO's political leaders will have to address to define a credible and shared Strategic Concept. These issues have to do with both the Alliance's internal dynamics and the broader evolution of the international scenario, which has undermined many consolidated balances. The increasingly blurred boundaries separating the different realms of security add a complex element to the problem. Finding a balance capable of meeting the needs of all NATO members and aggregating the consensus on which the Atlantic Alliance's decisions are based will, therefore, prove difficult. For these reasons, too, the process that will lead to the definition of the new document will be an important test for the European ambitions of strategic autonomy. Alliance's members who are also members of the European Union will benefit from the experience of the almost parallel process that has led to the elaboration of the EU's 'Strategic Compass'. Transferring this experience into the document to be approved in Madrid will be difficult. However, due also to the position taken by the current US administration, the time seems ripe for a (partial) revision of the relations existing between the two shores of the Atlantic. It does not mean questioning the United States' central role within NATO in political and military terms. Instead, this process is -- in many

¹¹ For the text of the Xi Jinping-Merkel conversation, as circulated by the Chinese Ministry for Foreign Affairs, see *Xi Jinping Talks with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on the Phone*, April 7, 2021. Online: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1867616.shtml accessed: November 19, 2021].

ways the 'natural' – product of different factors: a concept of security that has broadened, becoming increasingly complex and multidimensional; the United States that has gradually shifted the focus of its action to theatres other than Europe: and an EU that -- faced with these challenges -- seems to have partly set aside its previous rhetoric of 'civilian power'.

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Some developments about nuclear energy and possible implications for the European Union and Italy

On 10 October 2021, the French newspaper «*Le Figaro*» announced 10 EU states, including France, have drawn up and signed a document in support of nuclear energy as one of the possible strategic tools for ecological and energy transitions, both in Europe and globally¹. In addition to France, which bases on her over 50 nuclear reactors more than 70% of its energy supply (resulting in the only country of G7 with more investments in nuclear technologies than renewables), the document was signed by Romania, the Czech Republic, Finland, Slovakia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Poland, and Hungary. As shown by reactions of authoritative international press and consulting firms active in the energy sector, the news rekindled some attention on a notoriously controversial form of energy, not only in France².

The declaration, signed for France by the Minister of Economy Bruno Le Maire and by the Deputy Minister with responsibility for Industry Agnès Pannier-Runacher, maintains that nuclear energy should be supported because it "contributes decisively to the independence of sources of production of energy and electricity [...] and it is necessary to cope with the increase in energy prices, which has shown the high importance of reducing dependence on third countries". Furthermore, the text underlines that support for nuclear power would also be functional to achieve the objectives of 'climate neutrality' decided by the UN and the EU, that is to achieve the capacity of 'zero net CO₂ emissions' within 2050, and consequently limiting global warming below 2° C, more specifically at no more than 1.5°C. Regarding renewable energy sources, the signatory States recalled that, while playing a key role in terms of the energy transition, they "cannot produce enough low-carbon electricity to independently meet the needs in a sufficient and constant way"³.

Compared to the French context, the declaration seems to be partially in contrast with what Emmanuel Macron asserted shortly after the beginning of his Presidency (2017), that is the intention to dismantle approximately a dozen nuclear reactors and reduce the share of nuclear energy in domestic energy consumption, bringing such quote to 50% by 2035. After all, according to recent news also published in Italian newspapers, after a few years of thinking France decided to build six-generation III+ nuclear reactors, namely European Pressurized Reactors (Epr), to be completed by 2044⁴. For the French electric services company Edf (Electricite de France SA), the cost of the operation would amount to 47 billion euros⁵. Furthermore, on 12 October 2021, President Macron

¹ <https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/societe/nous-europeens-avons-besoin-du-nucleaire-20211010> ; the news was then picked up by various press agencies and newspapers, including "Corriere della Sera": 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

² On this point see the article by A. Gross on «*Financial Times*»:
<https://www.ft.com/content/d06500e2-7fd2-4753-a54b-bc16f1faadd8>

³ Cf the article by R. Liguori at the following link: <https://www.linkiesta.it/2021/10/francia-energia-atmica-nucleare-macron/>

⁴ Ibidem. Generation III reactors do incorporate improvements developed during the cycle of generation II reactors. Among others, these may include improved fuel technology, higher thermal efficiency, improved safety systems (including passive nuclear safety) and standardized designs to reduce maintenance and capital costs. On the various differences between the different generations of nuclear reactors, see the article by G. Robatto at the webpage below: <https://atomoenergia.wordpress.com/xx-tipologia-dei-reattori-nucleari-a-fissione/>

⁵ See Liguori, *op. cit.*

announced an allocation of 1 billion for investments dedicated to the construction of several IV generation reactors, the so-called *Small Modular Nuclear Reactors (SMRs)*⁶, to be built by 2030⁷.

A vigorous debate about national energy policy is thus remerged in France⁸. While several left parties remain tied to the idea of reducing nuclear energy, preferring to invest in renewable energy sources such as wind and solar, nuclear advocates, mostly on the right-wing, argue France is one of the European states with the lowest CO₂ emissions mainly due to nuclear, counting a significantly lower carbon emission level than Germany. Despite abandoning nuclear power in 2011, and investing more in renewables, the latter would become more dependent on fossil fuels, especially coal, failing to compensate for the closure of its nuclear power plants only with renewables⁹.

This position was recently supported also by Valérie Pécresse, a center-right candidate in the presidential elections of 2022, who declared in case of victory she will block some planned closures of several nuclear reactors, as well as work for the construction of new nuclear power plants¹⁰. At the same time, far-right politician candidate Eric Zemmour called for greater efforts in the direction of nuclear power and openly criticized, for example through an article on *Le Point*, the investments made by the government in wind energy. Zemmour argued France is risking adopting an energy transition excessively biased towards renewables, acritically copied from Germany. This would be detrimental to French energy sovereignty, which should be focused on further strengthening nuclear energy¹¹. Furthermore, nuclear energy, in France, seemed to have an advantage over wind power in recent months also in terms of new ideas within public opinion. A recent survey by French company Odoxa found that French society is overall more in favor of wind energy than nuclear energy, but also that support for the latter increased by 17 percentage points in the last two years when positive perceptions about the first decreased (more or less by the same value). On the other hand, the survey also revealed French citizens consider nuclear power less expensive and harmful to the landscape than wind power, as well as a sector in which France can be considered "more advanced than other states"¹². Meanwhile, at the end of October 2021, the operating company of the French electricity transmission system, Rte (Réseau de Transport d'Electricité), published a document containing several scenarios on the future energy mix of France state between now and 2050, suggesting with no or few quantities of nuclear energy the country may have insurmountable

⁶ The SMRs are 'advanced' small-sized fission reactors (without pumps or manual elements), belonging to the so-called Generation IV nuclear reactors, which theoretically can be used, at low cost and without enriched uranium and 'heavy water', in the production of heat as in that of electricity, producing less waste than previous generation reactors. Small nuclear reactors are already used in nuclear-powered vessels, such as eg. Russian icebreakers in the Arctic seas, while Russia, together with China and Argentina, is among the territories where Small nuclear reactors have already been installed for energy production in some regions (by 2026, the world should count about 20 operating SMRs). An international project concerning the development of small reactors would also be under development, with the contribution of an Italian physicist, in the context of marine transport, but with the goal of developing more powerful versions over time, capable of being able to contribute to the supply of domestic electricity networks. However, this last aspect is among those that arouse perplexity among several scientists, who believe SMRs cannot be used on a large scale (as well as not entirely safe and secure for man and the environment, and in any case still in too embryonic to be considered as an effective alternative or complementary tool to investments in renewable energy). On SMRs cf. Robatto, *op. cit.*; see also the article by C. Paudice at the following link: https://www.huffingtonpost.it/entry/cosa-e-il-nucleare-di-nuova-generazione-di-cui-parla-cingolani_it_6131d340e4b0df9fe274967c

⁷ See the article by Francois De Beaupuy and Ania Nussbaum, on Bloomberg: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-10-12/france-to-build-small-nuclear-reactors-by-2030-in-export-push>

⁸ For a summary of the different relevant positions, please refer to the article by J. York, at the link below: <https://www.connexionfrance.com/French-news/2022-French-Presidential-candidates-divided-over-nuclear-energy>

⁹ France is the G7 country with the lowest per capita level of climate-altering emissions, while in France the latter would be less than half of Germany, both in absolute terms and at per capita level, and despite French population is smaller. Cf. the following webpage: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/carbon-footprint-by-country>

¹⁰ See A. Gross, *op. cit.*

¹¹ https://www.lepoint.fr/debats/zemmour-notre-souverainete-energetique-passe-par-un-renouveau-du-nucleaire-02-10-2021-2445824_2.php

¹² For the survey, please refer at the following link: <http://www.odoxa.fr/sondage/leolien-a-moins-le-vent-en-poupe/>

troubles in matching its future energy demand, especially for electricity supply¹³. Having the technological and economic possibilities to bear related costs, France according to the RTE would be able to build new power plants (also to gradually compensate for the end of production of older nuclear power plants).

Assessment and forecasting

The recent French developments in the field of nuclear energy have multiple reasons. On the one hand, they come at a time when the availability and continuity of nuclear energy seem to be more certain and stable than natural gas - whose markets are still affected by a phase of a sharp rise in prices -, and, to a large extent, even than renewables, considered by many (not only in France) still quite volatile and difficult to store. In this sense, plans to upgrade nuclear power plants appear to be a measure directly related to the energy situation of recent months, but also to the structure of the national energy system, which is already strictly related to nuclear energy. In this context, however, the current French debate on nuclear power is also significantly fueled by the upcoming national elections of 2022, so much so that Macron's pro-nuclear outbursts could be traced, in part, to an attempt to intercept consensus from political areas looking favorably at nuclear energy, which are present especially in the right-wing.

However, the issue is also relevant for its longer-term strategic value, in France and the European Union. The latter does not yet expressly recognize nuclear energy as 'clean'. The question, beyond its more technical aspects, is not secondary. Indeed, if electricity produced through nuclear power plants were officially recognized as 'green', the nuclear energy sector could access substantial EU funds for the ecological-energy transition. Together with other European countries, France seems therefore aimed at making nuclear energy formally 'clean' in the financial classification system of the Union¹⁴, which distinguishes eco-friendly economic activities and those that are not, thus allowing certain investments rather than others access to the category of 'sustainable' finance (with consequent fiscal reductions/incentives). A recent report by the EU Joint Research Centre (JRC) seemed to already endorse the thesis of nuclear power as low-polluting and scarcely harmful to human health, also arguing the risk of accidents at power plants is significantly decreased compared to the past. However, such results did not find unanimous consensus in Europe, even among scientists; some of them considered the report insufficient, especially concerning radioactive waste management-related aspects. Therefore, while an explicit pronouncement by Brussels was postponed, the issue arrived at further technical evaluation tables¹⁵. According to some press reports released between October and November, another recent and at least partial opening towards nuclear power came, within the EU, from the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen¹⁶.

