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IN THIS ISSUE

Slaying the dragon

We must re-address arms control

BY HEIKO MAAS

When you walk past the United Nations headquarters on Manhattan's 1st Avenue, it's hard to overlook the massive sculpture on the front lawn: a larger-than-life Saint George slaying a giant dragon. You could easily mistake it for a medieval monument, if the dragon weren't made of fragments from Soviet SS-20 and US Pershing nuclear missiles – weapons destroyed under the INF Treaty of 1987.

For more than 30 years, the treaty was an essential building block of European security and a cornerstone of international arms control architecture. By developing a new ground-based mid-range nuclear missile, Russia has violated and de facto suspended it. The ball is in Russia's court. During my recent visits to Moscow and Washington, I proposed criteria against which Russian transparency proposals should be tested. Regrettably, everything Russia has offered so far falls far short of those benchmarks. Six months remain for Moscow to return to full and verifiable compliance with the INF. Germany will do whatever it can to make this happen.

An end to the INF Treaty would affect us all, and Europe would be less secure. Perhaps even worse, an end to the treaty would also damage the prospects for arms control in general. A new arms race looms large on the horizon, while a key lesson of international policy is undermined, namely that lasting security requires both military strength and cooperative security.

This realization is even more alarming when we look at the challenges ahead. The digital revolution offers potential for changing human lives for the better. But it also has a profound impact on tomorrow's weapons systems, on international warfare, on domestic security and global stability. In a nutshell, the wars of the future will most likely not be fought with mega bombs, but with megabits and megabytes.

The Cold War is over. Security today is less about counting nuclear warheads than about understanding the security challenges linked to future technological developments:

■ 5G networks, which are currently being tendered in Germany and many other countries, will fundamentally alter cyber capacities and the daily routines of household management. But how do we prevent their misuse for cyber warfare?

■ Biotechnology offers the potential to improve human life – from tackling genetic diseases to mitigating the impacts of climate change. But how can we ensure that access to biotechnology doesn't enable terrorists, criminals or states to weaponize biological agents?

■ Artificial intelligence is set to take unmanned aerial vehicles to the skies above our cities. But how can we stop autonomous weapons from building on this technology to select and attack targets without human involvement?

■ New frontiers in long-distance travel will soon be pioneered by hypersonic carriers, drastically cutting travel times. But how can we deal with hypersonic missiles that reduce reaction times to just a few seconds, thus eroding the ability for human control?

These fundamental questions remain unanswered today. To address them, I have invited colleagues, military experts and scientists to attend an international conference in Berlin on March 15 of this year. We want to launch an international dialogue that captures technology and rethinks arms control. It will be informed by an in-depth analysis of technological trends, a clear assessment of the security landscape and an open debate between affected countries. Our European neighbors need to be at the heart of this dialogue, since Europe is particularly affected by the current arms control crisis. Defining a common European position will also be necessary, as we are including global powers such as China, India, Japan and our trans-Atlantic partners in our discussions. We will also engage with the private sector, which is pioneering many of these technological developments. Together, we must put arms control back on the international agenda.

We must prevent a world in which we cannot tell good from evil

The sculpture of Saint George and the dragon on the UN's front lawn bears the title "Good Defeats Evil." If we don't take action now, we risk waking up to a world where we won't be able to tell good from evil, or right from wrong – where high-tech weapons are used in undefined gray zones and where the choice between war and peace has slipped from human control. To avoid such a catastrophic scenario, we must take new technological challenges into account in our arms control architecture. That would be a major step towards preserving peace in the 21st century – and a manifestation of pure *realpolitik*.

HEIKO MAAS
is the foreign minister of Germany.

With friends like these ...

The EU-US relationship is in crisis

BY JULIANNE SMITH

The relationship between the European Union and the United States has always been complicated and riddled with disagreements. It is, after all, an unconventional pairing between one of the most powerful countries on earth and a set of institutions that do their best to represent the often disparate views of 28 individual member states. Whether on trade, counter-terrorism cooperation or Iran, fostering EU-US cooperation is a never-ending exercise in patience, diplomacy and bureaucratic acrobatics. Yet, however challenging and tense the EU-US relationship has become, the relationship has persevered and in many cases prospered. Leaders on both sides have long understood the benefits of working through EU-US channels. That is, until now. Today, thanks to a mix of external and internal forces exerting unprecedented pressure on the EU, the EU-US relationship is ailing, weakening both sides of the Atlantic as both the EU and US compete with Russia and China.

Trump doesn't appear to see any value in the relationship with the EU

For the first time in the history of the EU-US relationship, the president of the United States is regularly and openly expressing disdain for the European project. Unlike his Republican and Democratic predecessors, President Donald Trump doesn't appear to see any value in America's relationship with the EU, nor does he appear to appreciate the historical circumstances that led to its creation. He believes that the EU was "formed in order to take advantage" of the US. "Nobody treats us much worse than the European Union," he said last November. In his eyes, the EU is more adversary than ally; last summer he labeled the EU a "foe." He has also asserted that EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy Federica Mogherini "hates America."

During the first year of the Trump administration, Europeans tried to reassure themselves that the president was isolated in his anti-EU views and that other members of his cabinet saw enough value in the EU-US relationship to prevent Trump from doing any significant damage. Senior-level members of the Trump administration pushed that narrative every chance they got by continually urging Europeans to "look at the policies not the tweets." The administration's policies, administration officials argued, were in stark contrast to the president's disparaging language on Europe and demonstrated a firm commitment to the trans-Atlantic relationship. The policy that Trump administration officials often cite in support of this argument is the decision to significantly increase support for the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI).

Near the end of Trump's first year in office, in November 2017, then Secretary of State Rex Tillerson delivered his first speech on Europe, which was generally well-received on the other side of the Atlantic. With Trump's notoriously soft positions on Russia, which had triggered concerns on both sides of the Atlantic that he might strike some kind of grand bargain with Moscow, Europeans found Tillerson's sobering language on Russia reassuring. Many Europeans also applauded Tillerson's special emphasis on "shared principles." But observers in Brussels noted a glaring omission in that speech, notably the lack of any significant reference to the EU. While Tillerson included passing mentions of the EU's work in the Balkans, its humanitarian support surrounding the conflict in Syria and a US commitment to maintain ties with the EU after Brexit, there was no mention of the multibillion-dollar EU-US trade relationship, long heralded as the cornerstone of the trans-Atlantic relationship. Still, a number of Atlanticists hoped the omission was just a case of benign neglect.

Those hopes came crashing down just a few months into year two of the Trump administration. Tillerson, considered to be one of the "adults in the room," was fired just days after claiming that Russia was responsible for the poisoning of a former Russian spy living in London, for which the White House had declined to assign blame. With the subtraction of one of the moderating forces on Trump's style and substance, Trump's tweets increasingly morphed into actual policy decisions. For example, after complaining about the trade imbalance with Europe for over a year, Trump imposed steel and aluminum tariffs in March of 2018. Since Trump argued that the tariffs

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Epochal breaks

Europeans need to get their house in order

BY WOLFGANG ISCHINGER

The year 2019 marks the 55th convening of the Munich Security Conference at a decisive time in international affairs, a time in which we will see the impact of the escalating crises of recent years.

To Europeans, the crisis of the trans-Atlantic alliance is particularly troubling. To feel it crumbling beneath our fingers is deeply unsettling, both because Europe currently lacks the capabilities to assert itself more fully and because NATO "represents a special, even emotional bond between the American and the European continents," as recently expressed by German Minister of Defense Ursula von der Leyen.

The trans-Atlantic bond is not the only foreign policy certainty that is being questioned. We seem to be experiencing a reshuffling of core pieces of the international order. In the future, when looking back at this time, we will see it as an *Epochenbruch* – an epochal break. Great power competition is returning, with the United States, China and Russia as its main actors, accompanied by a leadership vacuum in the liberal international order. And while the US theoretically enjoys a favorable position in this new Great Game and should be well prepared for an era of increasing competition, Washington currently seems to be forfeiting its competitive advantages. The kind of new order that will emerge remains unclear. Will core principles of the old system be preserved? Will we see a world with competing orders? And will the transition period be peaceful?

Much will depend on how other actors choose to react. Some call for liberal democracies such as Canada, Germany and Japan to compensate for the lack of stable US leadership. To differing degrees, leaders in these countries seem to understand that they need to do more, in their immediate neighborhoods and globally. Yet they also continue to face multiple domestic and international challenges that limit their scope of action, calling into question whether they will be up to the task.

At the beginning of 2019, we find ourselves in a situation potentially more dangerous than at any point since the end of the Cold War. While dialogue is scarce, great power rivalry is growing and, with it, the risk of miscalculation. At the same time, the world is facing a growing number of global security challenges that cannot be contained by borders, such as climate change, transnational crime and new technologies. Addressing them successfully requires a collaborative approach. Yet multilateralism is increasingly being challenged by the false promises of nationalism, which is a dead-end street.

In this context, it is high time for the European Union to become a truly capable actor in its own right; otherwise we risk standing on the sidelines of history while others decide our fate. Multilateralism is not in crisis because the concept itself is unworkable, but because certain actors actively choose not to engage in it, thinking they can achieve better results for themselves on their own. History has taught us to know better, and now we must do better. At times, this will demand that we set narrow domestic interests aside to achieve a greater good.

In order to assert itself in the world, the EU must speak and act with one voice on foreign policy matters. A union of 500 million people taking a joint stance cannot be ignored. But making decisions on foreign and security policy by consensus clearly prevents this – for every single member is tempted to veto decisions that go against their domestic interests, thereby weakening the EU as a whole. Qualified majority voting would solve this dilemma and would mark a crucial step towards making the EU, as Jean-Claude Juncker stated at the MSC 2018, *weltpolitikfähig*, that is, able to influence global politics. This could also help transform the trans-Atlantic relationship for the better. A great many people on both sides of the Atlantic believe in its importance and wish to preserve it. The best thing Europeans can do to support their fellow trans-Atlanticists in the United States is to make the EU a stronger partner and to do so quickly. We may otherwise find ourselves in a situation in which there's little more than broken pieces left to pick up.

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SHUTTERSTOCK

Who will run the world?

A new global order is in the offing

BY THEO SOMMER

The year 2019 was ushered in under clouds of gloom and doom. The current global order is, in fact, a frightening global disorder. Not only is the world economy weakening, as tariff conflicts herald a pernicious trade war, but the certainties of international cooperation are also waning and vanishing in the political realm, as America's retreat from global leadership and the rise of Xi Jinping's China upend the prevailing power pattern of the past 70 years. Geopolitical conflict has become thinkable once again.

The old world order is coming to an end. As Richard Haass argues, even the best-managed orders eventually do. The president of the Council on Foreign Relations fathoms the causes of disarray and decline in the latest issue of *Foreign Affairs*. "The balance of power underpinning [the existing order] becomes imbalanced," he says. "The institutions supporting it fail to adapt to new conditions. Some countries fall, and others rise, the result of changing capacities, faltering wills and growing ambitions. Those responsible for upholding the order make mistakes both in what they choose to do and in what they choose not to do." It is a perspicacious analysis.

Take the United States. The problem is not primarily President Trump's chaotic management, his boorish behavior or even his disregard for all values not expressed in dollars. It is his abdicating the leadership of what used to be called the free world as well as his brazen disrespect for allies, for international institutions and for taking the interests of others into account. Disruption of the old order, his Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told the recent World Economic Forum in Davos via video, was a "positive development" because "nations matter." Other nations, however, don't seem to matter.

In this spirit of reckless unilateralism, Trump continues to shed America's global commitments. He withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Paris Climate Agreement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – commonly known as the Iran Nuclear Deal – and, most recently, from the INF arms control treaty with Russia. Having called Europe a "foe" and welcomed the EU's breakup through Brexit, he has also repeatedly questioned the US commitment to defend NATO partners; reportedly he has privately told aides that he wants to leave the "obsolete" alliance. But dominating the world by fiat, whim and fits of temper can have only one effect: the further unraveling of the complex interdependence of the West.

Denouncing all the politics that made America great comes at a time when, after a century of US global supremacy, a powerful, ambitious, assertive, even aggressive rival has appeared on the scene: a rejuvenated, strengthened, emboldened China. Xi Jinping seeks to place the People's Republic in the center of the world stage and to achieve leadership status in the political, economic, technological and military fields. Time and again, Xi repudiates spheres of influence as well as hegemony, yet his practical policies tell a different story. His landmark Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – the new Silk Roads spanning the world – realizes infrastructure projects in the developing world; it is financed by a fund totaling one trillion dollars. Participants are forced to sign an MoU promising to support China's core interests (e.g. Taiwan, South China Sea).

This kind of monetary imperialism creates spheres of influence not merely in South East Asia and Central Asia, but also in Africa and Latin America. And while Xi shies away from open confrontation with the West, he aspires to achieve dominance in the Indo-Pacific region by forcing out the US. The annexation of the Paracel and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea and China's land grab in Sri Lanka show that he is serious about it.

Beyond that, Xi Jinping certainly wants to compete with the United States globally. Harvard's Graham Allison has drawn attention to the Thucydides Trap, named after the Greek historian who had written that the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC) was caused by "the growth of Athenian power and the fear that this caused in Sparta." Allison does not exclude the possibility of war between the rising power, China, and the established power, the US. This may be an overly pessimistic view. Yet even if Donald Trump and Xi Jinping manage to settle their trade conflict during their next meeting at the end of February, the geopolitical rivalry between the US and the People's Republic of China is not going to end. It will be the dominant element of international politics in the 21st century.

In this perilous situation, Europe is a helpless and clueless bystander. It finds itself adrift as it struggles with Brexit and disputes over sovereignty and migration. The Brexit debate has sapped the strength of the EU, its cohesiveness and its deeply felt conviction that sticking together is the only chance for its members to prevail in the emerging world of tomorrow.

In the United Kingdom, seemingly unable to clinch its divorce from the European Union, the venerable system of parliamentary democracy has been badly discombobulated; the failure of representative government in Westminster bodes ill for democrats, but will bring cheer to autocrats all over the world.

In France, the implosion of the traditional party system has led to near-ungovernability. President Emmanuel Macron's lofty vision of a "European renaissance" and his new start in French politics have fallen victim to the protestations of the Yellow Vests.

In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel's tenure is drawing to a close; after 14 years at the helm, she is on a glide path out of power. At the same time, the new government coalition in Italy, political blockades in the Netherlands, Belgium, Scandinavia and Spain as well as authoritarian tendencies in Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania are reinforcing a populist dynamic and a formerly unknown polarization of Europe's societies.

Right-wing anti-European parties – including the Alternative for Germany (AfD) – may capture up to 150 of the 705 EU Parliament seats in the elections this May. This is likely to create substantial complications. In addition, the EU will be absorbed with replacing its complete leadership. It must find successors for Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, Council President Donald Tusk, High Representative for Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini, for the president of the EU Parliament as well as for Mario Draghi, president of the European Central Bank. This means that Europe will continue its vacuous navel-gazing. It is hard to believe that the new Treaty of Aachen augurs a new era of European integration.

The fracturing of the EU and the weakening of Washington's commitment to NATO occur at a moment when the West faces a daunting array of challenges.

One challenge is Russia. Putin's annexation of Crimea and his support for the Donbass separatists ended a period of lukewarm peace in Europe – much in the same way that the Crimean War (1853–1856) ended the Concert of Europe, which had maintained peace on the continent since the Napoleonic Wars. The Ukrainian crisis will likely smolder on for some time – until Putin or his successor realizes that Russia is punching far above its weight, its quasi alliance with China will not solve its economic stagnation and that it will soon find itself evicted from China's Central Asian near abroad. Moscow may then repivot to Europe as its modernization partner.

And there are numerous other challenges. The Middle East will remain a cockpit of conflict, aggravated by the intensifying confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Israel and Iran. In Africa, a continent forever hovering between hope and horror, the doubling of its population within decades will exacerbate the development problems already bedeviling it while also dangerously increasing the migration pressure on Europe. Terrorism, the violence of religious fundamentalism, nationalist militancy, cyber aggression and the security consequences of climate change will be the hallmarks of the 21st century. And it is not merely state actors that are likely to pose serious threats to order and peace in the world, but also non-state actors from drug cartels to hacker gangs profiting from the progress of technology in the digital age.

The rise of new powers abroad and the spread of authoritarianism around the globe are worrisome enough. However, both the international liberal order and the constitutional order of our liberal democracies are threatened just as much by the rise of populist, nativist and illiberal nationalism in the West, nourished by a disturbing growth of inequality in our societies. As voiced by Elizabeth Warren, the Democratic US Senator from Massachusetts: "Around the world, democracy is under assault. Authoritarian governments are gaining power, and right-wing demagogues are gaining strength."

Warren's analysis is disheartening, and we should all take her admonition to heart: "If we do not stand up to those who seek to undermine our democracy and our economy, we will end up as bystanders to the destruction of both." Indeed, failing to do so would not only jeopardize the stability of our polities, but their security as well.

"Who Will Run the World?" is the title of the latest issue of *Foreign Affairs,* and it is a good question. The year 2019 will be a hinge year, replete with inflection points in global politics. At this moment in history, the West needs strong and capable leadership. Unfortunately, there are no Washingtons, Castlereaghs, Metternichs or Bismarcks anywhere to be seen, no Trumans, Churchills, Adenauers and de Gaulles capable of laying the groundwork for a new order. It is thus all the more urgent that our societies produce leaders who are up to the task of guiding us out of the tumult of international chaos and domestic mayhem.

If in this we fail, 2019 will be just another year of jostling and jockeying for advantage. Another lost year.

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Authoritarian advantage

The struggle for a liberal world order is occuring not just outside the West but also within it

BY ROBERT KAGAN

SHUTTERSTOCK

A character in the Hemingway novel *The Sun Also Rises,* asked how he went bankrupt, responds, "gradually and then suddenly." That is a fair description of how the world order collapsed before the two world wars. Unfortunately, Americans and Europeans have since forgotten how quickly it can happen, how quickly graver threats than we anticipate can emerge to catch us physically and psychologically unprepared. One would think it hard to embrace a 1930s mentality with the benefit of the knowledge of what happened in the 1940s, but we continually comfort ourselves that the horrors of 75 years ago cannot be repeated. We see no Hitlers or Stalins on the horizon, no Nazi Germany, no Imperial Japan, no Soviet Union. We believe that the leaders of today's potential adversaries, the Vladimir Putins and Xi Jinpings, are just run-of-the-mill authoritarians who just want a little respect and their own share of the international pie. We forget, of course, that people in the 1930s felt the same way about Hitler's Germany and Imperial Japan – the two self-proclaimed "have-not" nations in the international system.

There are always dangerous people out there, with resentments both legitimate and illegitimate, lacking only the power and the opportunity to achieve their destiny. They are constrained by the powers and forces around them – the "order," whatever it may be; so they never have a chance to reveal their true selves, even to themselves. The circumstances in which Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini rose to power – a world in which no nation was willing or able to sustain any kind of international order – gave them ample opportunity to show what they were capable of. Had there been an order in place to blunt those ambitions, we might never have come to know them as tyrants, aggressors and mass killers.

Today, we know a Putin with grand ambitions but not yet the capacity to realize them. He reveres Stalin but he is not Stalin. But what would a less-constrained Putin be like? What would a Russia that had restored its Soviet and imperial borders be like? Today, a more powerful China is abandoning the cautious foreign policies of Deng's weaker China. What will an even more powerful and less constrained China be like? Who can say whether either of these powers might in time become a threat on a par with those we faced in the past if they are allowed to expand their regional and global influence by military means?

We have taken too much solace from the fact that our opponents are not communists, but merely authoritarians. During the Cold War, people like Jeane Kirkpatrick argued that Americans had nothing to fear from authoritarianism. It was the communist governments that threatened democracy. Authoritarian governments would eventually evolve into democracies if given enough time and security against armed radicals, but "totalitarian" communism was forever. Of course, this turned out to be anything but the truth. Communist governments in the Soviet Union and Eastern and Central Europe did fall. In the Soviet Union and elsewhere, governments attempted to carry out peaceful reforms and to open the system, which ultimately led to the establishment of democracies, briefly in Russia and longer-lasting in Eastern and Central Europe. Authoritarianism has proved more durable, less susceptible to internal pressures for reform and so far more capable of withstanding the liberal pressures from beyond their borders.

One reason may be that communism sprang from the same Enlightenment roots as liberalism. In many ways it competed on the same plane, and proved unable to compete. Because communism proposed such an extreme version of the Enlightenment, it conflicted even more with human nature than liberalism did, and so, on the one hand, had to impose its system with greater brutality, and, on the other hand, was even more likely to fall short of its own promises. It offered so much that was appealing to the human soul – the promise of justice and true equality, an end to materialism and greed – but it also demanded more than humans could give and ensured a far greater gap between dream and reality. When it failed to deliver, it suffered a crisis of confidence. When it was also then deprived of geopolitical successes and fell behind in the Cold War competition for power and influence, even Soviet leaders had a hard time reconciling the promise of the ideology, in which they placed so much faith, and the reality of its failure, just as George F. Kennan had predicted.

Authoritarians do not have the same vulnerability. The case for authoritarianism during the Cold War was that it was traditional, organic and natural, yet it is perhaps the very naturalness of authoritarianism that makes it a bigger threat. It appeals to many of those elements of human nature that liberalism does not satisfy – the desire for order, for strong leadership and, perhaps above all, the yearning for the security of family, tribe and nation. If the liberal world order stands for individual rights, freedom, universality and equality regardless of race or national origin, for cosmopolitanism and for tolerance, the authoritarian regimes of today stand for the opposite, and in a very traditional and time-honored way. A Counter-Enlightenment sprang up in the late 18th and early 19th centuries in response to the French Revolution, but also in response to some of the basic tenets of Enlightenment liberalism. Counter-Enlightenment thinkers like Johann Gottfried Herder and Joseph de Maistre condemned the celebration of reason, which they insisted could not capture the ineffable human relationships "that make a family, a tribe, a nation, a movement, any association of human beings held together by something more than a quest for mutual advantage," as Isaiah Berlin wrote in his essay "Counter-Enlightenment." Cosmopolitanism, in this view, was "the shedding of all that makes one most human." Humans were "not made for freedom"; they could find happiness only under "wisely authoritarian governments."

Such anti-liberal views informed the German struggle on behalf of *Kultur* and the primacy of the state over the individual in World War I; they informed the fascist movements in the interwar years; in Asia, they inspired a defense of what used to be called "Asian values," which emphasize community over the individual, harmony over freedom. Today they inspire Viktor Orbán's celebration of "illiberalism." The present Chinese government's critique of liberalism is not so much a communist critique as it is a conservative critique. Just as German authoritarians did in the Weimar years, the Chinese criticize the "endless political backbiting, bickering and policy reversals" that "retarded economic and social progress," as a Reuters report put it in 2017. Putin and his political counselors have made much the same argument. Radical Islam is nothing if not a rejection of Enlightenment thinking in favor of spirituality and rigid adherence to religious tradition. The Counter-Enlightenment critique of liberalism will always appeal to those who fear that their traditions and beliefs are undermined by the cold materialism of the modern liberal world. It was not globalization that caused the backlash among such peoples; it was the globalization of liberalism.

While we were grateful when communism collapsed, the fact remains that the liberal world order flourished with communism as the enemy. It is doing less well against a Counter-Enlightenment that plays more effectively on liberalism's failings and insecurities. Mikhail Gorbachev had more in common with liberals in the West than he did with many of his own people. Putin, with his rebukes of gay rights and feminism, his condemnation of the "genderless and infertile" morality of the liberal West, his support for the Russian Orthodox Church and for conservative traditions in general, may well speak for the majority of Russians in a way that Gorbachev did not.

And Putin's message resonates in a Western Europe where disenchantment with liberalism, and the immigration it permits, is rising. It even resonates in the United States. Patrick Buchanan called Putin the voice of "conservatives, traditionalists and nationalists of all continents and countries" who were standing up against "the cultural and ideological imperialism of ... a decadent West." These days, if the polls are to be believed, favorable views of Russia's "strong leader" have grown, at least among Donald Trump's supporters. Putin has positioned himself as the leader of the world's "socially and culturally conservative" common folk against "international liberal democracy," as M. Steven Fish wrote recently in the *Journal of Democracy,* and there are probably more of those common folk around the world, including in the West, than there ever were committed communists. That is why Russian penetration into the political systems of the United States and Europe has been so effective. It has exploited the truly dangerous fissures in Western society, which are not based on class, as the Marxists wanted to believe, but on tribe and culture.

If so, the challenge to democracy today is greater than it was during the Cold War, when, after all, democracy spread across the globe. We must abandon the post-Cold War myth that liberalism is the natural end point of human evolution, just because it triumphed over communism. Five thousand years of recorded history suggest that it is not. Our belief that peoples at all times share a desire for freedom, and that this universal desire supersedes all others, is an incomplete description of the human experience. In troubled times – yet not only in troubled times – people seek outlets for anger and resentment, for fear and hatred of the "others" in their midst. Those who have suffered defeat and humiliation, such as Germans after World War I or Russians after the Cold War, often find that democracy offers insufficient solace and insufficient promise of revenge and justice, so they look to a strong leader to provide those things. They tire of the incessant arguing over national budgets and other trifles while the larger needs of the nation, including spiritual and emotional needs, go unaddressed. We would like to believe that, at the end of the day, the desire for freedom trumps these other human impulses. But there is no end of the day. Human existence is a constant battle among competing impulses – between self-love and the love of others, between the noble and the base – and because those struggles never end, the fate of liberalism and democracy in the world is never settled.

That struggle is not just occurring outside the West, but also within it. When Americans on both the left and right scorn "democracy promotion," they're usually thinking of Iraq and Afghanistan, or Egypt and Libya. They're not thinking of Poland or Hungary or Italy. American conservatives like to argue that democracy is a product of Western civilization and of Judeo-Christian culture and values, with the implication that it is only in these societies that we should support democracy – not in, say, Muslim societies where these traditions are presumably lacking. But setting aside whether democracy is possible in Muslim countries – it is and has been – what makes us so confident that democracy is guaranteed in the West? It was in the Christian West that fascism first arose and in which the ideas of communism were invented. It was in the Christian West that democracy collapsed after World War I. And it is in the Christian West, as much as anywhere, that democracy is at risk today.

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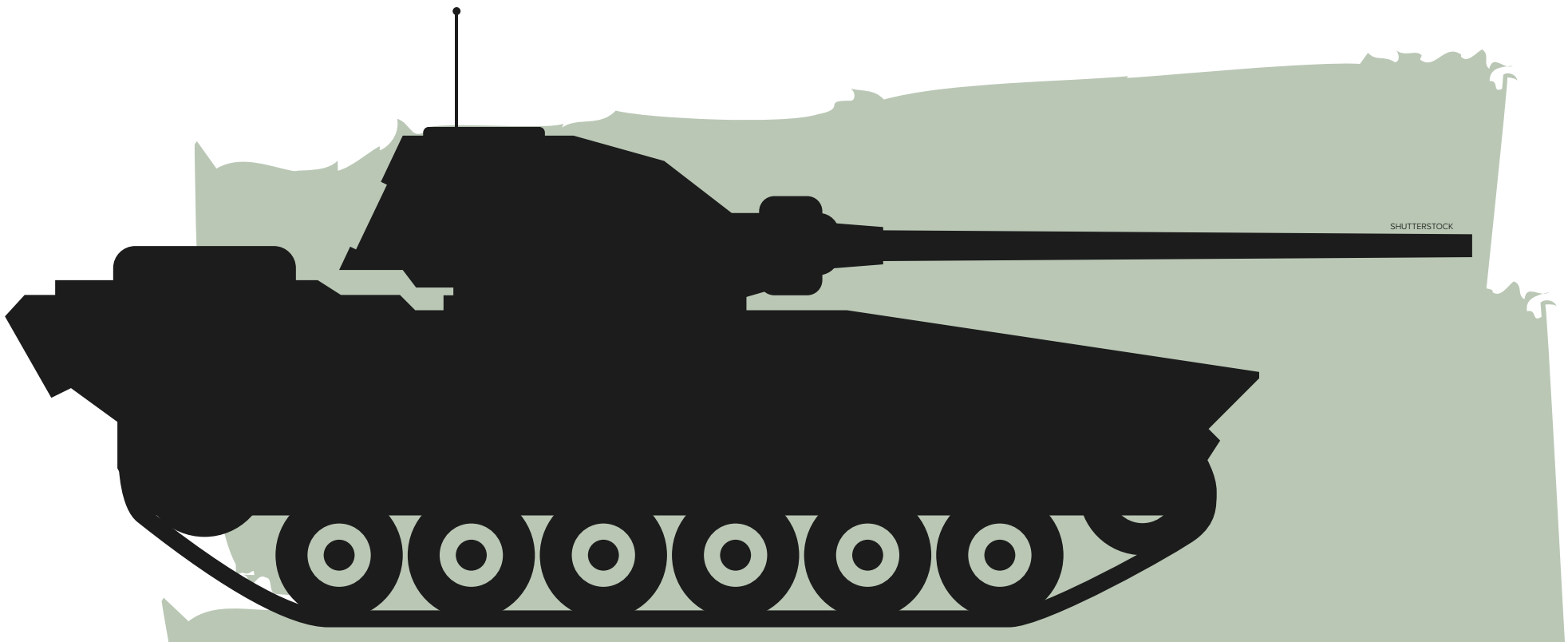

Arms control – here we go again

The world's security risks have become more severe. But what are today's great powers willing – and able – to do to counter them?

BY DAN SMITH

The contemporary security horizon is marked by a worrying number of negative developments. Gloomy prognoses abound. Although the details of analysis often differ quite significantly, the dismal mood is widely shared. This mood has barely shifted over the last four years. For confirmation, just consider the titles of successive editions of the Munich Security Report:

2015: Collapsing Order, Reluctant Guardians?
2016: Boundless Crises, Reckless Spoilers, Helpless Guardians
2017: Post-Truth, Post-West, Post-Order?
2018: To the brink – and back?

One of the most sensitive areas at the moment is arms control. It is widely depicted as being in crisis. Worse, this has unfolded amid a deterioration in geopolitical stability, with growing tensions between the United States and China and between NATO and Russia, rifts and significantly divergent perspectives within NATO, and a reordering of power in the Middle East. Moreover, the incidence of armed conflict is considerably greater than ten years ago and challenges for stability and security have emerged from climate change. These factors combine to offer a series of toxic short-, medium- and long-term prospects.

Labeling the plight of today's arms control a crisis is too generous, for there is no turning point in sight. The deterioration of arms control has developed slowly, barely noticed perhaps because its significant achievements at the end of the Cold War so successfully locked in major gains in security.

As the Cold War ended, four building blocks of East-West arms control were laid on top of foundations established by the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972. In chronological order:

■ The 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) eliminated all ground-launched missiles with a range between 500 and 5,500 kilometers.

■ The 1990 Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) capped the deployment of NATO and the Warsaw Pact's heavy weapons in Europe.

■ The 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) reduced the numbers of strategic nuclear weapons, with further cuts agreed in 2002 and again in 2010 in the New START agreement.

■ With the 1991 Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs), the US and USSR undertook unilateral but agreed-upon actions that eliminated thousands of short-range tactical nuclear weapons.

Right now, of this range of arms control instruments, only the PNIs look to be in healthy condition. President Donald Trump canceled the INF Treaty on Feb. 1 of this year. This comes after five years of US charges that Russia was violating the treaty with the 9M729 missile (and after a shorter period of Russian counter-charges). Russia has now offered the US the chance to inspect the missiles if it can have a look at the missile defense system in Europe, Aegis Ashore, which is one object of its chief concerns. The New START agreement expires in 2021; so far, there are no talks about renewing or replacing it and little sign of interest on either side. There are also complaints by Russia of technical violations on the American side. As for the CFE Treaty on conventional forces, Russia ended its participation in 2015, claiming that when ex-Warsaw Pact states joined NATO and, so to speak, took their quotas with them, the treaty became unfair.

Looking outside the US-Russian framework, the situation on the Korean Peninsula is much less alarming after a year of inter-Korean détente and US-North Korea diplomacy. While some analysts worry that little by way of concrete achievements can be seen so far, others contend that not much should be expected so soon. They point to the longer timelines of US-Soviet détente in the second half of the 1980s, after a shorter period of hostile confrontation that had not, after all, been kicked off by open war.

While the US president has talked up diplomacy with North Korea, he has simultaneously discarded it with Iran. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is not an agreement exclusively between the US and Iran and cannot be ended by the US alone. The other four permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany and the EU are also signatories, and the deal was endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 2231. Nonetheless, Washington's financial power means that its re-imposed sanctions against Iran have far-reaching influence in Europe towards deterring trade and investment. The US action against Iran has been taken despite Iran having properly implemented the technically sound agreement, with the result that, if it were indeed interested in moving along the pathway to nuclear weapons capacity, it could not. Furthermore, Iran has never acknowledged or been proven to have either nuclear weapons or nuclear ambitions.

The contrast with North Korea, which is proud of its nuclear weapons capacity, and, more particularly, with the US treatment of the country under this presidency, is striking. It may also be educational in a very negative sense.

Unlike a half century ago, when the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was about to enter into force (signed in 1968, in force from 1970), analysts today do not have a long list of potential nuclear proliferators. Back then, there were concerns that about 12 to 15 more states could go nuclear on top of the five declared nuclear weapon states (plus Israel, secretly). The emergence of just three since then – India, Pakistan and, most recently, North Korea – shows that non-proliferation, like nuclear arms control, has a history of a reasonable degree of success. But there may well be another possible proliferator out there; capabilities certainly exist. For states that may be considering going nuclear, the contrast between US behavior towards Iran and towards North Korea may bear an all too simple lesson.

Nonetheless, there is marked impatience among many governments that nuclear reductions have not gone further. The NPT swings on a bargain in which the nuclear have-nots agree to remain have-nots as long as they can have access to nuclear power for peaceful purposes and, crucially, as set out in Article 6, as long as the nuclear weapons states move in the direction of nuclear disarmament. The argument of many of the non-nuclear weapons states is that the nuclear weapons states have not been faithful to Article 6.

