EUROPEAN UNION
Institute for Security Studies

WHAT IF...?

Scanning the horizon: 12 scenarios for 2021

Edited by
Florence Gaub

CHAILLOT PAPER / 150
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INTRODUCTION

Back to the Future – Again

by
FLORENCE GAUB
Deputy Director (EUISS)

There are many ways to think about the future – but some are more productive than others. Horoscopes, prophecies and ancient dream interpretations, for instance, are not exactly useful: whereas horoscopes and dreams are too vague, prophecies are too doomsday-like to give a clear idea of *what can be done* to shape the future.

This is what foresight is really about: choice, decision and action – and not, as is repeated time and again, predicting the future and getting it wrong. It is an intellectual and creative exercise designed to help decision-makers develop and make choices, challenge long-held beliefs and/or orthodoxies, focus their resources and attention, and prevent and anticipate certain developments.

This is a continuous exercise for two reasons: the first is, somewhat obviously, that the future can change every day, and so does the way we think about it. It is precisely for this reason that reports about the future are issued regularly, superseding previous ones. Indeed, outdated future reports are rarely read again once new ones are released. The second reason is that most of our institutions are not designed to plan for the mid- to long-term future. Mainstream bureaucracy's implicit understanding of the future is linear – essentially, that tomorrow will be more of today. This is only logical: our institutions cannot permanently challenge themselves as they would cease to be operational.

Therefore, strategic foresight, while conducted for decision-making, is mainly done by entities slightly removed from the running of day-to-day business. After all, its role is precisely to challenge the assumptions of institutions, to search for and detect weak signals, to inspect the outer contours of events, and to investigate areas which do not necessarily feature in the headlines. The European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) is one of those bodies built for such an enterprise.

As with other actors involved in foresight, the EUISS uses a host of methods to think about the future in a constructive fashion. In the past, we have consulted experts (called the Delphi method), produced trend-impact analysis, and developed various types of scenarios. More often than not, we use two or more methods consecutively. And there are many more techniques to be explored, ranging from

crowdsourcing to surveys, visioning and simulations.[1]

The choice of foresight method is never random but depends on several factors: is it a near-, medium- or long-term future we are looking at? Who exactly is this for? What developments are we trying to understand, does it have to be analysed or interpreted? What kind of data is necessary and available? What will happen with the results? Do we begin with the end in mind (to create a preferable future), or do we react to things that occur around us (probable futures)?

In this publication, we aim to alert decision-makers to potential developments with significant strategic impact while they can still prepare for, or even avoid them. We do this using two methods combined: horizon-scanning as well as single scenario-building. Taken together, they produce plausible events set in 2021 – with strategic ramifications well beyond that.

Horizon-scanning is a method that seeks to increase the range of vision. Of course, the concept is an etymological reference to a time when the skyline and one's distance to it was vital, especially for navigation at sea: it indicated the next possible safe havens, but also potential dangerous encounters with weather phenomena or hostile ships. More generally, scanning the horizon expresses the fact that the human eye cannot capture the entire skyline in one glance; instead, it has to move in order to accumulate information. In foresight, this information can be quantitative (data on food prices or demographics, for example), but also qualitative (such as measuring discontent over a certain development among a given population). This method operates with an open mind rather than seeking to confirm a specific view: it spots changes, but also constants. By default, horizon-scanning is an ongoing and systematic monitoring and interpretation of a specific environment rather than an *ad hoc* event. This, in essence, is what EUISS analysts do on a continuous basis.

For this publication, EUISS analysts were asked to craft a scenario based on developments they have identified in their respective areas of expertise – one which illustrates the potential consequences of factors noticed during the horizon-scanning process.

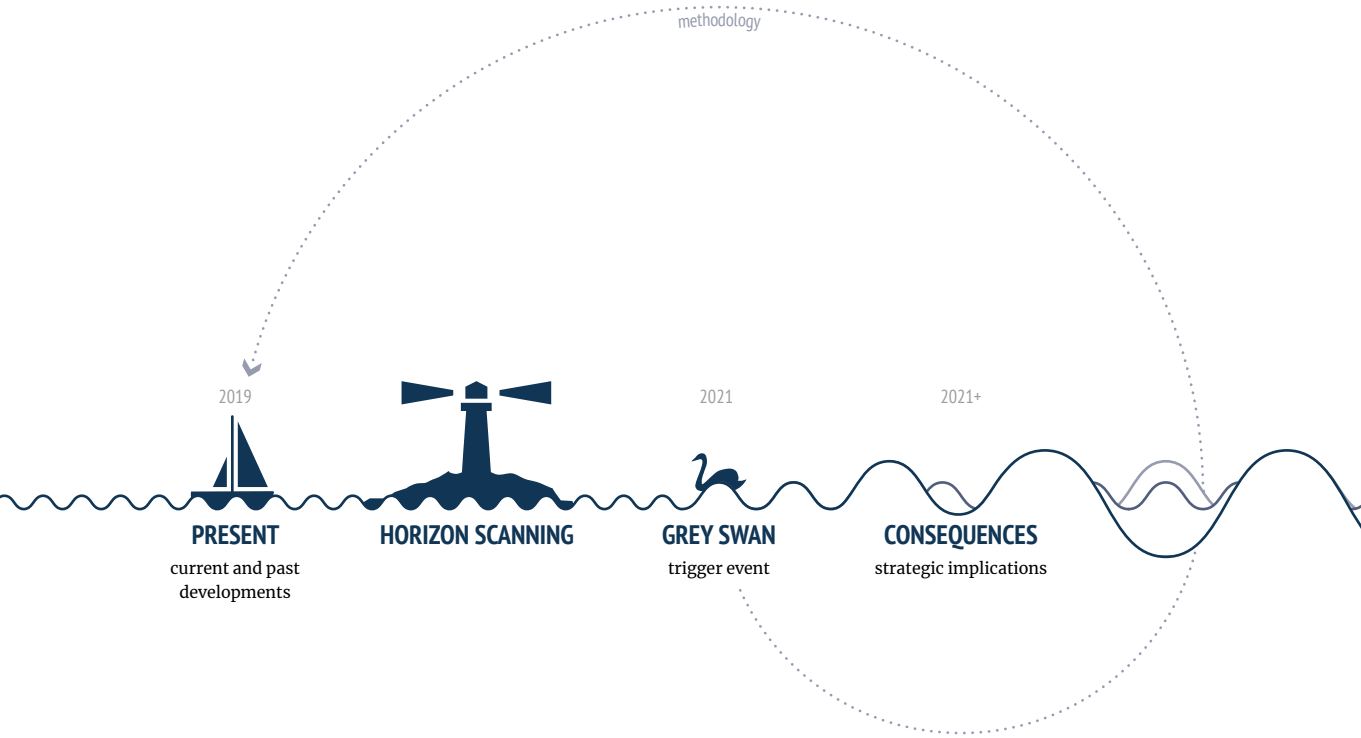
Scenarios are a method in foresight which is much more narrative and narrow than horizon-scanning – essentially, they are stories. The advantage of storytelling in foresight is twofold: first, is allows us to highlight relationships and trends that quantitative data can never catch. They are therefore particularly suited to cases where human beings shape events, as scenarios can incorporate values, motivations and behaviour that raw data does not reflect.