France and other European states firmly believe nuclear energy should be, together with renewables, part of the EU's official strategy towards 'climate neutrality!'. This position seems after

¹³ See the article by A. Breteau, available at the website below:
<https://www.argusmedia.com/en/news/2267034-rte-sees-massive-thermal-output-needs-without-nuclear?backToResults=true>

¹⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/banking-and-finance/sustainable-finance/eu-taxonomy-sustainable-activities_en

¹⁵ Please refer to the article by di C. Del Frate, at the following link: https://www.corriere.it/esteri/21_luglio_03/energie-nucleari-green-ue-chiamata-dare-risposta-687a60da-dc04-11eb-acdd-ea59277529b6.shtml?refresh_ce ; the JRC report is freely available here:
https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/business_economy_euro/banking_and_finance/documents/210329-jrc-report-nuclear-energy-assessment_en.pdf

¹⁶ See the relevant declaration at the following links: https://www.adnkronos.com/nucleari-von-der-leyen-ne-abbiamo-bisogno-accanto-a-rinnovabili_1qwGfu1ffmmPmoLWZa36lu?refresh_ce
<https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2021/11/02/cop26-su-glasgow-il-fantasma-dellenergia-nucleare-le-pressioni-della-francia-le-aperture-ue-e-la-tassonomia-verde-come-cavallo-di-troia-per-latomo/6376516/>

all to crystallize the existing division within the Union between states favorable to nuclear power and countries which, on the contrary, clearly decided to abandon its development, or at least are not intentioned to consider it in their future energy mixes. As shown by a relevant declaration signed at the 26th Conference of the Parties on Climate (Glasgow, November 2021), such countries include Germany, Spain, Ireland, Denmark, Austria, Portugal and Luxembourg¹⁷. At least until Brussels doesn't express its view, we can expect the issue will remain suspended, and perhaps still subject to opposing pressures within the EU¹⁸. In any case, a relevant decision is expected to come on 31 December 2021, that is with the publication of the *technical screening criteria* (TSC) of the EU taxonomy for sustainable finance. Regarding Italy, the country had based a small part of its energy consumption on nuclear energy between the 1960s and the early 1990s, and still imports little less than 5% of its electric energy supply from nuclear energy produced in France, abandoned the nuclear option after a referendum held in 2011. After all, a previous referendum, held in 1987, had already strongly discouraged nuclear energy maintenance and further development (contributing de facto to making the 5 related Italian plants inactive already by 1990). In addition to political and ideological reasons, emotional motivations may certainly have contributed to such choice. The outcome of the first referendum may have depended on the emotional wave of the very serious accident at the Russian Chernobyl power plant (1986), as well as the not uncommon negative perception of nuclear energy during the Cold War when a relatively wide segment of Italian public opinion tended to associate it to weapons of mass destruction. The result of the second referendum may have instead been conditioned, at least partially, by the very serious episode at the Japanese power plant in Fukushima, due to the Tohoku tsunami (2011). Even today, in Italy (including its scientific community) the debate on nuclear energy seems to be rather polarized, with very distant positions between those who are 'against' (e.g., Green Peace Italia and Europa Verde¹⁹) and who are 'favorable' (e.g., the Italian component of the international association Nuclear for Climate²⁰).

While the former considers nuclear energy inevitably risky, because of the high potential damage associated with possible accidents to reactors, and in any case structurally polluting due to environmental criticalities linked to radioactive waste disposal in the long term, the latter highlight its benefits in terms of climate-altering emissions, significantly lower than those produced by fossil sources²¹, as well as the progress made over the years to make it safer, reducing both the risk of accidents at nuclear plants and the ratio between radioactive waste and energy produced (whereas there is no agreement even on its economic sustainability). At the beginning of November, it was

¹⁷ <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2021/11/11/cop26-germania-spagna-e-altri-5-paesi-dicono-no-al-nucleare-e-litalia-si-tira-indietro/6389168/>

¹⁸ For example, according to some exponents of Green Peace, the 'pronuclear' positions would be deeply conditioned by the 'atom lobby', in search of substantial public funds to expand its activities. Cf. Del Frate, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ See, respectively, the contents of the following websites: <https://www.greenpeace.org/italy/storia/13824/10-anni-dal-referendum-nucleare-una-scelta-ancora-giusta/> ; <https://www.facebook.com/europaverde.verdi/videos/1089495875188149/>

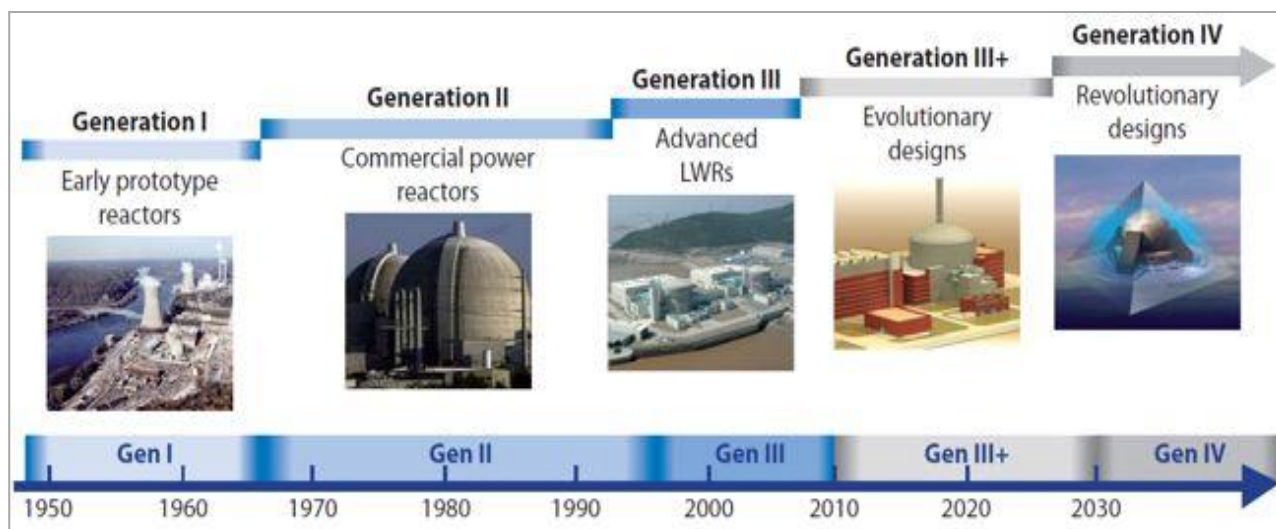
²⁰ See the association's position paper (2021), whose an Italian version (by G. Canzone) is available at the following link: <http://www.associazioneitaliananucleare.it/energia-nucleare-a-supperto-della-decarbonizzazione/>

²¹ Emissions produced by nuclear energy cycle, including decommissioning and waste management, would amount to about a tenth of those generated by a normal coal-fired power plant, while a nuclear power plant, for the same amount of electricity produced in a year, would reduce the pollution of about 16 million tons of carbon, an effect equivalent to the elimination of about 3.5 million cars powered by conventional fuels. If countries like France, the UK, Spain and Sweden hadn't had nuclear energy, their CO₂ emissions would have been at least 35% higher. Thanks to the spread of nuclear energy in over 30 countries, since 1970 the amount of greenhouse gases not released into the atmosphere has been equal to 60 billion tons of CO₂ equivalent. Other factors often mentioned by nuclear advocates concern its high complementarity rate to more intermittent sources such as renewables, in particular with respect to hydroelectricity, and its use to decarbonise not only electricity, but also industry and services, with consequent improvements on the environment as well as human conditions (both in terms of deaths reduction and new economic and employment opportunities). For further information on this, see the aforementioned position paper by Nuclear for Climate association; cf. also the contribution by R. Menia at the following webpage: https://www.minambiente.it/sites/default/files/archivio/comunicati/lenia_su_nucleareVIA.doc.

also announced the forthcoming presentation of a law proposal by some members of the Parliament, supporting the possible reintroduction of nuclear energy²².

In this context, it seems necessary to observe 'the nuclear issue' with a non-ideological approach. In other words, and even without environmental considerations, if future massive use of nuclear energy by our country might produce costs and timing exceeding its potential benefits, monitor carefully and without prejudice, any technological and economic development concerning the most recent generations of nuclear reactors could give Italy an additional option to diversify its energy supply through low carbon energy sources (provided the consumption of renewables, given the current Italian energy situation, should be higher than that of nuclear energy). This, obviously, in the event the latter show, hopefully in the short-medium term and as their advocates argue, real lower risks and environmental impacts than previous generations reactors, as well as sustainable costs, thus the possibility to be effectively complementary to other forms of alternative energy. After all, regardless of what decision the EU will take on the possibility to consider nuclear energy as 'green', international sources such as the International Energy Agency (IEA) and the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) already forecasted a future global energy mix showing, in addition to fossil fuels decreasing and renewables dramatically increasing, the net growth in the consumption of nuclear energy. In particular, according to IEA, to reach 'carbon neutrality' (*net-zero emissions*) by 2050 the contribution of nuclear energy to total world energy will have to double the current respective share (which is estimated between 4 and 5%)²³.

Fig. 1 – Nuclear reactors evolution



Source: <https://energycue.it/sicurezza-reattore-nucleare-sodio/11948/>

²² See: <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2021/11/02/cop26-su-glasgow-il-fantasma-dellenergia-nucleare-le-pressioni-della-francia-le-aperture-ue-e-la-tassonomia-verde-come-cavallo-di-troia-per-latomo/63765>

²³ The respective reports by IEA (2021) and IPCC (2019) are freely downloadable at the links below: <https://www.iea.org/reports/world-energy-outlook-2021> ; <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

U.S. dependence on the network: vulnerabilities, critical issues, and weaknesses of the Network Centric Warfare (NCW)

Network-centric warfare (NCW) is defined as «an information superiority-enabled concept of operations that generates increased combat power by networking sensors, decision-makers, and shooters to achieve shared awareness, increased speed of command, higher tempo of operations, greater lethality, increased survivability, and a degree of self-synchronization. In essence, NCW translates information superiority into combat power by effectively linking knowledgeable entities in the battlespace». ¹

U.S. military capability is de facto dependent on a network technology to the point that the very doctrine on which the use of the military instrument is based requires the integration of network technology in almost all areas, in particular Network Centric Warfare (NCW). And although the general orientation is to employ highly specialized personnel and systems, there is a growing need for human capital capable of operating within the "old analog dimension" if computer systems should cease to be functional, in whole or in part. This is what Matthew Crosston, in his insightful article "*The Millennials' war: dilemmas of network dependency in today's military*", calls the "MacGyver effect", i.e., the ability to develop and dispose of talents and solutions that allow to effectively conduct military operations even when the main systems are offline and there is no possibility to access or activate alternative network systems.