Whether this erosion of support for the NPT produces a functional weakening remains to be seen. A considerable number of the NPT Review Conferences – held every five years – have been quite fractious affairs. The most recent one ended without any statement agreed upon by the conference; there was not even agreement on the nature of the disagreement – or at least not one they would all sign. The next NPT Review Conference is scheduled for 2020.

Impatience over nuclear weapons states not fulfilling Article 6 helped produce the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), first signed in 2017 and not yet in force. Little about the nuclear weapon states' response to the TPNW suggests there will be a positive, forward-moving outcome of the 2020 Review Conference. But there is still time.

Other problems exist concerning multilateral arms control, such as the non-entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban, the flouting of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the lack of a prepared environment for new technology developments such as autonomy in weapons systems. What is most troubling about all these developments, or non-developments, in bilateral and multilateral arms control is not just the substance of what is happening but the context.

By all indicators – the scale of arms spending and arms transfers as well as the incidence, lethality and complexity of armed conflicts – the second decade of the 21st century has been significantly less secure than the first. And the third and fourth decades will likely see new pressures piling up.

In the last couple of years, it has become clear that some of the effects of climate change are unfolding faster than anticipated. Recent research shows that the interaction between climate and other environmental variables, such as the loss of biodiversity, could produce complex tipping points with unpredictable results. The impact of arriving at these tipping points is barely discussed in contemporary politics yet could determine much of what happens between now and mid-century.

Considerable concern has been expressed about the existential threats to Small Island Developing States (SIDS), some of which could become fully immersed in seawater. Of a total population of SIDS at roughly 65 million, about 20 million people live in areas at risk from sea-level rise. Nine states are facing an existential challenge; their combined population is 2.3 million people.

However, while the problems of SIDS demand urgent action, the statistics pale in comparison to the fact that over one billion people currently live in low-lying coastal areas. If major coastal plains and cities start facing inundation, what happens to agriculture and what happens to habitat? If governments lack resources, will or enough foresight to respond in ways that protects their citizens' well-being, what happens to political stability? And then international stability and security?

The only answer can be that international stability will increasingly depend on broader and deeper international cooperation. It will have to reach far beyond traditional alliance relationships. It will need to set aside long-standing antagonisms.

Geologists have named our era the epoch of the Anthropocene, a word stemming from the fact that human activity is the dominant influence on climate and the natural environment. We face the challenges of this era with an idea of geopolitics and international relations that is inadequate for providing security today, let alone tomorrow. That defense capabilities will in any event have a place in security provision seems clear. However, the idea that security can be provided without strengthening international cooperation is a delusion.

The point about cooperation is that it cannot be left until tomorrow. It takes time to learn and re-learn the habits of cooperation as well as to abide by formal rules and informal institutional norms designed to prioritize not individual advantage but shared benefit.

This is not the direction our current geopolitical climate is heading. The leaders of the three great powers are alike for seeking cooperation only when it suits them and institutional engagement primarily when it favors them. The result is intermittent toxicity in international politics. This, in turn, undermines opportunities provided by an otherwise strengthening United Nations that is focusing more than before on the intersecting issues of preventing violent conflict and acting on climate change. The most important shift in security thinking now required is towards a greater emphasis on institutions – and thus on rule of law and cooperation – and away from the arbitrary behavior of the great powers and the dependent alliance it creates.

Back to arms control then. We need Russia and the US to cease their sniping, resolve the technical issues and return to a more stable arms control relationship. We need this not just because a world without common restrictions and restraints is dangerous – a fact political leaders knew 30 years ago and should remember today – but also because today's world needs international cooperation more widely and deeply than ever before.

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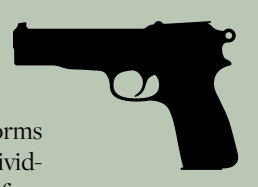
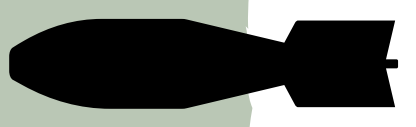
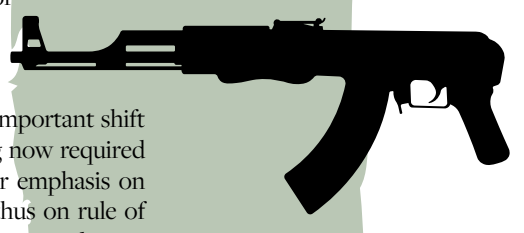
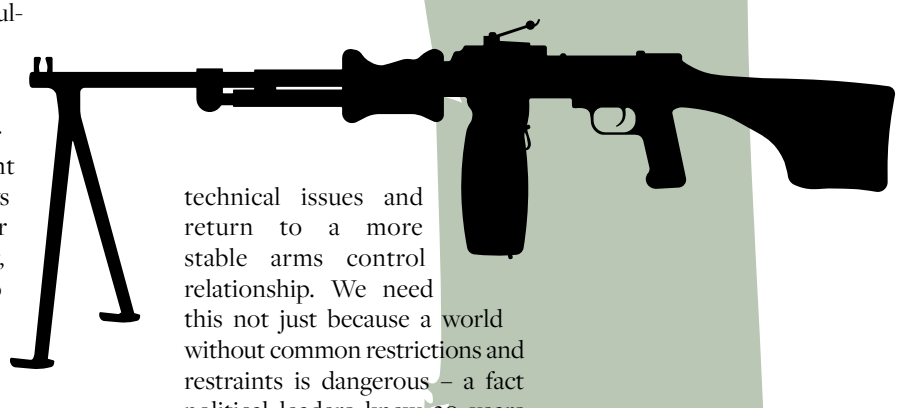


Splitting atoms

After scrapping INF, how might we prevent Arms Race 2.0?

BY RICHARD BURT AND JON WOLFSTHAL

As we move into 2019, a new round of US-Russian nuclear competition – Arms Race 2.0 – is clearly emerging. The risk of nuclear conflict through deliberate action or some tragic combination of mistakes and escalation is growing. While both sides are developing and deploying new offensive and defensive strategic systems, the two governments are taking actions that could lower the threshold to nuclear use.

Amid all of this, political engagement, strategic dialogue and trust have evaporated from this complex and increasingly adversarial relationship. This dynamic not only threatens to undo 50 years of efforts to avoid the possibility of a US-Russian nuclear exchange; it also undermines attempts to slow or halt the spread of nuclear weapons globally.

Despite the crises and close calls, we survived the Cold War without using nuclear weapons. But Arms Race 2.0 is arguably more dangerous in an era characterized by cyber-enhanced information warfare and the introduction of advanced capabilities by both countries that could undermine strategic stability.

One special new problem is the extent to which Washington and Moscow have interconnected their own nuclear and non-nuclear command, communication and control systems. This mixing of capabilities, described by analysts at the Carnegie Endowment as "nuclear entanglement," further increases the risk that conventional conflicts could escalate quickly to the nuclear level through miscalculation.

We will need to be more than lucky to manage this new competition. US and Russian leaders will need to be smarter and more focused than their predecessors to ensure that their efforts prevent any unintended or unexpected event from quickly triggering a more dangerous conflict.

Unfortunately, the toxic character of the current US-Russian political relationship will make this process much more difficult. The latest casualty in the growing freeze between Moscow and Washington is the 1987 Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF). Adopting the INF agreement banning all nuclear or conventionally armed ground-based missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers marked a critical step in ending the Cold War. Its entry into force ushered in a generation of nuclear transparency and reduction agreements that have served the security interests of both countries and Europe as a whole.

In 2013, Washington accused Russia of violating the treaty by testing and later deploying the 9M729 cruise missile and has now canceled the agreement. Russia, which denies any such violation, has, in turn, accused NATO and the United States of undermining the INF pact by deploying launchers for missile defenses in Romania that can also fire offensive missiles banned by the treaty.

Neither side has shown a willingness to compromise in order to save the agreement and the benefits it brings, although Russia has made some last-minute efforts to at least appear as though it seeks a diplomatic solution. In retrospect, it seems inevitable that the INF Treaty was to be scrapped, to the detriment of stability and predictability in Europe and elsewhere. If INF-range missiles are again deployed in or around Europe, the risk that a crisis or mistake can quickly escalate will further increase.

Europe is an accident waiting to happen. The Nuclear Crisis Group (NCG), an international group of specialists tracking potential nuclear flashpoints around the globe, catalogued in 2018 alone over 170 military incidents between NATO and Russian military forces in the European region that had the potential for serious escalation. Yet the refusal by Moscow and Washington to engage seriously on INF, or more broadly on political and security issues, is a symptom of the growing distrust and animosity felt on both sides of the relationship.

IMAGO / SERGEI BOBYLEV

Smoking gun: The 9M729 missile container on display at a facility outside of Moscow on Jan. 23, 2019

These strains now threaten the entire architecture of strategic arms control. The most recent pillar of this complex structure, the 2010 New START Treaty, limits both Moscow and Washington to no more than 1,550 warheads on 800 missiles and bombers and expires in February 2021. The accord built on its predecessors, including the original 1991 START Treaty that enabled on-site inspections in both countries and created a system of transparency and predictability in strategic nuclear deployments that has lasted for nearly three decades.

For the Trump administration, steeped as it is in the anti-arms control views of its national security advisor John Bolton, arms accords are viewed as a menace. In an environment where Russia is seen as having violated or skirted the limits on several arms control agreements, it is easy to understand how Trump could be convinced to let such agreements die or, better yet, be killed by his own hand. New START has the unfortunate additional stigma in the Trump administration of having been negotiated under Barack Obama, a president whose agreements tend to die painful deaths by Trump tweets.

For Moscow, the picture is more complex, but the INF Treaty, START and New START agreements are seen as legacies of an era when a newly independent Russia was willing to accept what are now seen by the hawks in the Kremlin as one-sided arms control deals. Not only is Moscow developing a variety of new nuclear weapons to counter its perceived conventional inferiority; it also seems ready to walk away from deals negotiated in a period of economic and political weakness.

It is unclear whether President Putin believes that Russia will benefit from a new phase of nuclear competition or, instead, seeks to negotiate new deals from a position of strength. In the meantime, however, Moscow seems intent on sowing confusion among its adversaries and leaving opaque the nature of its nuclear capabilities and doctrine.

This combination of shortsightedness and opportunism combined with the inherent risks of nuclear weaponry and the prospect for accidental or unintended military incidents presents a troubling set of risks. The current occupants of the White House and Kremlin – and their advisors – would do well to heed the key lessons of the Cold War. Both Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev came to recognize and then openly state that a nuclear war could not be won and should never be fought. Accordingly, they turned away from nuclear brinkmanship and accepted the idea of mutual and verifiable quantitative and qualitative arms limits. In an earlier era, both Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev, two hardliners for sure, also recognized the value of détente, including strategic arms control.

In assessing where we should go from here, one thing is clear: Both the United States and Russia will, for the foreseeable future, seek to maintain nuclear arsenals that can survive any combination of a nuclear or hybrid first strike by the other. Thus, having enough survivable weapons to inflict unacceptable damage on the other remains the core of deterrence that should continue to guide strategic thinking in both countries. This means that new developments and programs perceived as undermining such a capability – whether new missile defense technologies, advanced and highly accurate conventional weapons or increasingly the possible impact of cyber capabilities – should be the subject of deep strategic consultations. Even if these talks do not produce new agreements, understanding the thinking and activities of both sides will reduce the risks of miscalculation and escalation.

The fact that neither Moscow nor Washington at this juncture seems interested in pursuing a serious and comprehensive dialogue over what strategic stability looks like in the 21st century represents a remarkable abdication of their global responsibilities. That the rest of the international community, including US allies in Europe and East Asia, seems relatively unconcerned about this state of affairs strikes us as equally remarkable and in need of change.

The reality today is, as was the case decades ago, that neither Russia nor the US can outrace or out compete the other in the nuclear sphere. However, the "Russia issue" in US politics is increasingly toxic and it is unclear whether the nuclear agenda in the bilateral relationship can be salvaged. With accusations of collusion between Trump and Russia and hyper-partisanship now dominating Washington politics, anyone seeking a dialogue with Russia is accused of appeasing Putin. This has to end and real, sustained engagement between US and Russian officials and experts must get under way again.

Even if US officials can be convinced that arms control and strategic engagement with Russia remain beneficial, it remains uncertain whether the Russian leadership is ready for real dialogue, although Moscow has at least proposed to extend New START.

In the end, it is hard to predict when Washington and Moscow will be prepared to get serious about arms control. It is possible that by the time they do, today's arms control architecture will have collapsed. This will make it even more difficult to get productive talks back on track. The agreements negotiated over the last half century can all be traced back to the existential fear generated by the Cuban Missile Crisis. Let's hope that Arms Race 2.0 will not require another nuclear near miss to get both sides to the negotiating table.

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ARMS CONTROL TREATIES CONCLUDED SINCE THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS IN 1962

After the Cuban Missile Crisis brought the world to the brink of nuclear war in 1962, the nuclear states attempted to minimize the danger through treaties. The following agreements proved decisive in this regard

1963
Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

Signed on Aug. 5, 1963, by the UK, the US and the Soviet Union to contain the rapidly increasing nuclear fallout caused by testing. The treaty prohibits nuclear weapons testing in the atmosphere, in space and underwater (but not underground). It was modified several times (1974, 1976, 1996). Signatory states also include India (1963), Israel (1964) and Pakistan (1988, no ratification yet), while France and China declined. Germany signed in August 1963.

1968
Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

Signed on July 1, 1968, by the UK, the US and the Soviet Union, the treaty came into force on March 5, 1970. Nuclear weapon states promised not to proliferate atomic arms. States without nuclear weapons renounced their acquisition. 189 states have since joined, while India, Pakistan, Israel and South Sudan have abstained. North Korea withdrew in 2003. Compliance with the treaty is monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna.

1972
SALT I and ABM Treaty

130 meetings culminated in its signing by Leonid Brezhnev and Richard Nixon on May 26, 1972. In SALT I (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks), the US and the Soviet Union committed themselves to limiting and not increasing the number of land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and submarine-based ballistic missiles (SLBMs) for five years. The agreement made it possible to install anti-ballistic missiles (ABMs) around Washington and Moscow. However, the arms race could not be tamed by SALT I, as the number of warheads increased. The US unilaterally terminated the ABM treaty in 2001.

1979
SALT II

Signed on June 18, 1979, by Leonid Brezhnev and Jimmy Carter with the aim of limiting certain nuclear strategic weapon systems. The 1979 invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union caused the US Senate to veto SALT II. However, in 1982 Ronald Reagan agreed to comply with the treaty, provided that the Soviet Union also complied. Both sides committed.

1986
Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident

With the aim of preventing an "unintended nuclear war," the convention obliges signatories to notify the IAEA immediately in the event of any nuclear or radiation accident within its territory that has the potential to affect another state. In direct response to the accident at Chernobyl in April 1986, the convention was concluded and signed on Sept. 26, 1986.

1987
INF

The INF (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces) Treaty was signed in Washington, D.C., on Dec. 8, 1987, and entered into effect on June 1, 1988. Both sides promised to dismantle land-based nuclear missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers, including launchers, within three years, and not to install new ones. As a result, by 1991 the US destroyed 846 missiles, the Soviet Union 1,846. When the sanctions regime expired in 2001, mutual accusations could no longer be investigated.

On Oct. 20, 2018, alleging Russian non-compliance, US President Donald Trump announced that the US would withdraw from the treaty. The US withdrawal was made official on Feb. 1, 2019. As a reaction, Russian President Vladimir Putin also withdrew from the INF treaty.

1991
START I

Signed on July 31, 1991, by George H.W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev START 1 (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) entered into force on Dec. 5, 1994. Its main objective was the reduction of launchers and nuclear warheads. Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine were also included via additional protocol and eliminated all their nuclear weapons.

1993
START II

Signed on Jan. 3, 1993, by George H.W. Bush and Boris Yeltsin with the aim of further reducing stocks and completely abandoning land-based intercontinental missiles with multiple warheads while limiting the number of nuclear warheads to 3,400 (US) and 3,000 (Russia) by 2003. Because the US terminated the ABM Treaty in 2001, START II never entered into effect.

2002
SORT

With SORT (Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty) entering into effect as a replacement for the failed START II agreement, strategic offensive weapons were to be reduced within the range of 1,700 to 2,200 warheads. Vladimir Putin and George W. Bush signed this treaty in Moscow on May 24, 2002.

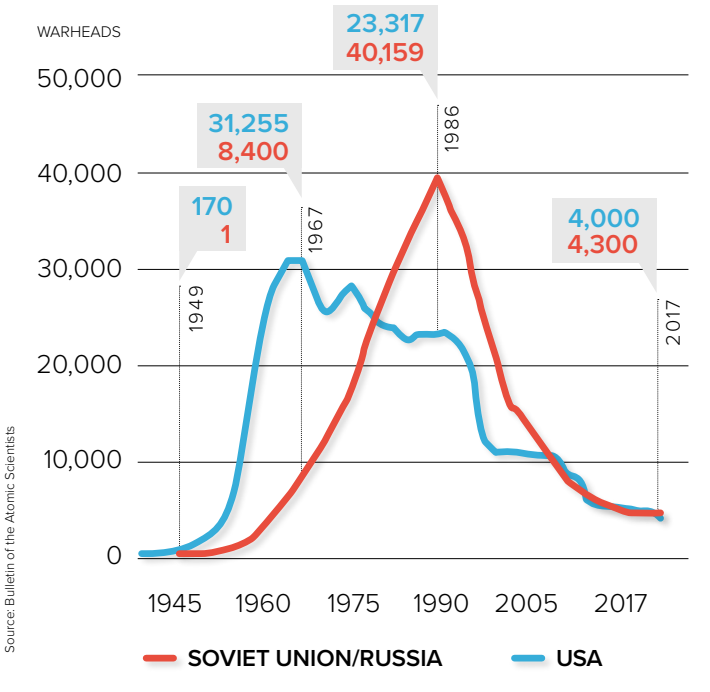
2010
New START

Signed in Prague on April 8, 2010, by Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin, the treaty was passed in the US with the approval of Republican senators. It entered into force on Feb. 5, 2011, after the exchange of documents by Sergey Lavrov and Hillary Clinton at the Munich Security Conference. The goal was to reduce nuclear arsenals to 800 carrier systems and 1,550 operational nuclear warheads by 2018. In 2013, Barack Obama announced his intention to renegotiate the START Agreement with the aim of drastically reducing the number of nuclear weapons. Nothing came of this. President Trump criticized the treaty, claiming that it favored Russia and was "one of several bad deals negotiated by the Obama administration." The treaty will expire in 2021.

Today
NPT

An agreement of the United Nations, the NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty), is an international treaty whose objective is preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. It prohibits the development, production, testing, acquisition, storage, transport, stationing and use of nuclear weapons. Initial negotiations began in 2016. In July 2017, 122 countries approved the treaty. By mid-August 2018, 60 states had signed the treaty and 14 had ratified it. It is due to enter into effect 90 days after the 50th ratification. Ratification by Russia or the US is not expected. Most NATO states have rejected the treaty.

Nuclear arsenals of the US and the USSR/Russia



Source: Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists

A distant dream

Even if prudent, there will be no European army any time soon

ALL TALK, NO ACTION – WHAT ARE THE CHANCES OF EUROPE ESTABLISHING ITS OWN ARMY?

No platitudes

The future of the West will be a conditional, task-oriented and transient affair

BY KLAUS NAUMANN

Concerns are growing in many European countries that they can no longer depend on the United States and the security guarantees enshrined in Article 5 of the NATO treaty. President Trump's decision to withdraw US forces from Syria marked the end of US reliability. Doubts about America's trustworthiness have produced a flurry of driveling speeches in 2018 on the idea of a European army. So – what about it?

It is an old idea, which failed first in 1954 when the French National Assembly refused to ratify the European Defence Union treaty. It has since resurfaced from time to time but was never agreed upon and implemented. Will it fare better now, five years after the wake-up call produced by Russia's illegal seizure of the Crimea from Ukraine?

Quite a few initiatives have been launched in recent years. Twenty-five EU members agreed on establishing the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). Its tiny steps towards building common force components compelled some to rekindle dreams of a European Defense Union. Within NATO, a similar German initiative was agreed upon: the NATO Framework Concept (NFC). Other political ideas have popped up, such as the creation of a European Security Council, the establishment of a Defense Committee of the European Parliament and the suggestion – a ridiculous one considering its legal impossibility – that France renounce its permanent membership in the UN Security Council and hand it over to the EU. While all were well-intended, there is simply no coherent political will to establish a common defense of Europe, to accept majority decisions or to transfer the defense portion of national sovereignty to a supranational organization – even a European one.

At any rate, such a body would have to be more inclusive than the EU. Defending Europe is politically impossible without the inclusion of the United Kingdom, Norway, Iceland and even Turkey. And in terms of geostrategy, it is not feasible without control of the North Atlantic and adjacent parts of the Arctic Ocean.

As long as this reality persists, there will be no meaningful European Security and Defense Strategy leading to command and control arrangements, to joint operational concepts and to a common and, above all, comprehensive planning process encompassing all political and diplomatic tools: economic instruments, police capacities, security and disaster relief elements and military forces that can operate throughout Europe and its periphery on land, in the air, at sea, in outer space and in cyberspace.

None of the steps taken so far make much of a difference. The sad European reality will thus continue. Our armies will comprise 17 different tanks, 26 different howitzers, 20 different combat aircraft and 29 different frigates or destroyers. Europe's defense budgets combined total approximately 50 percent of the US budget, while the military manpower of the Europeans is close to 50 percent greater than that of the US, yet the combat power of the Europeans is at best 20 percent of what the US armed forces can marshal.

Moreover, a unanimous decision on the use of European military power is rather unlikely; if such a decision were made, the command arrangements would be patchy at best. The EU Battlegroups established in 2004 is a telling example: They never saw action.

Looking at these sobering realities and at the multifaceted risks and dangers in the years ahead, there can be but one conclusion: Europe must improve its capabilities to protect and defend itself. To this end, the pledge to reach the goal of spending 2 percent of our nations' GDP on defense must be met.

What matters even more, however, is the real output. Demanding a European army now is putting the cart before the horse. Without two politically crucial prerequisites, there is not the slightest chance of making it a reality. The first is the political resolve to use military force as the ultimate instrument of politics; the second is agreement on a set of missions geared to the threats of today and tomorrow. The legal basis and rules of engagement must be agreed upon politically as well. Foreseeably, questions such as the potential area of employment and common funding of both equipment and operations will trigger divisive debates.

The transfer of authority to a European entity is a tricky problem. Could a European army only react to an attack on any of the EU members or would the presumption of an imminent attack suffice to trigger preventive action? These are by no means all the questions that need to be answered politically, but they indicate the intractability of the issues to be cleared before one can start planning a European army.

Beginning such a political process now, and were it by a core group, would be most desirable. But the complex nature of the issues suggests that there will be no such force any time soon. At best, we would get more empty shells such as an "army of the Europeans." The truly pressing question is therefore what to do in order to meet the urgent requirement of improving European defense now.

I could imagine that agreement could be won for a bottom-up approach. It would aim at force multiplying and enabling European component forces to be fully interoperable, identically equipped and able to cooperate with forces of non-EU NATO nations. They should be capable of operating under EU command while prepared and equipped to join up with units of other NATO nations, thus forming a NATO component force. This would kill two birds with one stone. The EU could act if and where it must defend its interests without US involvement, but it could also place these components under NATO command if and where NATO must act under Article 5 as well as Article 4.

Furthermore, this would strengthen both NATO and the EU. The justified American demand that the Europeans contribute more would be met, while the strategic indispensability of preserving the defense of the wider NATO treaty area as the sole responsibility of the Atlantic alliance would remain unchanged. At the same time, the US would no longer be the policeman for Europe, yet it would remain committed to serving its own national interest to protect its opposite Atlantic coastline.

In addition to the emerging European airlift capability featuring air-to-air refueling capacity, such component forces should include a sea transport capability, as close to 80 percent of our world's hypothetical crisis areas are within 200 kilometers from a shore. An EU heavy transport helicopter component could help in disaster relief as well as in interventions. It goes without saying that satellite reconnaissance along with medium altitude ground surveillance and mobile missile defense should round out the EU components. They could be tailored in such a way as to supplement respective NATO capabilities yet simultaneously enable the EU to operate independently within its area of interest.

Last but by no means least, one must think about nuclear weapons, ultimately the decisive tool in preserving peace, as arms control alone can never succeed in doing so. France, after Brexit the only EU country with a nuclear arsenal, will never renounce its weapons or share them with the EU. But there are six European NATO countries, five of them in the EU, that already operate nuclear-capable aircraft. One could thus imagine a European nuclear strike force to be manned, equipped and financed by these six NATO members. Could there be a better solution than two multinational wings of dual-capability aircraft comprising six national squadrons flying the American F-35?

Cyber, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology and robots may offer further options for EU component forces. More pressing, however, is the need, over time, to modernize and thus harmonize the equipment of the traditional land, air and naval forces. Europe should aim at standardized armaments programs. For this reason, it must strive for greatly improved industrial cooperation.

Mentioning the many obstacles on the long and bumpy road to meaningful European defense improvements does not mean that the process should not begin forthwith. Our politicians must develop the idea of a Europe that protects, "une Europe qui protège." Defense and security could thus become the core of a new vision for Europe, which could one day lead to the reality of a European army. ■

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BY FRANÇOIS HEISBOURG

NATO is not dead. European defense budgets have been rising steadily since 2014; American forces are staying in Europe; and Donald Trump will eventually leave the White House. Yet Europe can no longer assume the permanence of the historically exceptional strategic order created some 70 years ago. China has become the United States' peer competitor and the Indo-Pacific is the key theater in which that relationship will play out, with Russia providing a check on some of China's ambitions. US engagement in and with Europe will be fully determined by that reality.

While the Trump era did not create this trend, it has accelerated it, and the transactionalism introduced by Trump into Alliance relationships cannot readily be undone. By historical standards, the unconditional post-World War II alliance system is the exception, whereas transactionalism is the default mode. Thus, Europe must prepare for what will be referred to as the post-Alliance era, in which coalitions and partnerships between the nations of the West will remain important but will be of a conditional, task-oriented and transient nature. In effect, Donald Rumsfeld's statement after Sept. 11 that "the mission determines the coalition" describes the new normal, not simply a specific moment in time.

For Europe to meet the challenge, several existential decisions will have to be made. Paradoxically, the politically most visible item is also the least existential: levels of defense spending. Europe, however defined, spends more than four times what Russia does on defense and at least as much as China. Of course, as China's capabilities rise and Russia modernizes its forces, a good military case can be made for increasing our defense budgets and a political argument just as strong can be made in the name of burden sharing, i.e. the benchmark of spending 2 percent of GDP on defense.

But if our problems could be solved merely by spending, our life would be quite simple. Our main challenges lie elsewhere.

First, as the Atlantic security blanket loses its permanence, Europe must decide who it is and what it is. Is it the European Union? Then what happens post-Brexit? Is there a "core Europe"? And if so, who belongs? And why not recreate a Western European Union, one that would provide a home for the post-Brexit UK? But how to go about it? With no clear answers, there will be no space for a common European strategy, let alone a European army.

Second, a shared understanding has to emerge as to the nature of the threats and risks we have to face. Brave attempts have been made with the successive Solana (2003) and Mogherini (2016) documents. While they may be useful as snapshots of the world at the time of their publication, they are of little use as a guide to what awaits us. Who would guess from a reading of the Mogherini document that the US-Chinese strategic contest is the pivot around which US-EU and EU-Chinese relations will increasingly revolve?

Third, Europe will need to define its basic strategic objectives, which would arguably comprise three pillars: protection from the repercussions of war and state-collapse in the Middle East and Africa, including conflict exacerbated by climate change; defense against Chinese strategic attempts at control of the global commons from the South China Sea to cyberspace, technological predation and the leveraging by China of "debt-equity swaps" for strategic gain, already a factor in Asia and Africa and now spreading to the Balkans; and, deterrence and counterattack vis-à-vis Russian revisionism and interference from the Arctic to the Mediterranean.

A white-paper strategic assessment could then outline appropriate strategic choices to be made, such as: 1) thinking through the balancing of our economic interests with China and our strategic partnership with the US in its competition with China; 2) reviewing the policy mix in terms of the immediate threat from our revisionist neighbor Russia and the growing challenge from its bigger and more ambitious strategic partner, China; 3) revisiting Europe's strategic posture in the Middle East and Africa, including the actual – not merely rhetorical – ability to integrate the tools of defense, diplomacy and development; 4) agreeing on the terms of Europe's burden-sharing debate, without which it cannot be resolved. Again, this is not principally about money, but rather risk-sharing. A system in which the French or the British do the shooting and take the casualties while others do training, as is currently the case in the Sahel, is not politically sustainable. Shared risk-taking should have a flip side: shared decision-making. A grand compromise along these lines is necessary. Paris may be more prepared for it than officials in Berlin may think. The same remark applies to the field of nuclear deterrence .

Talk of European defense and a European army has gone on for close to 70 years. And the more florid the talk, the greater the disconnect from the real world – hence its persistent political appeal.

What we do have is as follows: 1) the continued existence of substantial national armies, some with broad and global capabilities, many with legitimate niche capabilities; 2) limited yet increasing levels of defense expenditure; 3) new and potentially substantial means to build defense industrial capabilities as well as military acquisition at the EU level through the European Defence Fund, interfacing with the European Intervention Initiative (with the UK) and so-called PESCO; 4) substantial development and diplomatic assets with global reach, albeit hampered by our practical inability (as opposed to our rhetorical ambition) to synchronize them with each other and with defense policy, whether jointly or separately.

These instruments all exist or are in the process of development. It remains to be seen whether we build on them or succumb to the sterile temptation of producing yet more *Zukunftsmusik* – compelling yet impractical dreams of the future.

This basic list of conditions for the defense of Europe in a post-Alliance world could alone cause despair. And the sense of foreboding only worsens when taking into account the growing divisions within and between European countries and peoples in the form of right- and left-wing extremism. Only the thought that previous generations somehow rose to meet greater challenges offers some reassurance.

What is clear, however, is that none of these conditions can be met without agreement between France and Germany. France's domestic situation remains uncertain, with a question mark on President Emmanuel Macron's political ability to continue the reform process launched in 2017; but the president was elected promising an agenda of European change. Germany has the opposite problem: no electoral mandate for big changes in Europe and a generally good economic situation that breeds inertia rather than the will to launch new initiatives. The result has been more *Sonntagsreden* and less dynamism. As the Merkel era and the grand coalition come to close, a window of opportunity may just open. ■


SHUTTERSTOCK

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NATO – unfazed by morning tweets

Recalibrating its geostrategic compass is a must if the Alliance is to remain relevant

BY KARL-HEINZ KAMP

On its 70th anniversary, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is doing fairly well as the most successful security alliance in modern history. Through constant evolution and adaptation, NATO has managed to preserve its relevance for both sides of the Atlantic, each a fundamentally unique security environment. In the long term, however, NATO faces an almost existential problem, as it will be difficult to maintain its significance for the United States as the dominant power within the Alliance. This will have less to do with the erratic policy of its current president, Donald Trump, and more to do with America's geostrategic reorientation away from Russia and towards China. Recalibrating its geostrategic compass is a must if the Alliance is to remain relevant.

With Moscow's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO found itself back in "Article 5 world" – a security environment where Alliance commitments must be bolstered by a credible deterrence and defense posture. NATO adapted swiftly to the new requirements; indeed, more quickly than Vladimir Putin had expected when he launched his war against Ukraine.

Since 2014, NATO has profoundly improved its readiness for territorial defense on many fronts. The NATO Response Force (NRF), created in 2002, has been tripled to comprise a joint force of some 40,000 troops. Its readiness has been improved through the 5,000 multinational troops constituting the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF). Under its abridgement called Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP), four combat-ready battle groups have been operational since 2017 in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. Moreover, NATO has vastly intensified the number and size of its multinational exercises while developing new defense plans. Even nuclear deterrence, a posture still contested by citizen groups in some NATO countries, has undergone meaningful augmentation.

It goes without saying that NATO's success over the last seven decades has relied heavily on the US as the ultimate provider of security for the European allies. It should be noted that US commitments have been maintained since the tidal change of 2014 and, more importantly, since 2017, when President Trump took office.

Such a positive description of America's role in NATO may surprise those who cite the fact that Washington is afflicted with a president that openly detests NATO and misses no occasion to express his disrespect for alliances and allies. On closer look, however, Trump's morning tweets against America's international commitments speak more to the president's ignorance in international politics than to his country's flagging engagement within NATO. Indeed, since Donald Trump assumed office, US NATO commitments in Eastern Europe have actually increased.

Since 2014, the US has increased the emergency response support for Eastern Europe – the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) – from $1 billion to $6.5 billion in 2019. Furthermore, the US has strengthened the "Eastern front" through rotational deployments of combat brigades, the pre-deployment of weapons and ammunition, the modernization of airfields and the enhancement of naval capabilities in the north, particularly vis-à-vis anti-submarine warfare.

The recent resignation of Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis as the guardian of America's trans-Atlantic focus stirred fears that US support for NATO could dwindle. Yet, these concerns underestimate the ironclad, bipartisan congressional support for NATO in Washington, which keeps the president from realizing his isolationist impulses, at least with respect to the Alliance.

On the financial side, Congress always links the appropriation of defense spending to America's engagement in NATO. While this cannot keep the president from unexpectedly withdrawing US troops from the Middle East or Afghanistan, it prevents him from taking a wrecking ball to Europe's web of security institutions.

Despite concerns about the future course of the Trump administration, NATO is now significantly stronger than it was five years ago. Still, NATO and the American engagement in Europe faces one major challenge, which is rooted less in the digressions of the current US president and more in a fundamental shift in the international distribution of power and in America's changing worldview.