Second, they can generate the emotion which is necessary to overcome denial – itself one of the strongest obstacles to changing perceptions on a matter. The best way to do this is to take advantage of a human feature, the 'willing suspension of disbelief' which occurs when we hear or watch a fictional story. A vivid scenario can capture the attention and imagination of decision-makers more easily than vague trends precisely because it can overcome denial and generate emotion.[2]

In order to be useful, a scenario must fulfil certain criteria: it needs to be, of course, plausible, and within the limits of what can conceivably happen. For instance,

1 Rafael Popper, "Foresight Methodology," in Luke Georghiou et al. (eds.), *The Handbook of Technology Foresight* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2008): pp. 44-88.

2 Peter Schwartz, *The Art of the Long View: Planning for the Future in an Uncertain World* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1996): pp. 29-43.



a scenario might be possible – such as a huge asteroid hitting earth – but it is not very plausible. The scenarios presented here are therefore not like the now (in)famous Black Swans or Wild Cards – highly improbable events with equally serious strategic implications – but rather Grey Swans.[3] Grey Swans share with Black Swans a high level of strategic impact, but there is more evidence to support the idea that they are actually possible. That said, although there is more data for Grey Swans, they are still often considered unlikely to happen and are often dismissed as fantastical – simply because humans, like the bureaucracies they built, cannot function with catastrophic thinking at all times.

But this is precisely the reason that these potentially strategic developments are fleshed out in this *Chaillot Paper*. After all, if these events were more foreseeable (a little bit like the weather forecast), they would not be part of foresight. In that sense, imagination is to foresight what creative genius is to a painter: without it, the exercise is more or less futile. Without imagination, information gathered in horizon-scanning is just that: dry data without implications for the future. It is imagination, not facts alone, that takes developments, joins them together and projects them into the future. This is, for instance, why the 9/11 commission stated that the failure to anticipate the attacks on New York and Washington D.C. was first and foremost 'a failure of imagination'.[4] The facts were mostly available: it was linking them together in a creative way that did not occur. An elaborate scenario should therefore not be disqualified due to its unexpected nature – what matters is that it is rooted in evidence and built on a logical coherence of thought.

3 Anthony J. Masys, "Black Swans to Grey Swans: Revealing the Uncertainty," *Disaster Prevention and Management: An International Journal*, 21, no. 3 (2012): pp. 320-335.

4 National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, "The 9/11 Commission Report," July 2004: p. 339.

All the scenarios in this *Chaillot Paper* reflect the expertise and imagination of the researchers who wrote them: some explore potential conflicts, while others look at disruptive political developments, or indeed at crises with significant ramifications. That said, all are designed for European decision-makers, in the hope of drawing their attention to foreign and security policy aspects which are potentially overlooked, and all are extrapolated from ongoing and recent developments. Just like the first *EUISS Report* 'What if… Conceivable crises: Unpredictable in 2017, unmanageable in 2020?',[5] the scenarios follow the same structure, presenting three strategic instants in time: the moment the event itself takes place (2021), the years following it (2021-2025), and the time where the developments leading to it are taking place (2019).

Put simply, we travel to the future in order to see what we could change today to prevent these events from coming true, or to prepare ourselves for their impact. The analogy with the 1985 film 'Back to the Future' is pure coincidence, of course – but just as in the film, we sometimes need to take a trip to the future to inform our decision-making today.