The growing threat associated with network dependency is a relatively unstudied topic that is still not given due consideration, both from a policy and military perspective. While some concerns have already been highlighted in academia, as well as in operations, they are overshadowed by the vast array of benefits associated with integrating technology into every aspect of the military, from individual combatants on the battlefield to the command-and-control system to leadership at the operational and strategic levels. The U.S. has the most technologically advanced armed forces globally, and this is the result of large investments and growing reliance on the development of Network Centric Operations (NCO) with which both routine and extraordinary activities are inextricably associated through network integration and proliferation. But the system, created to guarantee defense, offense, and deterrence capabilities, brings with it - Crosston points out - some potentially lethal vulnerabilities from the highest (strategic) to the lowest (tactical) level.

The first of these vulnerabilities is represented by the conceptual approach at the strategic level - adopted by the political and military leadership and corroborated by the conceptual and academic theories of Network Centric Warfare and the Revolution in Military Affairs - which in itself represents the first truly great system vulnerability because it is based on an unconditional trust in cyber tools that are widely vulnerable.

The second degree of vulnerability is found at the tactical level, where operators and users of networked systems are becoming dependent on computer systems to a degree that we can assess as alarming given that, on the one hand, most military operators intervene through a computer connected to the system and, on the other hand, techniques, tactics, and procedures have all evolved around the availability and real-time processing capability of networked information. The current generation of the military is digital native, having grown up immersed in the network system, with a residual "analog" component at the middle and upper hierarchical levels that have doctrinally adapted to the exclusive use of the network system leading to substantial dependence on it. Efforts at the policy level have been made with the intent to mitigate cyber threats but placing the option of

¹ Alberts D.S., Garstka J.J., Stein F.P. (1999), *Network Centric Warfare: Developing and Leveraging Information Superiority*, 2nd edition (revised).

warfare in a post-cyber-attack environment characterized by the availability of damaged, unreliable networks or even complete network isolation on the back burner. The most senior military personnel currently serving have operational experience from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, a time when very few areas were managed through networking. This generation is rapidly being replaced by the Millennials, the Internet-savvy generation who know the digital world, who have never lived without a reliable and readily available Internet connection on which they are heavily dependent; and within the next decade, all branches of the military will be completely staffed by the Internet generation.²

We can thus increasingly consider the level of dependence on the network system as critical because, when a network fails, work stops, and when work stops in the military, operational objectives cannot be pursued. Today, as Crosston well points out when the network is not operational and operators are offline, the only solution is to ask for help desk intervention and wait, queuing up; in the meantime, operators are unable to complete their task. In the meantime, operators are unable to complete their tasks. This is due to organizational and management choices that, in an attempt to reduce costs, have led to the transfer of support services away from operators, effectively transforming a proven and efficient decentralized model for network support into a centralized one. Can we imagine what would happen if the network connection was interrupted for a unit engaged in combat and under fire while artillery bombs were raining all around, or during a targeting operation carried out with a remote-controlled aircraft that could not be operated? What could the help desk do?

This growing and increasingly entrenched culture of network dependency is an unintended side effect of the race for efficiency and cost reduction.³ The United States can be called the champions of network management and NCW but, paradoxically, while countries lagging in technological progress are weaker and slower in their decision-making and operational processes, they will also benefit from a lower level of vulnerability to networked cyber-attacks. And as the US military proceeds in forced stages to replace traditional systems considered "obsolete" with modern network technology, the risk of network isolation becomes more and more real; and this also applies to the civilian sector, which often anticipates the military one. An evolution that could force modernization of the military force would render it incapable of operating effectively in an environment without network.

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Osservatorio Strategico

Part Two

Agreement between the United States and Georgia for the containment of Russia in the Black Sea

For decades, Georgia has been the most pro-Western and pro-American country in the Black Sea region. Its foreign policy priority has been becoming a member of the European Union and NATO, and it has responded to almost all requests from both countries' organizations in contributing to peacekeeping and combat missions.

Several dozen Georgians lost their lives while serving side-by-side with US troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. Georgia is also strategically important as an outlet to the Black Sea for the only economically viable east-west trade route that does not transit through Russia or Iran¹.

Eager to join the Euro-Atlantic community, Georgia has also distinguished itself in the region for making the most progress towards democracy. This progress is now being threatened by the ruling party, the Georgian Dream, which seems more intent on taking the reins of power than on meeting Western standards of government. Furthermore, in terms of international positioning, the Georgian Dream also seems to strengthen its ties with Russia and Belarus.

Public opinion polls have long shown that over two-thirds of Georgians support Euro-Atlantic integration. While the Georgian Dream government professes to seek deeper integration with the EU and NATO, recent events have shown that Georgian Dream is strengthening the one-party model and showing compliance with Moscow, thereby undermining the hard work done over the years towards integration with the Euro-Atlantic community.

Also of concern was the cooperation agreement between the Georgian State Security Service (SSG), the country's main internal intelligence agency, and the State Security Committee (KGB) of Belarus, which entered into force on August 1st.

The agreement, signed in August 2016, provides for the exchange of information on state security, as well as cooperation in the fight against crimes against the constitutional order, sovereignty and territorial integrity, transnational organized crime, terrorism, cyberterrorism, and illegal arms trafficking. The agreement entered into force concurrently with the decision by the United States, Georgia's main strategic partner, to extend sanctions against Belarusian authorities for their role in the disputed August 2020 presidential election and subsequent crackdown on opposition protesters. On 21 June Washington designated the Belarusian KGB as responsible for undermining the democratic process in Belarus.

As relations between Minsk and the West deteriorate, the Belarusian KGB has stepped up cooperation with Russian intelligence agencies².

In the face of this trend, the United States still has a strong influence based on long-standing ties and a series of levers to affect Georgia. It is in this context that the agreement signed between the US Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, and his Georgian counterpart, last October 18, to extend the military training of the United States to the ally of the Black Sea, fits into this context.

The agreement was signed during the first leg of the Austin voyage, before visits to the other Black Sea allies, Ukraine and Romania, to reaffirm a message of support for their sovereignty and territorial integrity in the face of Russian threats. Austin along with First Minister Irakli Garibashvili reiterated that "the United States condemns the current Russian occupation of Georgia and its attempts to expand influence in the Black Sea region through military force and hostile activities",

¹ Kelly I., *Georgia Turns Its Back on the West*, Foreign Policy 20/08/2021 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/08/20/georgia-russia-belarus-putin-turns-back-on-west/>

² *Georgia's Deal with Belarus KGB Comes Into Force*, Civil.ge 14/08/2021 <https://civil.ge/archives/436607>

adding that "this is an important region and that its security and stability are crucial to fully realize a vision of a united, free, and peaceful Europe".

Georgia and Ukraine are aspiring NATO members, and, despite the presence of Russian troops, the Atlantic Alliance has refused to advance Georgia's membership, in the face of corruption and lack of transparency in recent elections.

The Black Sea region has strategic value for Moscow as a corridor for energy, telecommunications, and transit to the Mediterranean and, according to Ben Hodges, former commander of US Army forces in Europe, high-level visits, such as that of the US Secretary of Defense are destined to put Moscow in difficulty, explaining how "the last thing the Kremlin wants is a large Western investment, in political and military terms in Georgia", adding that "the fact that the Secretary of Defense of the United States is visiting three Black Sea nations is an important signal of the interests the United States has in the region³".

Confirming Georgia's relevance to the Biden administration in the Black Sea balance of power, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency issued a press release in August approving a supply to Georgia of up to \$ 30 million worth of missiles, anti-tank and Javelin launchers. The release stated that the proposed sale will support US foreign policy and national security by improving the security of Georgia, a key contributor to the region's security and stability. The Javelin system will help Georgia build its long-term defense capability to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity to meet its national defense needs⁴.

³ Gould J., *US, Georgia sign military training pact amid Russian threat on the Black Sea*, Defense News 18/10/2021 <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2021/10/18/us-georgia-sign-military-training-pact-amid-russian-threat-on-the-black-sea/>

⁴ *GEORGIA – JAVELIN MISSILES*, Defense Security Cooperation Agency 3/08/2021 <https://www.dsca.mil/press-media/major-arms-sales/georgia-javelin-missiles>

Libya: is the Paris conference a turning point?

A new international conference on Libya has taken place on 12 November in Paris in a climate of mistrust. The major issue is regarding the upcoming December elections because, at present, it is not at all obvious that the vote will be held. In order to strengthen Europe's ability to put pressure on local and regional actors, the Elysée offered Germany and Italy to co-chair the event, a significant step since the difference between Italy and France on the Libyan problem. The fear shared in Paris as in Rome is that, if the EU continues to neglect Libya, other actors, i.e., Turkey and Russia, are free to impose their own agenda, and they already did.

About twenty regional and international heads of state participated in the meeting, including US Vice President Kamala Harris and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi that is one of the most important international supporters of the Cyrenaica government. Tunisia, Niger, and Chad were also present, and this is important because they are the three neighboring countries that are suffering the greatest repercussions of the Libyan crisis, in terms of instability, arms trafficking, and mercenaries.

The complete list of countries and regional organizations that participated in the Conference includes Algeria, Chad, China, Cyprus, the Democratic Republic of Congo (chair of the African Union), Egypt, Greece, Jordan, Kuwait (Chair of the Ministerial Council of the League of Arab States), Malta, Morocco, the Netherlands, Niger, Qatar, Russia, Spain, Switzerland, Tunisia, Turkey, the Republic of the Congo (Chair of the African Union High-Level Committee on Libya), the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, the African Union, the European Union, the League of Arab States and the Executive Secretariat of the Group of Five for the Sahel.