No matter what happens, NATO faces a fundamental shift in the international distribution of power

Washington's political and military support for NATO is largely based on American concerns vis-à-vis Moscow. Russia is perceived as a revisionist power ready to break international law to pursue its own great-power ambitions. Lacking the resources to mount a frontal challenge to the US, Russia uses the entire range of statecraft – including disinformation campaigns, cyber-attacks and interference in foreign elections – to operate against what it perceives as the "great enemy" in the West.

At the same time, there is a broad perception among US political elites that Russia is a power in decline. The country missed decades of political, economic and societal modernization, leaving it incapable of actually becoming the major international player it claims to be. Russia has a GDP significantly smaller than that of Italy and has only two competitive products on the world market – energy and weapons. While Russia will always pose a threat to the US, it will become less and less able to shape international politics on a grand scale.

China, in contrast, is perceived as a rising power undergoing breathtaking economic development, which increasingly correlates to military capabilities. Hence, China is on its way to becoming the true peer of Washington, challenging the US role not only in the Pacific but also in the international order of things. If Russia is no longer perceived as a global strategic challenge, but as a regional problem that can be hedged with limited means, Europe will then gradually lose its relevance to the US. In five or ten years, Washington could come to the conclusion that a number of well-equipped US combat brigades stationed on a bilateral basis in Eastern Europe, plus some maritime capabilities in the High North, should suffice to blunt potential Russian aggression against its neighbors. The US would no longer see NATO as critical to its interests, with the possible exception of those European allies in close proximity to Russia's borders.

NATO could become an empty shell, depending on how swiftly and profoundly the "decline scenario" would play out. Washington could engage bilaterally with those European allies it deems relevant without having to struggle with the consensus-driven institution comprising 29 member states. It might also be tempting for the US to redirect its resources previously used in Europe to the Asia-Pacific region in order to cope with the rise of China as its true challenger in global dominance.

In the event of a burgeoning Sino-American bilateralism, NATO could preserve its relevance to the US only if it can contribute to hedging China's global ambitions and keeping Beijing from replacing the current order through its own concepts of international relations. A NATO able to contribute to deterring China would not only be beneficial to the US but also to the European allies. One means to realizing this would involve a greater European readiness for military burden-sharing with respect to Asia. If the US remains the only NATO member with significant power projection capabilities in Asia, the Europeans will have to show more military willingness in their neighborhood in order to free up US military capabilities in areas beyond the reach of most NATO allies.

Many Alliance members may consider it unlikely that NATO would ever expand its portfolio as far east as the Asia-Pacific region. However, fundamental political changes require fundamentally new approaches – not too far from now, another adaptation of the Alliance to a new security environment may become inevitable.

SHUTTERSTOCK

Multicolored: There are currently 29 NATO member countries. Now that the naming dispute with Greece has been resolved, North Macedonia could become no. 30 by next year.

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BY VOLKER STANZEL

Clueless

Even proven foreign policy instincts do not much help when confronting challenges of a new sort. Moving forward, Europeans must forge a new social consensus on foreign policy

A look at Western Europe's postwar history helps illuminate what served as its foreign policy's point of departure in the past, and the foundation that undergirds its foreign policy moving forward. We can view the outcome of World War II as a global overthrow of Europe. In a matter of a few years, European imperialists and colonial masters found that their role on the global stage had changed completely. The power of the United States and the Soviet Union grew to such immensity that no European could hope to be more than a commentator or ally of one side or the other.

In the niche of world politics, which became the stomping ground for European foreign policy for decades, Western Europeans could experiment at least with new ideas, if not power. And this they did. Peaceful European unification was the result. In the case of West Germany, such experiments included Konrad Adenauer's European integration and reconciliation policy in the 1950s and Willy Brandt's détente and Ostpolitik in the 1970s. Europe's approaches eventually brought the whole continent back to the center of world politics as the fall of the Iron Curtain and the glaring implosion of the Soviet bloc transformed the world once again. Europe, with EU enlargement and integration moving ahead, made a success of its role in economic globalization and within the existing system of international order.

When achievements are truly unique, our instincts tend to apply and reapply the underlying political strategy – perhaps until we've gone to the well one too many times. Since 1990, Western Europe has continued to replicate the strategies that once brought it success. The first danger that emerged was the susceptibility to error, which quickly became apparent in the former Yugoslavia. There were whole peoples who now wanted to settle old scores rather than rely on strategies for peaceful conflict resolution in the tradition of the Commission of Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The Cold War was over, but the world had become colder. In its overconfidence – the second danger – European countries, and most of all Germany, misunderstood their traditional roles in the EU. Although the Federal Republic, in tandem with France, had previously played a leading role in the Union, at about the time of the global financial crisis in 2008, it failed to realize that it lacked a free pass to ride roughshod over its partners – even when large numbers of refugees arrived in Europe in 2015. The consequences were that Germany achieved less and less of what it wanted, and the EU lost much of its cohesion, an essential feature of its influence in the world.

This helps explain today's measure of cluelessness at a time when Europeans, along with most of the industrialized world, find themselves confronted with nontraditional foreign policy challenges. The impact of these challenges reaches far beyond just Europe. The fragmentation of international society means that we are dealing with more actors than ever before – states, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and transnational companies. At the same time, growing segments of our publics, spurred on by the use of social media, are leaving their mark on foreign affairs (and politics in general). This presents two main threats to the EU and to the legitimacy of governance in our societies.

The first is that an increasingly fragmented world lacks orientation.

What member state would agree to leave decisions affecting the life and death of its citizens to others?

In a situation in which the international multilateral order falls apart, the strong – as Thucydides pointed out – will again be tempted to do what they please, forcing the weaker to do what they must. A world without order will again be a world marked by competition over spheres of influence, which may include the use of military means. This begs the question: How can Europe maintain confidence in itself? And the answer is: Only as a unified Europe.

Europeans, when in difficult straits, love to pay lip service to collective action, to Europe-wide institutional solutions. This is often discussed today in the context of creating a European armed forces, as if it would somehow be a magic cure-all. The problem is a financial one, as it would cost more than NATO's famous 2 percent. Yet the problem is also a political one: What member state would agree to leave decisions affecting the life and death of its citizens to others? And what if such decisions included the use of nuclear arms? Let us be frank and admit that it would be more pragmatic to make use of tools already available to defend a territory and to exert coercive influence, such as the power of a cohesive alliance and the employment of sanctions. Libya, Iraq and Iran are recent cases where they have proved effective – and a lot less bloody than bombs.

Only the influence of all EU member states acting with cohesion can make French, German or whichever member state's foreign policy successful. This is not about stronger EU members "leading" others; it is about forging the laborious yet fruitful path toward bringing the EU countries together again. The looming danger of becoming the plaything of the divide-and-rule tactics of mightier powers should be enough to bring Europeans together in the same way that the memory of war brought them together more than half a century ago.

The second threat is the fragmentation of our societies into various sub-publics. It leads down a path towards the loss of the social consensus on foreign policy that has more or less prevailed since the creation of the European Economic Community. Most conspicuous are the new nationalist and populist movements. Whether it's former East Germans fearing migrants competing for their jobs, Brits wanting to "take back control," or French *gilets jaunes* feeling neglected by their president, a similar story is emerging in many democratic countries. While the populist movements are not democratically legitimized in the traditional sense and their interests may well be directed against the interests of a majority of the population, they nevertheless represent those many citizens who feel that today's foreign policy dictates run roughshod across national borders, affecting our everyday lives. With emotionally inflamed rhetoric, they ask what their elected politicians plan to do about it, yet the image before their eyes is of helpless bureaucrats, which only feeds their doubts of the legitimacy of their seemingly incompetent governments.

How, then, can foreign policy be conducted in ways that citizens recognize it as representing their own interests? It helps to look for answers where citizens are already involved in shaping politics. In 2015, hundreds of thousands of women and men in Germany volunteered to assist municipal institutions in coping with the influx of large numbers of refugees. This intense level of societal participation creates a dynamic inherently different from that of those much-praised "town hall meetings" or other fora that too easily smack of governmental paternalism. Laymen juries, honorary commitments in local administrations and foundations all prove citizens' desire to share the responsibility of governance. Political institutions need to accept this desire. In turn, citizens will transcend the helter skelter of domestic politics and accept the primacy of foreign policy. This is crucial to the fate of Europe, which now must stand safely and firmly on its own feet.

Europe still has the opportunity to make good on what it missed out on. We must find course and compass to bring European nations together again for the collective project of holding our own in a world of dissolving order. Building a new social consensus on foreign policy – and perhaps on governance as a whole – is an opportunity to overcome our current cluelessness.

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Showing our true colors

"What's wrong with America First?" – and other foreign policy questions Democratic presidential candidates will have to answer

BY ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER

As of the beginning of February, nine Democratic candidates had announced a bid for the US presidency; *The New York Times* estimates that a tenth candidate is "all but certain to run" and identifies three more as "likely to run" and an additional nine who "might run." That adds up to a potential 21 candidates on the Democratic side, plus Starbucks CEO Howard Schulz's possible candidacy as an Independent.

Of the nine running, only Senator Elizabeth Warren has laid out her foreign policy views thus far, in an article in *Foreign Affairs*. But the once and future foreign policy advisors to a number of candidates are also gearing up, offering their ideas and helping to frame the key issues that Democratic contenders must be prepared to address.

Democrats should not shy away from a robust internal debate on these questions. As important as it is to have a unified party in the general election, both Democratic and Independent voters will benefit from a defined, bold and genuinely progressive foreign policy platform, rather than a set of mushy compromises.

Here is my version of the most important questions that any candidate should be prepared to answer, followed by a description of emerging debates in what are admittedly still early days, with lots of voices left to weigh in. These questions do not follow the standard foreign policy script. For instance, they are not formulated in terms of the issues that foreign policy experts think about when we look at the world. They are likely to resonate much more, however, with the way US presidential candidates formulate issues in terms of the constituencies they are trying to court.

1. What's wrong with America First?

Before diving into this question, it is worth noting, and regretting, how Donald Trump has legitimized the very idea of America First. When he first put it forward in April 2016, both Democrat and Republican foreign policy pundits assumed he was simply unaware of its 1930s isolationist and pro-Nazi roots. It turns out that he understood it all too well.

Three years later, America First has become the banner not so much of isolationism as of belligerent nationalist unilateralism, the rallying cry of opposition to the alliances and institutions of the post-World War II international order. The issue is whether and to what extent the United States should underwrite that order and its leadership role within it, or whether it should put itself – and the welfare of its citizens – first.

"That's a false dichotomy!" would be the claim of virtually all the attendees of the Munich Security Conference (MSC). But Trump has plenty of fellow travelers on the left. Political scientist Daniel Nexon describes the Democrats as divided "between two depressingly familiar alternatives: liberal internationalists of the kind associated with the Democratic establishment, and anti-hegemonists, who want to see the United States drastically reduce its pretensions to global leadership."

To move from the conceptual to the concrete, Former Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the top foreign policy advisor to Vice President Joe Biden, co-writing with neo-conservative icon Robert Kagan, group together Trump's America First policy and "its progressive cousin, retrenchment," arguing that both are "broadly popular" among both Democrats and Republicans. "Retrenchment" is precisely what Trump is doing in pulling out of Afghanistan and Syria and making a periodic case for removing troops from Europe and South Korea.

It is up to Senator Warren to set the terms of this debate on the Presidential campaign trail. And she has, by acknowledging that the story of how the US built the "liberal international order" is a "good story" and owning the importance of "preserving the United States' global leadership role." She mentions US global leadership only once, but on the assumption that she is the furthest left of the heavyweight candidates, she is defining the boundary of intra-Democrat foreign policy debates in a way that deems the fiercest anti-hegemonists out of bounds.

2. How should America lead?

If the reigning assumption is that America should lead, and should lead very differently than Trump and his truculent trail of insults and attention-getting stunts, then the second question that all candidates must be prepared to answer, is how. The answer commands remarkable consensus across the Democratic Party: not by force, but by diplomacy, development, multilateral cooperation, law enforcement and targeted sanctions – a whole suite of civilian tools.

As Nexon sees it, this consensus includes "reining in the national security state," and, crucially, "reducing defense budgets." Warren certainly agrees. Perhaps more surprisingly, Hillary Clinton's former Director of Policy Planning and Obama's Deputy National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan also affirmed to me, in private conversation, "the need to shift money from defense to innovation, economic statecraft and diplomacy – as part of a unified national security budget." Blinken and Kagan similarly advocate more resources for "preventive diplomacy," but also emphasize the need for deterrence, which will require striking "the right balance of modernization, readiness, asymmetric capabilities and force structure" in our military planning.

One-year-old Lily Tang, reaching for the stars: Jasper Johns' painting *Flag* at the Royal Academy in London

Real differences lie beneath the surface here, although all candidates will take refuge in the demonstrable need for a radical reorientation of much US defense spending away from aircraft carriers and toward artificial intelligence.

A final area of agreement, and an important one, focuses on the criminal underbelly of many global problems. Sullivan and Warren agree, for instance, on the importance of fighting global corruption, kleptocracy and tax evasion, initiatives that are likely to catch many American as well as foreign fish in their net.

3. To what degree should domestic interests drive foreign policy?

By stepping out early, Warren has framed the traditional debate between protectionists and free traders on her terms – a framing that will be hard to dislodge. She says outright that "the United States can no longer maintain the comfortable assumption that its domestic and foreign policies are separate." On the contrary, she proposes a new guiding principle: "US foreign policy should not prioritize corporate profits over American families."

Sullivan agrees on the need to pay more "attention to the distributional effects of international economic policy." But Warren is flipping the Cold War script, assessing foreign policy decisions not according to a separate geopolitical or geo-economic logic, but in terms of their impact on working families across America.

What would this approach mean in practice? First, a very hard line toward China, regardless of whether the US needs China to cooperate on other global issues, or whether we risk making our other Asian allies and partners nervous. Second, the adoption of a "twenty-first century industrial policy," one that strengthens the nation by lifting up American workers.

On the debate stage, Warren and any other Democrats who follow her lead will be vulnerable to the "statesman's putdown": a candidate with direct foreign policy experience will recall a crisis or a set of complex negotiations that he or she faced with an adversary or ally and point out that the world is more complicated than Senator Warren realizes. But make no mistake – the question of who wins and who loses from foreign policies, and the refusal to subject foreign policy decisions to a different set of criteria than that of domestic policy decisions, will be the crux of intra-Democratic differences.

4. How much should American values shape our foreign policy?

Where do candidates fall in the endless, and endlessly frustrating, realist-liberal debate over the relative importance of standing for US values in our relations with other countries? Warren's *Foreign Affairs* article is subtitled "Strengthening Democracy – At Home and Abroad," which at first glance, at least for foreign policy mavens, seems as if it could have been written by Robert Kagan in the heyday of neo-conservatism and liberal interventionism.

But Warren has a very different twist on what promoting democracy and human rights actually means. She sees the threat to democracy, at home and abroad, as "the systematic failure to understand and invest in the social, political and economic foundations on which democracies rest." She thus again unites foreign and domestic policy, drawing a line between leaders who advance the interests of all their people and the autocrats and corrupt capitalists that Trump favors, leaders like Putin, Erdoğan, Orbán and Bolsonaro.

No other Democratic candidate is likely to stand up for closer relations with any of these governments, so the values question may simply be laid to rest for this primary campaign.

5. What happens if we suffer a major terrorist attack from foreign groups?

From a personal point of view, I would like the fifth question to be "what should the 21st-century global order look like?". But I honestly think American voters do not care. Much more pertinent is the way in which hardcore national security concerns can suddenly surge again to front-of-mind if the Islamic State, Al Qaeda or any other foreign terrorist group succeeds in pulling off a substantial attack within the United States.

As noted above, Democrats across the board are likely to argue that the US has focused too much on counter-terrorism and not nearly enough on counter-corruption and counter-crime more generally, including the many other global criminal networks that facilitate money-laundering and trafficking in arms, drugs and people. But an attack will suddenly thrust the threat of jihadist terrorism back to center stage. All candidates should be preparing their responses for that eventuality.

I have perforce left out a number of important foreign policy issues, such as immigration (which I am choosing to treat as a domestic issue), refugees, technology transfers and, indeed, most areas of the world. But to these five questions I would add a sixth bonus question, one that no one is currently asking despite how critically it will determine future US foreign policy.

To paraphrase the musical Hamilton, who will actually be in the room where it happens? Which candidate will recognize that a cadre of foreign policymakers, on the right and the left, who are still overwhelmingly male and even more overwhelmingly white simply cannot accurately reflect and promote American interests?

That's a tough issue to raise at the MSC, as a quick look around the room will reveal. But it is a question that US candidates for president *must* ask, not for silly reasons of "identity politics," but because the American people reflect and connect to the entire world. The foreign policy establishment currently reflects and connects only to Europe.

Two long years of speeches, debates, advertisements, primaries and conventions lie before us, on the Democratic side and possibly the Republican side as well. Foreign policy issues rarely swing an election. But deciding where they stand on these five broad questions will help candidates figure out how they see the world and America's place within it. ▬

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IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The rub: a peace treaty may prove to be little more than a ceasefire, and after a period of time the war begins anew. Versailles 1919. Painting by William Orpen

Why modern wars never end

Violence has morphed from a political instrument into an economic resource, but this is only one of five reasons for today's never-ending conflicts

BY HERFRIED MÜNKLER

In the grand scheme of European history, the 19th century stands out as an era of peace. However, this characterization of the epoch – defined by historians as spanning the Congress of Vienna and the start of World War I – rings only partly true. A whole series of wars dotted Europe at the time, like the Crimean War and the Italian and German wars of unification, just to name a few of the most significant conflicts. But these were limited both in space and time, and usually ended with one decisive battle after which peace was declared. The wars almost always lasted just a few months while never posing a significant threat to the social order or having greater consequences than the shifting of political frontiers. Spatially and temporally constrained and legally regulated wars seem to correlate with overall periods of prolonged peace.

However, it's an altogether different picture when conflicts drag on, cannot be localized and become dictated not by the pursuit of decisive victory but rather by survival in a war of attrition. Such was the case with the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) and then again in the two World Wars of the 20th century, after which thinkers and laypeople alike came to the conclusion that war ought to be forever removed from the tool chest of politics.

In 1648 and in 1815 – at the Peace of Westphalia and at the Congress of Vienna respectively – observers still had confidence in the idea that war could be regulated solely by limiting its scope. The means to this effect was the state monopoly on the right to wage war. The people left the issue of war to the prudence of their rulers, trusting that they would approach it with restraint and in accordance with sound cost-benefit analysis.

This trust had become a thing of the past in 1918 and 1945. At issue now was nothing less than the elimination of war. This would require an authority to ensure that any state or entity acting in violation of this ban on war would not benefit from doing so. Yet neither the League of Nations nor the United Nations developed into such an authority; the great powers only took action against breakers of the peace if it served their immediate interest to do so. Likewise, the 2005 global commitment to embrace the "responsibility to protect" has had no discernible effect. This is the first answer to the question of why today's wars never end: as a general rule, no state is prepared or in a position to enforce the termination of a war. Those concerned must content themselves with requests to warring parties – requests that either fall on deaf ears or achieve zero effect.

So, why does that rational calculus not apply today, the thinking in most cases ensured that wars were ended when the prospective harm exceeded the verifiable benefits? After all, in several regions of the world we are facing wars in which the harm far outweighs the benefits, for instance in the now four-decade long war in the Horn of Africa, or the wars that for 30 years have continually reignited around the African Great Lakes, or finally in the wars in and around Afghanistan and those that developed in the wake of the Arab Spring.

These conflicts are all marked by the fact that they only marginally pit one state against another; they are essentially civil wars, to which a different rationality applies than does to wars between states. If the latter follow instrumental guidelines, the first have an existential dimension that renders any compromise impossible. Yet peace treaties have always relied on compromise, even if there are clear winners and losers. Where this is not the case, a peace treaty proves to be little more than a ceasefire, and after a period of time the war begins anew.

Peace treaties have always relied on compromise, even if there are clear winners and losers

That is the second answer to the question of why today's wars no longer end: the dichotomy that developed under the Westphalian sovereignty established in 1648 – wherein a sharp distinction was drawn between interstate war and civil war, which third parties are forbidden to join – no longer applies; indeed, with increasing speed the two types of war are coalescing into one.

Wars may begin as civil wars, but soon adjacent or nearby states play an important role, thus fomenting transnational wars in which internal intrastate and interstate conflicts blur into one. These can be so complex that they may no longer be resolved through straightforward peace treaties; what is required are protracted peace processes.

Since the end of a clear distinction between interstate war and civil war, closed war economies have been supplanted by open ones. In a closed war economy, the warring parties only have access to resources within the territories they control – when these resources expire, so does the war. Carl von Clausewitz likened this process to a volcano becoming extinct. Open war economies possess an altogether different dynamic, one characterized by the permanent influx of money, weapons, relief supplies and combatants from outside the war zone. Although the world community may establish arms embargoes and monitor money flow in attempts to close an open war economy, our age of back-channel commerce allows these efforts only a meager chance at success.

This was already the case with the proxy wars of the East-West conflict, but since the end of the Cold War, this phenomenon has taken on even greater dimensions. The external backers have now diversified; and, accordingly, more actors now pose as external supporting powers while the number of parties to the civil war has multiplied. This is the third reason.

Presumably, the most significant reason for the extended duration of new wars is the fact that there exist numerous actors whose lifeblood is the wars themselves; they have transformed violence from a political instrument into an economic resource. Thus they have no interest in ending the war – not the warlords, for they would lose the opportunity to amass great wealth through the conflict, and not their followers, who would then recede into social marginality. Herein lies the rub: the longer the war wages on, returning to a peaceful life becomes all the more difficult. When entire generations have grown up knowing nothing but smoldering war and having learned little more than how to use violence to survive this war, it becomes close to impossible to end an armed conflict via peace treaty. This is the fourth reason.

Not all the factors identified here are always visible in the war zones themselves. Often, one factor plays only a minor role while another bears outsized influence. Moreover, the constellation of factors is subject to constant change. If classical warfare was marked by the fact that certain notions of order became elements in the regulatory framework for conducting wars (even if the warring parties did not always defer to this system of order), then our new wars are marked by the sheer lack of such regulation, which brings with it a higher level of cruelty and a greater number of atrocities. Breeding revenge and counter revenge, this cannot be dispelled through legal intervention by a neutral third party, for there are no neutral third parties in civil war. Violence must be returned and humiliation must first be avenged before any peace negotiations can begin.

There is always one party with a score to settle, which will then lead to new scores and new determination to settle them. This is the fifth reason why today's wars do not end on their own – and indeed have little chance of ending at all. ■

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With friends like these ...

were not directed specifically at Brussels, Europe waited for a special carve-out. It never came. To add insult to injury, after complaining for years about the Iran nuclear deal – one of the signature achievements of EU-US cooperation – Trump pulled the United States out of the deal in May of 2018.

Europeans were obviously upset over Trump's decision to abandon the Iran deal. But they were equally furious with the way in which Trump made the decision. European and American officials had spent the prior five months hammering out a fix that would address US concerns while also preserving the deal. When Trump made the announcement that the US was walking away from the deal, the negotiators were down to just a few lines of text. The lessons for European allies were clear: never assume that anyone speaks for President Trump and whatever you do, do not ignore his tweets.

Year two ended with a bang. In December of last year in Brussels, the new Secretary of State Michael Pompeo delivered a jarring speech on "Restoring the Role of the Nation State in the Liberal International Order." In front of a packed audience of Europeans, Pompeo ticked through the failings of a number of international institutions in an effort to argue that the rules-based order no longer worked. To the shock of many listening in person and online, Pompeo included the European Union in that list. Keeping with the title of his talk, he then urged Europeans to "reassert their sovereignty," a remarkable statement to make in the capital of Europe.

Unfortunately for the EU, the Trump administration's attitudes and policies towards the EU are but one of its many challenges at the moment. Externally, Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to use an array of asymmetric tactics – cyberattacks, disinformation, and energy – to undermine EU cohesion and resolve. Chinese investors now own 10 percent of Europe's ports, just one of the ways China is buying influence on the continent. Internally, whether, how and when Brexit will occur remains a mystery, presumably even to Prime Minister Theresa May herself. And populist parties and leaders like Viktor Orbán have succeeded in creating small but critical tears in the fabric of Europe.

EU officials and experts understand that this is a defining moment for the European pro-ject. One can hardly spend a week in any major European capital without stumbling into a forum about the future of Europe. European think tanks, EU institutions and national governments have issued a dizzying array of recommendations on the way forward, although reading them tends to send one in circles. "Europe needs incremental reform." "Europe needs radical reform." "Europe needs to strengthen its economic outlook." "Europe needs to complete eurozone reform." "Europe needs strategic autonomy." "Europe needs its own army."

Here's one more: Europe needs the US and vice versa. No, as a non-member, the US cannot help the EU navigate and cope with the fallout from Brexit, nor can it do much to address the populist winds blowing across the continent – although people like Steve Bannon are doing their very best to make those winds stronger. What the US and the EU *can* do together is strengthen their common position in the face of the return of great power politics.

The Trump administration rightly placed "strategic competition" at the heart of its national security strategies. Where the Trump administration veered off course was in its assumption that Europe or the EU more specifically will play no role in that competition. Instead, US policymakers appear to have reached the conclusion that they alone can compete with China and Russia. That is a grave miscalculation that is only weakening Europe and America's position vis-à-vis those two countries.

Russia and China know full well that divisions between Europe and the US play to their advantage. China knows that addressing one or two countries' objections to its recent arrest of two Canadians is far easier than addressing a coordinated Western response. Russia knows that Western sanctions on its country cannot hold when the two sides of the Atlantic are divided. And other countries like Saudi Arabia relish the fact that the US and Europe are incapable of issuing a joint response to the Kingdom's ongoing human rights abuses. That is precisely why these countries work so hard at fostering trans-Atlantic disunity. Let's stop doing their work for them. Let's strengthen the ties between the resilient democracies on both sides of the Atlantic. ■

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Strategic ambivalence

The EU needs a firm grasp on its neighbor to the east

BY ERIC BONSE

When Federica Mogherini was named the European Union's new foreign policy chief, one particular photo made the rounds in Brussels. It shows the Italian politician at the Kremlin, shaking the hand of Vladimir Putin. Their grasp is firm, their eyes locked. The photo was taken during her first trip to Moscow, in July 2014, when Mogherini was still foreign minister of Italy.

Whoever greets Putin so affably cannot possibly speak for all 28 countries of the EU, said her critics in Brussels. The Eastern Europeans in particular accused Mogherini of being too close to Moscow. Nevertheless, the Italian social democrat got the job. But the photo with Putin has haunted her to this day. It has become a symbol of the dramatic transformation in EU-Russian relations.

It would be unthinkable today that Mogherini would strike a friendly pose for a photo with Putin. Today, she must never let down her guard. Every statement on Russia by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy – Mogherini's official title – is a diplomatic balancing act. The "strategic partner" of four years ago has become an adversary, for many, even an enemy.

The annexation of Crimea, the poison gas attack on the former Russian agent Sergei Skripal and the naval incident in the Kerch Strait have strained relations with Russia to the breaking point. The EU has become so mistrustful that it is even accusing Moscow of using a disinformation campaign to affect the European election – and is preparing to combat it. And in Syria, Russia is seen as capable of almost anything.

That Russia's intervention in Syria has contributed to driving back the Islamic State and ending the waves of immigration to Europe has hardly been recognized in Brussels. Nor has Putin received any gratitude for his commitment to the Iran nuclear deal. The EU will gladly accept the support but it almost falls on fallow land – the mistrust is simply too great to overcome.

This is a significant disappointment for Mogherini. She had set out with the goal of building new trust. Now she must content herself if Europe does not descend into a second cold war. Brussels lays the blame squarely on President Putin, whose policies are increasingly felt to be aggressive. The trans-Atlantic relationship crisis since Donald Trump took office is only exacerbating the problem.

The Trump administration is trying to torpedo Russia's plans for the new gas pipeline, Nord Stream 2. Germany and other participating EU countries and companies are under threat of sanctions. Trump is even trying to redefine Europe's energy security. Yet his maneuvering is directed not only at Russia, but at Germany as well – and at the EU foreign policy that is working towards a common stance.

The cancellation of the INF Treaty by the United States presents huge problems for the EU. While most EU countries share the conclusion that Russia is harming the nuclear disarmament treaty, they fear unilateral action by the US that could have profound disadvantages for Europe. As Mogherini made clear: "The INF contributed to the end of the Cold War – and no one in Europe wants to go back to those dark days."

IMAGO/ZUMA PRESS

Euro star: Federica Mogherini

But so far it does not look as if the EU is in a position to prevent a return to times that the continent had long believed it had overcome. What's more, in recent years, the Europeans have striven to become more independent in terms of security policy and to emerge from the shadow of the old great powers.

The aim of the new security and defense union – PESCO, concluded in December 2017 – is to enable the EU to act with solidarity and autonomy, if necessary even by military means. Recently, there has been talk of establishing a European army; however, these plans remain vague and a point of contention between Berlin and Paris.

Of particular interest is the dynamic this proposal is fomenting. Is it primarily meant to refute Russia, as those in Poland and the Baltics are claiming? Or is it really about Europe taking a step away from the US, as Chancellor Angela Merkel has indicated? Should the EU even strive for "strategic autonomy," as France has requested?

No clear strategy has thus far come to light. Even Russia has difficulty assessing these new EU initiatives. President Putin offered that he has no problem with a European army. The idea borne in Paris is "a generally positive process in terms of strengthening the multi-polarity of the world. In this sense, our positions overlap with France."

While Germany may be in a position to be the decisive factor, its stance has become precarious, even ambivalent. On the one hand, the German government is committed to its close cooperation with France, even in terms of Europe's relations with Russia.

On the other hand, Berlin is under massive pressure from Washington to engage more strongly militarily and to position itself more squarely against Russia. And this drama is unfolding as Germany assumes NATO's military spearhead, the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF): at the beginning of 2019, Germany takes over a leadership role in the Alliance.

All the while, the EU is increasingly shifting its policies in opposition to Moscow. Although Mogherini may still see Russia as a "natural partner and strategic player," in terms of the European defense union, she is pushing for an expansion of tank routes within the EU to enable more rapid military mobilization in the east.

According to Brussels, the plans do not exclusively target Russia. Even the campaign against disinformation is said to focus on more than just Moscow. However, who else they are referring to remains an open question. It's hard to identify a strategy there, but at best it amounts to strategic ambivalence. The EU is keeping all of its options on the table. At the moment, only one seems unthinkable: a hearty handshake with Putin.

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Helsinki 2.0 – illusion or imperative?

We need new multilateral formats, including a new permanent conference on European security with Russian participation

BY ALEXEY GROMYKO

In the long and complicated history of the Cold War, tensions and détente had their peaks and troughs. One profound achievement of peacemaking was the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, signed in Helsinki in 1975. It was the embodiment of a new modus vivendi, above all in the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States. The Helsinki Process led to the creation of Europe's most inclusive organization – the OSCE, which comprises both East and West.

The Helsinki treaty has not become outdated, and the OSCE continues to play a crucial role – especially since the Ukrainian crisis. But recent developments have brought into sharp relief the necessity of a renewed commitment to its principles. The idea is to reconfirm the principles of 1975 and those of the 1990 Paris Charter, while taking into account the historical changes of recent years. The goal should be a balance of interests, compromise and mutually beneficial solutions based on international law and the supremacy of the UN Charter. In the absence of any positive signs in this sphere, the spillover of the new arms race into the nuclear domain is a stark reality. The readiness of the US to scrap the 1987 INF treaty could have dramatic consequences.

In 2008, then-Russian President Dmitri Medvedev proposed to the EU, NATO, OSCE, CIS and Common Security Treaty Organization (SCTO) the conclusion of the European Security Treaty. The idea was to create a common Euro-Atlantic security space based on the legally binding idea of indivisibility of security. NATO, the EU and OSCE never replied. The draft of the new treaty was part of Russia's efforts to revive the spirit of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and to draw a final line under the Cold War. "Helsinki 2.0" was coined as a shorthand of this and other attempts to find a common security denominator between Russia and the West. It never got off the ground. The main stumbling block has been the underlying intention of the US and its allies to marginalize Russia geopolitically and economically in Eastern Europe and in other regions of the post-Soviet sphere.

Several attempts have been made in the past to move in the direction of Helsinki 2.0. As a repercussion of Medvedev's proposal, the OSCE launched the Corfu Process in 2009, which re-examined the post-Cold War security arrangements in the wake of the war in the South Caucasus. The following year, Russia and Germany put forward the Meseberg Initiative, with the aim of establishing an EU-Russian dialogue focused on resolving the Transnistria conflict of 2010. Helsinki 2.0 could take various shapes. It can be a permanent conference covering all four Helsinki baskets, or it could concentrate on politico-military issues, taking into consideration the urgency of de-escalation in this particular area.

Participants of such a permanent conference could include states as well as international organizations. The Final Act of 1975 was signed by 35 states. The number of participants of Helsinki 2.0 could potentially be much higher in view of the sharp increase of European states following the breakup of the Soviet Union. Not all of them need to join right away. The initiative could be launched by a coalition of the willing. The role of host nation for the conference could be filled by an internationally recognized mediator state such as Austria, Finland or Switzerland.

What would be the fundamental tenets of a new Helsinki Treaty? The purposes and principles of the UN Charter; state sovereignty; equality and non-interference; the peaceful settlement of international conflicts; a comprehensive approach to security relations between member states; indivisibility of security; refrainment from the threat or use of force.

Some argue that there is no need for Helsinki 2.0, as the existing international treaties – the UN Charter, the 1975 Final Act, the Paris Charter, etc. – are fully sufficient. However, their interpretations vary while new historical circumstances take hold and pose new challenges. Lest mutual claims and counterclaims mount and tensions rise, all sides should meet and argue in a structured and serious dialogue.

Others argue that, prior to negotiations, the opposite sides should comply with certain preliminary conditions. This would only succeed in ruining the chance that the conflicting players would engage in talks with one another. In the past, major wars were followed by the conclusion of key international treaties that defined the victorious and defeated nations. Today, it is impossible to expect any major center of power, especially a permanent member of the UN Security Council, to admit defeat or yield to ultimatums. Insisting on preliminary conditions would in effect torpedo the settlement of international disputes through diplomacy.