5 Florence Gaub, "What if … Conceivable crises: unpredictable in 2017, unmanageable in 2020?," *EUISS Report* no. 34 (June 2017), https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/what-if-conceivable-crises-unpredictable-2017-unmanageable-2020.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IF…A FOREIGN SUBMARINE IS HIJACKED ON EU TERRITORY?

by
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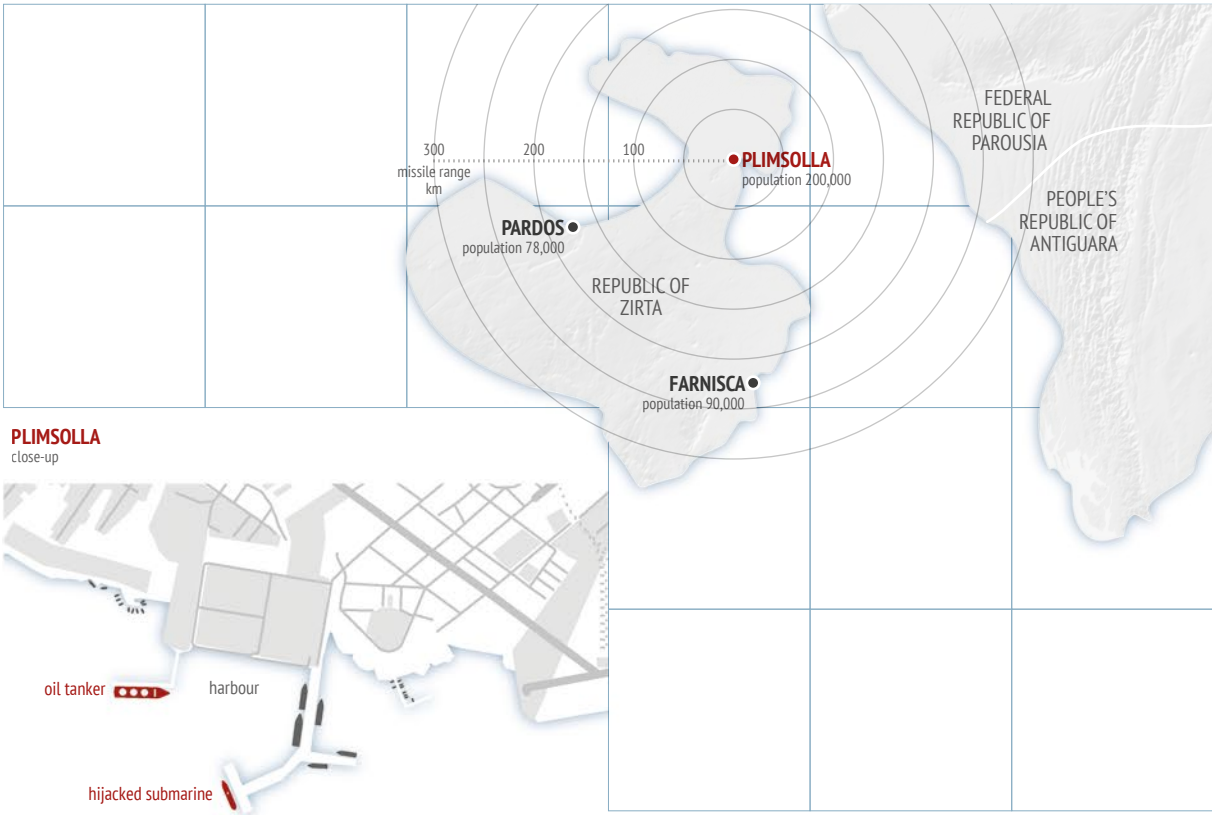
Security and Defence Editor, EUISS

At 04:44 on 17 May 2021, government authorities from the Republic of Zirta received communication from the 'New Petra Circle' (NPC) terror group that a diesel-powered submarine (Kilo-class) belonging to the navy of the Federal Republic of Parousia had been hijacked in the Zirtian harbour city of Plimsolla. Parousian officials confirmed to Zirtian authorities that they had lost direct communication with the captain of the Skulla-class submarine PK216. The NPC, which was based in Parousia and had been known to violently oppose the Parousian government, stated that 20 crew members on board PK216 were members of the group and the remaining 30 submariners had been placed in the holding bay.

The NPC threatened to start assassinating crew members and to fire on-board 'Excalibur' cruise missiles at Zirtian cities should Parousia or other parties seek to recapture the vessel. Given that PK216 carried a maximum of four missiles with a range of 300 kilometres, the cities of Plimsolla (population: 200,000), Farnisca (population: 90,000) and Pardos (population: 78,000) were all within range. While unable to take PK216 to sea with the reduced crew, the NPC threatened to torpedo three large commercial ships and an oil tanker docked in Plimsolla harbour if Parousia did not release NPC members held in prison or organise their safe passage to seek asylum in the EU.

Despite these warnings, at 23:37 on 17 May the Parousian navy unsuccessfully attempted to disable PK216's torpedo and cruise missile tubes utilising special forces. In retaliation, the NPC torpedoed the oil tanker docked in Plimsolla. The port was rocked by a huge explosion, and, given the risk that the resulting fire could have engulfed other parts of Plimsolla, the Zirtians moved to put out the blaze. On social media networks, 'fake news' reports emanating from Parousia began circulating which claimed that NATO forces were responsible for the oil tanker explosion. Nationalists in Parousia subsequently called for measures against the EU and NATO. In turn, bloggers from Zirta claimed that the hijacking was staged by Parousia in order to justify military intervention on the island and to stoke divisions within the EU.

A hijacked foreign submarine
in the EU member state of Zirta



Data: EUISS

THE CONSEQUENCES

Neither Parousia nor Zirta was a member of NATO. However, Zirta was an EU member state and after the torpedo strike, it invoked Article 222[1] of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) – the 'solidarity clause' – in order to trigger support from EU institutions and fellow member states. Meanwhile, Parousia forcefully stated that this was not a matter for NATO and the alliance should play no role. Zirta's neighbour and rival, the People's Republic of Antiguara (a non-EU NATO member) supported Parousia and blocked any discussion of the crisis in the North Atlantic Council. Zirta had first considered invoking Article 42.7 TFEU[2] (the 'mutual assistance clause') before opting for Article 222, even though it had been warned that invoking these articles could be seen to legitimise the NPC. It became clear to Zirta that to ensure a comprehensive response to the crisis, Article 222 was better suited.