While Russia, a crucial actor to defuse the Libyan crisis since its involvement in the East of the country, has sent its Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, it is fair to say that President Putin was not present, and even more alarming was the fact that the other most important external actor involved in the Libyan crisis, Turkey, first declared that it did not intend to participate due to the presence of Greece and Israel with which Ankara is on a collision course for the East-Med gas pipeline. Then, Ankara sent Deputy Foreign Minister Sedat to attend the conference Önal. This is an absence that weighs considering that in Libya there are still several thousand Turkish or Syrian pro-Turkish soldiers who intervened in support of the government of Tripoli when it was under siege, as well as Russian mercenaries from the private group Wagner, who rushed to the aid of the forces of the Cyrenaica led by General Khalifa Haftar. Both foreign militias have never demobilized or withdrawn from the country, as was expected after the signing of the ceasefire and the approval of an UN-mediated road map for ending hostilities and restoring institutions.

To further complicate the picture, the balance between Libyan institutions is precarious and fragile. The internal tensions were witnessed by the tough standoff between the Presidential Council and the government of Tripoli over Foreign Minister Najla Al-Mangoush, previously suspended from her duties and subject to a travel ban for administrative violations and then reinstated by Prime Minister Abdul-Hamid Dbeibah. On the day of the opening of the registers for candidacies, the head of the Libyan High Council of State, Khaled al Mishri, invited the population to boycott the vote, in light of the candidacy of criminals referring to the Libyan National Army (LNA), Khalifa Haftar. On the contrary, the Tobruk-based House of Representatives stressed the need to hold elections according to the agreed timescales and with a consensual constitutional basis. Moreover, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, son of Libya's former leader Muammar Gaddafi, has registered as a presidential candidate. Even though Gaddafi is one of the most prominent figures expected to run for president, he remains something of a cipher to many Libyans, having spent the past decade out of public sight since his capture in 2011. Complicating his presidential ambitions, Gaddafi was sentenced to death for war

crimes in 2015 and was later pardoned. Likely, he does not have a chance in the election, but his participation is a political message signaling that he is part of the game and the new Libya¹.

Furthermore, sources close to Prime Minister Dbeibah have reported his intention to run for the presidency. If confirmed, the decision would violate the agreements that sanctioned the birth of the provisional government, which provided for the exit of all ministers once the electoral rallies were called.

Another controversial point concerns the timing of the elections. Although the international community continues to insist that both parliamentary and legislative elections take place on December 24, the House of Representatives recently passed a law stipulating that the latter must be held 30 days after the presidential elections and the High Council announced that the presidential election runoff will be held 45 days after the first round, i.e., in mid-February.

The Libyan candidates represent the deep fault line that divide Libya and that the Paris Conference, and all the other previous international meetings, were not able to overcome. Dbeibah and Fathi Bashagha are close to the Muslim Brotherhood supported by Turkey, Aguila Saleh has been considered one of the main proponents of instability in Libya since 2014, while Aref Ali Nayed, former ambassador of the United Arab Emirates, would be a pawn of the Gulf countries. The son of Khalifa Haftar landed in Israel on November 08, while Libya and Israel currently have no diplomatic relations, Haftar should have promised that he would launch a recognition process akin to that carried out by the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco last year, in exchange for military and diplomatic assistance from Israel².

However, in this context, Saif al Islam Gaddafi is seen by many as the least compromised candidate with foreign powers, armed militias, and violence in recent years.

In this scenario, has the Paris conference achieved some results? Probably not and this is in line with previous conferences. In July 2017 a conference in Paris produced a ceasefire and elections in the spring were decided, but nothing happened. One year later another conference in Paris and a new one in Palermo were held but the only result was a delicate diplomatic crisis between Italy and Turkey. In Abu Dhabi in February 2019 truces and elections were decided but two months later Haftar began to besiege Tripoli. Again, nothing was achieved in Berlin¹ in 2020, while Berlin² did better with a military truce still respected.

In short, the final document of the Paris conference stressed three main points: major world powers could pursue sanctions against those who undermine Libya's upcoming elections³; the complete withdrawal of every "mercenary" group operating in Libya; the fact that every militia has to accept the election final result. These three points are not new, for instance, the withdrawal of foreign troops was a precondition of the election from one year at least, but at the moment no big change has been reported.

¹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/14/son-of-former-libyan-leader-gaddafi-runs-for-president-official>.

² <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/libya-haftar-son-visits-israel>.

³ <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/11/world-powers-warn-libya-election-obstructors-could-face-sanctions>.

Recent events in Ethiopia and Sudan threaten to escalate al-Fashaga dispute

The intertwining of the local and regional dimensions is one of the main features of conflicts in the Horn of Africa. The outbreak of an in-country crisis can have far-reaching spillover effects in neighboring countries. Likewise, a dispute between two regional players can quickly spread to neighboring countries due to cross alignments and ties. These dynamics generate instability throughout the area and, if not promptly countered, can erupt into large-scale conflicts. The Horn of Africa is currently a powder keg where there are a variety of internal crises and disputes between countries. One of them is likely to become the core of regional instability in the coming months: the issue of al-Fashaga. Al-Fashaga is a border area of 260 km², where the northwest of the Ethiopian state of Amhara meets the region of Gedaref, known as the breadbasket of Sudan. The Al-Fashaga area lies at the crossroads of Sudan, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. Although the dispute dates back to the early twentieth century, the outbreak of conflict in the regional Ethiopian state of Tigray, and recent domestic Sudanese instability, threaten to further elevate tensions in the area resulting in a conflict between Sudan and Ethiopia.

At the beginning of the XX century, two treaties (1902; 1907) signed by the British Protectorate on Egypt and Sudan and the Ethiopian Empire arranged the almost 800km of shared border between Sudan and Ethiopia. The decision to run the borderline towards the east generated vagueness around the al-Fashaga area, turning it into a disputed land for over a century. For decades the dispute had a local dimension with low-intensity clashes between peasant communities who lived in the area. In 1972, the dispute became a national issue prompting the governments of Khartoum and Addis Ababa to establish a joint commission. The commission would evaluate the matter and propose measures for the peaceful and fair resolution of the dispute. The Ethiopian revolution of 1974 froze the commission's action. The following decades were characterized by periodical episodes of violence between small Ethiopian paramilitary units, constituted in loco to protect rural communities, and Sudanese security forces. Only in 1998, during the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, Addis Ababa and Khartoum resumed negotiations to define the borders. It became soon evident how the issue of al-Fashaga remained challenging to solve. The area is particularly fertile and suitable for agricultural activity due to the water resources. Although the region belongs to Sudan, most of the crops and activities have been owned for generations by Ethiopian families who have always paid taxes to Addis Ababa. After months of difficult negotiations, the two parties solved with the so-called 2008 compromise. Ethiopia's recognition of the legal boundary established in 1907 was sanctioned by the agreement. In return, the Sudanese government allowed the many Ethiopian communities living in the area to continue farming and conducting activities in the area. The compromise was an example of the application of a 'soft' border interpretation. The parties intended to avoid affecting the livelihood of the population residing in the area. The Ethiopian cooperative approach was motivated by the need to secure Sudanese support for the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) hydroelectric plant construction project that was to be launched shortly thereafter. In the years that followed, thousands of Ethiopians took advantage of the soft border to relocate from the neighboring regional state of Amhara in search of work and more lucrative land. Despite some episodes of violence and moments of tension, coexistence has functioned for over a decade. The rise to power of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the sidelining of the Tigrayan elite from the ministries have revitalized the ambitions of the Amhara communities. The Amhara groups criticized the 2008 compromise, deeming it illegitimate because it was concluded by a Tigrayan-led

government, which according to the Amhara leadership, would have operated not in the Ethiopian interest but only against that of the Amhara community.

The outbreak of the Tigray crisis has therefore shaken the fragile balance along the border area. Last November, PM Abiy Ahmed met the head of the Sovereignty Council of Sudan (SCS), General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, asking him to secure the Sudanese border with Tigray. The Ethiopian government aimed to cut off all access routes to Tigray to reduce supplies to the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF). The increased demand for troops by the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) resulted in the displacement of several battalions of the Amhara State Regional Army. Therefore, the border area remained partially uncovered. Sudan exploited the moment to deploy more than 6000 soldiers in al-Fashaga. The troops, composed by Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the "reservists" of the SAF, succeeded in seizing control of areas inhabited by Ethiopians for years. Addis Ababa has increased support for Ethiopian paramilitary groups active in the area. These groups are part of legitimate and semi-regular militias that operate at the level of local constituencies (kebeles). The increase in clashes in the al-Fashaga area pushed the two Prime Ministers to organize a meeting in Djibouti. The talks, however, failed. In recent months, Sudan has enhanced its military presence in the area and has started the construction of connection lines (roads and bridges). On the other hand, Ethiopia has gathered Amhara troops along the border, including the armed militias of the Fanno group. Furthermore, Ethiopia and Sudan accuse each other, as they have in the past, of supporting non-state actors in order to destabilize the rival. Ethiopian authorities claim that the Sudanese army provides support and weapons to Gumuz militiamen. The Gumuz group opposes the federal government causing episodes of insurrection in the regional state of Benishangul-Gumuz. On the other hand, Sudan accuses Ethiopia of supporting the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-North (SPLM/A-N), a rebel group operating in the Blue Nile area.

The new factor in recent months that highlights the intertwining of local disputes and regional rivalries is the involvement of Sudan's and Ethiopia's regional partners. The ongoing crisis in Tigray and the launch of a new offensive by the ENDF in October led several battalions of the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF) to settle along the border with Sudan, establishing their headquarters in the town of Humera in Western Tigray. For months Khartoum authorities have been reporting occasional Eritrean raids in Sudanese territory. Moreover, Sudan would host armed groups of Eritrean opposition, while Asmara would support dissidents in eastern Sudan. In addition to Eritrea, the dispute has acquired a regional dimension with the involvement of another player: Egypt. The military cooperation agreement signed last spring between Khartoum and Cairo has linked the issue of al-Fashaga to that of the management of the Nile waters. Regarding the GERD, Sudan maintained an attitude of convergence with Ethiopia's positions due to the benefits that Khartoum would have obtained once the dam was completed, especially in terms of energy supply. The Sudanese position shifted last fall when the Trump administration used its leverage to bring the country closer to Egyptian positions. The recent seizure of power by al-Burhan with the consequent strengthening of the alignment between Khartoum and Cairo is likely to result in a further souring of relations with Ethiopia. The Egyptian military leadership believes that increasing pressure on Addis Ababa by exploiting the al-Fashaga dispute could help diminish the position of relative strength Ethiopia enjoys on the Nile. The number of actors involved (Sudan, Ethiopia, Egypt, Eritrea), the domestic instability of the two main contenders (Sudan, Ethiopia), and the increasing use of proxy forces raise the fear of an escalation of violence. The outbreak of a conflict would further worsen the already precarious conditions of the people of the macro-area. This scenario would generate an uncontrolled and unstoppable wave of migratory flows towards the Mediterranean Sea increasing the pressure on the countries of the northern shore.