NATO is vehemently opposed to anything that might limit the ability of the Alliance to enlarge. However, indivisibility of security does not automatically prohibit enlargement of any military organization. Nor does it eliminate the open door policy of NATO, SCTO or other alliances; instead, it undergirds expansion with pragmatism, not ideology. Moreover, it implies that all sides become reciprocal stakeholders in the common security sphere and that the dividing lines between opponents begin to blur. The more this process is advanced, the more it becomes unnecessary for military organizations to grow territorially.

Common sense and the extremely precarious conditions of arms control and strategic stability dictate the necessity to launch dialogue among a coalition of the willing in the spirit of Helsinki. It is highly desirable that all states from Vancouver to Vladivostok participate in this endeavor. Unfortunately, the near future holds little hope that such an idealistic scenario will prevail. However, waiting for the perfect moment to arrive risks allowing the chances of a new big war to increase.

The states that suffered most from the wars of the 20th century should assume the responsibility of initiating a new permanent conference on European security. Is there a nobler task than saving the world?

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IMAGO/ZUMA/KEYSTONE, IMAGO/ITAR-TASS

The architects of Helsinki 1.0 in July 1975: Henry Kissinger and Gerald Ford for the US ...

... and Leonid Brezhnev, Andrey Gromyko (grandfather of the author) and Konstantin Chernenko, for the USSR.

State of play: Russia and the fraying West

Despite their troubles, Europe and the US are not withering away. It would behoove Moscow to avoid escalations

BY DMITRI TRENIN

Looking at the West today, a Russian who witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall 30 years ago sees a striking picture. Political America is gripped in a cold civil war, and is led by a president who acts as if he were still the star of a reality TV show. British politicians have managed to maneuver their island into a Brexit limbo. Their French colleagues had to file for collective bankruptcy before installing a kingly figure whose political clothes have since become threadbare. Even Germany's political system, a paragon of post-World War II stability, is beginning to visibly wobble. A range of smaller Western countries add their own bright colors to the group portrait of the elites across the Euro-Atlantic world who have lost touch with their publics and confidence in themselves.

A few Russians are quite giddy at this view. They should sober up. Western economies, even if they may be facing yet another recession, are fundamentally strong. The United States still basically controls global finance and leads the world by a huge margin in both technology and innovation. For all the talk of fake news and Russian propaganda, mainstream Western media continue to dominate the information landscape across the globe. Migration waves to Western Europe and North America testify to how attractive Western living standards remain for the masses of less fortunate people all over the world. And, of course, the Pentagon wields phenomenal military power. So, unlike what happened to the Soviet Union and the communist system in the late 1980s, the West will live to see another day, even if it will have to transform itself in the process.

So, how should Russia deal with America and Europe in their present condition? Above all, one needs to accept that while the West is altering its structure at the national, international and supranational levels, it is not withering away. The United States will continue to be in the lead, even if its leadership looks less benevolent and less altruistic. Europeans and other allies will have to accept the new regime, even if begrudgingly, and protect some of their own interests. The EU, for all the initiatives of French President Emmanuel Macron, is unlikely to emerge as a strategic player anytime soon. Many Europeans are sufficiently terrified of China's geo-economic expansion, Russia's geopolitical resurgence or both. There will be hand-wringing, but also arm-twisting. In any case, the bonds that tie Europe to America will not disappear.

In this situation, Russia would be wise to focus its US policy on preventing a direct military collision. It must accept that the current confrontation will probably go on for years, meaning that sanctions will not be lifted. The Kremlin also must stay away from Trump: Vladimir Putin's meetings with him only make things worse. Seeking to influence the US domestic scene, even in a most innocuous way, is counter-productive. Reviving US-Russian arms control will not help. The INF Treaty is dead, and New START is likely to follow when its time is up in 2021. Thus, Moscow can only work with Washington to prevent incidents from spinning out of control; to avoid escalation of running conflicts such as Ukraine; and to minimize mutual misperceptions. Crucial here is a 24/7 US-Russian military-to-military communication link, and high-level personal contacts between their military and security chiefs. These contacts, of course, are no substitute for a comprehensive dialogue that will have to wait at least five to six years, and possibly more.

In this larger strategic framework, Russia's relations with Europe will need to focus largely on protecting EU-Russia trade links in the thickening sanctions environment and allowing human contacts to proceed despite growing alienation and estrangement. With EU-Russia relations largely frozen, Russian-European relations will be a sum of bilateral ones. While trade is only a bit more than half of what it was before 2014, it is still important, particularly in the energy sector. Security matters will have to take a back seat: Europeans cannot decide alone on the issues that fall within NATO's competence. The OSCE is essentially irrelevant, and the Russia-NATO communications line is but an add-on to the US-Russian one. Yet, a few EU member states, including France, Germany and Italy, prefer to keep open their channels of political dialogue with Moscow. Despite the likely termination of Russia's membership in the Council of Europe, contacts among ordinary people are still vibrant. This mutual interest that has so far withstood the hybrid war is a firm enough basis on which to begin discussing a new lasting foundation for the Europe-Russia relationship, one centered on trade, human contacts and neighborly ties.

It goes without saying that no such discussion can avoid the formal reason for the breakdown of Russia-Europe relations: Ukraine. While chances for solving the issue in the foreseeable future are slim, every effort must be made to ensure that incidents on land in Donbass, in the water off Crimea or in the Sea of Azov do not lead to escalation. The hybrid war may take a long time to play out, but it is crucial that, like its predecessor, its stays mostly cold.

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Despite everything: Get Russia involved

Cold hard fact: Peace is only possible with Moscow on board

PICTURE ALLIANCE/AP IMAGES

Ostpolitik and *Entspannungspolitik:* Driven by Egon Bahr (right) and implemented by Willy Brandt (middle) in the 1960s and 1970s with Leonid Brezhnev (left) – and spoken about during a meeting in Crimea in 1971.

BY ROLF MÜTZENICH AND ACHIM POST

When Social Democrats make the case for new initiatives in Germany's official Russia policy, they are usually dismissed for being "naïve Russophiles." So let's get the following out of the way before we go any further: Yes, the Russian state has broken international law and continues to undertake obvious attempts to destabilize the EU and Western democracies. And, yes, it's highly likely that Russian forces have influenced elections and referenda. Russia's democratic deficits are also plain to see, while the human rights situation in that country is blatantly unacceptable. And it doesn't help that a tempestuous and unpredictable US president has been tweeting amok from the White House for the past two years. Indeed, this is a man who does not shy away from spreading fake news and sparking confrontations and escalations wherever he can.

What conclusions can we draw from all of this? How are we to deal with this highly explosive and challenging situation? It is our firm conviction – precisely because the situation is so problematic and increasingly dangerous – that we should take time to reflect on how we can relieve tensions and reduce them to at least a manageable level.

In light of the prospective termination of the Iran nuclear deal, the scheduled end to the INF Treaty and the possible non-extension of the New START arms reduction treaty set to expire in 2021, we are faced with the potential collapse of the entire system of international arms control – an event that would have unforeseeable impact on global security. The rules-based international order as a whole is at stake. We find ourselves at the beginning of a new nuclear arms race with many groups of allies going their own way.

For this reason, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas is holding talks in Moscow and Washington in an attempt to find ways to counter the logic of escalation and preserve the international arms control regime. It's very easy to throw cheap shots from the sidelines, but critics themselves are obliged to look long and hard at the alternatives and their foreign policy consequences. Are we really supposed to blindly follow Trump and Putin into a new cold war, or would it not be better to try everything we can to prevent an escalation – in spite of all the associated obstacles and uncertainties? Are we really supposed to continue adding fuel to the fire or would it not be more sensible to attempt to rise above the current spiral of mutual accusations, reproaches and prohibitions?

We are convinced that black-and-white thinking is simply unviable and that we need a policy that makes use of initiatives and formats that break down blockades and extricate us from dead ends. These are policies that would hinge on acceptance, a sober analysis of the status quo and a pragmatic policy of small steps designed to exit the current stalemate. The policies of *Ostpolitik* and *Entspannungspolitik* created by Egon Bahr and implemented by Willy Brandt in the 1960s and 1970s were exactly that.

Efforts relating to those historic policies were crowned with success. Today, too, German and European foreign policymakers would be wise to set out on a long-term and equally clear and pragmatic course in the direction of arms control, disarmament and détente.

We have various reasons for being interested in cooperating with Russia – just as Russia has an interest in cooperating with us. China is very aware of Russia's economic weaknesses and undoubtedly exacts – unhindered – very favorable conditions vis-à-vis access to the Russian market. These experiences have led to a fundamental sobering-up in Moscow. And this is exactly why it makes sense and is necessary to find common interests.

But this can only happen in concert with our European partners. Germany and the EU must continue to focus on cooperative multilateralism rather than egocentric unilateralism. The idea of integrating difficult partners into multilateral approaches does not reflect a lack of principles; instead, it is evidence of key insights into what is actually feasible and the fact that pressure alone will not bring about a change in behavior.

In addition, it is essential that we present a clear and coordinated European approach, especially when it comes to dealing with difficult partners. For example, the current debate regarding Nord Stream 2 underscores the necessity for a joint European energy policy. Any retroactive consequences for decisions already taken would only make this objective more difficult to reach. Moreover, they would counteract efforts made by the German government to secure and modernize the Ukrainian transit route.

German and European foreign policy must use clever diplomacy to nudge the two major nuclear powers – the US and Russia – into overcoming their dangerous silence. We are under no illusions: The Russian government will not change its internal or external course overnight.

The fact is that the principle of multilateralism is under enormous pressure – even within the EU. The goal must therefore be to make better use of existing institutions, to reform them and to fill them with new life – as we saw recently with the confirmation of the German-French partnership by way of the new Treaty of Aachen.

In spite of all setbacks and disappointments, we cannot let up in our efforts. We must stay the course, especially when things get difficult. Back in the day, if Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev had allowed themselves to be discouraged by what was an even less favorable starting position, the INF Treaty would never have come to fruition in 1987.

Why don't we take Moscow at its word and offer them new relationships and contacts to those institutions dominated by it, such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)? This would have the advantage of regionalizing the conflicts of interest, thus ensuring that it wasn't always Russia and the West that were at odds, but rather the EU and the EEU (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia) and – under the umbrella of the OSCE – NATO and the CSTO (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Russia). Plus, we would be fulfilling Russia's request for talks "at eye level." Why are we not making even more use of the opportunities offered by the NATO-Russia Council and the OSCE?

However, we cannot allow all of our offers of cooperation towards Russia to lead to the West throwing its own principles overboard and accepting a new policy based on spheres of influence in Europe. The inviolability of borders and the prohibition of violence as the basis of international law and the guarantor of peace on the European continent are not negotiable.

Nevertheless, we must do everything in our power to prevent the post-Cold War era from coming to be known as the time between two cold wars. Germany and Europe must never again become the site of war games involving nuclear or conventional weapons. With this in mind, smart foreign policy cannot wait for democracies to exist everywhere; instead, smart policy proves its value by dealing with those who think differently.

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SHUTTERSTOCK

From Brussels with love

To a more assertive EU in a volatile world

BY HELGA MARIA SCHMID

As we meet in Munich this year, the prediction made in last year's edition of this paper with regard to the growing importance of great power rivalries still rings in our ears. Geopolitics is back and likely to stay.

What is more, our strategic environment is growing ever more unpredictable. Today, major powers openly challenge the rules-based international order and seek to promote alternative visions of a world divided into spheres of influence. Geopolitical rivalries stoke tensions and raise the alarm bell of a new "proliferation age" that risks escalating into inadvertent military confrontation. Climate change is becoming an existential threat while cyberspace and disinformation campaigns are the new weapons of the 21st century.

For the European Union, the answer is clear; these challenges can be tackled only through a multilateral approach. If we stay united, we will have the tools and the political weight to shape the future global order. This is why instead of retreating from international cooperation and global partnerships, the EU is stepping up its commitment to address global challenges together with its partners. This is true for the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iranian non-proliferation, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the EU's strategy for connectivity between Asia and Europe and the reform of the WTO.

While these agreements are, in essence, hard to reach, we are convinced they are the best way to ensure a more peaceful, prosperous and secure global environment – even more so when it is clear that no single country can address these challenges alone. I am convinced this approach is the right one. The fact that demands for European action from our partners have never been so high speaks for itself.

At every given opportunity, the need to define common answers to common problems is not only highlighted, but also translated into action. The EU is therefore investing in broader international cooperation and partnerships, above all with NATO, the UN and regional organizations such as the Africa Union and ASEAN. Our trilateral EU-AU-UN cooperation on common challenges such as migration illustrates how multilateral solutions can contribute to greater safety, stability and prosperity.

For instance, as the UN IPCC Special Report on Global Warming warned us recently, there is an urgent need to act on climate change. This is the logic behind the EU's tireless efforts to reach a successful outcome at COP 24 in Katowice. The EU will lead by example by turning its own ambitious commitments for 2030 into concrete action. This was made clear at the high-level event on climate and security hosted by the EU last June.

In the security sector, the EU continues to assert its role as a security provider. Not only is it working internally to intensify joint efforts to effectively fight terrorism, hatred and violent extremism, the EU is also engaged on the ground with 16 crisis management missions, which involves the coordination of nearly 4,000 men and women. From strengthening the capacaties of internal security forces in the Central African Republic, Mali and Niger to supporting security sector reform in Iraq, fighting piracy off the coast of Somalia and preventing a resurgence of violence in Georgia, the EU continues to bolster international security in its neighborhood and beyond. This is complemented by continued engagement in more than 40 mediation activities across the world – from Colombia to Yemen and the Philippines – and underpinned by financial assistance as the EU remains the lead donor for development and humanitarian aid.

As Europe takes more responsibility for its own security, the debate on European strategic autonomy has moved to the fore, and not without controversy. However, at its heart is some simple reasoning; when needed, Europeans must be able to protect and defend European interests and values and have the capacity to act. We want to be able to cooperate with third countries on our own terms.

In this respect, we stepped up the development of joint military capabilities through our Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO); we will increase joint investments through the European Defence Fund; we are streamlining military command structures (MPCC); and we agreed to a compact to strengthen our civilian crisis management. As such, these initiatives also contribute to strengthening NATO's European pillar as well as the EU's collective defense. Greater responsibility also includes beefing up our own resilience and capacity in energy, space, infrastructure and other critical sectors. We Europeans cannot accept interference and destabilization through hybrid and cyberattacks, hence our ongoing focus on reinforcing cybersecurity capacities, improving the protection of data and containing disinformation through the recently adopted Action Plan against Disinformation.

We also need to be extra vigilant to preserve achievements on non-proliferation, such as the INF treaty or the nuclear deal with Iran, as the stakes for our own security are simply too high. The starting point cannot be to dismantle the current architecture and start from scratch. We Europeans are working at all levels to promote the universalization and implementation of existing agreements, such as the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation. We are also pushing for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty to enter into force, which could play an important role as we work towards a complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of North Korea.

Taking greater responsibility does not stop at defense issues. Security today is also about economic security. This notion includes the strategic importance of the euro and the need to ensure that the single currency can play its full role on the international scene. Promoting the euro's international role is part of Europe's commitment to an open, multilateral and rules-based global economy. The extra-territorial effects of sanctions also challenge the EU's capacity to follow through on our own political commitments. In this context, we are developing mechanisms that will assist, protect and reassure economic actors when pursuing legitimate business abroad.

As Europeans, we cannot afford to waste time or be less innovative than others. We need to modernize our approaches and engage more actively with new actors at the intersection of technology and foreign and security policy. This is why the high representative launched the Global Tech Panel – including the CEOs of major tech companies – to help ensure that international ethics and rules can keep pace with human ingenuity. To harness these opportunities, we must also take the security implications seriously, hence the recent European Commission Communication on Artificial Intelligence.

All in all, supporting a rules-based multilateralism and greater European strategic autonomy are not contradictory objectives. If we strengthen our resilience in the face of new risks, the European Union will play its part in reinvigorating the multilateral order and become a force to be reckoned with as an assertive actor in a volatile world.

The starting point cannot be to dismantle the current architecture and start from scratch

HELGA MARIA SCHMID
is secretary general of the EU's European External Action Service.

The counterlife of the Western alliance

This year's EU elections could become an unlikely battleground for the future of the liberal world order

BY MARK LEONARD

The Munich Security Conference has grown accustomed to ranking the security threats to the West: Islamist terrorists, Russian revisionism or the global ambitions of China's big data dictatorship. But today, the most critical challenges come not from outside the West but from the political dynamics within.

In 2019, they actually derive from one of the most unlikely sources: the elections to the European Parliament. Traditionally, these elections bear almost no relevance to trans-Atlantic security. In spite of their name, European elections were predominantly national affairs with low turnout and even lower stakes. But this year could actually be different on all of these fronts.

First, rather than being merely a national story, there is a transnational element to European elections in 2019. Viktor Orbán and Matteo Salvini, assisted by the American alt-right representative in Europe, Steve Bannon, would like to turn these elections into a European answer to the Trump revolution that has afflicted Washington. Rather than fighting it on purely national grounds, they aim to turn it into a referendum not just on the future of migration, but also on the idea of an outward-looking and cohesive European Union. As such, they are creating a new kind of Western counter-alliance – one that challenges many of the ideas inherent in the traditional project of the West. They share a vision of what Mark Lilla recently described as "social organicism," which pushes back against what it sees as the uprooted, elitist and cosmopolitan vision of the West and its sister project, European integration.

Orbán and Salvini are working with Bannon in trying to create a federation of different strands of European populism – anti-austerity from the left, anti-migration from the right. Rather than talking about destroying the EU, they are trying to show how they would reshape it into a Europe of nationalist states.

Second, it just so happens that, as with Trump, all these parties have ties to Russia, and they all share a skepticism of trade and multilateral institutions. This is how they seek to mobilize people who traditionally do not vote in European elections – and why, in turn, there may be much greater turnout than is traditionally the case. The 2019 elections could shape up to be a big challenge for the established parties – such as Emmanuel Macron's La République En Marche and Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats.

Third, the stakes are much higher this year. If the pan-populist project succeeds, Orbán, Salvini et al. could secure a blocking minority in the European parliament, or, even worse, form an Austrian-style coalition between the right and center right. Rather than Brussels being a focal point for EU institutions and their efficient operation, the pan-populist alliance could get their wish by blocking or delaying the nomination of EU commissioners, making trade deal ratification less likely and preventing the Commission from pursuing Article 7 on rule of law procedures. Populists could actually create the conditions for their fear-mongering populist prophecy: a dysfunctional Brussels, from which they must then seize control from.

DPA/PHOTOSHOT

Movement politicians in Trump's mold: Victor Orbán and Matteo Salvini

Most worrying is that, while euroskeptic forces are limbering up for a momentous political year, their mainstream counterparts are not. They are, in fact, in danger of falling into the trap the populists are laying for them – by accepting the battle lines of a fight between globalism and patriotism that will almost certainly help bring the populist forces a higher turnout and a degree of unity that their disparate agendas do not deserve. Everything is still up in the air, but avoiding Hillary Clinton's fate on election day 2016 will require that pro-Europeans accomplish three things:

First, they must counter the image, painted by Orbán and Bannon, of elitist, pro-status quo and pro-Brussels cosmopolitans. This means developing a critique of the Brussels institutions and an alternative agenda of change so that people are not forced to endorse the many elements of dysfunction and unfairness that have characterized European integration over the last few years. Macron instinctively understands that the next wave of the European project cannot be about ripping down barriers between countries, but rather should focus on de-risking interdependence by showing how to help those disadvantaged by free movement, free trade and the single currency. But his rhetoric of a "Europe that protects" has not yet been embodied in a clear and convincing political program.

Second, if they aim to polarize the debate, the pro-Europeans must do so from a position where they have a majority of public opinion on their side and where they are likely to actually win over voters rather than shoring up support among their more ideological base. The worst they could do would be to allow for a debate that juxtaposes an open Europe with a closed, nationalist Europe. Instead, pro-Europeans must earn the right to be listened to by confronting dysfunctional elements in the EU – and finding wedge issues on the right. For example, they should ask Salvini's supporters if they support Orbán's vision of keeping migrants in the countries where they land and ask Orbán's supporters whether they support the Lega's idea of spreading refugees around EU member states.

Third, they must find compelling reasons for voting that will mobilize people not just through a purely moralist campaign against "evil populists." If they fail to do so, the political dynamics that have blighted Washington could catch on in Brussels. This risks creating an alternative trans-Atlantic relationship. Rather than a West united around the defense of the liberal order, as championed by John McCain, Joe Biden and Barack Obama in the US and Angela Merkel, Emmanuel Macron and John Major in Europe, we could see an illiberal axis with Salvini and Orbán on one flank and Trump, Bannon and John Bolton on the other. ■

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CHALLENGES

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Looking for alternatives (in all the wrong places)

Are the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia preparing for regime change in Iran?

MICHAEL LÜDERS

As *The New York Times* reported in November 2018, the United States and Saudi Arabia have apparently reached a framework agreement for the sale of nuclear power stations to the Kingdom. The deal is said to be worth up to $80 billion. However, Riyadh is insisting on creating its own nuclear fuel, despite it being cheaper to buy abroad.

There can only be one plausible reason for this pursuit of uncontrolled uranium enrichment. Accordingly, US intelligence officials are increasingly concerned with the question of whether Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman, the gulf state's de facto autocrat often referred to as MBS, is planning to build a Saudi atomic bomb.

Those responsible in Washington or Israel do not seem overly concerned by the prospect; in any case, they are doing nothing to challenge the deal. Likewise, the political and media establishment's indignation over the murder in Istanbul of the Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi – an act most probably endorsed, if not ordered, by MBS – has had next to no effect. Still, a clear bipartisan majority of US senators voted twice at the end of last year to limit President Donald Trump's authority in the war in Yemen. Although this nearly four-year-old war, which Mohammad Bin Salman could never have waged without the military assistance of the US and the United Kingdom, has unleashed what the UN considers the greatest humanitarian crisis in the world, the protest votes by the US senate have had absolutely no consequences; a change in US policy toward Saudi Arabia is not to be expected despite the Khashoggi murder. The Saudi monarchy is appeased, and, in turn, continues to demonize the Iranian theocracy – a stark world view with sober geopolitical underpinnings.

Close American-Saudi ties date back to World War II, for which the meeting between President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the kingdom's founder, Ibn Saud, on Feb. 20, 1945, aboard the USS Quincy on Great Bitter Lake near Cairo would later assume great symbolic value. Saudi Arabia has since delivered petroleum to the US under preferential terms, and the US has returned the favor by guaranteeing the Saudi monarchy's security, primarily in the form of enormous amounts of arms exports – nearly 10 percent of all US arms sales go to Saudi Arabia.

Weapons for oil – this is one pillar of the special relationship between the two sides. Another dates back to the 1980s, with the triumph of financial capitalism and Saudi investors' discovery of the American market. There remains not one publicly owned US company without Saudi capital. While the exact level of Saudi investment in the US market is unknown, the figure is thought to be in the hundreds of billions of dollars.

And, finally, there is the decades-long cooperation between American and Saudi intelligence services, which bore fruit during the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988) as well as during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979–1989). At that time, the Saudis were providing considerable financing to the Mujahideen, the religious fighters deployed as guerrilla troops to fight the Soviets. The Mujahideen would later spawn the Taliban and Al Qaeda – a fact the Washington political establishment is all too happy to overlook. That Saudi Arabia exports not only petroleum, but Islamist terror as well, must have been a painful realization for Americans on Sept. 11, 2001 – 15 of the 19 assassins came from Saudi Arabia. The consequences? None.

Yet another reason for the United States' unwillingness to rock the boat is the common regional archenemy it shares with Saudi Arabia and Israel: Iran. This triangle – or perhaps square, if the United Arab Emirates is thrown into the mix – considers the Islamic Republic to be nothing less than an empire of evil. They all dream of a regime change in Tehran, if necessary by military means. Washington and Israel above all are convinced that Iran is seeking to annihilate the state of Israel. Moreover, Tehran exercises a brand of power politics that leaves the US allies of Riyadh and Abu Dhabi feeling under threat.

The Iranian government has indeed engaged in an increasingly aggressive anti-Israeli polemic. For the sake of balance, it should be noted that the Israelis, particularly under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, have seldom endeavored to temper their rhetoric vis-à-vis Iran. But can the Islamic Republic actually "annihilate" Israel, even if its current leadership actually desired to?

A country without atom bombs is simply incapable of annihilating a country that has them

Strictly speaking, this would be impossible for two critical reasons. First, Israel has the atom bomb and Iran does not. The Israelis share no information on their nuclear potential and, in contrast to Iran, are under no pressure to embrace any significant transparency on the matter. Estimates of Israel's capacity range between 75 and 400 atom bombs, which puts them in a league with the UK and France. Iran possesses no nuclear weapons and in 2003, as confirmed by US intelligence, ceased all attempts to acquire them. A country without the atom bomb is simply incapable of "annihilating" a country that has them. It is objectively impossible.

The second reason calls for a look at respective military budgets. In 2017, Iran had a military expenditure of $14 billion, Saudi Arabia $70 billion, Israel $58 billion and the US $750 billion. The numbers speak for themselves. The suggestion that Tehran is pursuing an expansive program of power politics is – in light of US hegemony in the region since World War II – laughable. It is true that Iran understands how to exploit the mistakes and shortsightedness of American policies for its own purposes. In 2001, Washington toppled the extremist Sunni Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the archenemies of Shi'ite Iran. Two years later saw the US-led invasion of Iraq and the demise of Saddam Hussein, which was followed by Iraq's Shi'ite majority population claiming power from the Sunnis. The new Shi'ite power elite in Baghdad soon allied with their equivalents in Tehran: Who would have thought it? In each case, Washington did Iran a huge favor.

The attempt to effect regime change in Damascus – a policy promoted primarily by Hillary Clinton and the neocons and then thwarted by President Barack Obama – was an unconditional failure.

Bashar al-Assad remains in power and his military allies in Iran and Russia have been strengthened as a result. But Syria remains in a state of unrest, as Israel and Iran are engaged there in a proxy war of sorts. At the same time, foreign policy decision-makers in Washington are using all possible means to attempt to thwart Trump's decision to withdraw US troops from northern Syria. The idea of negotiating with Russia and Iran to come to an agreement on a balance of interests in the region feels to them like treason. A dangerous worldview – on Jan. 13, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that last September, after three grenades exploded in the vicinity of the US embassy in Baghdad, National Security Advisor John Bolton instructed the Pentagon to work on options for taking military action against Tehran. Nothing is known about the perpetrators of the attack, which caused no injuries or damage of any kind. But why worry about facts when it comes to cracking down on Tehran?

There are many good reasons to criticize Iranian policy, but despite all the repression in the Islamic Republic, societal conditions in the country are far more complex, multifaceted and, indeed, liberal than in Saudi Arabia. Power lies in Tehran, not in the hands of a single individual, as in Riyadh. And the Iranian authorities, like it or not, act far more rationally and predictably than MBS. Why then does the Islamic Republic sit squarely in the crosshairs of Washington and its regional allies?

Iran is the sole remaining country in a wide stretch of land between the Atlantic in the west and Indonesia in the east (with the exception of the little that remains of Syria) with a political system that is neither pro-Western nor pro-American. This, in turn, has causes that go back decades. In 1953, the CIA and MI6 overthrew the democratically elected and extremely popular prime minister of Iran, Mohammad Mossadegh. Two years earlier, he had nationalized the Iranian oil industry – blasphemy in the eyes of London and Washington. In his place they installed as shah, or sovereign of Iran, Reza Pahlevi, also a close ally of Israel. But the repressive policies of his regime led to the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Nary a historian believes that we would have an Islamic Republic today had Mossadegh not been deposed – it is the radical answer to the coup a generation hence.

But who in politics, whether in Washington or elsewhere, thinks in historical contexts? The Trump administration is hardly the only Western government to see Iran as the last remaining rogue nation, now that the neocons and their allies have instigated regime change in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

Their attempts to do the same in Syria have failed – see above. Trump's May 2018 termination of the Iran nuclear deal forged under Obama in 2015 is the first step toward his goal of Regime Change 2.0 in Tehran. Although the pact's European co-signers, along with Russia and China, want to continue to adhere to the terms of the deal, the idea has little appeal for the ideologues of America First, also known as the gravediggers of the trans-Atlantic alliance.

Prior to a potential attack of Iran by the US and/or Israel, insurgency financing of ethnic and religious minorities in Iran as well as economic sanctions should be maximally employed to bring Tehran to its knees. (Despite its arms expenditure, Saudi Arabia is still militarily a paper tiger.) And Iran's ballistic missiles are a thorn in the eye for Washington and Israel, as they can jeopardize the safety of attacking aircraft. The presence of Shi'ite militias in Iraq and Syria is particularly unacceptable for Israel, and the same can be said for Iran's support of Hezbollah in Lebanon. For the Iranians, however, the focus would be on an asymmetrical preemptive defense in the case of an attack.

A peaceful alternative to negotiations with Tehran and the retention of the nuclear deal does not exist. Although the regime sits firmly in the saddle, pressure from the Americans is strengthening the hand of the hardliners at the expense of the pragmatists around President Rouhani. An attack on Iran would bring Armageddon to the Middle East. The entire region would explode: Jews against Muslims, Shi'ites against Sunnis. And what if Russia and China were to come down on the side of Iran, against the US? Would it trigger NATO's Article 5 on collective defense?

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Beyond all recognition

The EU and its members will have to come up with their own policy for the new reality in Syria

BY VOLKER PERTHES

For the past eight years, Syria has been the place where almost all the geopolitical, political, ideological and sectarian conflicts of the Middle East have converged as if under a burning magnifying glass. Syria is not at peace today, but the government of Bashar al-Assad – with more than a little help from Russia and Iran – has won the war.

The opposition is largely marginalized; most of its Arab backers are about to normalize their relations with the government in Damascus. Russia and Iran remain the main external power brokers. The United States' impending military withdrawal from Syria will also reduce its political influence. The European Union and its members will have to come up with their own policy for the new reality in Syria. For Europe, Syria is too close – and too fragile – to ignore.

Diplomats love to reiterate that there is no military solution to the conflict in Syria. While this is true, there clearly are military outcomes, most notably the defeat of the main opposition and rebel groups. The Islamic State, too, has lost its territorial control over parts of the country, but it remains a veritable terrorist force. Some areas are still beyond government control: The Idlib de-escalation zone in the north has survived thanks to a Turkish-Russian arrangement but is likely to be retaken by the government sooner or later, probably gradually rather than through a major offensive. Turkey seems intent on holding on to an area between the Turkish province of Hatay and the Euphrates River.

The territory east of the Euphrates is, at the time of writing, still controlled by the Kurdish PYD. Without the support of US troops, however, the PYD will not be able to maintain its semi-autonomy. It makes little strategic difference whether the US withdrawal is slowed down or not. The PYD knows that the US presence is finite, whereas the Syrian state – as well as Turkey – will not go away.

Between a Turkish invasion and an arrangement with Damascus, the Kurdish group will surely choose the latter – trying to secure some meaningful form of decentralization as well as an integration of its own militia into the state's armed forces. Most likely, therefore, and in the not-too-distant future, public buildings in the east will again hoist the Syrian flag, and Damascus will regain control over the oil fields and over the eastern part of the Turkish-Syrian border.

The future of Syria will no longer be decided on the battlefield or in UN-led political negotiations. The new UN Special Envoy for Syria may be able to set up a constitutional committee with credible representatives from different sides of the conflict. It is very unlikely, however, that Assad's government would allow the adoption of any constitutional text that could seriously limit his powers or that of the security apparatus.

Postwar Syria will nonetheless only partly resemble Syria before the war. Assad will be in power and, absent unforeseen events, stay there even after the next presidential elections, now scheduled for 2021. He will be ruling a devastated country, however: Syria's economy is down to roughly 50 percent of its pre-war performance. More than half of the population have become refugees or have been displaced. The social fabric has been disrupted. The government is not eager to have refugees return. Parts of the former rebel-held areas find themselves under de facto occupation. Neither local nor external actors are likely to be held accountable for war crimes or the close to 500,000 deaths caused by the war in Syria.

Also, given its dependence on Russia and Iran, Syria's sovereignty has been compromised. Moscow has become the most and Iran the second most important powerbroker in Syria. Both will likely maintain a military presence and military bases as well as a heavy dose of influence inside the political and security apparatus.

While they have managed their differences quite successfully, their strategies for postwar Syria diverge. Iran sees Syria as a forward base for what Iranian strategists call their deterrence posture against Israel. To consolidate its influence, Iran seems intent on ingraining itself more deeply into the military, political, ideological and economic fabric of Syria.

Russia, in contrast, is interested neither in such a form of Iranian hegemony in Syria nor in further regional escalation. It aims at reconstituting a stable, closely allied and internationally accepted government in Damascus. To that end, Russia is pursuing an ambitious agenda that includes military stabilization and military reform, a constitutional process, local reconciliations, the return of refugees, economic reconstruction and the prevention of a major Israeli-Iranian confrontation in Syria. This is more than Russia can shoulder on its own, or achieve by military means. Moscow has left no doubt that it needs support from Europe and the rest of the world, particularly in terms of financing the country's reconstruction.

The impending military withdrawal of the US from Syria will also reduce Washington's diplomatic influence on political developments in Syria. This increases the need for Europe to develop a common policy for the new reality in Syria. Even before the US decision to leave, it was right for Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Emmanuel Macron to meet and discuss Syria with the presidents of Russia and Turkey in order to avoid further international polarization over Syria, at the very least. While it remains to be seen whether such a format can effect a significant degree of international coordination, it is certainly useful to try. Not all, but much of what Russia tries to achieve in Syria today, i.e. after its own and Assad's victory, is compatible with European interests – and certainly when compared with the Iranian agenda.