1 Article 222 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU states 'The Union and its Member States shall act jointly in a spirit of solidarity if a Member State is the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or man-made disaster. The Union shall mobilise all the instruments at its disposal, including the military resources made available by the Member States'.

2 Article 42.7 of the Treaty on the EU states 'If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. This shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States'.

As this was the first time that Article 222 was invoked by an EU member state, Zirta made the argument that the EU's failure to respond to the crisis would set a negative precedent. The legal implications of the crisis were vast given the potential recourse to using military assets under Article 222. Following a request to explore military options, EU legal experts were split between those that believed the Article 222 mandated the deployment of military assets on the territory of an EU member state, and those that argued that Article 42.1 of the EU treaties only allowed for EU military deployments outside of the Union.

The EU institutions attempted to defuse the crisis through diplomacy: leaders condemned both the torpedo attack and the NPC, and decided that they would not directly negotiate with the terrorist group. Brussels also made bilateral contact with NATO and Parousia and called for restraint to ensure no further military escalation. Drawing on the EU's crisis management and civil protection structures, a decision was taken to plan for potential evacuations of major cities in Zirta to decrease the risk posed by the Excalibur cruise missiles. The EU also sent civil protection assets and humanitarian assistance to Zirta to deal with the port explosion.

Following these actions, Parousia publicly complained that the EU was not acting as an honest broker. It argued that Zirta had breached Article 24 of the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea[3] because it did not protect PK216 after Zirtian authorities had granted the submarine right of passage. Countering this argument, Zirta claimed that Parousia had violated its sovereign territory by attempting to forcibly take back PK216. Given this disagreement, Parousia decided to take the matter to the UN Security Council (UNSC) where it claimed that the EU no longer had any legitimate role to play in the stalemate.

The EU's only permanent UNSC member, France, and two non-permanent members, Finland and Spain, supported Zirta (as did the UK), although Parousia had the support of China and non-permanent members Antiguara, Iran and Venezuela. Diplomats from Parousia drafted a UNSC Resolution condemning the actions of the NPC, and, with reference to UNSC Resolution 1950[4] (2010) which authorises states to intervene in case of piracy, argued that they have a legal basis for further military action to seize PK216. EU member states vetoed the draft resolution, arguing that Resolution 1950 was specific to the situation in Somalia.

Fuming at being rebuffed, the Parousian ambassador stormed out of the UNSC chamber in New York, vowing that Parousia would take back its submarine by force even without a UNSC Resolution. Despite this outburst, at 9:00 on 20 May crew members were seen emerging from PK216. Early reports stated that the crew loyal to Parousia had managed to take back control of the vessel.

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

This was the first Article 222 crisis the EU had to deal with, even though it had undertaken numerous in-house studies and simulations. While Zirta had met its obligations for EU port security

3 Article 24 of UNCLOS states '...The coastal State shall give appropriate publicity to any danger to navigation, of which it has knowledge, within its territorial sea...'.

4 Resolution 1950 concerns the situation in Somalia.

Timeline

under Regulation (EC) No 725/2004[5] and Directive 2005/65/EC[6], this legislation does not apply to naval vessels (EU or otherwise). Furthermore, while the 2018 revised EU Maritime Security Strategy Action Plan[7] called on member states to improve the resilience of maritime transport infrastructure by 2020, Zirta had a relatively small navy and an under-resourced ministry of defence. It was left to the coastguard and the interior ministry to draw up Zirta's port security strategy – defence considerations were notably absent. Relevant EU legislation on port security had not kept pace with Article 222 considerations and the EU had not worked closely enough with national civilian authorities to ensure that defence aspects had been mainstreamed in port security strategies.

Furthermore, some member states complained that Zirta had become too close to Parousia economically through inward investments, which made it difficult for the former to deny PK216 right of passage. Other member states stressed the importance of due diligence when foreign submarines enter EU ports, including the need for a more comprehensive listing of crew members. Zirta hit back at these assertions having stated that inward investment flows are a sovereign matter, and that even if a full crew list for PK216 were to have been available, they would not have had the capacity to conduct intelligence checks. EU institutions and member states did not support Zirta with its intelligence screening procedures. This, ultimately, was an error given the importance to plan for any Article 222-related contingencies.

5 Regulation (EC) No 725/2004 concerns enhancing ship and port facility security.

6 Directive 2005/65/EC concerns enhancing port security.

7 Council of the EU, "Council Conclusions on the Revision of the European Union Maritime Security Strategy Action Plan," *10494/18*, June 26, 2018.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT IF…A COUNTRY CREATES SPACE DEBRIS ON PURPOSE?

by
GUSTAV LINDSTROM
Director, EUISS*

In late 2021, a country which shall remain unnamed decided to push the limits of asymmetric and hybrid threats to new heights – literally. At first, when the idea of introducing space debris in low earth orbit (160 kilometres to 2,000 kilometres above the earth's surface) was presented to the two senior advisors of the country's leader, it was unceremoniously brushed off.[1] Neither advisor took it seriously, even if such a move supposedly could disturb satellite services, dealing a blow to arch enemies in the West. One of the advisors even sneered at the proposal, noting that the idea was either from someone who had "watched too many Hollywood movies" or who had "taken the leader's call to think out of the box a bit too far."

Later on and upon closer reflection, however, the idea started to garner support. The advisors learned that the challenge posed by space debris was real. If satellites were struck by debris or had to periodically change their positioning to avoid collisions with debris, their capabilities could be degraded, impacting services such as earth observation or communications. And while everyone on earth would suffer the consequences, it would affect Western countries disproportionately given their greater reliance on those services.