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The ASEAN Summits and the US-China strategic competition

Introduction

Between the 26th and 30th of October 2021, the heads of state and government of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) gathered for the 38th and 39th summit under the rotating presidency of Brunei Darussalam. The summit took place in virtual mode, due to the logistical limits determined by the COVID-19 pandemic. The leaders of the ten member states also participated in a series of meetings on the ASEAN + 1 format, with leaders of the major regional powers, namely Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea, Russia, and the United States. Finally, the series of meetings concluded with the East Asia Summit.

What ASEAN members agreed on

The final declaration relating to the ASEAN summits shows that the member states have found an agreement on several relevant points. First, they reaffirmed the centrality of ASEAN in the regional institutional architecture. This concept refers, in addition to the role of the Association within the various formulas of institutional cooperation, primarily to an agreement on the main normative pillars shared and promoted by the member states. Among these the most important are multilateralism, non-interference in domestic affairs, peaceful settlement of disputes, respect for the rule of law, and non-alignment in competition between great powers. The final declaration states that the centrality of ASEAN is enshrined in the ASEAN Statute, the Treaty of Cooperation and Friendship, and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. The declaration also reaffirms the importance of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This can be interpreted as a political signal to China, even without naming it directly. Indeed, most member states feel directly or indirectly threatened by Chinese coercive activities in the South China Sea (ASEAN, 2021).

The second fundamental point concerns cooperation to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2020, several ASEAN states, such as Vietnam and Thailand, presented themselves as model states and minimized the economic and health impact of the pandemic. The emergence of the Delta variant has led to much higher infection rates and much more significant numbers in terms of victims.

For this reason, ASEAN has promoted, together with external partners, the ASEAN Response Fund and other forms of cooperation aimed at a rapid and equitable distribution of vaccines. In addition, the summit declared its intention to establish a common stockpile of medicines and medical equipment to be used in case of health emergencies. Nonetheless, vaccination campaigns have been implemented at very different rates throughout the region. Some countries, such as Singapore and Malaysia had managed to exceed 75% of the vaccinated population in October. Others, such as Vietnam and Indonesia, proceeded more slowly with around 25% (Reporting ASEAN, 2021).

Several ASEAN states have received large vaccine donations from the United States, the European Union, Australia, and Japan, as well as numerous other Western states. Vaccination campaigns have suffered from the geopolitical competition, and several states have accepted Chinese and Western vaccines looking both at health priorities and foreign policy alignment considerations.

The health emergency has also led to new forms of cooperation, particularly in the sectors of tourism and the resilience of value chains, which have been severely tested by the pandemic. The summit also produced a joint statement on climate change, which underlines the need for the association to maintain its commitments with the Paris Conference.

The absence of Myanmar

Myanmar's representatives were not invited to the ASEAN summits in held October. During a meeting between foreign ministers, ASEAN members agreed not to invite the leader of the military junta, General Min Aung Hlaing, who exercised the role of de facto head of state after the February 2021 coup. ASEAN has nevertheless invited Chan Aye, the permanent secretary of the Myanmar Foreign Ministry, regarded as a non-political and neutral representative. The ruling military junta rejected this option, as it would not put Myanmar on an equal footing with other member states.

The decision not to invite General Hlaing emerged following a lack of cooperation from the military junta. ASEAN in April approved a declaration in five articles, which was to be the starting point for negotiations functional both to the internal stabilization of the country and to the return to a civilian government. These articles included:

- 1) the immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar;
- 2) a constructive dialogue between all parties to seek a peaceful solution in the interest of the people;
- 3) mediation facilitated by an ASEAN envoy;
- 4) the dispatch of humanitarian assistance from ASEAN 5) a visit by the special envoy and the delegation to Myanmar to meet all interested parties.

The exclusion of a member state from the summit is a very significant event for ASEAN, which intends to signal that both the coup and the political repression in Myanmar are considered a regional problem and not an internal affair of the country. This stance represents a strong act of discontinuity with the ASEAN tradition, which in the past has tolerated human rights violations, military coups, and the presence of authoritarian regimes in the name of respect for sovereignty and non-interference, considered as central normative pillars for ASEAN. Paradoxically, some of the most critical voices against the Myanmar junta have been those of the Thai Prime Minister, General Prayut Chan-o-Cha who took power in a coup in 2014.

The final statements of the summits reflect internal divisions on how to deal with the Myanmar dossier. On the one hand, the Association reiterated that Myanmar remains "an integral part of the ASEAN family" and that the country "needs both time and political space to face the many and complex challenges". On the other hand, the need to re-establish constitutional government and the rule of law is emphasized, putting an end to political repression.

ASEAN and the US-China competition

The summit meetings at the end of October also reiterated how competition between China and the United States and their main regional allies creates significant difficulties for ASEAN member states and the association as a whole. Almost all of the ASEAN states promote a hedging strategy that aims to diversify the complex of relations with the great regional powers, avoiding an alignment for or against one of the great powers. For this reason, ASEAN and its members hope that the intensification of Sino-American competition will not damage their process of economic development. This in turn is based on the maintenance of peace and stability, from the opening of maritime communication and transport lines, as well as the absence of trade barriers. For this reason, the Association stressed the need to respect the law of the sea, implicitly criticizing Chinese aggression. However, many states in the region are deeply skeptical of the initiatives of the United States and its allies in the region. In particular, the emphasis on the concept of Free and Open Indo-Pacific and the role of the Quad, based on the centrality of liberal democratic values and cooperation between maritime democracy, seems to be an alternative to the centrality of ASEAN and its political and regulatory principles. More specifically, some states consider the actions of the United States and its allies as aimed at polarizing the region along ideological and strategic lines, risking destabilizing the precarious regional balance. The most recent example of this is the criticism by Malaysia and Indonesia of AUKUS, the defense industry cooperation agreement between

Washington, London, and Canberra, which led Australia to commit to acquiring nuclear submarines produced by American and British companies (Strangio, 2021).

The summits also provided an opportunity for powers outside ASEAN to reaffirm their positions on major regional disputes. Biden criticized China for coercive strategies it promoted against Taiwan and the South China Sea and human rights abuses in Xinjiang. In addition, they confirmed the United States' commitment to promoting an order based on the concept of Free and Open Indo-Pacific. The position of Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida was consistent with that of Biden. Kishida stressed the need to strengthen cooperation between Japan and ASEAN to face the greatest challenges to regional security and to consolidate an order based on the idea of Free and Open Indo-Pacific (Kyodo News, 2021).

At the end of the summits, leaders announced that ASEAN has inaugurated two Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships, one with China and the other with Australia. The partnership with China envisages new forms of cooperation in the fields of 5G and telecommunications, digital economy, climate change, and vaccine distribution. It also includes an effort to restructure value chains to make them more consistent with the rules and membership of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Furthermore, it promotes a form of "multilateralism with Asian characteristics", a formula that calls for a synthesis between multilateral cooperation and respect for the principles of sovereignty and non-interference. Finally, the agreement establishes forms of dialogue aimed at alleviating the tensions related to territorial and maritime disputes in the South China Sea (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2021).

The partnership with Australia will be characterized by Canberra's greater involvement in Southeast Asia through the financing of projects in the field of energy security, counterterrorism, measures to counter the pandemic, and in the sector of education and scientific research. This agreement was seen as a way to try to remedy the negative reactions of the states in the region to the promotion of AUKUS with the United States and Great Britain (Prime Minister of Australia, 2021).

Conclusion

The ASEAN summit cycle of October 2021 revealed how the competition between different regional models has a profound impact on the political and strategic dynamics of Southeast Asia. The United States, Japan, and Australia propose a vision based on the Free and Open Indo-Pacific model, based on a central political and strategic role of Washington and the great democracies of the region, namely India, Australia, and Japan. On the contrary, China promotes a model of a closed region based on its leadership and the principles of respect for sovereignty and non-interference. ASEAN countries continue to promote hedging strategies and try to avoid siding in favor of Beijing or Washington. For the ten member countries, maintaining the centrality of ASEAN in the regional institutional architecture represents the most effective solution to avoid polarizing the region on political and ideological lines, preserving the economic openness that has allowed regional development in recent decades (Dian, 2021; Ba, 2020).

In the first year of the Biden administration, the United States sought to intensify military cooperation with regional and extra-regional actors, as highlighted by the AUKUS, but also by the consolidation of alliances with Tokyo and Seoul. In addition, the Biden administration, in concert with regional allies, has tried to compete with China in the area of economic diplomacy and on the front of measures to combat the pandemic. In these sectors, however, there is a lot of ground for the United States to catch up. As evidenced by the approval of the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and ASEAN, Chinese influence in the region is expanding, as are the levels of economic interdependence. In this sense, to compete for regional influence, the Biden administration should deploy many more political, diplomatic, and economic resources.

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Riots in Kazakhstan. Terrorist acts or expressions of popular discontent?

Kazakhstan, the second largest of the former Soviet republics after Russia, has recently been rocked by protests¹ that have strained the presidency of Kasym-Zhomart Kemelevich Tokayev. The reasons for the riots and their dynamics are reported by the Western and national media and the Russian Federation in a way that is not only discordant but even contrasting. Thus, according to the former, the riots began in conjunction with the removal of the state price ceilings for butane and propane, the so-called "road fuels for the poor" given their low cost. The effects of the reform, which came into force on New Year's Eve and aimed at alleviating the oil shortage, have dramatically manifested themselves in the doubling of prices (the price of LPG has gone from 50 Kazakh tenge - € 0.10 - to over 120 tenge) and, at the same time, citizens' frustration has grown. The protests have spread by tapping into wider public discontent over the state's endemic corruption, income inequality, and economic hardship, exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic.