The EU and its members may not like it, but they recognize the military outcome. They no longer demand a transitional government or power-sharing arrangements in Damascus. They are right to support the efforts of the UN. But this cannot replace a European strategy for Syria, which, after all, is a fragile, close neighbor. Simply put, Europe must decide whether to leave international responsibility for Syria to the Astana group – Russia, Iran and Turkey – or to engage.

There are no ideal options with regard to reconstruction – but reconstruction is the one significant lever Europe has. The EU cannot simply provide the funds, or most of them, for a reconstruction effort led by Russia, Iran and the Syrian government. Europe does not want to support a still-repressive regime that is indeed responsible for the vast majority of the war dead and most of the destruction. Nor should it help to further enrich war profiteers and regime cronies who have already come up with plans to "develop" and change the demography of devastated neighborhoods formerly held by rebels.

At the same time, Syrians, particularly in war-torn areas, are in dire need of support. These populations have been harmed not only through the destruction of their towns or neighborhoods; many of their youth are in exile, imprisoned or dead. They have lost the backing of Western and Arab donors who had supported social infrastructure and services in these areas as long as they were under opposition control. The government does not prioritize support for these people; on the contrary, it treats them as defeated enemies. Lack of reconstruction would not only leave former opposition-held areas in unacceptable humanitarian conditions, but would indeed foster new unrest and create breeding grounds for a resurrected IS or "IS 2.0."

Europe should make clear to Russia and thus to Damascus that it is prepared to contribute to reconstruction in Syria in a conditional approach based on three elements: rights, protection and access. More specifically, these conditions would include a modicum of rule of law and civil rights, such as the rights of returnees and refugees to their property and freedom; protections for the most vulnerable, notable displaced persons, children, detainees and anyone who has been vanquished in the war; and access for international organizations, NGOs and diplomats. The more progress there is with regard to these elements, the more funding that could be made available. Support would principally go to the most needy areas and people in Syria, particularly war-damaged locations such as Aleppo, Homs and the suburbs of Damascus, but also Raqqa, which was heavily destroyed during the US-led campaign to oust the IS from the city.

Support should not be channeled through the institutions of the central state, but through international NGOs and UN agencies that, in turn, will work with municipalities and local NGOs, employ local people and thus also be able to monitor progress and make sure that disbursements actually reach people and places in need. While this will lead to a slower flow of funds and smaller-scale projects – low-income housing, schools, local clinics – than would be the case with projects controlled by government agencies or private developers that enjoy high-level patronage, it is likely to be more effective. Neither the Syrian government nor Iran will welcome such an approach. Russia, however, which is demanding European reconstruction support for Syria, would understand and probably even appreciate it.

Does this mean the Syrian government should be ignored? No. The regime is there to stay and European states need official and unofficial channels to communicate with Damascus. Diplomatic relations are not a reward for good behavior. Most EU states have not cut diplomatic ties but rather have reduced or withdrawn their personnel. They should now find a common line on how to re-establish political contact with the Syrian government. Diplomatic presence can improve access, allows for a realistic assessment of the situation and may, at times, help solve humanitarian or other problems. Furthermore, it demonstrates to the people in Syria that the international community is not indifferent to what happens in their country.

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PICTURE ALLIANCE / REUTERS

Counterstrike: Chief of General Staff Gadi Eizenkot (right; talking to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu) in 2015 admitted to having carried out thousands of attacks on Iranian arms transports and military facilities in Syria over the past four years.

War and non-war

As long as civil war in Syria continues, neither Israel nor Iran can have an interest in escalating the conflict between their two countries. And yet, the conflict has already taken on a sinister tone

BY GISELA DACHS

It's nothing new for Iran and Israel to find themselves on a collision course. In the past, confrontations between these two countries – including cyberattacks, Israeli intelligence operations and Iran-sponsored terrorist attacks abroad – were often spectacular, but almost always covert. At the moment, however, we are seeing confrontations increasingly carried out in the open, for all to see. For example, direct military clashes took place on Feb. 10, 2018, on May 10, 2018 and on Jan. 21, 2019, roughly 1,500 kilometers from Tehran.

Of course, the setting in each case was Syria, where President Bashar al-Assad – with help from Iran and Russia – is now emerging triumphant from the civil war. Today, in a strategic environment that has been fundamentally transformed since 2011, all actors in the region are jockeying to establish new positions. For example, Iran has significantly expanded its influence in Syria and is eager to have a say in rebuilding the country's future. According to the argument put forth by Tehran, Iran's presence in the region is legitimate, seeing as it comes at the request of the government in Damascus. Israel considers this to be mere pretext and accuses Tehran of seeking only to expand its power and to achieve a position from which it can attack its "Zionist archenemy" from three directions in the future.

If that were the case, Israel would be forced to deal on its northern border not only with Syria but also with the Lebanese Hezbollah, a militia heavily armored by Tehran. On its southern border in Gaza, it would have to continue to deal with Hamas, the Islamist movement supported by Iran. In other words, with Tehran closer than ever before, Jerusalem is determined to keep it at a distance by regularly and heavily attacking Iranian targets in Syria.

Until now, all of this happened without Israel ever having to admit to its military strikes. At the beginning of this year, however, the outgoing Chief of General Staff Gadi Eizenkot officially admitted to having carried out thousands of airstrikes on Iranian arms transports and military facilities in Syria over the past four years. This new openness can be interpreted primarily as a warning designed to be heard loud and clear in Tehran. Jerusalem wants to send out the message that Iran's entrenchment along its neighbor to the north crosses a red line, and that Israel will seek at all costs to prevent an Iranian corridor of influence – one that would stretch from Tehran across Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and all the way to the Mediterranean.

There is also great concern that the striking force of pro-Iranian militias could increase. Israel recently destroyed six Hezbollah tunnels that had been dug below the border in Lebanon. Today, Hezbollah already has an arsenal of roughly 130,000 missiles that could easily reach Tel Aviv. Last September, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu presented to the UN General Assembly a map of Beirut that showed where Iranian weapons factories were thought to be located. Three days later, when diplomats went to inspect these sites, they found nothing – that is, nothing left.

Still, Tehran makes no secret about its efforts to supply its henchmen with the most state-of-the-art military equipment available. As Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani recently noted, Iran is continuing to deliver precision weapons to militias in Lebanon and Gaza so that they can unleash an "inferno" in response to "any foolish Israeli behavior."

This new Israeli transparency is no doubt designed to act as a deterrence and thus to prevent war. The Israeli Air Force's freedom to attack is based on the assumption that – at least as long as the civil war in Syria is not officially over – none of the parties to that conflict has an interest in yet another confrontation.

The new strategy of openness is quite controversial in Israel. What is not at all controversial is the assessment that Tehran's aspirations to hegemony have long since become something that other parts of the world should be worried about. From the very beginning, there was much criticism that Iran's thirst for power could not be restrained by the nuclear deal. In addition to the supply of state-of-the-art weapons technology and funds for its henchmen in Lebanon, Yemen and Gaza, the agreement also involves Iranian activities in Europe. For example, Iranian intelligence was recently caught planning attacks in Denmark and France.

In keeping with a tacit US-Russian agreement, it is up to Russia to make sure that the Iranian and Shi'ite militias in Syria stay at least 80 kilometers away from the Israeli border. In practice, however, this has not worked. In November, Israeli media revealed that Syria had stationed roughly 10,000 soldiers at its borders with Iraq and Israel and that the newly created divisions would be trained by officers of the Al-Quds Brigades, a special unit of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.

A first collision of interests between Russia and Israel occurred after a Russian Ilyushin IL-20 aircraft was shot down over Syrian territory in late September 2018, an incident Moscow blamed on Israel. After that, Israeli attacks continued, yet no longer in the vicinity of Russian bases. Since then, Russia has pursued a double strategy, on the one hand it condemns Israeli airstrikes on Syria, on the other it assures Israel that it will guarantee its security.

Still, things could easily get out of control. What's more, the electoral campaign has just got underway in Israel, and it would not be the first time external actors attempted to influence Israeli voting behavior in Israel by launching military attacks. This makes the situation even more unpredictable.

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The Israeli defense

Military success in the age of terrorist armies hinges on public education, too

BY RAFAEL L. BARDAJÍ AND DAVIS LEWIN

Democratic nations constrain their militaries in line with a moral code developed over centuries, forged in the face of the horrors of war and enshrined in the Law of Armed Conflict. However, recent history has shown that much of the fighting Western armies and their democratic allies have had to engage in has been against adversaries who abuse these rules purposefully for battlefield gains. This is particularly prominent in relation to hybrid terrorist armies making unlawful tactical and strategic gains through the abuse of civilians and the special protections they are afforded. In many cases, the enemy sees civilian deaths as a tactical success.

Our High Level Military Group of senior retired military personnel from ten democratic nations, including the former German, Italian and Canadian chiefs of the defense staff, has examined this challenging new reality through the lens of their own operational experience. We studied Israel's military operations in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon, as well as campaigns by Western and allied militaries in Afghanistan, Colombia, Iraq, Mali and Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

Adversaries in these conflicts all share an approach to warfare that has war crimes built into its basic premises. The deliberate failure to distinguish between combatants and civilians, placing them at the center of military operations and thus exploiting the protections Western militaries will adhere to, is a studied tactic. They use human shields, protected locations such as hospitals as well as civilian housing as bases, weapons stores and command and control centers. Advances in communications technology have also had a major impact on the fight against irregular and terrorist adversaries, who often display a highly developed ability to exploit social and traditional media in order to influence the battle over political narratives with real strategic effect. As such, ill-informed political and social narratives, particularly where enemy messages meet receptive amplifiers in our own civic arenas, inflict serious harm on the ability to prevail in such conflicts.

International institutions and human rights organizations also too often engage in misleading or politicized narratives around core concepts of warfare and international law, while governments fail to assert to their publics what such warfare entails. The unwarranted legal pursuit of troops post-conflict in some countries has compounded their uncertainty over whether our nations will continue to stand behind them as they seek to defend us.

Yet the militaries of all the democracies we examined in detail go to great lengths to avoid civilian casualties by using strict rules of engagement and command and control in the face of terror armies. In many cases, the measures employed to protect civilians constitute a grave tactical disadvantage on the battlefield and go above the requirements of the law of armed conflict.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the case of Israel, a nation slandered so widely that its allies in Europe are nearly as reticent as its traditional adversaries in the Arab world to admit that it needs its world-class intelligence and technological assistance. Yet our work shows that in clear contrast to the global campaign of propaganda against the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), the country has developed the most sophisticated mechanisms of any democracy to prevent the loss of civilian life when it fights adversaries such as Hamas, which hides behind civilians in Gaza, and Hezbollah, which has worked with Iran to capture Lebanon and turn the entire southern border of that country into a military enclave hidden in plain sight among innocent civilians.

Israeli tactics to preserve civilian life exceed similar attempts by other democratic nations because they are based on battlefield intelligence resources that other militaries cannot match in the war zones in which they are called upon to operate. Military commanders from other democratic nations would thus be gravely concerned if the standards Israel sets become customary norms, no matter that their own standards adhere to and, in some cases, also exceed applicable laws.

We have reached a point where our terrorist enemies fight without any restraints, yet our own soldiers are placed in ever greater danger while having to worry ever more about the legitimacy of their military actions. Our conclusion: We must educate our publics about the military, strategic, political and, above, all moral realities of our actions.

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Grit and grind: Iraqi youths train for karate on a mountainside in Sulaymaniya in January of this year.

PICTURE ALLIANCE / FERIQ FEREC

Surprising endurance

When it comes to Iraq, it is easy to expect the worst, but the country refuses to collapse

BY ANDREA BÖHM

During the past 15 years, Iraq has been the subject of numerous obituaries written by foreign policy experts and journalists – including myself. After the United States and its allies brought down Saddam Hussein in 2003, the country seemed constantly on the verge of collapse. Lately, however, it has become a source of better news. In late 2017, the government in Baghdad declared victory over the Islamic State (IS). Car bombs have become rare. Another round of elections has been held. Oil exports have picked up. And so has nightlife in Baghdad. Travel companies offer "adventure holidays" to foreigners. Is Iraq finally on the path to stabilization?

Making predictions about a nation state so volatile is presumptuous. But with a fresh look, it is possible to better comprehend its dynamics.

Over the past decades, several key words have shaped the debate on Iraq: religious sectarianism and its rifts between Shia and Sunni, ethnic hostility between Arabs and Kurds and the struggle over oil. While all of the above contribute to the country's fragility, they also lead us to believe that this fragility is something inherently "Iraqi," "Arab" or "Middle Eastern," and therefore abnormal.

That is misleading. The Middle East is afflicted by a set of global challenges that increasingly impact every other part of the world as well, albeit in different ways and dimensions: the crisis of the nation state, the volatility of a globalized economy and its impact on labor, and the effects of climate change. What makes Iraq an exceptional case is the agglomeration and mutual acceleration of these crises – and the often surprising resilience of its people.

Iraq's prospects of becoming a stable nation state were not exactly promising when it was founded after World War I. The quasi-colonial British project with arbitrary borders was soon burdened with a toxic sequence of military coups, superpower meddling, a particularly brutal dictatorship, wars against its neighbors Iran and Kuwait and crippling international sanctions.

The country's social and physical infrastructure was already in ruins when the US-led intervention began in 2003. A quick military victory was followed by a disastrous occupation and a golden opportunity for other actors to expand: Iran on the one hand and Al Qaeda and the IS on the other, with the latter carving out a third of the country's territory for its caliphate in 2014. The end of Iraq as we know it seemed near.

Why didn't this happen? First of all, neither the US nor Iran, the two main foreign antagonists in Iraq, wanted the country to fall apart. Both became de facto allies forcing IS to abandon its caliphate (and killing thousands of civilians in the process). Both also opposed the Kurdish vote for independence in 2017, which Baghdad blocked militarily with the blessing of Washington and Tehran.

Another factor holding the country together seems less obvious: Iraqi nationalism. The winner of the last parliamentary election in May 2018 was none other than Muqtada al-Sadr, the former Shia firebrand whose militia wreaked havoc in the years of the US-led occupation. Today he has joined the political process. He champions an Iraqi identity and openly opposes Iranian influence.

His success must be taken with several grains of salt: Voter participation reached a new low at only 45 percent and al-Sadr's alliance must seek compromises with the runner-up, Hadi Al-Amiri, a Shia leader with close ties to Tehran. Still, the support for al-Sadr by a large part of the poorer Shia population and even a growing number of Sunnis indicates that many Iraqis are tired of sectarianism and being bossed around by their aggressive Persian neighbor. Iraq and Iran have Shia majorities, but many Iraqi Shias value their Arab identity at least as highly as they value their religious affiliation.

Even in the Kurdish part of the country, an Iraqi passport is more popular than one may imagine. Despite the overwhelming vote for independence in September 2017, many Kurds saw the referendum for what it was: a maneuver by Masoud Barzani, then-president of the Kurdish autonomous region, to stay in power despite accusations of plundering the region's oil wealth. Many Kurds want autonomy *within* an Iraqi nation state, but most of all they demand decent public services, jobs and less corruption.

That the borders of the Iraqi nation state have proved more stable than expected does not mean the state is doing well.

Its fate is becoming increasingly intertwined with the forces of a globalized economy and the growing job crisis in the Middle East. The "gold rush" of privatizations after 2003 provided lucrative contracts for American companies and huge kickbacks for a new Iraqi elite, but it never created the thriving private sector and the jobs that were promised.

This partly fueled the uprising against the occupation. It also exacerbated the discrimination of the once dominant Sunni minority, as resources were now directed towards the once suppressed Shia majority. Al Qaeda and later IS dexterously tapped into the growing Sunni resentment.

According to the World Bank, several million Iraqis are still in need of humanitarian assistance and a quarter of its working-age population is either jobless or underemployed. Agricultural production has declined by 40 percent, which makes Iraq more dependent on Iranian imports and thereby pushes it deeper into the confrontation between Washington and Tehran.

Water scarcity and periods of drought are further endangering food security. Both are aggravated by climate change. It is a macabre twist of fate that the region of the Persian Gulf is already much more severely affected by climate change than the countries that consume its oil.

Of all the Gulf states, Iraq is the least prepared for that scenario. Public services are at best inadequate while contingency plans for ecological disasters simply do not exist. Corruption is rampant. Last summer, thousands of people in the southern and predominantly Shia oil city of Basra took to the streets to protest poisonous tap water and long power cuts during temperatures of almost 50 degrees Celsius. Among them were many young Shia men who had fought against the Islamic State up north, only to return and join the masses of unemployed in their hometown.

The unrest in Basra highlighted two important developments. First, protests against corruption, poverty and pollution continue in Iraq as well as in other Arab countries, where the economic and ecological situation is worse today than on the eve of the Arab Spring in 2011.

Second, Iraq's new model of "militia governance" has clearly met its limits. Muqtada al-Sadr and Hadi Al-Amiri may have opposing views of Iran's role in the region. But like several other leading politicians, they both rely on their well-armed militias as the backbone of their political aspirations. These militias have proved to be crucial ground troops in the fight against IS. They are also job machines. Their mostly poor recruits receive a steady income and, of equal importance, social recognition as "heroic holy warriors" seeking martyrdom.

Now that the war against IS is over – at least for the time being – funds for armed groups are becoming more scarce and those fighters who want to return to civilian life are demanding better opportunities.

The country is once more at a crossroads. Either its political stakeholders move towards a policy of the common good – which would require sincere efforts to stem corruption and to use public resources for economic reconstruction benefiting all groups – or sectarianism and clientele politics will thrive again and channel resources, including donor money, to the partly armed ethnic and religious support bases of the country's strongmen. This would accelerate a Shia-centric state-building process mostly at the expense of the Sunni part of the population, but also at the expense of Kurds and poorer Shia.

When it comes to Iraq, it is easy to expect the worst. Another summer without electricity and clean water may provoke a much more violent protest than demonstrations and barricades. Even Iran may want to push its Iraqi protégés towards a more inclusive and responsible policy in order not to endanger its own sphere of influence. It certainly did not escape the attention of Tehran that one of the few buildings set on fire during the protests in Basra was the Iranian consulate.

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Indifference to chaos

What Libya tells us about Europe's role in its unstable neighborhood

BY WOLFRAM LACHER

For the past four years, US and European policymakers have thrown up their hands in despair at their inability to influence the course of the war in Syria. Russia, Iran and Turkey, they complain, have relegated them to secondary roles. But the West's failure to contain the conflicts in Libya since 2014 tells a different story.

Libya is not a theater of intense rivalry between major powers and regional heavyweights. Meddling by states such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt is not an inevitable consequence of the new multipolar disorder in the Middle East and North Africa. Rather, the United States and Europeans have stood by – and eventually joined in – as cavalier interference by minor powers turned Libya into a playing field without rules. The Libyan crisis continues to deepen, not least due to a stunning indifference among Western governments to the chaos on Europe's doorstep.

In December 2015, Western states were the main backers of a fragile agreement to overcome the political divides plaguing Libyan factions and form a Government of National Accord (GNA). While that agreement had many flaws, the principal cause of its failure was the continued foreign support – from the UAE, Egypt and France – of the leading opponent of the deal, Khalifa Haftar, who now effectively controls eastern Libya. The GNA has survived in Tripoli largely thanks to its status as the internationally recognized government. Meanwhile, institutional divides have persisted and Haftar has advanced. Attempts to broker a deal that would include Haftar in a unified government have proven elusive.

However, it is important not to overstate the role of foreign actors in Libya's conflicts, whose fundamental driver is an ever-evolving power struggle between the country's innumerable factions. External actors did not push Libya into civil war; rather, Libyan conflict parties mobilized foreign support as the struggles escalated in 2014.

Haftar, in particular, has enjoyed substantial foreign backing. But most armed groups sustain themselves by tapping into Libya's flourishing war economy, siphoning off state funds through a variety of licit and illicit schemes.

A look at the key foreign players in Libya tells us much about the extent and limits of external involvement. By far, the leading foreign meddler is the UAE, a small, faraway state that has little tangible interest in Libya and remains unaffected by the fallout of the Libyan crisis. Next comes Egypt, which is directly affected by instability in Libya and has a major stake in developments there but has long ceased to be a leading regional power. Libya is the only regional hotspot where Egypt now plays a notable role.

The regional heavyweights Saudi Arabia and Iran have not displayed any interest in Libya. The UAE and Egypt accuse their regional foes – Qatar and Turkey – of backing "terrorists" in Libya, but evidence of Qatari or Turkish support to Libyan factions is scarce, and to the extent that it does exist, it pales in comparison to Emirati and Egyptian support for Haftar.

This is the extent of regional involvement. There is much talk of Russia, which has printed currency for the parallel central bank in eastern Libya, deployed military advisors with Haftar and simultaneously reached out to a range of other players in Libya. But there is much to suggest that Russian actions in Libya are first and foremost a cheap way of signaling that it can act as a spoiler if ignored. Russian support for Haftar only materialized after he had already emerged as a key player in the east, and after the onset of US and French counter-terrorism assistance to Haftar.

Among Western governments, Italy is by far the most active in Libya. This is unsurprising, as Italy is most directly affected, but also telling, as it underscores the absence of serious engagement by major powers. France has stood out for its erratic, short-lived diplomatic initiatives and modest military support to Haftar, pioneering the outreach of other Western states to the warlord in the east. The embarrassing diplomatic spats between France and Italy over Libya in the past year are not conflicts over substance; rather, they are a manifestation of the Elysée's casual attitude towards Libya policy, and of populist rhetoric by Italian politicians.

US disengagement from anything other than counter-terrorism began under President Barack Obama – following the killing of the US ambassador in Benghazi in 2012 – and has accelerated under Trump. A defining moment came in July 2018, when the US, worried about rising oil prices as it prepared to impose new sanctions on Iran, successfully pressured the Emiratis and forced Haftar to lift his blockade on oil exports from ports under his control. The episode showed that the US could solve major problems in Libya if it cared – but it quite obviously does not.

Amid international indifference, Libya has become a place where anything goes. It is the only country on earth where, when an airstrike happens, the responsible party could be any of at least two local and four foreign governments – but in many cases, it will never be publicly identified.

The UAE was a forerunner in this regard when it bombed armed groups in Tripoli in 2014 – apparently without even informing the US. Since then, a number of airstrikes, believed to have been carried out by Egypt, have caused significant civilian casualties. As in other countries, US strikes against purported terrorists are also regularly followed by local allegations that the victims were innocent civilians; but contrary to such cases in Yemen or Pakistan, the international media has yet to investigate such claims in Libya.

The UN arms embargo offers another striking illustration. The UN Panel of Experts meticulously documents blatant violations of the embargo by regional, Eastern European and Western states – which the UN Security Council then carefully ignores. It has recently moved to impose targeted sanctions on selected Libyan "spoilers" – but these are, without exception, politically expendable losers. Powerful players with ties to foreign states can be certain of their impunity.

While not initially among the foreign actors who turned Libya into a free-for-all, the Europeans are now doing their share to keep it that way. The European approach to curbing migration from Libya's shores, spearheaded by Italy, amounts to refoulement by proxy. Europeans are providing support to Libyan coastguard and interior ministry units that are themselves deeply involved in the economy of migrant extortion. For now, the European approach has been grimly successful in reducing migrant crossings, but at tremendous human cost – and by trampling international law and human rights.

For those who claim to defend a rules-based international order, Libya would be a good place to start. As a first step, this would require European governments to transcend their puzzling disinterest in the turmoil in their immediate neighborhood. Admittedly, there are few incentives to do so for leaders who are driven by short-term priorities. Libya seldom features in the media, who have trouble getting in and often find Libya's complexity hard to communicate. Libya's role as a transit country for migration – which all Europeans recognize as strategic – has moved to the background, as a result of short-sighted policies that undermine the overall objective of stabilizing Libya. And Libya's conflicts are hardly tempting for European leaders with prospects of quick wins that would allow them to shine in domestic politics. But if Europeans want to help solve a crisis that directly affects them – and prevent others from deepening it further – they need to be much more strategic, assertive and united.

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Erdoğan's triumph and defeat

The clear winners in Syria are Assad, Iran and Russia – with the Kurds caught between a rock and hard place

BY FRANK NORDHAUSEN

It is not often that something leaves Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan speechless. Yet following his visit to Moscow in late January, Erdoğan needed several days to return to his old rhetorical form. His meeting with the Kremlin leadership was the latest in a series of talks on resolving the drama in northern Syria. US President Donald Trump's surprise announcement on Dec. 19 that he would pull out all 2,000 US troops from the war-wracked country has reshuffled the cards. When the Americans leave, there can be no more doubt that Syria's fate will be decided in Moscow. Iran, meanwhile, is cementing its position, while the Kurds suddenly face an existential threat.

After returning from Russia, Erdoğan said Turkey was ready to "unilaterally establish a safe zone in northern Syria if one does not emerge in the next few months," because his country "cannot wait forever." This was just a windy admission of defeat. Since November, Erdoğan had been announcing an "attack within the coming days." In January, he said a 30-km buffer zone along the Turkish border in Syria's Kurdish region would be set up "soon."

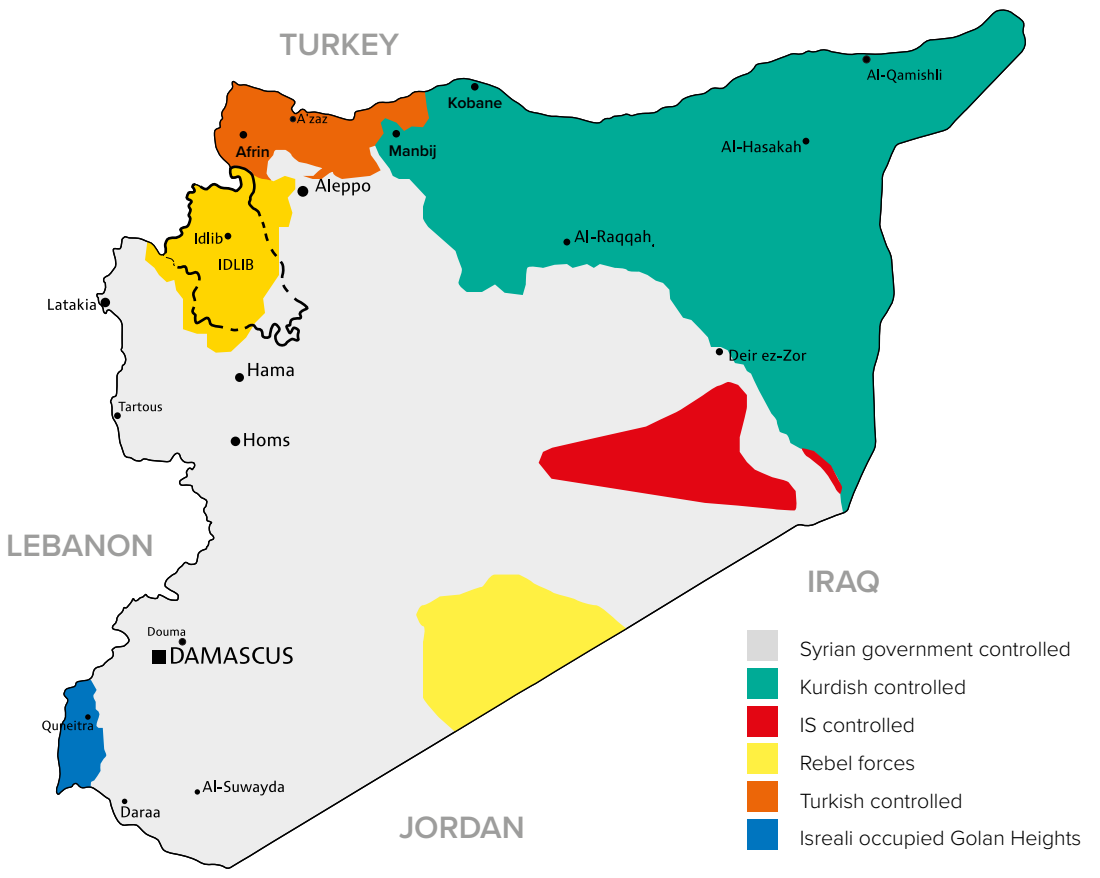
Erdoğan wants to continue the interventionist policy he launched in Syria in 2016 to prevent the formation of a contiguous Kurdish state on Turkey's southern border. He fears that such a Kurdish republic could pose a threat to Turkey. Now that Ankara already maintains two protectorates in Syria, it also has its sights set on the province of Manbij, west of the Euphrates, which is currently under Kurdish-Arab administration, as well as the autonomous Kurdish cantons beyond the river's eastern bank.

The Syrian Kurds currently control about a third of Syria. Although no clearly documented attacks against Turkey have been launched from this territory, it is also true that the area's ruling PYD and its 30,000-strong People's Defense Units (YPG) are offshoots of the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party, the PKK, which has been fighting against the Turkish state for 35 years. While Turkey makes no distinction between the three groups, calling them all terrorists, the US also lists the PKK as a terrorist organization yet has fought alongside the PYD and YPG against the jihadist militia Islamic State. In an alliance with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and with US air support, the Kurds have largely routed the Islamic State.

Trump used this successful campaign as the occasion to prematurely proclaim victory against IS and announce the US withdrawal, thereby keeping a campaign promise and relieving Washington of its strategic dilemma of having to choose between the YPG and Turkey. The result was an immediate destabilization of northern Syria. The Kurds, who were relying on US protection from Turkey at least in the medium term, sensed betrayal, even though Trump later revised his stance, saying the pullout would take place "over a period of time" and that he would protect the Kurds, even though no one knows how he intends to do so.

Feeling triumphant, Erdoğan euphorically proclaimed his anti-Kurdish offensive, which would begin against Manbij. The Kurds, however, responded immediately. Facing the two bad options of either a Turkish offensive or a deal with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, they chose the latter. They called on Damascus for help against the Turks and began fresh talks over their future status in a unified Syria.

The tactic worked. To prevent a Turkish intervention, Syrian government troops and Russian units entered Manbij in December and began joint patrols with the YPG. Russian President Vladimir Putin, who wants to keep Turkey's power in check, is now pressuring Damascus to come to terms with the Kurds. In so doing, the Kremlin has conclusively become the dominant external actor in the Syrian theater – and its protégé Assad the biggest winner. With Russian and Iranian help, his forces have reconquered about two-thirds of Syria's territory, but the north and northeast remained mostly beyond Assad's reach. That will now probably change.



For Erdoğan, however, there was no green light from the Kremlin at the Moscow summit, unlike last year regarding Afrin. Moscow insists that a buffer zone could only be negotiated with the Syrian government, "because ultimately the necessity that the Syrian government reclaims control over its entire territory, including the zone, is clear to all," said Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Putin offered Erdoğan a face-saving measure in the form of the 1998 Adana Agreement between Syria and Turkey, in which both countries agreed to cooperate on security matters. Yet by pledging to uphold Adana, Erdoğan was in fact following Russia's demand that he once again cooperate with Assad officially – something Erdoğan had, until then, always vehemently rejected.

And the Turkish president has a second problem. In Idlib, the last of the rebel-controlled provinces in Syria, Turkey is unwilling or unable to disarm the Al Qaeda-affiliated HTS militia, despite Ankara's pledges to the Russians. The jihadists now control nearly the entire Idlib enclave. Putin is angry – military action against the rebels, probably sending new waves of refugees across Turkey's borders, will now be harder to avoid.

Erdoğan's triumph has turned into defeat. The clear winners of the US pullout from Syria, meanwhile, are Assad, Iran and Russia, which continues to inch closer to its goal of a Shi'ite land bridge to the Mediterranean. The question now is whether Russia has taken on a bigger load than it can handle.

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Reclassified

Afghanistan is again the world's deadliest conflict

BY THOMAS RUTTIG

Reports of a "breakthrough" in US-Taliban talks have returned Afghanistan to the international limelight. Although both sides have reached consensus about a "framework" to deal with two key issues – a US troop withdrawal and Taliban guarantees about preventing a return of Al Qaeda-type terrorist groups to the country – this still needs to be fleshed out and represents just a first step in the marathon to a peace deal. Too many details remain open, not least about the transformation of the current political system into one including the Taliban. Significantly, the Afghan government has yet to be part of these negotiations.

While making progress, Zalmay Khalilzad, Washington's new Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, must make sure that democratic, human, women's and minority rights provided by the current constitution are transferred to the new political system. A peace deal that has no buy-in for the majority of Afghans would be worthless.

At the end of last year, alarm bells rang across Afghanistan. Only a few days after the announcement – which has since been somewhat walked back – that the US would extract all its troops from Kurdish territories in Syria, US news outlets reported that President Donald Trump has also decided to withdraw half of America's 14,000 troops currently stationed in Afghanistan. This, too, has since been minimized in an all too familiar way: *The Washington Post* wrote that Trump's "military advisers have convinced him that a smaller, and slower, withdrawal is best for now."

There is no doubt that the Afghan government is completely dependent on external resources, thus on the US and their allies. According to various sources, the state relies on financial support for between 60 and 90 percent of its costs – more than any other country in the world. Moreover, US Special Forces and air support oftentimes make all the difference when the Taliban attacks Afghan cities. A substantial US withdrawal, if linked with a cut to most of its aid, could lead to its breakdown. This cannot be desirable for Washington. So, without Kabul's buy-in, it is inconceivable that any deal could be implemented.

Along with the US soldiers, the 38 other NATO and non-NATO countries would also leave, including the 1,300 German soldiers currently stationed there, as Minister of Defense Ursula von der Leyen told the *Rheinische Post* in January.

Afghan security forces are far from being able to hold the insurgency in check without outside help. US military experts say that Afghan troops need "at least another 5–10 years" of international aid and advice.

For some years, Afghanistan has been seeing the erosion of what official German analyses, echoing statements by NATO, describe as a "military stalemate." But since the end of 2014, the war has significantly broadened and intensified. Indicators such as the number of civilian war casualties, losses among armed government forces, internally displaced persons and the ratio between government- and Taliban-controlled areas are plateauing on all-time highs.

The UN cited deteriorating security conditions in 2016 and 2017 and a consistently high level of uncertainty in 2018. It also upgraded the country from post-conflict back to in-conflict. Think tanks like the International Crisis Group and the US Council on Foreign Relations now again classify Afghanistan as the deadliest conflict in the world.