The advisors also learned that several bodies monitor the debris trajectory to minimise collision risks. They were stunned to learn that the US Strategic Command alone kept track of over 20,000 pieces larger than 10 centimetres. Before 2021, a new system dubbed Space Fence would enable the tracking of approximately 200,000 objects around 5-7 centimetres. Surely, this had to be a serious matter!

With newfound confidence, plans started to take shape. Three weeks later, the advisors forwarded the idea to their leader for his consideration. The plan hinged

* The author wishes to thank the EU Satellite Centre as well as Mr Laurent Muhlematter, Space Security Consultant at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, for their helpful review of this chapter.

1 Matt Williams, "What is Low Earth Orbit?", *Universe Today*, January 6, 2017, https://www.universetoday.com/85322/what-is-low-earth-orbit/.

on leveraging the country's rudimentary missile and satellite technology to place a satellite in low earth orbit (LEO). Once in orbit, the satellite would be destroyed by an explosive charge inside – hopefully creating a significant amount of debris. They had forewarned the leader that the idea was unusual, but held promise. Their anxious wait for a response was short-lived: after two days, the leader enthusiastically endorsed the idea. In the leader's mind, not only could this action deal a disproportionately large blow to the West, it could also open the door to a simpler way of life, where technology no longer held centre stage or could be trusted. If done properly, they would probably even get away with it, or at least be able to plausibly claim it was an accident.

On Monday, 15 November 2021 – three years after the idea had first been presented – the plan was set in motion. That morning, a space vehicle was launched carrying a sizeable satellite. After its release, the satellite entered into orbit approximately 800 kilometres above earth.

After roughly one hour in orbit, the explosive went off, destroying the satellite and sending debris in all directions. Following the leader's orders, an announcement was made stating that the country's attempt to place a communications satellite in space had unexpectedly failed. Regardless of the explanation, there were now at least 10,000 new pieces of debris in a particularly congested portion of LEO. If very small pieces were counted, including dot-sized objects, the number was multiples higher.

THE CONSEQUENCES

The event, which quickly made the news, surprised the international community. Besides trying to understand what had just happened, there was concern over possible consequences to other space infrastructure.

Attention first focussed on the safety of the International Space Station (ISS). Fortunately, the ISS, which normally operates at an orbital altitude of 408 kilometres, has several protective measures such as debris shields, a space debris sensor, and the possibility to carry out avoidance manoeuvres.[2] In extreme circumstances, and if time permitted, the astronauts could even take shelter in the Soyuz capsule – as had already happened before – to wait out the passage of debris.

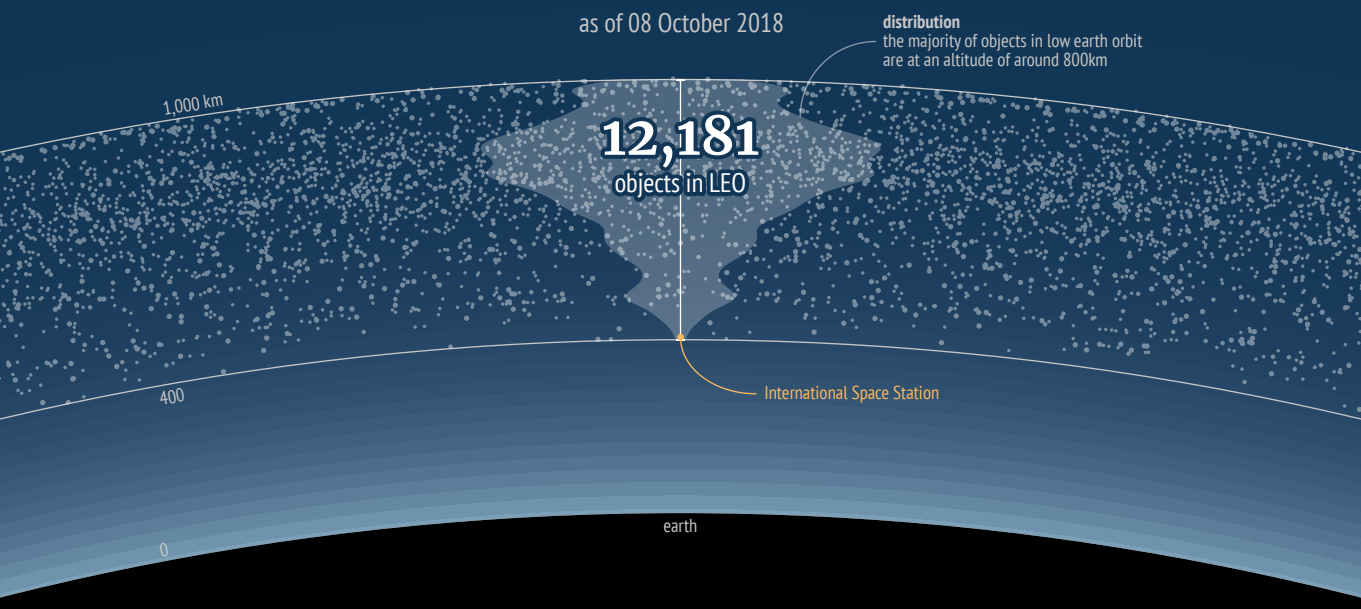
A minute after the blast, the ISS started noticing some effects. Several micro-sized objects slammed into the station's solar arrays, resulting in damage. It was suspected that some hand railings, which aid astronauts during space walks, might be impacted. While a complete damage assessment would take days if not weeks, three of the eight solar arrays were malfunctioning. As a result, the use of energy aboard the station was rationed and space walks temporarily cancelled over fear that protective gloves could rip on the damaged handrails. The space station would also need repairing to ensure that the station's batteries could be properly charged.