On the other hand, Astana and Moscow see the revolts as involving external actors² and, in particular, Islamic fundamentalist groups. In the west of Kazakhstan, where the demonstrations began, there are traditionally strong Salafist movements, radical Islam characteristic of ISIS (and banned in the Russian Federation), and Al-Qaeda (banned in the Russian Federation). Furthermore, this episode would not be the only isolated case, the difference from previous episodes would be the upstream organization, on a large scale. Ten years ago, in the Aktobe region (the homonymous city is an important industrial center where chromium compounds, X-ray equipment, and parts for agricultural machinery are produced), there was a real battle against the police, in which they took part. radicalized combat-trained groups in Pakistan. Furthermore, only three years ago, a Salafist gang was arrested, as it kept all the long-distance traffic in Atyrau (the main port on the Caspian Sea and considered the border between Asia and Europe as it is located on the Ural delta) in check. As stated by the expert of the Russian Council for International Affairs Viktor Murakhovsky: "In addition to the Salafist cells, in those areas, there was a strong nationalist tendency, even if not directly sponsored by some representatives of the official Kazakhstan authorities, at least the authorities Kazakhstan have not paid serious attention to such nationalist cells and the work of foreign non-profit Wahhabi persuasion organizations³. "In Kazakhstan, there are quite a large number of non-governmental organizations, about 22,000, of which two-thirds are funded by Kazakhstan is one of the few countries in the post-Soviet space, where the Soros Foundation still operates without restrictions (considered undesirable in the Russian Federation)⁴ investing more than one hundred million dollars in Kazakhstan, but what

¹ According to foreign sources, about 160 deaths and 5,000 arrests <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/10/kazakh-leader-declares-attempted-coup-detat-over>

² "Аль-Каида" или фонд Сороса: кто стоит за беспорядками в Казахстане" (Al-Qaeda or Soros Foundation: who is behind the unrest in Kazakhstan), Вести.Ру, 09.01.2021 <https://www.vesti.ru/article/2661641>

³ «Быстро возглавили банды»: эксперт назвал цели радикальных исламистов в Казахстане 06.01.2022 <https://tvzvezda.ru/news/2022161343-V7vkQ.html>

⁴ On November 30, 2015, the Russian Attorney General placed the NGOs financed by billionaire George Soros in the list of 12 unwanted organizations (Soros Foundation, National Endowment for Democracy, International Republican Institute, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, MacArthur Foundation, Freedom House, Charles Stuart Mott Foundation, Education for Democracy Foundation) or that "represent a threat to the foundations of the constitutional order of the Russian Federation, the defense of the country and the security of the state". Генпрокуратура РФ включила Фонд Сороса в список нежелательных организаций (The Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation has included the Soros Foundation in the list of unwanted organizations), TASS.ru 30.11.2015 <https://tass.ru/politika/2483822>; Russia bans two Soros foundations from disbursing grants, The Guardian, 30.11.2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/30/russia-bans-two-george-soros-foundations-from-giving-grants>

exactly does not appear in the reports. of Soros were greater only in Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine, where the protests managed to overthrow the existing government.

As stated by the Kazakh president in his official speech to Parliament⁵, the dynamics would be clear: "the weapons were brought to the bandits from the cars and distributed outdoors in the squares. Bystanders became victims of chaotic shootings. Participants in the riots did not allow firefighters and ambulances to work. The actions of the *pogromists*, even from abroad, were coordinated". This interpretation was also given by the political scientist and orientalist Evgeny Satanovsky⁶ who, broadcast on the TV channel Russia 24⁷ and the media platform Watch, declared that "The clashes with security officials in Kazakhstan are not made by" peaceful citizens who they protest against gas prices", rather they are groups of militants" with excellent street fighting tactics" while being able to coordinate their actions across the country. The scale of the protests in Kazakhstan and the professionalism of those who oppose the local security forces are impressive. According to him, it is obvious that it is not civilians who are protesting against the increase in the price of gas operating in the country, but militants "armed to the teeth" with street guerilla tactics, who can intercept and stop security officials directed to guard any object and even to coordinate their actions across the country".

According to the researcher, the events in Kazakhstan were, among other things, a consequence of the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan.

The importance of the country

Kazakhstan, located between Russia and China, also borders with three other ex-Soviet republics and represents the largest economy in Central Asia, with rich hydrocarbon deposits (it is the ninth oil exporter in the world, with a production of about 85, 7 million tons in 2021, and the tenth producer of coal) and metals such as uranium⁸. Since independence, achieved in 1991, the country has attracted hundreds of billions of dollars in foreign investment, recording one of the most dynamic growth rates in the world and reaching almost 8% in the 2000s⁹ (thus tripling its GDP). The country also has a strong strategic value as it connects the large and rapidly growing markets of China and South Asia with those of Russia and Europe by road, rail, and a port on the Caspian Sea, thus fully joining the Chinese "Belt and Road" project.

There is, however, a less known aspect but, undoubtedly, more relevant from the point of view of the "new economies". Since China banned all activities related to cryptocurrencies, thus causing the exodus of around 80,000 crypto-mining companies to Kazakhstan, it has made it the second-largest Bitcoin producer in the world. Following the internet blockade of January 3rd ¹⁰, the value of Bitcoin fell by 8% even if, in truth, it was already in a downward phase, as a consequence of the Federal Reserve's attempt to introduce new regulations¹¹ sector. This delocalization phenomenon has caused an 8%

⁵ *Выступление Главы государства К.К. Токаева на заседании Мажилиса Парламента Республики Казахстан. Уроки «трагического января»: единство общества – гарантия независимости.* Speech by Head of State K.K.Tokarev at the meeting of the Lower House of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Lessons of the "tragic January": social unity as a guarantee of independence) Official page of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan: <https://www.akorda.kz/ru/vystuplenie-glavy-gosudarstva-kk-tokaeva-na-zasedanii-mazhilisa-parlamenta-respubliki-kazakhstan-1104414>

⁶ *Ландскнехты джихада: Сатановский – о том, кто устроил погромы в Казахстане* (Landsknechts of jihad: Satanovsky - about who staged pogroms in Kazakhstan) <https://smotrim.ru/article/2660779>

⁷ <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Cr0jLsNJ8o8>

⁸ The riots this week have led, among other things, to an 8% increase in the price of the metal that powers nuclear power plants. *World's biggest uranium miner says it is unaffected by Kazakh turmoil*, REUTERS, 06.01.2022 <https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/worlds-biggest-uranium-miner-says-unaffected-by-kazakh-turmoil-2022-01-06/>

⁹ GDP at current prices expressed in € is: 2016-120.8; 2018-149.9; 2019-157.5; 2020 (year of the pandemic) - 149.7; 2021 (estimates) -174.7; 2022 (forecast) -186.1. Economic Observatory of the Farnesina updated to 22.12.2021 https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/quadro_macroeconomico.php?id_paesi=130

¹⁰ *Kazakhstan internet shutdown deals blow to global Bitcoin mining operation*, The Guardian, 06.01.2022 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/06/kazakhstan-bitcoin-internet-shutdown>

¹¹ *Riots in Kazakhstan reveal the background to cryptocurrencies* L'indipendente 08.01.2022 <https://www.lindipendente.online/2022/01/08/i-disordini-in-kazakistan-rivelano-i-retroscena-sulle-cryptovalute/>

increase in internal energy demand (according to the Bitcoin Energy Consumption Index, the "mining" or calculation process used to create new digital currencies and keep the register of all transactions, requires a lot of energy, about 133.68 terawatt-hours¹² per year and makes it the process that requires more energy than entire states)¹³, causing several power outages. The Kazakh government, in an attempt to regulate or control such a "volatile" sector, has tried to tax these activities, but many have continued to work illegally. However, following the crisis, about \$ 400 million worth of mining equipment is leaving Kazakhstan for the US.

Since 2002, Kazakhstan has been a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (*Организация Договора о Коллективной Безопасности*) and, as such, required the intervention of force, provided for by art.4 related treaty¹⁴. On January 6th, with the declaration of the President of the Collective Security Council, the Prime Minister of the Armenian Republic, this intervention began¹⁵ and, since peace has been restored¹⁶, the forces will begin the withdrawal on January 13th¹⁷.

The situation in Kazakhstan has become an important topic in the numerous telephone conversations of the Collective Security Council that have taken place in recent days. Russian President Vladimir Putin repeatedly called CSTO leaders for a week: Kyrgyz President Sadyr Zhaparov, Belarusian President Aleksander Lukashenko, Tajik President Emomali Rahmon, as well as Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who now chairs the organization. They discussed joint actions under the CSTO mandate to combat international terrorism and ensure order and security for the citizens of Kazakhstan. Additionally, the Russian president supported the idea of holding a Collective Security Council videoconference.

The Russian Federation has many economic interests in the country, a cosmodrome in Baikonur, built at the time of the USSR and still functioning and which falls under its administration and common affiliation with regional organizations, but it is not just that. According to the 2009 census, about 23.7% of the population is Russian, so Moscow must also be the guarantor of their "safety". In addition, the stability of Kazakhstan represents a bit of the proving ground for the region and, if a *coup d'état* upsets the dynamics of power, cases of emulation could occur in neighboring countries.

¹² *Bitcoin's growing energy problem: 'It's a dirty currency. Elon Musk has highlighted the cryptocurrency's environmental impact and governments are starting to take notice'*, Financial Times, 20.05.2021 <https://www.ft.com/content/1aecb2db-8f61-427c-a413-3b929291c8ac>

¹³ *Bitcoin Uses More Electricity Than Many Countries. How Is That Possible?* The New York Times, 03.09.2021 <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/09/03/climate/bitcoin-carbon-footprint-electricity.html>

¹⁴ *Договор о коллективной безопасности. от 15 мая 1992 года (с изменениями, внесенными Протоколом о внесении изменений в Договор о коллективной безопасности от 15 мая 1992 года, подписанным 10 декабря 2010 года)*, testo dell'accordo su https://odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/dogovor_o_kollektivnoy_bezopasnosti/

¹⁵ *"In relation to the appeal of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan K..K. Tokayev and in view of the threat to national security and the sovereignty of the Republic of Kazakhstan caused, inter alia, by external interference, the Security Council of the CSTO, in accordance with Article 4 of the Collective Security Treaty, has decided to send the collective peacekeeping forces to the Republic of Kazakhstan for a limited period of time in order to stabilize and normalize the situation in this country".* Заявление Председателя Совета коллективной безопасности ОДКБ – Премьер-министра Республики Армения Никола Пашиняна (Statement by the President of the CSTO Collective Security Council - Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan), https://odkb-csto.org/news/news_odkb/zayavlenie-predsedatelya-soveta-kollektivnoy-bezopasnosti-odkb-premer-ministra-respubliki-armeniya-n/#loaded