IMAGO/XINHUA

The apprentices: Afghan soldiers at a military training center in Kandahar province, January 2019.

The Taliban control no provincial capitals and only a few of the almost 400 district centers. But according to a survey by the BBC, they carry out a significant amount of activity in roughly 70 percent of the country and control much of rural Afghanistan, encircling many cities and towns. In many cases, however, local populations work towards making sure that they do not occupy such centers, as they hope to avoid counterattacks from the air and the destruction they would cause. When the Taliban lost the large city of Ghazni after a five-day occupation, it was unclear whether it was the result of pressure from the allies or their own free will. The local offshoot of the Islamic State holds almost no territory, yet possesses underground urban structures with the potential to carry out brutal terror attacks, above all against Shi'ites.

For Northern Afghanistan – where the Bundeswehr leads the Train Advise Assist Command-North (TAAC-North) part of Operation Resolute Support headquartered in Mazar-i-Sharif – the social anthropologist Kristóf Gosztonyi cites a decreasing number of security incidents while the Taliban still increase control, meaning their military campaign has become more focused. In Balkh Province, the Taliban are focused partly at the outskirts of its capital city of Mazar-i-Sharif. In October, a group of election volunteers who mistakenly ventured out of Mazar's city limits ran into Taliban forces and were killed. Furthermore, the Taliban's expanded bases in Samangan Province are no longer far removed from the Bundeswehr-operated Camp Marmal.

Not only is the military stalemate eroding (a formulation used by the UN and more recently by former US National Security Advisor Richard Haass), so are many of the development-related achievements of the last 17 years. According to data from the World Bank and the UN, 54.5 percent of Afghans now live below the poverty line – just as in 2003, shortly after the fall of the Taliban. Moreover, economic growth once again trails population growth.

Under these conditions, the Afghan government, when provided with foreign aid, can barely hold its ground against the Taliban. If no progress is made, elections riddled with fraud will further erode the already severely compromised trust of the populace. The upcoming presidential election, now delayed until July 2019, could become mired in organizational chaos, as was the case with the 2018 parliamentary elections and most other previous ones. The Taliban can simply wait and see if the Kabul government proceeds to crumble.

The government's only trump card is the fact that very few Afghans prefer Taliban rule. If the government does not make its voice heard, many will have no choice other than to submit to Taliban rule – just like their fellow Afghans in the regions already controlled by rebel forces, where they have had to come to terms with this reality.

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The war IS not over

Pulling out would lead to more conflict on the ground and more instability overall

BY BEHNAM SAID

Shortly before the holidays, on Dec. 19, 2018, US President Donald Trump claimed victory over the Islamic State (IS) and ordered the withdrawal of 2,000 American troops from the northeast of Syria. Experts and observers mostly agreed that the true beneficiaries of this decision were Turkey on the one side and the current Syrian government and its allies Russia and Iran on the other. Additional winners include jihadi militants such as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, Hurras ad-Din and IS, which is far from being defeated everywhere.

To assess the impact of the withdrawal on the capabilities of IS, it is important to keep in mind that the organization has deep regional roots and long-standing experience in the field. Its history did not begin with territorial control, which was a later outcome of its successful strategy. It was founded in October 2004 as the Iraqi branch of Al Qaeda and in its first years grew in terms of numbers and activities. Within a short period of time, Al Qaeda in Iraq became one of the most feared and powerful militias in postwar Iraq. In January 2006, it declared the "Islamic State of Iraq," an alliance of jihadist insurgent groups under its leadership. Over the next few years, the tide began to turn: IS leaders overestimated their power and pushed too hard. The organization became estranged from the local population, which grew more and more outraged by the religious strictness and rough behavior of IS members.

The US troops sent to Syria by President Barack Obama in 2015 were reinforced as part of the coalition against IS. They also recruited Sunni tribal militias for the fight against the Islamic State. Between 2008 and 2010, many IS fighters were either incarcerated or killed. Its leadership was decimated.

In 2010, the Pentagon believed it had killed or imprisoned 34 of the Islamic State's most important 42 leaders and that only an estimated number of 700 fighters remained. For this reason, IS was no longer perceived as an existential threat. Only four years later, however, it rose like Phoenix from the ashes to conquer a wide swath of territory in Syria and Iraq, expanding its land reach far beyond its core regions. Important cities like Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria fell under IS control.

After Obama declared war on IS and formed an international alliance of 74 nations in September 2014, pressure on the jihadi militias increased. IS has since lost almost all of its territory in Syria and Iraq. Nonetheless, in September 2018, the US Department of Defense estimated the number of IS fighters in Iraq and Syria to be between 20,000 and 30,000 individuals, divided more or less equally between the two countries. Even if there were only 10,000 to 15,000 fighters, this would be a far larger number than the 700 reported in 2010. Furthermore, the financial situation of IS and its supply of weapons is far better than in its worst days in 2010. In both Syria and Iraq, IS is far from being defeated. It is still carrying out attacks against civilians and security forces.

Brett McGurk, then-special presidential envoy for the global coalition to defeat the group, warned a few days before the announcement of the withdrawal that IS is a "significantly degraded organization," but that no one should be so naïve as to "just declare victory and walk away. We have to maintain pressure on these networks really for a period of years." Two days after Trump's statement declaring the US withdrawal and one day after US Defense Secretary James Mattis announced he would step down at the end of February, McGurk submitted his resignation. In his resignation letter, he underlined the importance of respecting allies, with a hint to the Kurdish forces that would be left in the lurch. The response of US allies to Trump's decision was unanimously negative.

The withdrawal leaves the field wide open for the Syrian government, Russia and Iran as well as for Turkey. The hard-line rebel factions will extend their activities at the expense of the Kurds in northeast Syria. This will lead to more conflict on the ground and to more instability – a perfect setting for IS, which is waiting in the desert for a next chance.

The leaders of the Islamic State are experienced enough to know that time is on their side as they patiently work towards a comeback. The militants have gone underground and returned to their insurgent roots. For the moment, they are back in the hit-and-run business while attempting to rebuild their networks.

PICTURE ALLIANCE/REUTERS

Trump withdrawal syndrome: It is naïve to "just declare victory and walk away," says former Special Envoy Brett McGurk.

To make matters worse, just a day after announcing his decision on Syria, President Trump also ordered the withdrawal of half of the 14,000 US troops stationed in Afghanistan. Last year, Afghanistan witnessed a massive military campaign by the strengthened Taliban militia in various parts of the country. Although the Afghan government officially announced that it would be able to maintain security without US support, every observer of the developments knows that even now – with US boots on the ground – Afghanistan is far from being a peaceful and stable country. For the Taliban, the announcement is seen as the fulfillment of their long-declared prophecy of a US defeat in Afghanistan, especially as it comes before a deal with the Taliban is reached.

Both IS and the Taliban began as insurgent groups, not as regular armies. They have amply demonstrated their resilience when facing enormous military pressure. If this pressure lets up, it will be only a matter of time before we see them rise again.

BEHNAM SAID
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Denuclearization doubts

US-North Korean talks continue, but can Kim Jong-un's pledge to give up his nuclear program be taken at face value?

BY HANNS G. HILPERT

PICTURE ALLIANCE/AP PHOTO

The process of implementing a thousand provisions starts with one blast: Detonation of the command post facilities of North Korea's nuclear test site in Punggye-ri.

The White House has announced that US President Donald Trump and North Korea's Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un will hold their second summit meeting at the end of February. Optimists expect that Kim Jong-un will follow through with his stated willingness to denuclearize and commit to a verifiable, irreversible nuclear dismantling. Pessimists are afraid that we will see just another summit full of rhetoric and void of substance. As of today, we do not know what the summit meeting might hold, but we should be clear about where we stand.

Let us remember Summit I, when the two leaders convened in Singapore on June 6, 2018, for their first and unprecedented meeting. On his way home, President Trump spoke of a breakthrough and tweeted that North Korea no longer presented a nuclear threat.

Noted experts and observers disagreed. They deplored the summit's sparse final declaration, which lacked substance and perspective. They missed meaningful concessions in return for the tremendous political validation North Korea had received from meeting the president of the United States. Indeed, no definite steps on nuclear disarmament were announced.

These legitimate objections notwithstanding, the Singapore summit as such was significant and productive. Last year's summit tackled the root cause of the diplomatic failures of the past – the mutual distrust between the US and North Korea – instead of narrowly focusing on diplomatic and military issues and technicalities. Once the leaders have agreed on a common objective, it was said, negotiations will proceed in a good spirit and tensions can be reduced. Regrettably, this political approach has worked only to some extent.

To begin with, the most positive outcome so far is that the imminent risk of war has been repressed and diplomacy reigns again. Whereas in November 2017, some US military experts put the risk of war as high as 50 percent, in 2018, North Korea halted all missile and nuclear tests, thereby de-escalating military tensions.

The UN Security Council's sanctions regime against North Korea remains intact, notwithstanding the various sanctions violations, loopholes and the repeated calls for "adjustment" by China and Russia. Thus, the international community has sustained the pressure on North Korea to give up nuclear armament definitively and earnestly.

There is no doubt that the country has undertaken some initial steps towards denuclearization, for example the high-visibility dismantling of the Punggye-ri nuclear test site. However, these actions are far from sufficient to achieve the required irreversible abolition of nuclear and missile weapons. What is more, North Korea has refused to provide an inventory of its warheads and production facilities and remains adamantly against allowing international verification. Still worse, rather than phasing out its nuclear armaments, Pyongyang appears to be continuing to invest in upgrading its ballistic missile bases and nuclear production facilities, as has been disclosed by intelligence research institutions.

Given the unresolved controversial issues, it should come as no surprise that bilateral negotiations between the US and North Korea have stalled for some time. In addition to the absence of clear North Korean obligations, matters are further complicated by the lack of clarity surrounding the term "complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula." It may imply the North Korean demand that US troops leave South Korea and that nuclear-armed American bombers and submarines withdraw from the region.

Despite these various problems, the negotiations have not derailed. Indeed, there is talk among the ranks that in the run-up to the summit, the climate of the talks has become very good. Preparations are taking place at different working levels and through different channels. Both South Korea and China are participating in the negotiations in an indirect way.

South Korea experienced a remarkable rapprochement with North Korea in 2018. Over the year, the top leaders of the two Korean states met three times, concluding wide-reaching agreements on common political objectives, on security issues and on bilateral cooperation. Most notably, both sides agreed on practical steps to reduce border tensions, such as removing guard posts, carrying out demining operations and establishing no-fly zones.

These new arrangements do not amount to a "de facto non-aggression agreement," as a South Korean Blue House official has claimed, but they represent meaningful confidence-building measures and have effectively ratcheted down tensions in the DMZ. Beyond the inner-Korean rapprochement, South Korea has assumed the very delicate role of facilitation and mediation between North Korea, its former war enemy, and the US, its alliance partner.

China-North Korea relations have apparently eased; Kim Jong-un has visited the Chinese president in China four times after not meeting him in the first six years after succeeding his father. Yet normalizing the bilateral relationship does not reflect a changing strategic orientation. Rather, it follows political opportunism. China, wary not to lose influence in Pyongyang, is backing and reassuring North Korea in its negotiations with the US.

Looking ahead to the summit, no one can realistically expect that Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un will agree on a grand bargain that would end the complex and multifaceted conflict over North Korea's nuclear program. Aside from the impossibility of dealing with these many interwoven problems all at once, there remains significant doubt surrounding the sincerity of Kim's assertion to give up completely on the country's nuclear program, into which North Korea has invested so much for decades that it has become a significant part of its national identity.

Against this backdrop, the upcoming summit can ideally represent the first step of a nuclear exit process. Such a process can only be imagined as a gradual, long-term procedure involving several administrations. In order even to initiate such a positive development, the forthcoming summit must finally lead to a concrete commitment to nuclear disarmament.

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A new frontline at sea

Russia's aggression in the Black Sea shows how little it worries about a strong response from the West

BY ANN-DORIT BOY

For the first ten months of 2018, the war in Ukraine continued to simmer without making front-page news abroad. Neither the Russian-backed separatists nor Ukrainian forces escalated the fighting beyond limited but often deadly violations of the Minsk II agreement along the Eastern Ukrainian frontline. The situation changed on Nov. 25, when Russian coast guard vessels attacked and seized three Ukrainian naval vessels, two small gunboats and a tug in the Black Sea, preventing them from transiting to the Sea of Azov via the Kerch Strait. It was the first direct clash between Russia and Ukraine since the onset of the crisis in 2014, when Russia sent soldiers without uniform markings to invade the peninsula of Crimea and occupy the Donbass region.

SHUTTERSTOCK

The Kerch Strait is located between the Russian mainland to the east and Crimea to the west. Russia and Ukraine share these waters under an international treaty signed in 2003. After Russia annexed Crimea, however, it appears to consider the strait its national waters and is restricting access from Ukraine's eastern ports to the Black Sea. A new bridge across the Kerch Strait, which Russia opened in May 2018, was built too low for many larger Ukrainian ships to pass under. Furthermore, after the bridge's inauguration, the Russian coast guard – a branch of the Federal Secret Service (FSB) – began illegitimate checks on merchant ships. This effectively strangled business at the ports of Mariupol and Berdyansk in the Sea of Azov, which have been major export points for coal and steel since Soviet times.

Russia's attack in late November has raised tensions with Ukraine to a new high. Russian coast guard forces not only intercepted and blockaded the Ukrainian naval vessels; they also wounded several Ukrainian crew members. In total, Russian servicemen captured 24 Ukrainian sailors, who have been in custody since January 2019 and are being accused of illegal border crossing.

An investigation by Bellingcat, an independent group of internet researchers, confirmed the Ukrainian claim that the vessels were located in international waters of the Black Sea at the time of the attack. It is Ukraine's word against Russia's as to whether or not Ukraine followed advance notification procedures before attempting to transit the Kerch Strait.

During the summer months leading up to the incident, Russia reportedly expanded its military presence in the Sea of Azov to some 40 ships. In September, the Ukrainian government responded by announcing its intent to set up a new naval base in Berdyansk to "repel Russian aggression in the region." This goal is ambitious given that the Ukrainian navy has been substantially weakened by the loss of a larger part of its fleet during the annexation of Crimea and that it has thus far received little support from Western partners.


PICTURE ALLIANCE/REUTERS

Testing the waters: Russian naval blockade at the Kerch Strait

Not surprisingly, Russian media and military experts criticized the Ukrainian announcement as a provocation and warned that the government in Kiev should not invite NATO member fleets for friendly visits in the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea – both important passages for Russia's navy. Thus, the attack against the Ukrainian vessels can be interpreted as a warning shot to deter Ukraine's leadership from opening its new naval base in Berdyansk.

The timing of the clash – four months before the presidential elections in Ukraine – suggests that the Russian leadership was looking for an opportunity to interfere in Ukraine's political process. President Putin openly accused his Ukrainian counterpart, Petro Poroshenko, of provoking the incident in the Sea of Azov to boost his popularity, claiming "the war in Ukraine is not going to end – as long as the government in Kiev is in power."

The fact remains, however, that the Ukrainian president cannot settle this conflict unless Russia acts first. Yet Putin has yet to make a credible attempt to end the fighting. An unstable and chaotic Ukraine serves his interests better than a pacified one.

President Poroshenko, who started as a white hope after the pro-European revolution on Maidan Square, has lost domestic support for delaying critical anti-corruption reforms and keeping the old system of influential oligarchs intact. There is no doubt that Poroshenko is more likely to stay in power as long as the war continues. His decision to declare martial law for the first time since 2014 in reaction to Russia's attack was thus heavily criticized in Ukraine as a political stunt and also helped fuel Russian rhetoric.

The Kremlin's interference, however, will not increase the likelihood of another pro-Russian president in the upcoming elections in March, since a large majority of Ukrainians support independence from Russia in every possible way. The recent creation of a new Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which Poroshenko described as "tearing off the last chains that tied us to Moscow," might also help him win back some support.

Russia's aggression in the Black Sea also shows how little Putin worries about the possibility of a strong response from the West. The United States and Europe initially reacted with mere expressions of concern. Meanwhile, Washington offered a symbolic $10 million "to further build Ukraine's naval capacities." Germany and France pushed for an enlargement of the OSCE's Observer Mission in Ukraine to include the Kerch Strait, but Russia rejected the plan. It remains unclear if Berlin and Paris will at least be able to send their own forces to monitor the area, since Russia and Ukraine would have to agree on the terms of such a mission.

The November incident has revived dormant theories regarding the potential of a Russian invasion along the coast of the Azov Sea in order to create a land bridge between Russia and Crimea, a plan that may seem obsolete since the completion of the Kerch bridge. While this particular scenario still appears unlikely, a further escalation of the conflict is not. Russia has tested the waters once more with this latest clash and learned that it can act with de facto impunity. It is highly improbable, though, that Russia would attempt further escalation prior to the Ukrainian elections, for it would encourage the country to unite behind Poroshenko with even more zeal. ■

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For a future without chains

African authoritarianism and Western intrusion are blocking the continent's development

BY DOMINIC JOHNSON

Africa is the cradle of humanity and simultaneously the world's youngest continent. It is home to more than 1.3 billion people (including North Africa), a number that continues to increase by roughly 50 million each year. According to UN projections, the population is set to almost double to roughly 2.5 billion people by mid-century.

In Europe, this rise is often depicted as a horror scenario, with many focusing on the fact that economic development in Africa is not keeping step with demographic growth. In Africa itself, however, this new generation of exuberant young Africans is valued very highly – as an engine for growth and change, as a means of overcoming ossified political and social structures and as trailblazers towards a better future thanks to a more unobstructed view than previous generations. These young people make up the majority of the population.

When an irresistible force meets an immovable object, things usually don't end well. Today, in many African countries, irresistible forces – in the form of innovative social movements and urban protest cultures – are coming up against immovable objects embodied by long-tenured presidents and their military-economic power apparatuses. While this phenomenon is having a major impact on Africa's political development, it also provides us with a framework within which to evaluate security risks and the emergence of new crisis hot spots.

It is rare for sub-Saharan Africa to experience spectacular escalations akin to the revolts associated with the Arab Spring in 2011, which continues to function as an inspiration for African protest movements. The 2014 popular uprising that toppled Blaise Compaoré, the long-time ruler of Burkina Faso, remains an exception. Much more prevalent are cat-and-mouse games that tend to run on forever between clever emerging critics and state apparatuses that react automatically in an authoritarian way.

For example, Ugandan rapper Bobi Wine garnered worldwide attention when he became the youngest parliamentarian elected in his country, but also a victim of legal persecution and even physical abuse. Similar cases, albeit not as well-known, can be found almost everywhere on the continent. Singers are especially well-suited to take up such opposition roles, but there are also more and more young preachers, feminists, students and social activists speaking out.

Many rulers find it politically expedient to decry such forms of opposition as seditious, and even as displaying terrorist tendencies due to the fact that these individuals operate outside of established institutions. Indeed, the charge of high treason and terrorism against Africa's non-parliamentary opposition is an ideal pretext to call for support from other states, to arm the security forces and to justify the restrictions on civil rights.

When seeking to prove the necessity of these measures, some state actors even stoop to fomenting low-intensity armed conflicts themselves, which then give them good cause to use military force against their own people. In countries with chronic security problems, such as Mali, Nigeria or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, well-founded rumors circulate that one or the other armed group actually enjoys political or military protection. However, anyone who openly expresses such suspicions will quickly become the next target of state reprisals.

The background circumstances are key to understanding why so many African countries are plagued by structural instability and why armed conflicts break out easily yet are very difficult to bring to an end. When violence radiates from a known area of unrest and spreads to previously peaceful regions and neighboring countries, the usual security policy reflex from outside Africa is a military one: armed forces in each African country are strengthened and placed in a position from which they can face the threat independently. As policy, this approach is not wrong; however, most African armies are in desolate condition, which begs the question of why young men with uniforms and weapons do not demand improvements to their living conditions in a much more pressing manner.

In most regions of Africa outside of larger cities – and sometimes even in these cities – people take care of their own safety and manage their own living conditions as much as they can. At best, the state is merely absent; at worst, it functions as an intrusive authority. In such contexts, providing new military equipment without any accompanying new policies is doomed to lead to more insecurity, not less. From Mozambique to Algeria, we see countless examples of where this phenomenon hinders political development and upholds ossified power apparatuses – all at the expense of social stability.

For this reason, it is gravely misguided that to this day Africa is seen, especially by Europe, as a kind of military training field or experimental laboratory. New approaches are tested time and again in Africa, with the erroneous assumption that their eventual failure would have no serious consequences. In Somalia, for example, Germany's military engaged in its first combat mission since World War II; in Congo, the European Union engaged in its first-ever military intervention; in Sudan, the United Nations undertook its first joint military mission with the African Union; and, finally, the first active, cross-border multinational combat force is being set up in the Sahel.

Each of these operations charted brand-new territory. And yet, none of them were adequately thought through in advance or subsequently evaluated in an effort to draw generalized conclusions – certainly not in cooperation with the affected states and their populations.

Thus it would be highly damaging to the credibility of future European policy in the Sahel if the current flagship project – the multinational intervention force G5 Sahel comprising Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger – were to fail because it does not live up to its own financial commitments and does not develop a recognizable strategy.

In those African countries where large UN peacekeeping missions have been stationed for years – Congo, South Sudan, Central African Republic – without any visible effects on the security of the people, trust in the credibility of the international community has dropped to zero. International aid and non-governmental organizations are already subject to severe criticism across the continent. Indeed, while many perform valuable work that saves countless lives and draws attention to forgotten victims of war and injustice, others burn ten times as much money as local organizations.

The notion of "Africa First" – which rejects all foreign interference in African affairs in the name of a sovereignty that is available solely to violent actors – has long been in full swing. More and more African governments want nothing to do with outside forces, especially Europe, North America, the UN and other international organizations. This state posture reflects the deep-seated resentment felt by their peoples against paternalism and racism. At the same time, authoritarian regimes exploit this posture as a means of closing themselves off from criticism and cloaking their own bad politics in populist tones.

The starting point for a more enlightened international approach to Africa would be to perceive Africans as they are and take them seriously as actors – rather than passive objects – in creating their own future. What we can say for sure is that whichever the path the cradle of civilization takes, it will shape the future of the entire world.

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All terror politics is local

Jihadi groups in sub-Saharan Africa are more of a regional than a global threat

BY MARC-ANTOINE PÉROUSE DE MONTCLOS

France's former minister of defense and current minister of foreign affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, takes very seriously the threats currently destabilizing the Sahel, especially since the intervention in Mali by French troops in January 2013. He co-organizes the annual Dakar International Forum on Peace and Security in Africa. At the most recent forum, on Nov. 6, 2018, he declared: "Cybersecurity is a priority in the fight against terrorism."

This echoed the worries of many analysts in Europe, America and the Middle East who have noted how the internet has permitted terrorist networks to raise funds, indoctrinate new recruits, train "martyrs" and plan attacks by gathering and sharing information on their targets.

Those experts who believe in the transnational and interconnected character of the various jihadi movements around the world thus insist on the global dimension of the ideology of Al Qaeda and its successors. In their view, as well as serving to disseminate revolutionary models and combat techniques that could inspire terrorist networks in Africa, Asia or Europe, the new communications technologies, paired with Al Qaeda's global ambitions, also facilitate tactical and strategic cooperation that is more or less formal in nature and sometimes goes as far as mergers of multiple insurrection groups.

The problem is that such analyses hardly correspond to the reality on the ground in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa where jihadi groups are active: essentially, Al Shabaab in the Horn of Africa, Boko Haram around Lake Chad and the nebulous Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) in Mali and westward.

As the available studies show, these insurrection groups recruit not through the internet, but rather via clan solidarity by forging matrimonial alliances and by offering their protection to communities stigmatized by the security forces. Moreover, the zones affected by conflict are often among the world's least connected.

Africa's most populous country, Nigeria, where Boko Haram was founded, is rather typical in this respect. According to official statistics for 2017, 51 percent of the population has internet access. In practice, however, less than 10 percent are capable of participating in social media, and bit rates are below 3 megabytes per second. The rate of mobile phone coverage, officially over 80 percent, should also not be taken at face value. First, this figure is overstated, as users must actually obtain multiple SIM cards to compensate for the failings of providers. Second, there are huge regional disparities; the more urbanized south has far better coverage than the rural and Muslim regions in the north, where Boko Haram operates.

In its way, then, the question of the role of the internet in the production and diffusion of movements described as terrorist (rather than as insurrections) illustrates the erroneous and stereotyped representations that exist concerning the state of jihadi forces in sub-Saharan Africa. Out of ignorance of the reality on the ground, many observers imagine that, being poor, Africans are easily manipulated and susceptible to the most extreme forms of religious fanaticism. However, these same observers tend to see the jihadi movements in the Sahel as an extension of the conflicting dynamics in the Arab world, even if this means according exaggerated importance to the allegiance to Al Qaeda sworn by Al Shabaab and AQMI, or that sworn by one faction within Boko Haram to the Islamic State.

From Somalia to Mali, the tendency to consider local or regional threats within a global perspective is doubtless due to the pioneering role played by sub-Saharan Africa. Al Qaeda's attacks on the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998 prefigured those on targets in the United States in 2001. Moreover, the setbacks currently being suffered by IS in Iraq and Syria are giving rise to fears that Islamic State combatants may try to seek refuge south of the Sahara.

It is worth bearing in mind, however, that beyond the alignment of their communications policies, the global connections of the jihadists of the Sahel are very limited, particularly in operational terms. Al Shabaab is the only group with a genuine overseas network via the Somali diaspora; several second-generation migrants have returned to the Horn of Africa to commit attacks. Unlike the Islamic State (IS), the nebulous forces of Boko Haram and AQMI have little appeal for prospective jihadists coming from Europe, America or the Arab world. Their recruiting structures are very local and focused on areas with porous borders.

Moreover, unlike IS and Al Qaeda, none of these groups have mounted any attacks overseas. Known by various names, the milieus centering on Al Shabaab, Boko Haram and AQMI are homegrown and highly fragmented. In spite of recurring phantasms concerning the existence of an Islamist International, they are not offshoots of Al Qaeda or IS and they in no way take orders from some hypothetical central command that supposedly coordinates their attacks from southern Libya. Similarly, inside a country like Mali, it would be mistaken to see the Katiba (Islamist fighting units) of the central Macina region as a simple extension of the Tuareg rebellions being conducted further north.

In this light, it is important to relativize the significance of allegiances to IS or Al Qaeda. Depending on the needs of the hour, sub-Saharans, too, are entirely capable of manipulating the Arabs. As admitted by an internal IS document, the leader of the "original" Boko Haram, Abubakar Shekau, declared allegiance to IS in 2015 to stay in power, crush his opponents and confront the anti-terrorist coalition recently marshaled against him by the armies of Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon. In practice, the armed gangs that continue to operate around Lake Chad are completely at odds with "jihadi orthodoxy."

In this sense, the errant ways of Al Shabaab, Boko Haram and AQMI highlight the limits of the franchise policy pursued by IS and Al Qaeda. For the two rival brothers of global jihad, the African groups serve above all as pretexts to insult each other and to flatter their global ambitions while engaging in a kind of war of communiqués. In recent months, both have repudiated Abubakar Shekau, who is unanimously condemned for his tendency to excommunicate (takfir) and kill Muslims.

In fact, the African forms of jihad have proved to differ widely from the model proclaimed by Osama bin Laden – hence the need to understand the conflicts in Somalia, Mali and Nigeria less in global terms and more in terms of local dynamics.

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Terror, old and new

In Africa, militant groups swearing allegiance to the Islamic State are multiplying. Expect more violence

BY MARC ENGELHARDT

On Dec. 21, 2018, the declaration of war came from an unexpected source: "A so-called Islamic State has appeared in our country," it said. "We have been observing its dangerous behavior for a time in the hope that it would change, but this has not taken place." The speaker was Ali Rage, leader of Al Shabaab – the biggest Islamist terrorist militia in Africa.

According to estimates by the US Military Academy at West Point, Rage commands at least 4,500 fighters in Somalia. For more than ten years, they have controlled large parts of the country in the Horn of Africa. They are being opposed by the 22,000 troops of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), chiefly in the capital Mogadishu. Yet Rage's call to "eradicate the cancer" and "defeat the disease" was aimed not at these forces, but at the perhaps 150 militants who, in Puntland in northern Somalia, had founded the "Islamic State in Somalia."

Just before Rage's statement, the group's members had shot 14 Al Shabaab fighters and then posted a video of the deed online. It was a deliberate provocation that demonstrated how much power the IS cell now wields in Somalia. It is believed to have carried out 39 attacks in just the first seven months of 2018.

When Abdulqadir Mumin swore allegiance to IS and its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in October 2015, he had fewer than two dozen fighters by his side. He recruited the rest of his force from the dissatisfied inhabitants of his sanctuary, the Galgala mountains, and perhaps among former Somali pirates.

In late October 2017, some 50 IS fighters unexpectedly attacked and captured the port city of Qandala on the Gulf of Aden. It took government forces two months to retake the city. However, the spectacular operation failed to earn the hoped-for official recognition by al-Baghdadi.

The rise of IS in Somalia is no isolated phenomenon. West Point's Jason Warner and Charlotte Hulme of Yale estimated in August 2018 that more than 6,000 men are currently fighting in Africa under the black banner of IS. More than half of them, some 3,500, are thought to belong to "Islamic State's West Africa Province" or ISWAP.

ISWAP spread fear and destruction in northern Nigeria under its previous name Boko Haram. In March 2015, the terrorist group's leader Abubakar Shekau swore allegiance to IS and received official recognition. Not least because of his extremist methods, which are too brutal even for other terrorists and have caused hundreds of thousands of Muslims to flee their homes and undermine the IS strategy of territorial control, IS appointed Abu Musab al-Barnawi as successor to Shekau in August 2016.

Since then, both groups have been fighting against the Nigerian army as well as each other. Shekau's faction is the smaller of the two, with an estimated 1,500 men. The other, ISWAP, has carried out a deadly offensive in recent months, killing hundreds of Nigerian soldiers. With each attack, ISWAP captures more weapons, vehicles and other military hardware.

Journalists on the ground claim that government troops no longer leave their bases for fear of resurgent IS fighters. There are reports of revolts against the army leadership. As half of all Nigerian troops have been committed to the anti-terrorism campaign, soldiers are not rotated. Some elite troops have been fighting in northern Nigeria nonstop for two years or more against the Islamists, who are threatening to gain the upper hand under their new label, ISWAP. The army, meanwhile, is short on arms and munitions and, most importantly, its morale is suffering, says one military analyst in Nigeria.

For civilians, the growing popularity of the Islamic State in Africa is a disaster

Another Islamic State cell is fighting in Mali. It was founded in May 2015 by Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, former second-in-command of the militant group Al-Mourabitoun, which carried out an attack on a restaurant in Bamako in March 2015 and, in November of that year, took 170 hostages in the city's Radisson Blu hotel. Two months later, Al-Mourabitoun operatives stormed two hotels in Burkina Faso's capital, Ouagadougou. In January 2017, the group claimed responsibility for an attack on a Malian military base in Gao in which 77 people were killed.

Gao is also the location of the German military's regional base. Al-Mourabitoun is among its most dangerous adversaries, yet the group does not belong to the IS network – shortly after al-Sahrawi pledged allegiance to IS, Al-Mourabitoun's founder and leader Mokhtar Belmokhtar denounced al-Sahrawi, saying the latter had spoken for himself only. The number of fighters who then left Al-Mourabitoun to fight for the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) is estimated at just over 400.

Al-Mourabitoun, which since March 2017 has been part of the Nusrat al-Islam network or GSIM, is at least twice as strong in terms of numbers. Still, al-Sahrawi's IS cell has gained prominence with attacks, including one in September 2016 in the border region of Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali. In October 2017, its fighters killed four members of a US anti-terrorism unit.

African terrorist groups have their origins in the regions where they operate. The reasons that IS has managed to spread through Africa as the second-generation of global-branded jihadism are also peculiar to the region. One of the most important of these is that Al Qaeda-affiliated groups such as Al Shabaab and GSIM, and their forerunners, have now become somewhat of a "terrorist establishment." Nearly two decades after 9/11, the power structures of these once-revolutionary groups have taken root.

In Somalia, Al Shabaab shares revenue from illegal commerce with the state and units of the AMISON mission, which are actually there to fight the militants. Rage's fighters are less interested in establishing a caliphate than in getting rich. Trafficking charcoal and sugar, taxation and tolls on the distribution of humanitarian aid generate millions of dollars in annual revenue for these groups in Somalia. Al Shabaab is an established partner in a system of mafia-like patronage that divides the spoils of illicit activities among the most powerful.

Trafficking cigarettes, drugs, arms and (not least) migrants is likewise a lucrative business in the Sahara. This business is controlled primarily by the militant groups with changing names centered around Mokhtar Belmokhtar, a trafficking kingpin nicknamed Mr. Marlboro. In this sense, the founding of IS cells by Abdul Qadir Mumin in Somalia and Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi in Mali was also a rebellion against the established elite at a time when IS was at its territorial zenith, stretching from Palmyra in Syria to Ramadi in Iraq.

The Islamic State brand name, seen and heard throughout the world's media, guaranteed maximum fear among populations and enormous attractiveness among fighters. At the time, both factors probably helped persuade Abubakar Shekau to place himself and his Boko Haram group at the service of IS.

For civilian populations, the growing popularity of the IS in Africa is a disaster. As demonstrated by Al Shabaab's declaration of war against the Somali IS cell, the establishment Islamists will not give up without a fight. In the propaganda struggle, the two camps will likely seek to outdo one another with the most spectacular terrorist attacks possible while avoiding any sign of straying from Islamist doctrine.

An early victim of this development could well be Mauritania, a West African state that Al Qaeda operatives blanketed with a wave of attacks between 2007 and 2011. Since then, the country has remained astonishingly peaceful while militant attacks have ravaged neighboring Mali and other Sahel states. A note released by US intelligence that Algeria's Al Qaeda leadership supposedly wrote to Osama bin Laden provides one possible reason: It says that Mauritania's government has been paying between €10 and €20 million a year in protection money to the terrorist network.