Soon, concerns shifted elsewhere. Five minutes after the explosion, an earth-observation satellite travelling in a sun-synchronous orbit was struck by loose debris. News agencies quickly explained the forces at hand. Quoting the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), they

2 European Space Agency, "Where is the International Space Station?", December 18, 2018, www.esa.int/Our_Activities/Human_Spaceflight/International_Space_Station/Where_is_the_International_Space_Station.

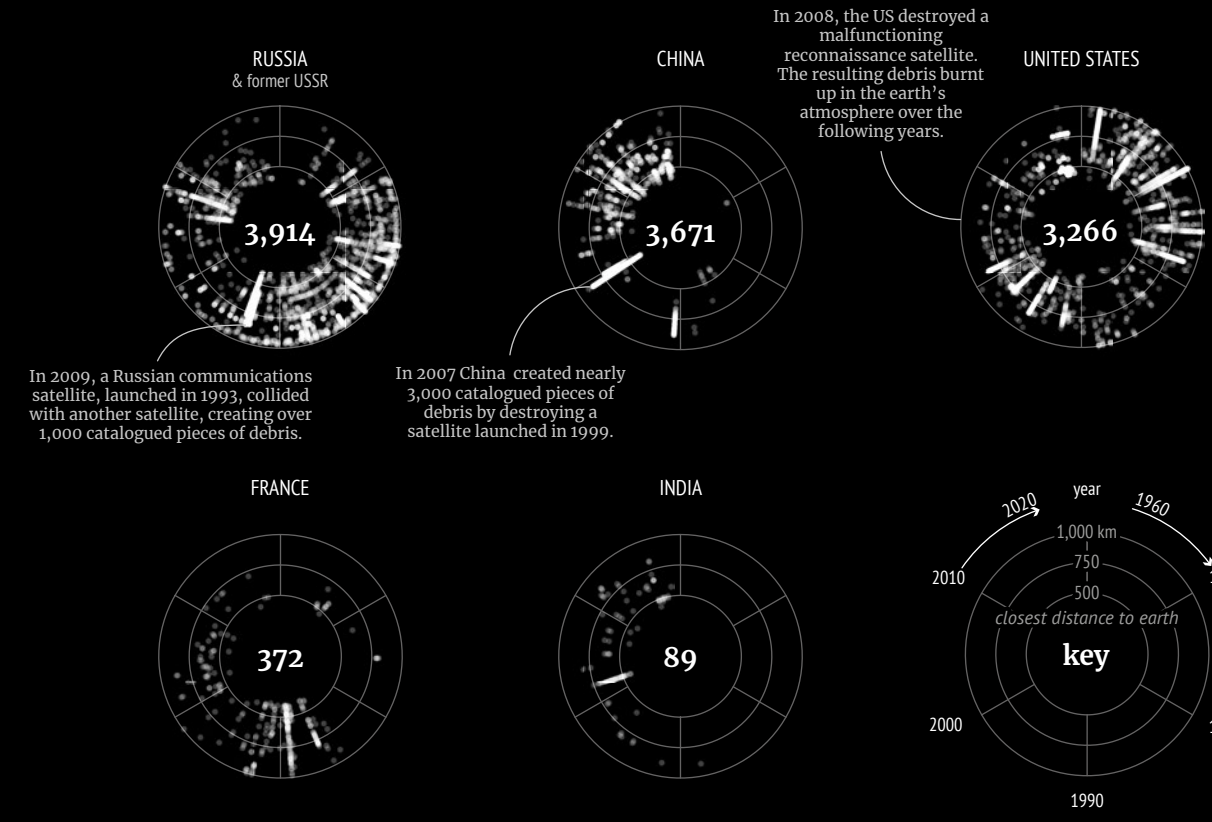
Objects in low earth orbit

as of 08 October 2018



Objects in low earth orbit by launch date

top five countries with most statellites and debris in low earth orbit



Data: space-track.org, 2018

explained that a 10-centimetre piece of debris travelling at 10 kilometres per second would hit with a comparable force of 7 kilos of TNT.[3] The destruction of the satellite resulted in a cascading effect, whereby the new debris destroyed another satellite within three minutes. Nobody had the time to react or take evasive actions. For many, this was a clear demonstration of the Kessler syndrome at work: an increasing amount of space debris increases the probability of debris colliding with other debris, yielding an ever-growing amount of space junk.

The end result was two lost satellites, a damaged space station, and a substantially more congested LEO. Satellite operators now had to make more frequent positioning adjustments to keep their satellites out of harm's way. In addition, several operators moved their satellites to higher orbits to avoid the debris, degrading some of their services. They also had to accept a reduction in the life span of some satellites given the need to use on-board fuel to reposition satellites. Looking ahead, questions loomed whether future space missions could be compromised due to an expanding ring of debris in LEO. There was a fear that the international community no longer had the same access to outer space as it had before.

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

There was no clear point of origin or combination of events that led to this incident – even if some pointed to the precedent set by anti-satellite tests, the trend towards the militarisation of space, or the lack of space debris mitigation measures in UN treaties dealing with outer space.

Rather, the event raised three issues for further consideration. First, that there was a need to better understand the security risks posed by space debris, especially in an already congested LEO. This issue would likely grow in importance as new actors, in particular those from the private sector, entered the satellite market. Some observers pointed to the early indication that thousands of small satellites might be

Timeline

3 NASA, "Micrometeoroids and Orbital Debris (MMOD)," June 14, 2016, www.nasa.gov/centers/wstf/site_tour/remote_hypervelocity_test_laboratory/micrometeoroid_and_orbital_debris.html.

launched into LEO over the next decade to boost broadband internet access.[4]

A second consideration was the recognition that the space debris challenge was unlikely to get better over time without proactive measures. Needed action could range from efforts to physically collect large-sized debris to implementing existing guidelines outlining the disposal of satellites at the end of their lifespan.