¹⁶ *Песков объяснил эффективность миссии миротворцев ОДКБ и скорый вывод из Казахстана* (Peskov explained by the effectiveness of the CSTO peacekeepers their early withdrawal from Kazakhstan) Interfax, 12.01.2022 <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/814981>

¹⁷ *Токаев анонсировал вывод миротворцев ОДКБ из Казахстана на 13 января* (Tokayev announced the withdrawal of the CSTO peacekeepers from Kazakhstan on 13 January) Interfax, 12.01.2022 <https://www.interfax.ru/world/814994>

In the quest for strategic autonomy. The ‘Strategic Compass’ and its possible impact on the relations among NATO, the European Union, and the United States

According to the existing timetable, after the presentation on November 15, the first half of 2022 should see the competent bodies adopting the EU’s Strategic Compass. It is an important milestone on the road towards the development of the Union’s strategic autonomy. In this context, the functions of the ‘Compass’ are diverse. According to the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, it should provide the Union with “an operational guide for [...] decision-making [...] on security and defense”, answering three key questions: “Which challenges and threats do we face? How can we better pool our assets and manage them effectively? And what is the best way to project Europe’s influence as both a regional and global actor?” (Borrell, 2021a). The underlying objective is to foster the emergence of a common security culture among the different members but, above all, to ensure greater coherence between the strategic environment, the level of ambition of common action, and the means to achieve this action. In this sense, the ‘Compass’ is proposed as a linking and coordinating element of the documents produced so far to give substance to EU action on security and defense. In other words, it has a dual function. On the one hand, it must contribute to developing a coherent approach to existing defense initiatives and strengthening the Union’s security and defense policy in light of the threats and challenges it faces. On the other hand, offering a detailed analysis of these threats should help define policy guidelines and objectives for joint action in the four dimensions of crisis management, resilience, capability development, and partnerships (Zandee et al., 2021).

As is often the case with European security and defense policy issues, these are ambitious goals, at least on paper. In recent months, then, the ‘Compass’ and its adoption had become more and more closely intertwined with that of the short-term development of a genuine European operational capacity: the one that the High Representative, in the days of the withdrawal of US troops from Kabul, identified as a ‘first entry force’ of at least 5,000 men to deploy as a rapid reaction force in the event of a crisis (Fubini, 2021, and Borrell, 2021b; the issue of the ‘first entry force’ had already been raised in the previous months, when the High Representative had endorsed the proposal for its establishment put forward by the so-called ‘Group of the 14’ at the Council of European Defence Ministers on May 6, 2021¹). This association has contributed to raising the visibility of the ‘Compass’ and loading its approval with new expectations. On the other hand, it has also helped to bring the debate onto much more sensitive ground. In the last four to five years, initiatives to achieve a ‘true’ European operational capacity have proliferated both within and outside the Union. All these initiatives have, however, sooner or later come up against resistance that has held back their development. If the ‘Compass’ approval appears to be a foregone conclusion, problems could arise regarding its concrete implementation. Some countries, for example, have already put forward reservations concerning the project and expressed the fear that greater European strategic autonomy could translate into a downsizing of NATO’s role. Similarly, other countries have criticized the fact that such autonomy would transfer too much power to common institutions to the detriment of national ones (Terlikowski, 2021).

The first clouds seem, thus, to be gathering over the possibility that the ‘Strategic Compass’ could speed up the process of building a ‘Europe of Defence’. On the other hand, the implications of a failure would be potentially serious. As summarized: “A weak compromise [...] may greatly degrade

¹ The ‘Group of the 14’ includes Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Spain.

the value of the entire exercise and result in yet another document with no real impact on European military capacity” (Terlikowski, 2021: 4). It has long been noted (e.g., Fiott, 2021) that the ability to effectively ‘buy-in’ member states is an essential component of the initiative’s success. However, there are considerable doubts about whether even this shared commitment can overcome – in the short term -- the divisions existing on the issue of common defense. In their meetings in early October, EU leaders highlighted that there still seems to be a lack of a shared vision of the features of a hypothetical common defense system and how – in this field -- the United States and NATO remain the main points of reference. Moreover, in a European Union often challenged for its lack of transparency and low democratic profile, the defense dimension is perhaps the one that most escapes public debate: a situation that affects the possibility of building the necessary engagement around the ‘Compass’ issue. Again, this is a problem of an inherently political nature: “the EU security and defense policy has become an elite preserve of high-politics, technocratic expertise, and industry interests: [a state of things] that undermines the energy needed for continued democratic legitimacy and public buy-in” (Csernaton, 2021).

Another risk is duplication. In the past years, the Union has already produced a long series of documents to define its ambitions and role on the international scene, starting with the 2016 *EU Global Strategy*², which is the central reference of the ‘Strategic Compass’. Therefore, the value of the ‘Compass’ lies in its ability to offer ‘something new’ compared to these documents, particularly a more concrete and precise definition of the objectives listed in them and how they can be effectively pursued. In this perspective, it has been pointed out how an accurate ‘Compass’ can also contribute to better allocate the financial resources that have increasingly been attributed to the common defense. In the same vein, it can foster better coordination of projects currently under development within the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) framework (Scazzieri, 2020), increasing the system’s overall efficiency. Once again, the critical issue is to find a credible balance between the many souls of European defense and their oft-conflicting priorities. The attitude of the current US administration could facilitate this process. On several occasions, President Biden has argued in favor of a possible strengthening of Europe’s military role (e.g., Herszenhorn 2021a; Baron, 2021; for a critical assessment of this position, see Kochis, 2021). However, in a meeting with NATO leaders, the Secretary of Defence, Lloyd Austin, also seems to have suggested the possibility that Washington’s position continues to be one of tacit support rather than active involvement (Herszenhorn, 2021b). Such a ‘wait-and-see’ attitude risk negatively affecting a process in which the divisions among European countries and their difficulties in agreeing on a shared set of commitments have often been an obstacle to success.

² *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy*. Online: https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf [accessed: November 18, 2021].

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The 26th Conference of the Parties on Climate (COP26)

During the first ten days of November 2021, the 26th International Conference of the Parties on Climate (COP 26) was held, not without being symbolically accompanied by various pro-environmental public demonstrations in different parts of the world. The Conference was intended to take stock and accelerate the ecological-energy transition of the planet, decided at least starting from the Paris Agreement on Climate (2015), which called for a global decrease in CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions to limit global warming and climate change¹. Through a lower use of fossil fuels and an increase in the consumption of renewable energies, the world should achieve, possibly within 2050, the goal of 'climate neutrality'². Hosted by the United Kingdom in Glasgow, with the co-presidency of Italy, COP26 saw tens of thousands of participants, coming from 197 countries³. One of the most relevant opening speeches was given by the Italian premier, who outlined some programmatic lines of the conference, the need for a permanent dialogue of governments with civil societies (including the Youth For Climate groups)⁴, as well as the importance of an international mobilization of private funds for energy transition – e.g., for research and development projects in technologies for the removal and capture of climate-altering emissions produced by oil, gas, and coal, which is complementary to their lower use and a simultaneous increase in the consumption of renewables and other alternative energy sources⁵. The need for greater involvement of private companies and banks in support of the transition, as well as actors such as the World Bank, was one of the key passages of Mario Draghi's speech, also highlighted due to the correlation between climate change and insecurity phenomena such as crime and terrorism, especially – though not exclusively – in poor countries. Growing involvement in the transition process of public and private actors, including energy companies, is necessary not only due to challenges and geopolitical-economic risks associated with global energy transformation, but also to avoid affecting the ratio between supply and demand, at all levels and also given the related social and occupational risks, by radical unbalances. All this also led German political leader Angela Merkel, on the first day of the Conference, to invite states to adopt global pricing for carbon emissions⁶.

The main topics discussed at COP26 concerned the reduction of climate-altering emissions and the increase of renewable energies ('climate mitigation'), financing in favor of climate neutrality in industrialized states but especially in developing countries, limiting coal production and consumption, oceans' safeguard, economic use of earth's land, anti-deforestation policies, sustainable agriculture, the role of young people and women concerning climate change and energy

¹ Although similar, such two concepts are not synonymous. In other words, while climate change depends on both pollution (mainly due to global warming) and natural causes, contemporary global warming depends primarily on pollution.

² Or 'carbon neutrality', that is a situation in which for each ton of CO₂ equivalent (carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gas) released into the atmosphere, the same amount can be removed (or 'zero net emissions'); 'decarbonization' means instead the process of reducing the carbon-hydrogen ratio in energy sources.

³ Delegates from states and intergovernmental organizations were 21.695, while non-governmental organizations counted for 11.734 people, with the media recording 3.781 persons. The 1st Conference of the Parties on Climate was held in 1995 in Berlin, following the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (so-called Rio Agreement, 1992), later completed by the Kyoto Protocols (1997), which were substituted by the Paris Agreement signed at COP21 (2015).

⁴ It includes at least 400 young people under 30 (including the well-known 18-year-old Swedish Greta Thunberg), who participated in the pre-Cop26 summit hosted in Milan from September 30 to October 2, 2021. Also, in the wake of this event, Italy decided to give political and economic support to *Youth for Climate* groups, so that it can become a permanent annual forum for representing the views of young generations on the very many energy transition issues.

⁵ See the article by M. Galluzzo at the following link: https://www.corriere.it/esteri/21_novembre_02/draghi-clima-soldi-rinnovabili-cop26-33e1b15c-3b4f-11ec-b785-0d6e92ed304d.shtml

⁶ On this point see the article by A. Majocchi at the website below: <https://www.lastampa.it/esteri/2021/11/06/news/dal-g20-alla-cop26-il-ruolo-dell-unione-europea-1.40890689>

transition, non-polluting vehicles, regional and local initiatives for eco-sustainable urban planning and infrastructure policies⁷.