Whether the note is genuine remains unclear, yet its publication appears to have put pressure on Al Qaeda. In May 2018, the group issued a call for attacks that explicitly singled out Mauritania.

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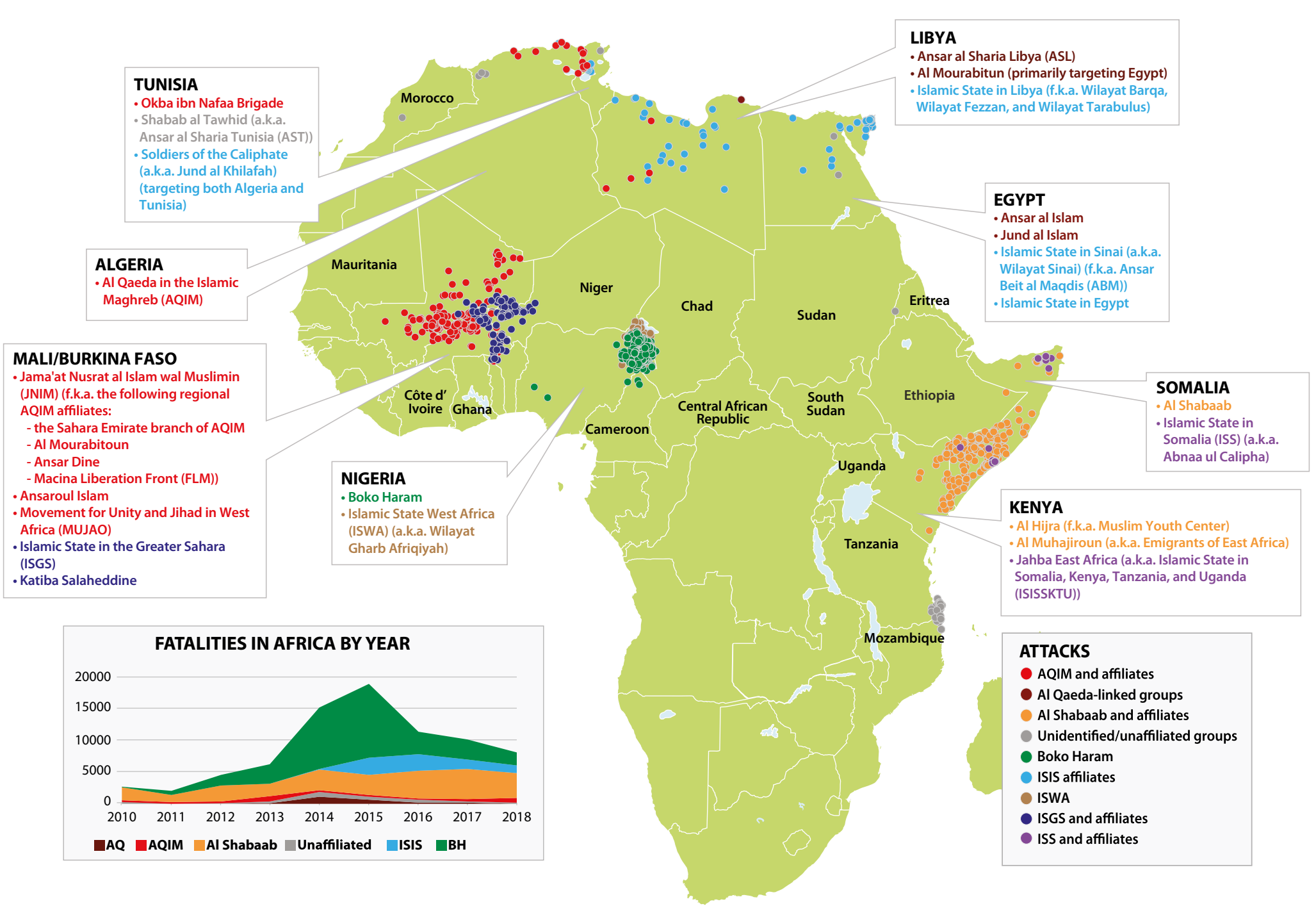
Militant Islamist groups active in Africa



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POLITICAL BRIEFS

The scramble for Europe

The number of Africans migrating overseas is bound to rise significantly, and most will head for Europe

BY STEPHEN SMITH

A growing security threat at Europe's southern borders has remained unacknowledged for almost a century. It has never been conceived in military terms and, I believe, rightfully so. But it has been depoliticized as merely a matter of economic expediency – the intake, first, of a cheap and much needed low-skilled labor force and, then, of a vital demographic to rejuvenate the Old Continent's faltering social security systems, "retirement fodder" in cynical shorthand. Since the late 1990s, it has been dealt with, haphazardly, as a humanitarian issue. *Moralpolitik* has rivaled *Realpolitik*, a dichotomy that has further deepened the rift between Europe's cosmopolitan elites and populist sentiments, if not nativist resentment, among its citizens.

The security threat is Africa's "scramble for Europe." Since the 1930s, when Africa's demographic fortunes underwent a sea change – from stagnation in the *longue durée*, and even depletion during the centuries of slave trade, to the fastest population growth ever experienced in human history – Europe's southern neighbor has grown into a giant. While Africa had only about 150 million inhabitants between the two World Wars, its population rose to 300 million by 1960 – the UN's "Year of Africa," when 17 former colonies on the continent became independent – and doubled again by the end of the Cold War to reach 600 million by 1990. The population of Africa is now 1.3 billion.

Over the next 30 years, Africa's population will almost double again, according to UN projections that expect it to reach 2.4 billion by 2050, a figure 17 times higher than in the 1930s. By comparison, Western Europe's population – which stood at roughly 300 million in the 1930s and now stands at 510 million – has only grown by a factor of 1.7, or one-tenth that of Africa.

In 1885, at the conclusion of the Conference of Berlin, which established the rules for the colonial partition of sub-Saharan Africa, Europe's scientific prowess, industrialization and modern armies made it the most developed continent in the world; Europe counted some 275 million inhabitants, not including Russia. Africa, with 6.5 times the surface area, had less than 200 million inhabitants and was the least developed continent in the world.

Relatively isolated by the Sahara Desert (a landmass as vast as the continental United States), uncooperative trade winds and the scourge of malaria – "the most formidable guardian of Africa's secrets," according to the Arab explorer Ibn Battuta – Africa's interior had barely been mapped. But at a time when the aspiration "to reign on earth" was taken literally, when Christianity and the Enlightenment cult of progress were ardently proselytized, when other continents were already conquered and previously closed countries like Japan had been forcibly opened to free trade, it would have taken a minor miracle for Africa to escape European domination.

It would be equally astonishing if Europe were not acutely concerned today with the next massive south-north migration rippling across the globe from the less developed regions of the world. Between 1960 and 2000, south-to-north flows rapidly accelerated, with the total number of migrants tripling from 20 to 60 million. Except for the Maghreb, whose inhabitants left almost exclusively for France, Africa had so far played only a minor role in these migratory waves, which emanated mostly from Asia and South America. Sub-Saharan Africa was still too poor and marginalized to play a part.

And it is still relatively poor. In 1960, a little more than half its population lived in absolute poverty; today that figure has been nearly halved, according to the World Bank. Yet at the same time, the population south of the Sahara has not only more than quadrupled, it is also more and more in step with the rest of the world, to which it is now connected by satellite television stations, mobile telephones and broadband technology. Today, half of the continent's population has access to 4G telephony and the internet.

And, finally, emerging from Africa's sea of poverty is a real middle class. Some 150 million of the continent's inhabitants now have a disposable daily income equal to anywhere from $5 to $20. Not far behind are another 200 million people who make between $2 and $5 a day. In short, a growing number of Africans are in the global information loop and can muster the resources to seek their fortune elsewhere.

Will Africa become Europe's Mexico?

This is a crucial point and the most likely reason for Europe's long-time inattentiveness to Africa's spectacular population growth. In the past, war, hunger and state failure in Africa did not cause massive numbers of its inhabitants to migrate north, and demographic growth on the continent did not translate into demographic pressures exerted on Europe. But, as Jeremy Harding adumbrated in his 2012 book *Border Vigils. Keeping Migrants Out of the Rich World*, "the first glimmerings of prosperity may well inspire higher numbers of Africans to come to Europe."

Why? The poorest of the poor cannot afford to migrate. They are too busy making ends meet. At the other extreme, which often coincides with the other end of the world, the well-heeled travel frequently, to the point of believing that neither distance nor borders are of any consequence. Their freedom of movement blunts their desire to settle elsewhere. That is not the case for those who have narrowly escaped bare life and wish to live in the lands of seemingly unconfined opportunity. "Rising Africa," a demographic billionaire and soon multi-billionaire, is rapidly scaling up its migratory potential. While yesterday it lacked the wherewithal to leave, today its population is approaching the threshold of a prosperity that will set it on the road to the European "paradise."

Will Africa become Europe's Mexico? Before the 1970s, only a tiny fraction of Mexicans could scrape together the means to cross the Rio Grande and settle in the United States. But as their country crossed a threshold into relative prosperity, more and more Mexicans decided to depart. Between 1975 and 2014, close to 12 million Mexicans migrated to the US. In all, including their children born in the US, Mexican-Americans now constitute a community of 37 million people, about 11 percent of the total US population.

If Africans followed that example, the Afro-optimistic leitmotiv of "Africa Rising" would become a reality. At the end of a sustained African migratory wave, Europe's population would include some 150 to 200 million African-Europeans, both immigrants and their children, compared with just nine million today.

History is never written ahead of time – past events can be grossly misleading, or misinterpreted, while different demographic projections as well as the magnitude, duration and destinations of future migratory patterns can vary significantly. Comparisons with Mexico are also less apt because Africa is not a single country neighboring Europe, and the Mediterranean is a decidedly more redoubtable body of water to cross than the Rio Grande.

On the other hand, in 1975, the population of America was 3.5 times that of Mexico's then 60 million inhabitants, while today it is still 2.5 times larger, although the Mexican population has more than doubled. The current demographic imbalance between Africa's 1.3 billion people and the EU's 510 million will grow much starker: by 2050, the ratio will be almost five to one. And the contrast will be even more striking in terms of age structure, i.e. the shape of the age pyramids. Today, four out of ten Africans are under the age of 15, twice as many as in the EU, where the median age is 43. As the population of Europe continues to age, sub-Saharan Africa's demographic will continue to trend in the opposite direction.

By 2050, seven out of ten Africans will be under 30 while the median age in Europe will approach 50. Put differently, in a little more than 30 years, for every European in their fifties, there will be three Africans, two of whom will be in the prime of life.

It is sometimes pointed out that most African migrants – 68 percent in 2017 – remain on their continent; they leave their country of birth only to move to another, more prosperous African state.

This is correct. However, 40 years ago nine migrants out of ten stayed on their continent, while the percentage of Africans crossing international borders to establish themselves elsewhere was not only smaller but also a smaller proportion of a much more modest overall population. This is to say that the number of Africans migrating overseas is bound to rise significantly, and most of them will be headed for Europe, which is not only the nearest region of prosperity – twenty times wealthier than Africa per capita – but also the world's citadel of social security. Every other dollar spent on social security on this planet is spent by Europeans, though their share of the world population has dropped to 7 percent.

There is no need to fantasize about "revenge colonization" or, for that matter, any other sinister master plan for Africa's scramble for Europe. If you come from a dysfunctional country and you have managed to escape the poverty trap, if you are looking for more security and better life chances for yourself and affordable education and a brighter future for your children, Europe is your best chance.

The choices ordinary Africans make do not constitute a threat for Europe as long as these young migrants move to the Old Continent to live there as Europeans, or African-Europeans, and not as members of an African "diaspora" – and as long as Europeans are convinced that the final say on "who is let in" rests with them. Both conditions have become a matter of public dispute. But even if they were fulfilled, Africa's migration would still represent a major challenge for Europe, as its pace rapidly accelerates over the decades that lie ahead and Europeans start to realize not only the shape of things to come but also the changes that have already taken place. They are trying to come to grips with the "Africanization" of their continent. Back in 1950, even colonial metropoles such as the United Kingdom and France had only a few African immigrants living on their soil, less than 20,000. This has since dramatically changed, and so far in fairly undramatic ways. For reasons that include demagoguery in addition to Europe's economic stagnation and doubt about its sense of direction, the balance of this assessment might easily tip toward fear. If so, the prospect of "more Africans" will be perceived as a threat to homeland security.

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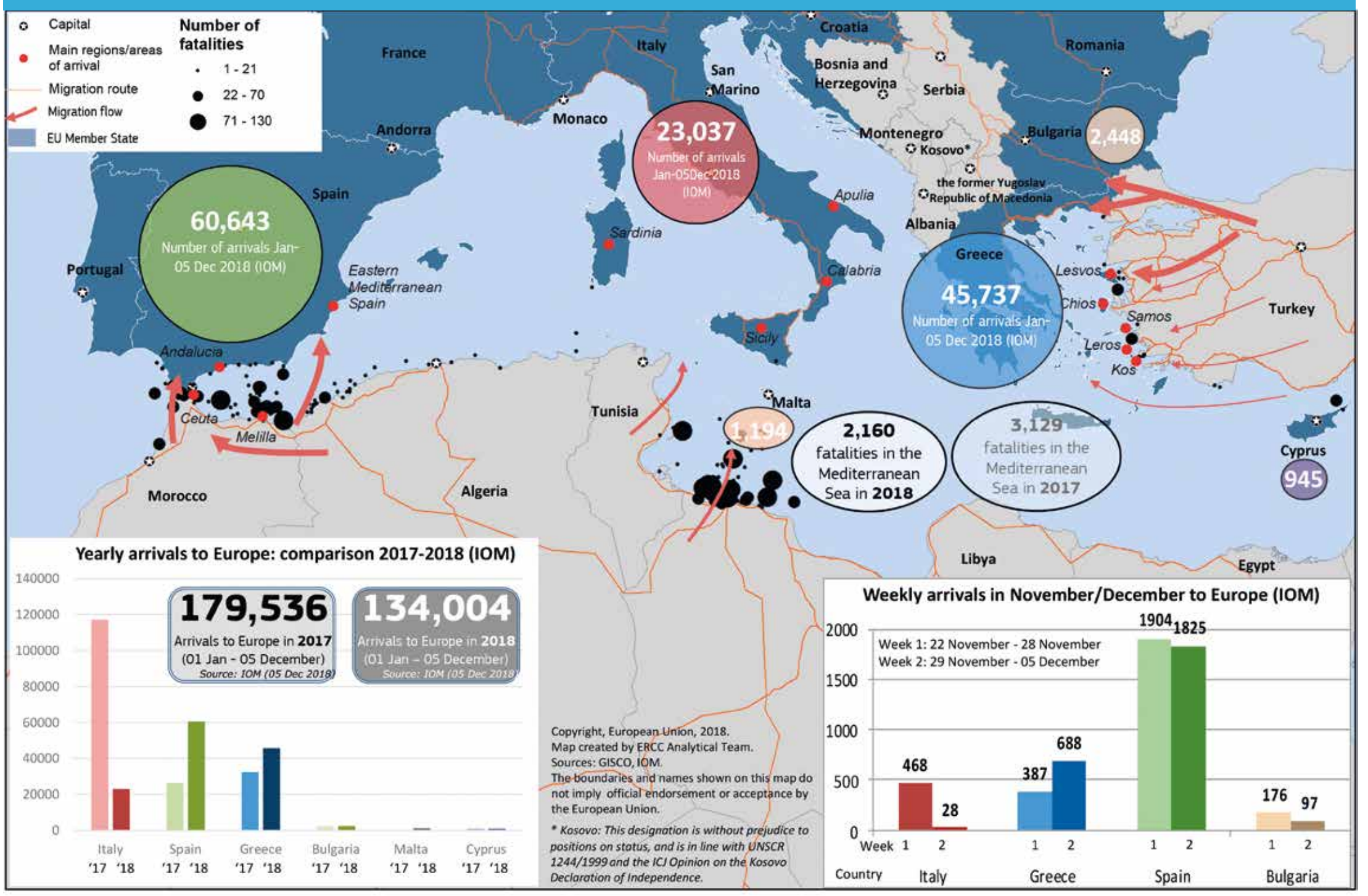
Influx of refugees and migrants to Europe

Source: Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC)



Boom-Inc.

Global arms sales have grown for the third year in a row with Russia crowding out the UK for second place

BY MARKUS BICKEL

The difference in numbers is striking. Whereas $7.87 billion was spent on the 16 peacekeeping operations organized by the United Nations, global arms sales reached almost $400 billion. For the third year in a row, the United States along with Russia, China, Great Britain, France and Germany earned almost fifty times more in arms revenues than they spent on peacekeeping missions – clear evidence that armed conflicts continue to boost the global business of killing.

This sad fact is confirmed by the numbers presented last December by the renowned Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), which showed that in 2017 alone, Lockheed Martin, the US-based global market leader, sold weapons worth $44.9 billion. The gap between Lockheed Martin and Boeing, the aircraft manufacturer and number two on the global stage, has now reached $18 billion. The deliveries of F-16 combat aircraft and the Aegis naval combat system, in particular, have fueled the booming business in arms.

For the first time ever, the Russian defense industry was able to displace the United Kingdom and reach the No. 2 spot behind the US. In 2017, the ten largest Russian companies had revenues of $37.7 billion worldwide. In addition to that, SIPRI reported that Russia's state-owned Almaz-Antey had finally cracked the top ten of the world's largest armaments companies.

In view of the fact that annual results are subject to fluctuations resulting from the granting of major contracts, SIPRI also measures sales volumes at five-year intervals. In this case, from 2013 to 2017, they recorded an increase in sales of 10 percent over the previous five years. The largest exporters were the US, Russia, France, Germany and China; the largest importers were India, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and China which, combined, accounted for 35 percent of all global imports.

In terms of the highest-performing companies, the US still leads with industry giants such as Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman and General Dynamics. Only three of the ten largest global companies are headquartered in Europe. Next to Russian companies, the only other Asian company among the top 30 is Mitsubishi Heavy Industries from Japan; on the bottom half of the Top 100, one finds companies from Singapore and South Korea. Israel has counted among the world's 15 largest weapons exporting countries for decades.

Pushed out of its second place on the world market by Russia, the UK was nevertheless able to maintain its status as the top producer in Western Europe, with $35.7 billion in sales originating from the country's seven largest companies. The booming business at Rolls-Royce, GKN and BAE Systems, in particular, prompted a 2.3-percent increase in revenue over the same time period in 2016. With sales totaling $22.9 billion, UK market leader BAE Systems maintained its position as the third-largest defense contractor worldwide behind Lockheed Martin and Boeing.

One particular trend has been confirmed for the third year in a row: the lion's share of the $398.2 billion in global revenue generated by the hundred largest companies continues to come from the US (57 percent) and Western European arms manufacturing giants (23.8 percent); the Russian share is 9.5 percent.

Still, the final piece of the pie is now being fiercely contested. As in the previous year, Turkish and Indian companies are making headway. Indeed, considering Turkey's economic crisis, its 24-percent growth in sales is quite an achievement, even for defense industry companies. At $7.5 billion, the four largest arms manufacturers in India still account for 1.9 percent of the top 100.

One statistic not taken into account by SIPRI data is the revenue generated by Chinese companies; this is due to the fact that existing data is very difficult to verify. In 2017, the military budget in Beijing was $228 billion – an increase of 110 percent over 2008. On the other hand, the Pentagon, with $610 billion annually, still spends 2.7 times as much. In 2017, roughly 35 percent of global military spending totaling $1.74 trillion was attributable to the US defense budget, with 13 percent to the Chinese defense budget.

The driving force behind these high growth rates are the high-rolling importers in Asia, Oceania and the Middle East. For example, in 2017, Saudi Arabia increased its military spending to $69.4 billion, which is 9.2 percent more than the previous year. The Indian government invested $66.3 billion in that country's military industrial complex, which is roughly 5.5 percent more than the year before. SIPRI researcher Nan Tian also discerned a "clear trend away from the Euro-Atlantic region."

Roughly 49 percent of US weapons continues to go to the Middle East. Saudi Arabia alone accounted for the purchase of 18 percent of US armaments between 2013 and 2017 – an increase of 448 percent over the period between 2008 and 2012. Even though the Saudi royal family is expanding its cooperation with the Russian defense industry, deliveries from the US between 2013 and 2017 made up almost two-thirds of Saudi imports, with 23 percent coming from the UK. However, unlike in the 1990s, when Saudi Arabia was the world's second-largest importer, the Gulf Kingdom is now actually using its weapons – not least in Yemen.

There are also significant exports going from the US to the United Arab Emirates (7.4 percent of total US sales) and Egypt (3.4 percent). Both states are members of the Arab military coalition against the Houthi insurgency in Yemen. Attempts by US congressmen to suspend exports to Saudi Arabia failed in late 2018. For its part, the European Parliament called on EU governments to stop exporting to Saudi Arabia as early as 2015.

And yet, the resolutions coming out of Brussels are not worth the paper they're printed on. For example, the export ban imposed on Egypt in 2013 did not prevent France from replacing the US as the largest arms exporter to that country. From 2013 to 2017, roughly 37 percent of all Egyptian weapons imports came from France, with 26 percent from the US and 21 percent from Russia.

The lion's share of the $398.2 billion in global revenue generated by the 100 largest companies continues to come from the US and European arms manufacturing giants

MARKUS BICKEL
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Who's buying, who's selling

The ten largest producers of arms and military services, excluding China, 2016–2017

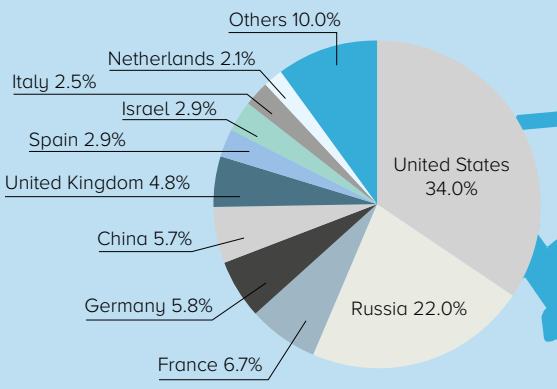
RANK 2017	RANK 2016			ARMS SALES 2017	ARMS SALES 2016	Change 2016 to 2017	Total sales 2017	Arms sales as a % of total sales 2017
1	1	Lockheed Martin	USA	$44.9	$41.5	8.3%	$51.0	88%
2	2	Boeing	USA	$26.9	$30.1	-11.0%	$93.4	29%
3	3	Raytheon	USA	$23.9	$23.4	2.0%	$25.3	94%
4	4	BAE Systems	UK	$22.9	$22.2	3.3%	$23.5	98%
5	5	Northrop Grumman	USA	$22.4	$21.9	2.4%	$25.8	87%
6	6	General Dynamics	USA	$19.5	$19.6	-0.9%	$31.0	63%
7	7	Airbus Group	Europe	$11.3	$12.9	-13.0%	$75.2	15%
8	9	Thales	France	$9.0	$8.4	6.9%	$17.8	51%
9	8	Leonardo	Italy	$8.9	$8.8	0.9%	$13.0	68%
10	13	Almaz-Antey	Russia	$8.6	$7.3	17.0%	$9.1	94%

All $ figures in billions

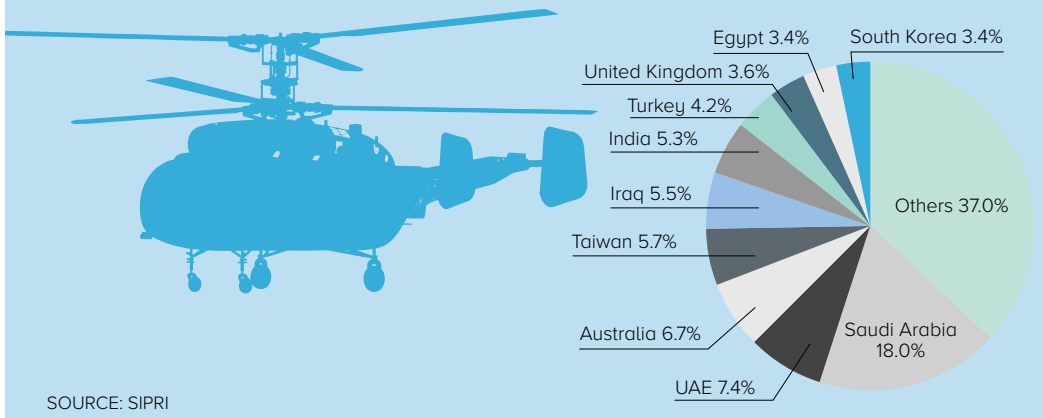
The ten largest importers of major arms and their main suppliers, 2013–2017

	Importer	Share of arms imports 2013–17	Share of arms imports 2008–12	% change 2008–12 to 2013–17	Top 3 suppliers Share of importer's total imports 2013–17 1st		2nd		3rd	
1	India	12.0%	11.0%	24.0%	Russia	62%	USA	15%	Israel	11%
2	Saudi Arabia	10.0%	3.4%	225.0%	USA	61%	UK	23%	France	4%
3	Egypt	4.5%	1.6%	215.0%	France	37%	USA	26%	Russia	21%
4	UAE	4.4%	3.2%	51.0%	USA	58%	France	13%	Italy	7%
5	China	4.0%	5.4%	-19.0%	Russia	65%	France	14%	Ukraine	8%
6	Australia	3.8%	4.0%	7.5%	USA	61%	Spain	26%	France	7%
7	Algeria	3.7%	4.1%	0.8%	Russia	59%	China	15%	Germany	13%
8	Iraq	3.4%	1.7%	118.0%	USA	56%	Russia	22%	S Korea	9%
9	Pakistan	2.8%	4.9%	-36.0%	China	70%	USA	12%	Russia	6%
10	Indonesia	2.8%	1.0%	193.0%	UK	17%	USA	16%	S Korea	12%

Global share of major arms exports by the ten largest exporters, 2013–17



The ten largest importers of US arms and their share of US arms exports, 2013–2017



SOURCE: SIPRI

Apples and oranges and warheads

Even a globally adopted database will not resolve the problem of ambiguous military spending data

BY MATHIAS ALBERT AND THOMAS MÜLLER

As a comparative measure, military spending is frequently used in both scholarly and political debates. Assessing the balance of power, level of armaments as well as arms races and arms control issues all require comparisons. While military spending refers to the input rather than the output dimension of military capabilities, it is nonetheless often regarded as a straightforward comparative measure.

At second glance, however, military expenditures illustrate the difficulties and elusiveness of making objective comparisons. What compounds these difficulties is the lack of global standards. Despite long-running UN efforts, there is no official, globally comprehensive data on military spending. This stands in stark contrast to the critical and widely used global economic data provided by international organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank.

In the military realm, this gap has been partially filled by state actors, such as the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), as well as by non-state actors like the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). These actors collect and publish considerably more comprehensive military spending data than does the UN.

The absence of a globally adopted database affects the usefulness of military expenditures as a comparative measure. States calculate and present military spending in various ways. The small number of key non-state and state actors that aggregate and provide military spending data mitigates this situation somewhat by creating common reference points for comparison. Their data series nevertheless differs significantly in the numbers provided for the military expenditures of individual states.

A good example lies in the numbers given in the IISS *Military Balance 2018* and the SIPRI *Yearbook 2018* for the top five military spenders of 2017. In some cases, most notably for China, these numbers differ markedly: $602.8 billion v. $610 billion for the US; $150.5 billion v. $228 billion for China; $76.6 billion v. $69.4 billion for Saudi Arabia; $61.2 billion v. $66.3 billion for Russia; and $52.5 billion v. $63.9 billion for India.

There are also discrepancies within the datasets of a single provider. *The World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers* (WMEAT) database (formerly compiled by the ACDA and now by the US State Department) is a case in point. The WMEAT database provides military expenditure data for five different conversion mechanisms from local currencies into US dollars. Thus, for example, for 2015, compared to US expenditures of $641 billion, the conversion via market exchange rates produced military spending figures of $215 billion for China and $66.7 billion for Russia. In contrast, the purchasing power parity-based conversion produced figures of $382 billion for China and $179 billion for Russia.

In addition to the broader issue of source availability, there are two factors that account for the variations in the comparative data. The first involves the use of different definitions for military spending. Whereas SIPRI uses "military expenditures" data in ranking the top military spenders quoted above, the IISS relies on "defense budget" figures. Military expenditure figures, which include military-related expenses often contained in other budgets (e.g., military pensions), generally exceed defense budget figures. This discrepancy makes it even more difficult to assemble comparable figures.

Because measuring military spending is never a purely technical issue, ambiguities will persist

Non-state actors generally qualify their military expenditure figures by indicating those states – China and Russia usually among them – for which estimates had to suffice due to limited available information. *Military Balance 2018*, for example, gives only an estimate for China's military spending in 2016 ($197 billion) and indicates that the figure for 2017 is "not known."

The second factor is the use of different currency conversion mechanisms. The aforementioned WMEAT data demonstrates that, most notably for China and Russia, purchasing power parity-based conversion mechanisms result in significantly higher military spending figures than conversions based on market exchange rates.

Although worthwhile as a political goal, instituting an official, comprehensive military spending database that employs a commonly accepted definition of the measure faces substantial practical hurdles – witness the history of the UN Report on Military Expenditures. A considerable number of states remain reluctant to fully submit information on their military spending within a joint comparative framework to an international body. Even if established, however, such a database would only diminish, not eliminate, the ambiguities that mark the comparison of military expenditures.

Because measuring military spending is never a purely technical issue, ambiguities will persist. Such measurement is inherently political and, as a result, is regularly subject to partisan disputes.

During the Cold War, measuring Soviet military spending was a prominent point of contention in Western security debates. NATO's current 2-percent debate likewise involves disputes over the definition of military expenditure. For example, does development aid count as "preventive" military spending?

The WMEAT data quoted above shows how simply switching from one currency conversion mechanism to another allows for rather varied interpretations of the current state of great power competition between the US, China and Russia. Calculated one way, China and Russia combined spent $281.7 billion compared to the US, which spent $641 billion. Calculated the other way, China and Russia combined can account for a military expenditure of $561 billion. For those who advocate increased US military spending, the second interpretation is far more appealing, while official Chinese statements prefer different relative measures and stress that China's military spending is lower than that of other major countries, both as a percentage of GDP and in terms of per capita military expenditure.

It is in light of this ever-present possibility of politicization that the seemingly unsatisfactory situation of a lacking global standard, with a variety of data providers and data series on military expenditures, also has its merits. Although it allows proponents of different political agendas to more easily cherry-pick the figures that best fit their arguments, the existence of independent data providers such as the IISS and SIPRI acts as a critical check on the political uses and abuses of data on military expenditure. The independent data providers produce alternative reference points that allow critical scrutiny of arguments about military spending and capabilities advanced in national and international political debates on security politics.

That said, attempts to promote official global standards and databases for the comparison of military expenditures and capabilities via international bodies should not be dismissed as a futile exercise. These negotiations help states better understand the comparative measures through which other states assess regional and global military developments. The likelihood of destabilizing misperceptions can thus be decreased. Moreover, globally accepted standards and data would facilitate future arms control negotiations by demonstrating that, and how, problems of comparability can be overcome. Past arms control negotiations provide ample evidence that problems of comparability are often exploited as a convenient excuse for states that lack the political will to actually realize arms control and arms-reduction proposals.

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Death by remote

The high number of civilian drone victims begs the question: Do drones actually serve the war on terror?

BY EMRAN FEROZ

KEVIN SUDJETH / WARRUG.COM

Several weeks ago, Mullah Abdul Manan Akhund, a powerful Taliban commander from the southern Afghan province of Helmand, was struck down by an American drone strike and his death celebrated. Many observers, including journalists and politicians from Afghanistan and elsewhere, flooded networks like Twitter with exclamations of joy over the attack.

The death of Mullah Manan, as the Taliban leader was called, was important news. But it was also a headline that served the narrative that the war on terror is a sensible and success-oriented endeavor.

But this is not the case. On the day Mullah Manan was killed, at least one other attack was carried out in Afghanistan that deserved attention. In the east Afghan province of Paktia, at least eight civilians became the target of air attacks involving manned aircraft and drones. On the following day, relatives of the victims from Paktia buried their deceased loved ones and protested the attacks.

Such a scenario is no rarity in Afghanistan. While the world's attention is focused above all on Kabul and other large urban centers, everyday life in the rural regions in the Hindu Kush is neglected or forgotten. Brutal onslaughts, usually in the form of raids, drone strikes or other military operations, are carried out on a regular basis.

The victims are frequently civilians. "My brothers and my father were not Taliban fighters," I was told by the nomad Pasta Khan, from the province of Khost. "But no one's interested in that." In June 2015, drones killed his brothers, his father and other members of his tribe. The nomads were forced to mourn a total of 14 victims.

Pasta Khan now suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and paranoia. He lives in constant fear that American drones are watching him and could obliterate him at any time. The children in his village of Bati Tana, not far from the Pakistani border, have similar fears – they're too afraid to go outside and play.

Similar scenarios are playing out in other Afghan provinces that I visited. In Wardak Province, near Kabul, miners, greengrocers and taxi drivers are hunted and killed by US drones. The drone operators, who work in shifts from their little cubbies, evidently have no idea whom they kill day in and day out by simply pushing a button.

Several attacks have been executed in the past few weeks. In the provinces of Paktia, Nangarhar and Helmand, where Mullah Manan was killed, numerous civilians have fallen victim to the same fate. Armed drones played a key role in all these operations, but while Manan's death attracted considerable attention, we heard little about the nameless, faceless Afghans who perished as "supposed militants," "terror suspects" or other euphemisms concocted by international media outlets. No one cares about anyone from the Afghan hinterlands – they're considered nothing more than collateral damage.