Lastly, there was recognition that the more the world relied on space-based services, the more vulnerable it would be to disruption. While the effects of such disruptions would be felt across the globe, they would vary across countries depending on their reliance on such services. This divergence in usage could in turn encourage actors to consider targeting space infrastructure – either directly or indirectly – to achieve additional asymmetric effects. Indeed, some began to wonder if that was what had happened in this particular case.

4 Caleb Henry, "LEO and MEO Broadband Constellations Mega Source of Consternation", March 13, 2018, https://spacenews.com/divining-what-the-stars-hold-in-store-for-broadband-megaconstellations/.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT IF… JIHADIS MERGE WITH CRIMINALS?

by
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Associate Analyst, EUISS

"*Alhamdulillah*" was the first thing Hayat whispered to herself when the main gate of Isoren prison closed behind her. On the bus back home, she felt relief that everything had gone well: none of the guards in the visiting area had seen her slip the piece of paper to Aymen, her brother. Like her, over the last weeks around 20 other women had delivered the same paper to their relatives in prisons across Karolia, a western European country. The scheme which Abu Hamza Al-Karuli had been planning for months was proceeding as planned.

Two months previously, Al-Karuli had finally put down on paper the thoughts he had so carefully formulated in his head. The charismatic Daesh-linked proselytiser was serving a 20-year sentence in an isolated block for high-profile jihadist convicts in the main prison of Säntjana, Karolia's capital city. In his cell, he had drafted what he named the '*Irshadat lil-akhwan al-masjunin*' ('Guidelines for brothers in prison'). The document outlined a number of rules for jihadist inmates, aimed at helping them organise themselves and expand their influence within the prison walls: 'Brothers must reach out to each other (…) They must coerce new inmates, Muslims and non-Muslims, to join our righteous cause (…) To avoid arousing suspicion, violence must only be employed when it can be hidden from the watchful eyes of prison guards.' Beyond the usual jihadist recruiting tips, the document also aimed to expand the power of jihadist inmates in the outside world: 'Brotherhood is for life; a brother must kill defectors, within or beyond prison walls.'

Despite his isolation, Al-Karuli had managed to transfer the document to the outside world. He had slipped the guidelines to one of the prison guards, whose high levels of personal debt meant that he could be bought off. The guard had delivered the piece of paper to Al-Karuli's niece, who then distributed copies to jihadist convicts across the country through their female relatives. Women were generally monitored less by the Karolian Intelligence and Security Agency (KISA), which underestimated their role in jihad. Al-Karuli was hopeful that spreading his strategy among jihadist convicts would sow the seeds of a powerful, pan-country jihadist prison gang.

CONSEQUENCES

In September 2025, a bomb exploded during the morning rush hour on a train departing from Säntjana's central station. In

addition to leaving 14 people dead and another 85 injured, the attacks also caused severe damage to the tracks and the train station, putting it out of action for a week. No one in Karolia was surprised when the Free Muslim Bloc (FMB) claimed responsibility for the atrocity: it was their third significant attack so far that year. The group stated that its suicide bomber, Michel Veren, a Karolian citizen, had died as a "soldier of Allah", but more unforeseen was that the FMB also pledged allegiance to Daesh and claimed the establishment of *Wilayat al-Gharb*, a European province of its so-called caliphate.

As part of their investigation, Karolia's federal police questioned Veren's mother. She told officers that her son, recently released from prison, had socialised with the FMB in prison, but insisted that he had not become a jihadist.

She was right about that. Veren had indeed been close with the Bloc in prison, but after his release he had hoped to leave his radical cell mates behind. Some months later, however, after FMB members threatened his family, he decided to work for them. After all, he only needed to occasionally deliver a backpack full of drugs from Säntjana to affiliated networks in the east of the country. He could not have foreseen that this time around his backpack did not carry the usual package but a timed explosive charge.

Michel Veren was not the only ex-convict forced to cooperate with the FMB. The Bloc had become a powerful jihadist prison gang across the country, just as Al-Karuli had foreseen: in 2025, approximately 45% of Karolia's inmates were affiliated to the FMB. Members maintained their prison-based connections after their release and went after those inmates, such as Veren, who distanced themselves from the group once they had been released. For many criminals, the anticipation of their reincarceration was sufficient to make them cooperate with Bloc members: they would end up meeting the FMB again in prison anyway, so why not cooperate with them now and avoid punishment later on?[1]

Daesh had managed to establish a powerful network in the heart of Europe by adapting its usual state-building strategy (i.e. control and administer a territory before expanding elsewhere) to Karolia's prison system: control inmates through a combination of governance and intimidation, before extending that domination to outside of the prison walls.

The Karolian government was now confronted with an extremely complicated task. How could they neutralise the prison gang when most of its leadership was already incarcerated? Rather than breaking up the terrorist network, aggressive policing and enhanced sentencing would only bolster the prison gang's ranks and strengthen its ability to coordinate activity on the streets.

WHERE DID IT ALL GO WRONG?

The seeds of this disaster were planted a decade before, when Karolia saw a significant increase in arrests and convictions for jihadist offences.[2] Arrests included individuals who had attempted to join or had joined Daesh in Syria and Iraq (as prescribed by the 2017 EU Directive on

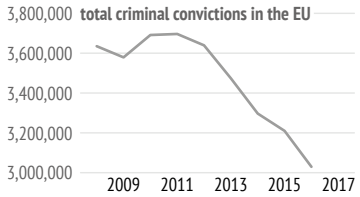
1 David Skarbek, *Social Order of the Underworld: How Prison Gangs Govern the American Prison System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): pp. 131–150.