In terms of outcomes, the Conference set, more explicitly and precisely than the Paris Agreement and other subsequent international conferences on energy and the environment, the increase of 1.5°C as the maximum limit for future global warming by the end of the century, hopefully in 2050 (previously, even if the value of 1.5° was indicated as the one to be achieved, the critical threshold in terms of global warming was 2 °C). Consistent with this new approach, already emerging in previous energy and environment summits of 2021, new commitments were announced for the reduction of CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions, through new limitations on fossil sources that should bring such emissions to decrease by 45% within 2030 (in relation to 2010 levels). Significant negotiations focused on methane, with 105 states agreeing to reduce related emissions by 30% within the end of the 2020s, and coal, with over 40 states (including several EU countries) pledging to eliminate coal from their energy mix – by 2030 or, in other cases, before 2040⁸. In this regard, however, it should be noted in addition to India and China, still significantly linked to coal production and consumption, neither the US nor Australia expressly accepted such deadlines, thus limiting in some way the effective and symbolic value of the agreements (although, assuming among other parameters a possible future falling cost of renewables, economic dynamics will perhaps be able to anticipate the end of many coal plants production cycles)⁹. The divergences that emerged on coal had a significant impact on the Final Declaration of the Conference ('Glasgow Climate Pact'), which is the document signed, unlike the various multilateral sectoral agreements of the summit, by all the participants. Indeed, it speaks, mainly due to requests by India and China, of coal 'phase down' rather than 'phase out', moreover only concerning unabated coal (i.e., without systems for the simultaneous capture of CO₂ emissions)¹⁰. India, the third-largest CO₂ emissions producer in the world (after China and the US), has finally indicated an exact date for its 'climate neutrality', albeit this is 2070, 20 years after the EU, the US, and other countries, and 10 years later than states such as China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia; New Delhi also affirmed it wants to bring the percentage of renewables in its energy mix up to 50% by 2030. Brazil has pledged to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030 (its previous target was 43%), thus, achieving climate neutrality by 2050¹¹.

Furthermore, COP 26 established after 2022 it will no longer be possible for states to fund fossil sources-based projects abroad if the latter occurs within countries lacking strategies and plans for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Even in this case, however, the agreement received partial adhesions: in all over twenty, including those of the UK, US, New Zealand, Canada, Switzerland, Italy, and other European states (consistently, in the latter case, to the positions expressed during the summit by the European Investment Bank)¹². Most countries have committed themselves, to a more limited extent and as emerges from the Final Declaration of the Conference,

⁷ https://www.lastampa.it/esteri/2021/11/01/news/cop26_il_calendario_della_conferenza_sul_clima_di_glasgow_in_programma_fino_al_12_novembre-371331/

⁸ Italy had already decided to phase out coal by 2025, and among other things to increase, as stated in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021), the reduction of climate-altering emissions already set in its National Plan on Energy and Climate (2020), bringing it from 37% to 51% by 2030 (compared to 1990 levels); a reduction of emissions of more than 50% is also foreseen by the EU *Fit for 55 climate package*.

⁹ Cf. D. Riosa's article at the link below:

<https://www.advisoronline.it/asset-manager/gestori-e-mercati-finanziari/62708-carbone-soldi-auto-e-alberi-le-priorita-della-cop26.action> ; see also: https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/mondo/europa/2021/11/02/cop26-ue-sale-a-100-paesi-impegno-ridurre-emissioni-metano_ac9e3e72-a028-4c7d-a276-03f74de9d551.html

¹⁰ <https://www.wired.it/article/clima-cop26-accordo-glasgow-cosa-deciso/#due>

¹¹ See the article by G. Didonfrancesco at the following link: https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/cop26-sorpresa-dell-india-neutralita-climatica-ma-solo-entro-2070-AEt8O2t?refresh_ce=1

¹² <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2021/11/04/cop26-litalia-cambia-idea-allultimo-minuto-e-firma-lo-stop-ai-finanziamenti-ai-paesi-che-investono-in-combustibili-fossili/6379538/> ; <https://ecquologia.com/finanziamenti-ai-combustibili-fossili-arriva-finalmente-lo-stop-della-bei/>

to avoid 'inefficient' subsidies for projects based on hydrocarbons - a future role could be played, concerning the interpretation of the concept of 'inefficient subsidies' (supported by Russia and Saudi Arabia among other states), by the International Panel on Climate Change of the UN. In addition, the Beyond Oil and Gas alliance was launched, an international forum led by Denmark and Costa Rica to overcome fossil fuels, with the participation of only 12 members, including Italy (with the status of 'friend')¹³. The Conference then officially sanctioned the birth of the Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet (GEAPP), a multilateral public-private fund; participated also by Italy (with 10 million euros) and important international private foundations, it aims to accelerate the ecological transition, especially in the south of the planet. Its initial 10 billion US dollars endowment should reach at least 100 billion over time, to create 150 million new jobs in developing countries¹⁴. To stimulate investments in low-carbon technologies and a more general congruence between the global economy and investment portfolios, as well as, on the other hand, the effectiveness of the green transition, COP26 also saw the participation of the Glasgow Financial Alliance to Net Zero (GFANZ). The Alliance brings together a range of private players and asset managers, with combined assets of tens of trillions of dollars¹⁵. World leaders and 30 financial institutions then pledged to ensure the stop of deforestation and new investments for 'reforestation' activities, as well as financial support for specific geographic areas, such as the Congo Basin. Other projects were launched to enhance electric mobility, sustainable agriculture, 'green steel', hydrogen applications, and protection of the seas. The latter pledge saw at least 10 states joining 60 countries already committed to formally consider, according to the Global Ocean Alliance agreement, 30% of their respective submarine reserves as a 'protected area'¹⁶. Overall, also and above all thanks to COP26, the nationally determined contributions (NDCs) for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the increase of clean energy would cover today nearly 90% of the world economy (almost triple compared to the beginning of 2020)¹⁷. The Final Declaration of the Conference calls for states to update their NDC, to debate on them as early as 2022 (rather than waiting until 2025, as per the five-year review timeline decided at COP21 in Paris in 2015). It also envisages forthcoming meetings and ministerial summits, also to launch specific negotiations for the definition of shared commitments in 'climate finance' by 2024 and, in view of COP27 (scheduled for November 2022 in Egypt), for the adoption of behaviors and infrastructures to mitigate climate change effects. The document also provides for the implementation of operational tools already provided for in the Paris Agreement, but which remained unimplemented to date, such as the 'carbon market'¹⁸, the *reporting format* with which States have to report on their progress in decarbonization and common rules for the implementation of commitments regarding the ecological-energy transition (the so-called Paris Rulebook)¹⁹.

As expected, different if not opposite evaluations alternated during and after the Conference on its negotiations. After all, it was inevitable that on the one hand, COP26 marked some progress, on the other its various agreements did not receive endorsements from all the parties, and the latter continued on some issues to express divergent needs and positions, or in any case to contract potentially insufficient commitments to reach climate neutrality in 2050. Predictably, such last aspect

¹³ <https://www.iconaclima.it/cop26/cop26-litalia-entra-nel-boga-la-beyond-oil-gas-alliance/>

¹⁴ <https://www.rinnovabili.it/green-economy/finanza-sostenibile/litalia-10-mln-global-energy-alliance/>

¹⁵ <https://www.unepfi.org/news/industries/banking/net-zero-banking-alliance-at-cop-26/>

¹⁶ Cfr. Riosa, op. cit.

¹⁷ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/11/1104812>

¹⁸ Set of mechanisms, not only economical-financial in nature, through which actors polluting less can compensate those polluting more (i.e., exceed the limits set for pollution or need support not to exceed them). For further details see: <https://www.ecosystemmarketplace.com/articles/breaking-new-article-6-draft-shows-broad-compromise-on-carbon-markets/>

¹⁹ <https://tg24.sky.it/ambiente/2021/11/14/cop26-accordo-finale-cosa-prevede#08> ;

https://www.ansa.it/canale_ambiente/notizie/green_economy/2021/11/13/cop26-bozze-nuovo-obiettivo-di-finanza-climatica-al-2024-_2234dadcf7b-426f-8e88-9823a4bd9c4c.html

was highlighted mainly by associations and environmental activists, believing COP26 outcomes are not enough to keep future global warming within 1.5°C. This opinion could be not entirely specious since the International Energy Agency said the commitments announced during the Conference would be more consistent with a future temperature increase of 1.8°C, while the international research consortium Climate Action Tracker they are unlikely to guarantee global warming below 2.4°C²⁰.

Other criticism concerned the funds allocated for the energy transition. Several developing countries, in particular, have highlighted in the text of the final declaration there are no commitments for an allocation of 100 billion dollars per year already included in the Paris Agreement to facilitate decarbonization (the establishment of the fund would have been postponed until 2023), as well as the absence of a specific financial instrument (Loss and Damage Fund) to restore damage and losses due to climate change (although the declaration provides for the launch of a two-year multilateral dialogue to address this issue)²¹. More general criticism concerned the inability of the Conference to create full convergences on the timing and ways of the energy transition. In other words, by simplifying, states would be too autonomous in deciding their ecological-energy objectives, thus being able to deviate significantly from more collective and ambitious targets, as well as the specific national paths to achieve them²².

COP27 may perhaps reduce some of these gaps, hopefully capitalizing also on a certain spirit of multilateral collaboration that emerged, albeit not without the rhetoric, limits, or contradictions, between Washington, Beijing, and the other main players of the Glasgow Conference. Nevertheless, energy transition is a very long-lasting process; only constant monitoring of the empirical data on climate-change emissions and the ratio between fossil sources and clean energy consumption will provide for objective and credible parameters to assess its real trends, as well as policy solutions States may progressively adopt not to excessively slow down its evolution.

²⁰ <https://www.iea.org/commentaries/cop26-climate-pledges-could-help-limit-global-warming-to-1-8-c-but-implementing-them-will-be-the-key> ; <https://climateactiontracker.org/publications/glasgows-2030-credibility-gap-net-zeros-lip-service-to-climate-action/>

²¹ See on this point the article by L. Gaita at the following link: <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2021/11/13/cop-26-firmato-laccordo-sul-clima-e-al-ribasso-testo-indebolito-per-accontentare-lindia-sul-carbone-il-presidente-sharma-in-lacrime/6391464/> ; see also: <https://tg24.sky.it/ambiente/2021/11/14/cop26-accordo-finale-cosa-prevede#09>

²² See, on this aspect, the articles at the following webpages: <https://www.ilpost.it/2021/11/08/cop26-seconda-settimana/> ; <https://www.rainews.it/dl/rainews/articoli/cop26-si-chiude-con-intesa-indebolita-blitz-su-carbone-18e6b49d-7faa-45f3-86d3-994ad5b914bc.html>

Acronyms list

AIAI: Al-Itihaad al-Islamiya

ALP: Amhara Liyu Police

AMISOM: African Union Mission to Somalia

ASWJ: Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama

AU: African Union

EDF: Eritrean Defense Forces

ENDF: Ethiopian National Defense Forces

FGS: Federal Government of Somalia

GERD: Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

ICU: Islamic Courts Union

NISA: National Intelligence and Security Agency

SAF: Sudanese Army Forces

SCS: Sovereignty Council of Sudan

SPLM/A-N: Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-North

TDF: Tigray Defense Forces

UN: United Nations

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