Those familiar with reality in the affected lands and regions know that drone strikes seldom kill the leaders of militant groups. Perhaps the best example of this was the first-ever attack by an armed drone in human history. It occurred in October 2001 in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar, and its target – the Taliban founder and leader Mullah Mohammad Omar – survived. Years later, Omar would die a natural death. However, the US drones that stalked him over the years continued to claim the lives of other civilians.

In the past year, it became known that Jalaluddin Haqqani, a well-known Taliban leader and head of the so-called Haqqani network, had been dead for some time. He did not perish by way of Hellfire missiles; he eventually succumbed to illness and old age. Nevertheless, on multiple occasions over the past 17 years, Haqqani was declared dead after drone strikes levied on Kabul by America and its allies.

Such has been the case with other renowned militants as well, including none other than the leader of Al Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri. He, too, has been reportedly killed on several occasions, yet he lives on. The British human rights organization Reprieve called attention to this problem in 2014, highlighting the fact that between 2002 and 2014, the killing of 41 targeted individuals in Yemen and Pakistan resulted in the killing of at least 1,147 others who were not targeted.

The critical yet unspoken question remains: Who were all these people?

Truth: A dangerous quest

Journalists in conflict zones are increasingly targeted for their work. Media outlets must take ownership of their responsibilities

Despite all we know of the realities in these affected regions, this question is almost never posed. It is also objectionable that journalists, analysts and politicians disproportionately tout the death of men like Mullah Manan while ignoring the numerous civilian victims of the global drone war. Such behavior merely contributes to the perpetuation of the fraudulent narrative of the "precise" drone that exclusively kills "terrorists."

Recent figures indicate that from January to September 2018, the US military dropped more than 5,000 bombs from manned and unmanned aircraft over Afghanistan – marking a 17-year high. Moreover, such statistics issued by the military have proved to be erroneous in the past. In 2017, it was found that numerous sets of data from Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan were faulty. The *Military Times*, which brought the scandal to light, reported "potentially thousands of lethal airstrikes" of which the public was never informed.

Even less data exists on the drone war. Both the US military and the CIA disclose virtually no information on attacks. In 2015, the Obama administration published a four-page document in which it claimed to have killed between 64 and 116 noncombatants in Libya, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen over the course of Obama's presidency. As for the 2,000 victims of drone strikes, Obama officials maintained that each and every one of them was a "terrorist." For that point in time, even conservative estimates of civilian drone victims exceed by far those provided by the White House.

Through my own research alone, I have been able to reconstruct dozens of cases where civilians exclusively were killed. But none of this much matters when the White House classifies more or less all males in range of a drone strike as "militants" or "enemy combatants."

The following question is thus all the more relevant: If I were killed by a drone in Afghanistan, would I be considered a terrorist as long as the opposite is not proved? And this begs my final question: Who makes the effort to prove otherwise, when an Afghan nomad, greengrocer or farmer is obliterated via remote control from Nevada? Far too few of us – that's the grim truth.

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BY INES POHL

Unfortunately, the remark attributed to Senator Hiram Johnson remains as valid today as when it was uttered in 1917: "The first casualty when war comes is truth." With the outbreak of armed conflict, information decays into propaganda, thereby becoming an additional weapon of war. That makes the independent work of reporters all the more important in zones of war or crisis. Only a free and independent press ensures objective information from all those affected by armed conflict.

The situation for reporters and their colleagues in the field is deteriorating by the day. Protective arrangements such as the Geneva Convention and "Press" or "TV" labels on body armor and vehicles no longer protect their legitimate users. Indeed, journalists are increasingly becoming victims, and not by coincidence. They are being targeted deliberately.

In 2018, at least 80 journalists were killed – 15 in Afghanistan, 11 in Syria, nine in Mexico, six in India – all told 36 of them outside war regions.

The reasons are numerous. First, independent reporting is unwelcome in war zones. Journalists are often detained or kidnapped, to be used as propaganda tools or held for ransom. The videos of the Islamic State celebrating the killings of reporters are evidence enough in their brutality.

Yet this grim picture is quickly evolving elsewhere as well, in non-military contexts, even in Europe. Last summer, for instance, Germans could witness this phenomenon firsthand. To report on the disturbances and neo-Nazi demonstrations in the eastern city of Chemnitz, journalists could not do their jobs without police protection or facing manifest bodily harm on the streets.

The core of the problem is that, instead of being accepted as neutral observers, journalists are increasingly regarded as parties to the conflicts on which they report.

Journalists face the greatest amount of danger when reporting on military conflicts, terrorism, restrictive states, organized crime or – increasingly – politically motivated violence aimed explicitly at media representatives.

The dangers can also be categorized regionally. In Latin America and Africa, local reporters and correspondents are chief targets. In their various conflict zones, Al Shabaab, Boko Haram, Al Qaeda, the Taliban and IS seek to silence local journalists. The Taliban, for example, specifically hunts down Afghan journalists. Protecting correspondents on the ground requires constantly revamped measures that now include the use of aliases.

Despite all the threats they face, journalists want to and must do their jobs. Some risks can be minimized, above all through comprehensive security management. Deployments must be carefully planned, with proven and reliable contacts on the ground an absolute necessity. Furthermore, reporters require special training, including first aid, particularly when operating in hostile environments. Reporters also need competent and closely coordinated guidance and support from their media outlets spanning every single moment of their deployment. A network of contacts to colleagues in the danger zone should also be maintained.

In short, media outlets must go beyond mere awareness of their legal and ethical responsibility toward their reporters. They have to weigh whether a reporting deployment should be cut short or perhaps whether the dangers are too great to even authorize it in the first place. They must take ownership of these principles. This involves defining with precision the company's risk tolerance and providing active security for their journalists in the field. We owe much to the men and women whose courageous reporting helps truth reach the public's attention.

Journalists are increasingly regarded as parties to the conflicts on which they report

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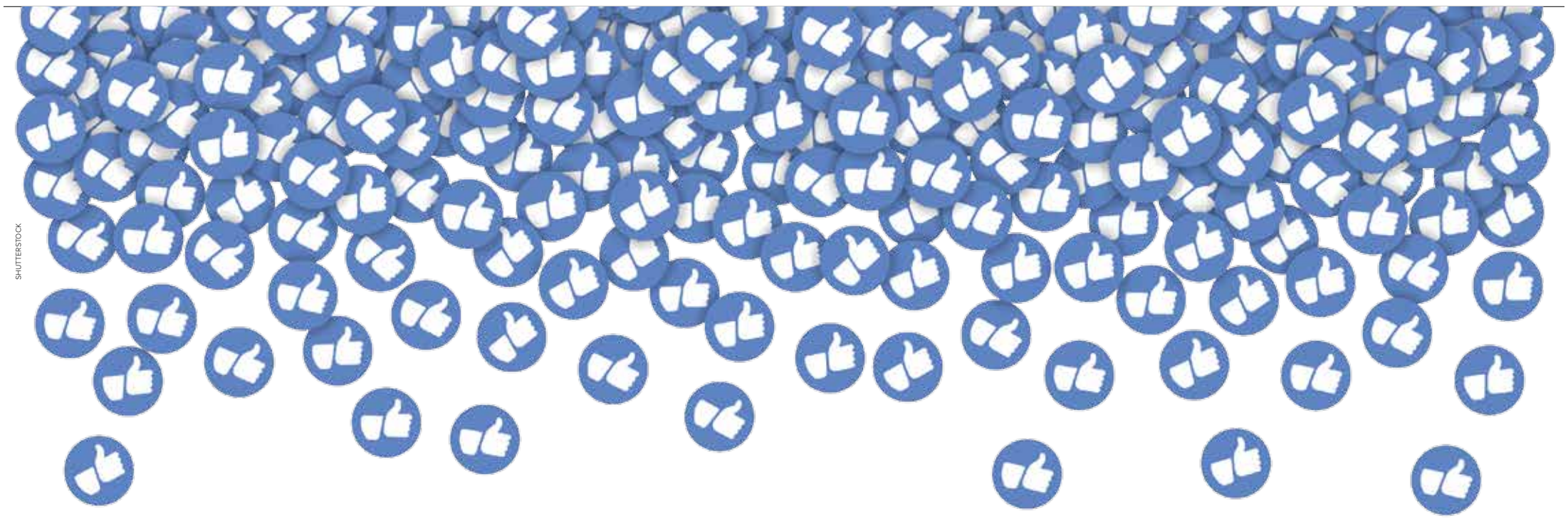

SHUTTERSTOCK

The real cyber threat is your likes

It was the largest data breach in German history. But what made it remarkable is what came after the massive theft of information: its spread

BY P.W. SINGER

All through December 2018, a hacker by the online handle "Orbit" teased and tantalized his followers, releasing a new heap of hacked emails, chatlogs and home addresses each day. At first, German comedians, YouTube stars, rappers and TV stars were the only ones affected, with the media and public commenting and sharing the information that went viral. But then the real target, over 1,000 politicians from the Free Democrats and Greens to the Social Democrats and the Christian Democratic Union, were hit. This led to a wave of wave of finger-pointing and a slew of questions: Why was the far-right AfD the only party spared? Why had the federal government and information security agency, the BSI, originally dismissed the breach in December as a "one-off incident"?

Yet, what so shocked the German political system should not have been a surprise, as it followed a familiar script. Social media's use as a new kind of weapon to spread disarray had previously struck everywhere from the Brexit vote in the UK to elections in the US, France, Brazil, Italy, the Philippines and Mexico. And it has also appeared in conflicts ranging from the Ukraine invasion to the Syrian civil war. This new kind of attack is not about hacking the networks of computers (known as cyber warfare) but, rather, hacking the users of social networks, driving ideas viral through a mix of "likes" and lies – what we call "LikeWar."

Over the last year, revelations of such operations targeting democracies have come out in dribs and drabs, meaning that the sum total is greatly underappreciated. For instance, after initially downplaying the problem, Facebook now estimates 146 million Americans – roughly half the nation's population – saw content on its networks surreptitiously pushed by Russia's information warriors during the 2016 vote. On Twitter, tweets driven by Russian trolls and bots were viewed at least 288 million times in just the closing six weeks of the election. Meanwhile, a study of just 28 Instagram accounts since identified as being covertly operated by the Russian government shows that they alone drew an astounding 145 million "likes," comments and plays of their embedded videos.

Importantly, the reach of these efforts is much wider than even those numbers show, as they rippled out into other media. It has become increasingly common among journalists to use social media to determine what stories to cover, what angle to take and whom to interview, meaning online trends also shape radio, newspapers and TV. For instance, British journalists shared the false Russian accounts, as if they were authentic voices, in stories on at least 80 different topics ranging from Brexit to the London bridge attacks.

While it is up to the historians to debate the impact that such campaigns had in historically close elections, we do know one thing: the attackers think it worked, because they are still at it now. In the US, Russian accounts have since been caught trying to glom onto everything from the NFL anthem controversy to debates over gun rights, while in Europe, they are expected to go after the wave of elections in the spring.

Whatever the topic, the goal is always the same: using online means to alter real-world beliefs and actions. To compound the problem, it is no longer just Russia whom we must keep an eye on; there are also dueling online influence campaigns by Saudi, Qatari and Iranian operatives as well as would-be authoritarians in places like Turkey or the Philippines that are weaponizing social media. According to the Oxford Internet Institute, an estimated 48 nations now engage in some form of social media manipulation. To make matters worse, this can involve a mercenary-for-hire situation – the LikeWar version of private military contractors.

As bad as all this may seem, the battles playing out on every smartphone are set to worsen. Just as the first biplanes introduced into World War I quickly became antiquated, the tactics and technologies used in the first wave of LikeWar will be soon surpassed. A massive increase in data availability will enable propagandists to target smaller and smaller segments of a population, going after not merely a national vote, but single legislative districts or even local elections. In turn, the ongoing revolution in artificial intelligence will enable machine-run accounts – "bots" – to masquerade effortlessly as humans, as well as the creation and then weaponization of fabricated images and video that are indistinguishable from the real thing – known as "deep fakes."

But that future has not arrived yet. NATO has stood strong for 70 years, adapting to ever-changing military technologies and political conditions. There is still time to confront this newest challenge. But our work must begin now.

First, we must acknowledge the stakes and adjust our perception of and preparation for online threats. Since 2006, NATO has codified the importance of cybersecurity in its formal strategy, establishing and expanding new capabilities and doctrines. It must do the same for the LikeWar side, as events have shown online influence operations to be equally or even more threatening to the Alliance. Indeed, by altering political realities in several key member states, NATO itself has been called into a question like never before in its history.

In this endeavor, though, NATO cannot look to the United States for leadership. While the US may have invented the internet, it is now the poster child for how not to face these new online threats.

Instead, the best model for responding aggressively comes from the countries nearest Russia, as they were the first to suffer such attacks. Drawing on a mix of defense strategy, education and lessons from public health, countries like Estonia and Sweden have moved towards "whole-of-nation" efforts intended to inoculate their societies from viral misinformation. Overall, these countries seek to build a layered defense, through efforts like citizen education programs, public tracking and notices of foreign disinformation campaigns, enhanced transparency of political campaign activities, and action to limit the effect of what might be thought of as "super-spreaders," the subset of people and accounts who serve as statistically virulent distributors of online disinformation.

It is equally important to recognize that this battleground may shape security and politics, but the terrain itself is managed by a handful of private companies.

In many ways, Silicon Valley's response has been most akin to that of parents progressing through the stages of grief after a dark turn taken by their creations. For instance, Mark Zuckerberg went from denial – claiming it was a "pretty crazy idea" that such threats mattered – to acceptance – discussing recently how his firm is in an "arms race" with information warriors. But while the firms have laudably stepped up measures for disinformation campaigns attacking both their customers and their home nation, there is still a long way to go. Indeed, on Twitter, some 80 percent of the accounts that spread the most misinformation during the 2016 election are still online today, pushing "upward of a million tweets a day," while the Brazilian election saw many of the same online toxic forces prevail, despite a new wave of Facebook reforms.

Governments must endeavor to work more closely with these companies; to work as helpful friends in some cases, providing needed information and tips; and to apply regulatory pressure when they fall short. The needed efforts by the tech firms include stepped-up investment in content moderation; creating a cross-industry information clearing house on disinformation operations akin to the organizations that industry sectors like banking have in cybersecurity threat-sharing (known as ISACs); "deplatforming" proven super-spreaders of harassment and foreign influence operations; wargaming their products before they are deployed into the world, not just to uncover cybersecurity vulnerabilities, but likely misuse by attackers as well; labeling bots and deep fakes to allow humans to know when they are interacting with a machine online (aka the "Blade Runner" rule); and implementing measures to identify and foil the next generation of AI used as sophisticated chatbots and faked imagery.

Yet, one of the best things these firms can perhaps do is to aid their own customers in better understanding how their very business works, which means admitting the inherent dangers that come with it. For instance, 74 percent of Facebook users do not even know the basics of where the information that pops up in their feed comes from, that the firm collects and shares data about them, or even the difference between the online news and advertisements that are deliberately interwoven. Digital literacy is now also a national security issue. But, similar to public health or cybersecurity, it is one that requires both the government and the private sector to play a part. Imagine a world where instead of downplaying Russian information attacks, the firms deployed pop-up tutorials that explained how you had been taken in and then how to prevent this from happening again.

But there is also a larger problem that will stay with us until we acknowledge the elephant in the room in Munich. The challenge for any proper Western government response to new online threats is not merely that the only cabinet meeting the US president has ever held on election security did not discuss the problem of disinformation, or that his administration has not used nearly any of the $100 million dollars allocated to it by Congress to combat Russian influence operations. The challenge is that the commander-in-chief himself is a core part of the problem, with @realdonaldtrump acting as a venue for disinformation on nearly a daily basis.

But Donald Trump is far from the only one. We now have the data to track who provided their personal megaphone to elevate foreign government misinformation and the forces of extremism. It is remarkable how few have apologized for aiding and abetting enemies who seek to harm democracy, or explained what actions they are taking to prevent future votes from being poisoned.

The battles waged on social media are no longer merely about personal branding or political identity. They are about the very future of our democracies.

P.W. SINGER
and Emerson Brooking are co-authors of the book *LikeWar: The Weaponization of Social Media*. Portions of the above article previously appeared in *The Guardian*.

Showing backbone

We need a genuine European Cybersecurity Agency

BY SIR JULIAN KING

The security threats we face, not only in Europe but around the world, are increasingly cross-border in nature. Those who seek to harm us pay little heed to the niceties of national boundaries or international law.

Successfully tackling these cross-border threats requires a cross-border response. Our work on security in the European Union underscores the added value in enhanced cooperation. Security is first and foremost a national responsibility. But we also work with member-state authorities, providing the tools and support needed to help keep Europeans safe from the threats posed by terrorism as well as organized and cybercrime.

In response to the series of deadly terror attacks on European soil in recent years, we have sought to deny terrorists their means to harm by restricting their movement and access to money, munitions and manpower. Along the way, we have strengthened our capacity to not only prevent attacks but improve our response when they do take place. This includes countering radicalization by working on the ground in our communities and by tackling terrorist content online. We have also made headway in improving how we protect our public spaces and our support for victims of terrorist attacks.

We are working to counter the fast-growing and evolving array of cyber and cyber-enabled threats we face. We are in the process of introducing a new EU Cybersecurity Act aimed at building our resilience, strengthening our deterrence and supporting member states in cyber defense. This includes creating a European Cybersecurity Agency with the authority to develop a new European certification scheme, coordinate the response to major incidents and institute a network of competence centers. Moreover, we must establish credible disincentives for those who may contemplate cyberattacks, including improving law enforcement access to electronic evidence.

We also need to tackle cyber-enabled threats, which include disinformation and the manipulation of data and behavior. This is particularly important in terms of election security and ensuring that our democratic processes are free, fair and open.

We have introduced a series of measures – with member states, the European Parliament and European political parties – to guard against cyberattacks, data abuse and disinformation. We want to reinforce cooperation with fact-checkers to call out disinformation. And we need internet companies to step up and make real progress on their commitments to tackling disinformation.

These commitments on the side of industry include improving how advertisements are placed online, strengthening transparency around sponsored content, rapidly identifying and deleting fake accounts, regulating the use of bots, promoting more effectively genuine narratives that are maliciously obscured and being more clear about the use of algorithms. Last month, we reported on the progress made by internet companies and while we acknowledge their efforts, they must go further and faster if they are the effect required before the European elections in May.

In Europe, we need to discuss whether we want to continue watching our own cutting-edge technologies sold off, one after another. We also need to consider how we might minimize the risk of a dominant supplier within a given sector emerging across the continent. Deepening European coordination would also allow our collective investment in artificial intelligence and other vital technologies, such as quantum computing and cryptography, to yield more than the sum of its parts.

These issues present challenges to national decision-making that will not be easy to resolve. Trying to protect everything will not work. We must determine what really matters in a digital ecosystem and whether greater transparency around suppliers, supply chains and foreign investment is enough to offset the security risks. It may be that certain elements of digital infrastructure are simply too critical to risk.

Wherever that discussion takes us, cooperation is clearly essential to our work on all these security challenges. The only way to tackle them successfully is to work together at several levels, including the European level.

As threats evolve, we must strengthen and deepen our joint efforts to help keep Europe safe.

SIR JULIAN KING
is European commissioner for the Security Union.

Behavioral norms in cyberspace

Can corporations make the digital sphere secure?

BY MYRIAM DUNN CAVELTY AND JACQUELINE EGGENSCHWILER

Not so long ago, when it came to cyberspace, states were believed to be powerless entities with no meaningful policy tools at their disposal. The supposed novelty of the cyber domain was thought to render traditional forms of state intervention and strategies useless. Now researchers and policymakers have come to realize that this is not the case, and that the erroneous assumptions of sovereign powerlessness were the result of flawed arguments inspired by technological determinism. Cyberspace is not a natural environment that has developed beyond the point of human control. On the contrary, it is man-made and almost entirely malleable.

As states have come to reveal themselves as capable and determined actors, willing to use and shape the digital realm as part of their strategic and military toolsets, unease over the escalatory potential of offensive cyber operations has risen. States have invested heavily in digital infrastructures and have built up cyber-command units, often at the intersection between military and intelligence branches. Concurrently, terms such as cyberwar, cyberweapons, or cyber arms race have entered the vocabulary of policy analysts and commentators, and the latter seem to agree that in classic security-dilemma fashion, levels of insecurity have increased rather than decreased.

Through their actions, great powers reveal themselves as able and willing to use and shape the cyber domain as part of their strategic and military toolbox. Therefore, the sense of unease about the escalatory potential of cyber operations is certainly not waning. The overall feeling is that the problem has gotten worse in both quantity and quality. Many experts refer to the malware used in some operations as cyberweapons and regard the build-up of cyber capabilities by state actors as part of a cyber arms race. The uncertainty over the intentions of other states leads to heightened feelings of insecurity and, again in classic security-dilemma fashion, to high incentives to build up (offensive) capabilities and cyber-command units, often at the intersection between the military and intelligence.

The uncertainty about the intentions of other actors and general unease about offensive cyber capabilities cause states to control the risk of escalation and fallout. As a result, the number of ministerial meetings and conferences attempting to agree on norms of responsible behavior in the virtual realm has increased. However, with global political tensions on the rise and cyberspace being treated as a strategic domain, the chances of agreeing on anything meaningful are close to zero. The failure to arrive at a consensus document by the 2017 United Nations Group of Government Experts (UN GGE), which was tasked with examining extant and nascent threats derived from the digital realm, is one case in point. The ideologically inspired bifurcation of the UN-driven norms process is another.

However, because cyberspace is of strategic importance for a great variety of different actors, state behavior, including the failure to come to an agreement concerning rules of the road for the virtual realm, does not go unchallenged by other stakeholders. Subsequent to the UN GGE's inability to come up with a consensus report, and following major cybersecurity incidents of transnational magnitude, including WannaCry and Petya/NotPetya, there has been a surge in the number of private-sector initiatives directed at fostering responsible conduct in the digital domain. Examples include Microsoft's proposal for a Digital Geneva Convention as well as its adoption of a Cybersecurity Tech Accord, Google's New Legal Framework for the Cloud Era, Siemens' conclusion of a Charter of Trust as well as Telefónica's Manifesto for a New Digital Deal.

From an empirical perspective, it is fair to say that in cyberspace, the definition of norms is no longer just the domaine réservé of nation states, but increasingly also the purview of business enterprises. Private actors extend their traditional zones of operation and engage in diplomatic dealings at an international level. While the key drivers for corporate engagement on issues relating to international security and stability in cyberspace may be commercial in nature, i.e. the reduction of costs and risks or the acquisition of competitive advantage, the private-sector proposals also display considerable degrees of normativity which go beyond pure business interests and are likely to have an impact on international politics.

Not only have private companies come to assume roles as proposers of norms and diplomatic change agents, they have also put on the table important topics that were previously unaddressed. Most of the normative efforts conducted by states are geared towards the high-end form of cyber aggression, the fabled cyberwar, which could be devastating but presently has a very low probability of occurrence. Indeed, more common are destabilizing cyber acts below the threshold of war. The biggest actual cyber issue, next to cybercrime, is cyber exploitation or cyber espionage, with the goal of gathering classified information from an adversary and using it in strategically opportune ways. This is the world of intelligence agencies, whose actions are regulated by domestic law in their home states but remain more or less unconstrained by international law.

The private-sector initiatives aim to tackle the destabilizing actions of intelligence agencies. Bad actors who plant and exploit vulnerabilities in current operating systems and hardware are making cyberspace more insecure; their aim is to have more access to data while preparing for future conflict. Backdoors and unpatched vulnerabilities reduce the security of the entire system – for everyone. In short, the strategic exploitation of vulnerabilities in computer systems and the weakening of encryption standards have the potential to destroy trust and confidence in cyberspace overall, which would produce considerable economic and social costs.

While the emergence of a coherent global cybersecurity regime in the near future is unlikely, a push for more state restraint and responsible behavior by private-sector protagonists seems probable. In the best case, corporate pushback, especially if coupled with technical innovation and better cybersecurity solutions, will lead to a more-or-less deliberate change in the conduct of state actors. While the norm-building activities of private-sector entities raise a number of important follow-up questions pertaining to legitimacy and order, in the worst case they will create pressure for states to continue diplomatic efforts to make cyberspace more – not less – secure.

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Fail-safe cyber resilience

We need early warning and quick response systems that work

BY TOM KOEHLER AND OLIVER ROLOFS

The unprecedented scale of digital conversion and very high level of connectivity in the world around us drastically increase the scope for cyberattacks. One undeniable result of this fact is the increased vulnerability of all sectors of industry, defense and critical infrastructures as well as our private lives around the globe. Living in the era of digital dependency has obviated the need to emphasize that a cyberattack on any of these critical sectors could spell disaster for national security, our work and the safety of our citizens. As we face a new technology wave driven by the rise of 5G networks, artificial intelligence and billions of devices in the internet-of-things, we can be sure that our exposure to attack will only grow.

SHUTTERSTOCK

"Someone sitting on their bed that weighs 400 pounds" – or Guccifer 2.0.

Who would have believed, just a decade ago, that the internet would enable cybercrime to inflict almost $600 billion worth of damage around the world in 2018? Or that social media could be misused as systems of mass disinformation, and thus significantly affect the outcome of elections? And who can imagine today that blockchain technology has the potential to bring entire economic systems grinding to a halt?

Although we are increasingly aware of the risks involved in these new emerging technologies, the actual use of the technologies themselves is never a matter of debate. This points to the fact that we urgently need a paradigm shift in security policy. Security in the digital era is much more than an inconvenient cost factor or a field of action for technology freaks. It is something we have a pressing need for if we are to build sustainable cyber resilience into the potentials offered by digitalization. And it should play a role not only at the highest level of government, but also in the cities where we live.

Urbanization is proceeding apace. Experts forecast that more than two-thirds of the world's population will live in cities by 2050. Urbanization is accompanied by far-reaching technological change that is increasingly encroaching on our lives. We are already living in a world that has seen itself transformed into a global village by digitalization. And this process is set to continue. If our cities are to keep pace with future needs and not end up drowning in dirt and trash, they must and they will become smart cities. In the future, sustainable urban development is going to need modern information and communication technologies to be applied in urban management more than ever before. But how does the process of digitalization actually work in practice?

Generally speaking, the digitalization of a city takes numerous previously isolated systems and brings them together. Homes and buildings can suddenly communicate with utility companies and garbage disposal services. Traffic lights are digitally connected to cars and public transit vehicles. Hospitals might access data from primary care providers and health insurers to optimize their demand planning.

It is precisely this process of connecting up different data systems that carries the greatest security risks, because the highly dynamic system of systems that emerges as a result of all this digital connectivity will not ordinarily have any organic protection built into it in the design phase. It is frequently not until later that additional interfaces are developed to integrate security systems, and this is exactly where technology strategy risks emerge, many of which we are not even aware of and must better understand. At present, we are enormously trusting of new technology, whereas our understanding of risk is still limited.

We overestimate our capacity for control and we often underestimate the risks. For many of the things in life, we have developed effective ways of making decisions that keep us out of danger. But we still lack such rules of thumb for life in the digital age.

But what happens if one day hackers target an entire city or a country's entire power grid? How well prepared are we today to withstand a complete digital meltdown?

Without a doubt, more internet users, devices, connections and data flow mean that the risks will continue to grow and, in particular, to burden our critical infrastructures. At the same time, there are considerable concerns that we are neither prepared to handle these threats nor able to rely on fallback options. Indeed, we lack the capacity to even respond in the event of a large scale cyberattack. States, cities and their industries still fail to recognize that they are all potential targets for cyber attacks.

In real life, crises do not run on a timetable, and they are not linear. Cyber-risk resilience questions need to be answered in the here and now. And they must be answered for every government at a national and local level as well as for companies that work with digital processes and administrative structures, because it will not be possible to provide overarching cybersecurity and cyber-risk resilience. Instead of focusing only on resisting cyberattacks, organizations must look at how they can be more resilient.

As unwelcome as this message may be to a risk-averse society, we must learn to manage these threats and develop functioning fallback options and cyber-resilient capabilities in case of large-scale cyberattacks. We need to work on increasing people's awareness of cyber resilience in order to build organizational capabilities to sense, resist and react to disruptive cyber events, and to recover from them in a timely fashion.

While national crisis management exercises are necessary, local urban infrastructures also need to be more effectively prepared to engage in interconnected civil defense against cyberattacks – the threat is real. Just look at the digitally progressive country of Estonia. In 2007, the Baltic state spent weeks being subjected to the largest cyberattack in history, which was waged by neighboring Russia. In order to better protect itself in the future, Estonia subsequently developed agile defense and resilience strategies with national and international backup strategies.

Germany recently heeded this example by starting to build up a cyber reserve within the German armed forces. The civil mobilization of cyber experts in a crisis – i.e. specialists who can return the country to a state of normalcy after an attack – is a commendable first approach.

Aside from mobilization, however, we need to improve the orchestration competency between all levels of governments, including local authorities, so that a form of continuous, citizen-centric cyber-risk resilience can be realized in the future. But this is precisely where we find that the majority of policymakers are not sufficiently sensitized to the subject or remain rooted in old patterns of thinking.

In today's world, digitalized infrastructures are crucial to the success of planned urbanization. Without a doubt, there is added value to be had from managing a city digitally through connected and optimized infrastructures and services. However, for this kind of urban planning and management to be possible, cyber security and resilience strategies must become more agile and should be a crucial part of the plan from the very beginning.

Resilience includes both early warning and quick response systems, as well as efficient procedures to prepare our urban societies and their businesses. Having functioning and sustainable fallback options and resilience capabilities are key in the event that network-based infrastructures are targeted in an attack. In this light, we must rethink cybersecurity and stop ignoring the digital elephant in the room.

To achieve our goal of fail-safe cyber resilience, we need to engage in permanent and interdisciplinary dialogue with more clarity and with concrete actionable recommendations. We must take an innovative hands-on approach that creates adequate cyber resilience while at the same time not restricting our creativity and freedom. It goes without saying that organizational structures and cultures must also be adopted in order to cope with the dynamic and complexity outlined above. If local governments and their representatives understand these challenges and are successful in this endeavor, their citizens will feel more secure and understand that the risks do not outweigh the opportunities inherent in the new emerging technologies.

TOM KOEHLER is a founding partner and **OLIVER ROLOFS** a partner at connecting trust.

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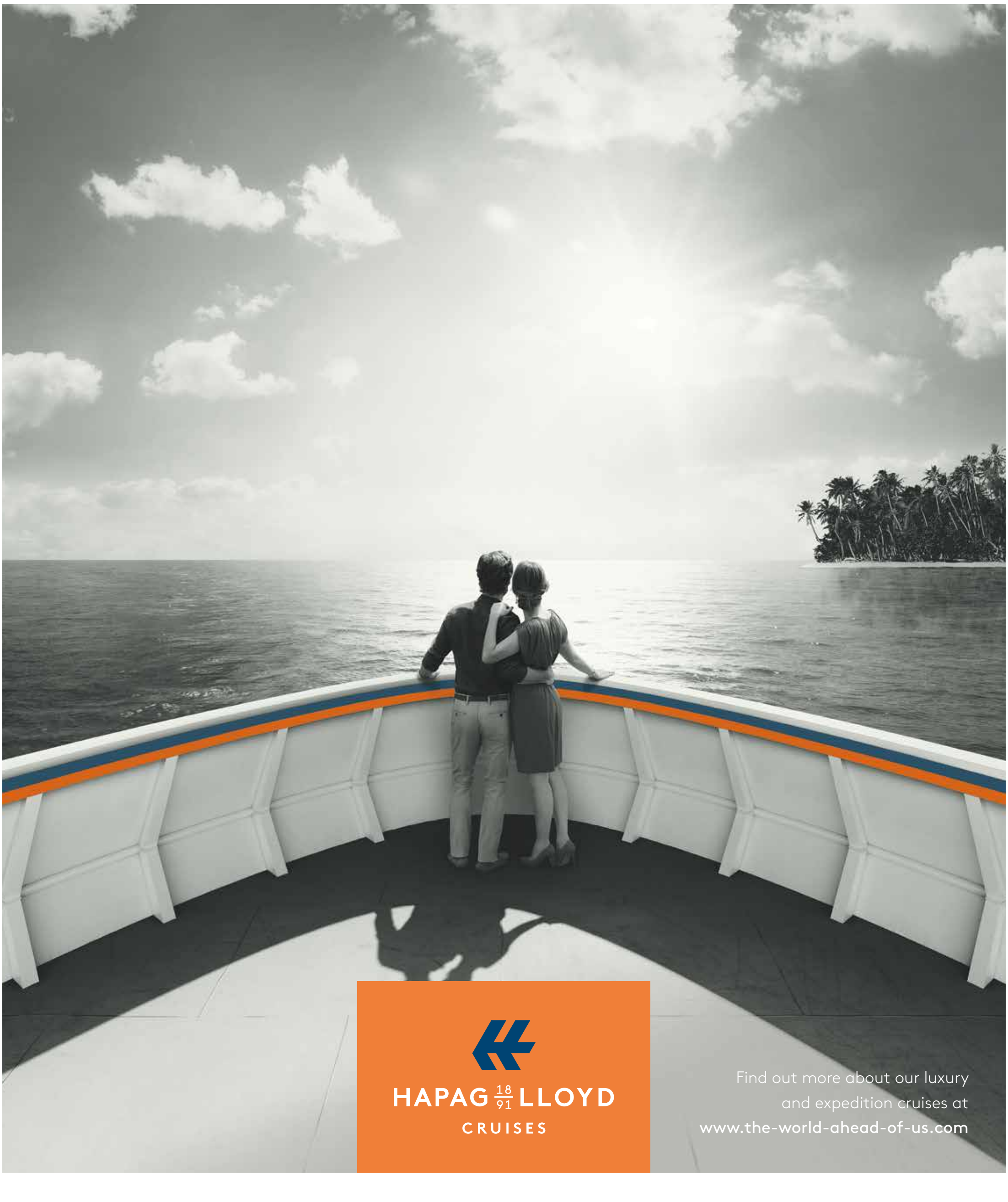

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