2 From 2015 to 2017, EU member states issued 908 verdicts for jihadist offences. Europol, *TE-SAT: EU Terrorism Situation & Trend Reports* (The Hague: Europol, 2016, 2017, and 2018).

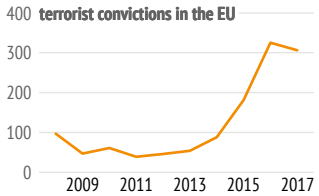
Surge in convictions for terrorist offences

While the number of criminal convictions in the EU has decreased from nearly 3.7 million in 2012 to just above 3 million in 2016, the number of terrorist convictions has increased sharply since 2014, surpassing 300 in 2016.*

* This data does not include UK figures unless otherwise stated.

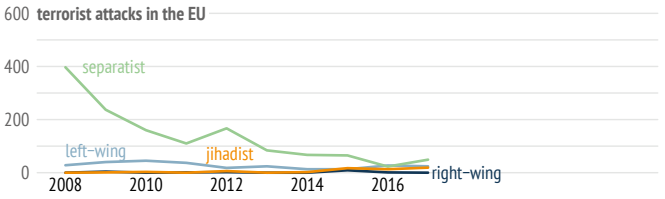


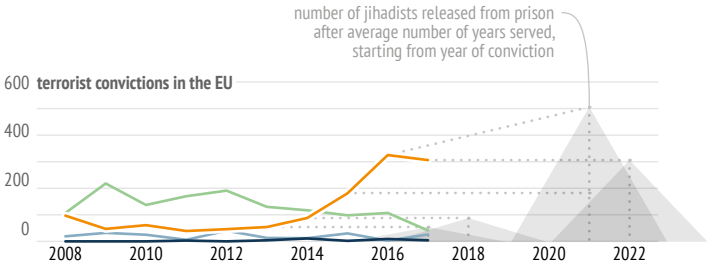
15 out of 100,000 criminal convictions in 2016 were for terrorist offences.



Jihadist attacks increased from 2 in 2014 to 19 in 2017: a 9.5-fold increase. Convictions increased from 88 to 306 over the same period.

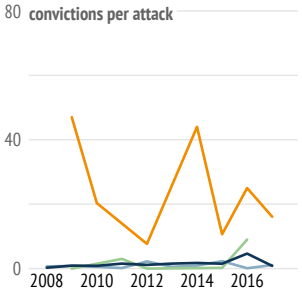
High number of jihadist convictions compared to other extremist groups





Higher number of convictions per attack for jihadists

The higher number of convictions for jihadists can partly be explained by the inclusion of returned foreign fighters (approximately 1,500).



Jihadists (and **separatists**) also focus more on civilian targets and cause more deaths per attack. In fact, jihadist attacks are 26 times deadlier than other types of terrorist attacks.

Rates and reoffending by age category

A high proportion of criminal convicts are reoffenders, with numbers particularly high for certain age groups. 28% of terrorist offenders (out a sample of 197 jihadist convicts) have a history of a previous arrest.

30.3 years

average age of 197 terrorist convicts

Data: Europol, 2018; Eurostat, 2018; Globsec, 2018; National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), 2018; The Soufan Center, 2017; UK Ministry of Justice, 2018.

Terrorism[3]), but also those who had stayed at home and supported terrorist groups (in line with Karolia's domestic counter-terrorism law, which was amended in 2016 to significantly broaden the notion of what constitutes support of a terrorist organisation).

The increase in convictions added to the already predominantly Muslim prison population (approximately 70% of Karolia's prison inmates were Muslim).[4] They shared a loose sense of ethno-religious solidarity, but the large number of convicted jihadists, drawing credibility from their combat experience, took up leadership positions among them. They stirred tensions with non-Muslim prisoners to increase the group feeling of Muslim inmates, and then further tightened their control over the Muslim population by, *inter alia*, enforcing prayer times and a stricter interpretation of Islam.[5] Much of this activity went unnoticed, since jihadists often behaved as model inmates.[6]

The extension of power over the criminal world outside was facilitated by the high rates of recidivism in the country (approximately 49% of Karolia's prison population were reconvicted within three years after their release[7]). Potential recidivists were also not subject to sufficient monitoring by security services and local authorities, who were mainly hindered by the lack of information flow from the penitentiary services on released inmates.[8]

Karolia's Federal Penitentiary Service (FPS) adopted a number of measures to deal with the sudden rise in jihadist convicts and increased radicalisation of inmates. It decided to disperse inmates convicted for terrorist purposes among the general prison population, with the aim of preventing any attempt to create a structured group. High-profile figures (leaders or proselytisers) were isolated to combat their attempts to recruit and radicalise other prisoners. The interior ministry, in cooperation with the FPS, also adopted a number of projects aimed at weaning jihadist inmates off their violent ideology and assisting in their post-release reintegration into society.

Yet a substantial reform of the penitentiary system was put off. Inmates were housed together in large facilities, with no significant differentiation according to their background, needs or reintegration prospects. This meant that social dynamics seen on the outside simply reproduced themselves as a microcosm in prison: criminal power hierarchies, radicalisation as a result of a quest for belonging, and the emergence of a strong 'us vs them' feeling.

The prison system was also mainly geared towards separating inmates from society. This made the government's disengagement and reintegration programmes ineffective: two hours a week did not have an impact on individuals who were confronted with other radicals (religious or non-religious) for the rest of the week. Moreover, disengagement programmes in prison occurred on a voluntary basis and rehabilitation was generally only available for prisoners eligible to be released under

3 European Parliament and Council of the EU, "Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating terrorism and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA and amending Council Decision 2005/671/JHA," *(EU) 2017/541*, Brussels, February 23, 2017.

4 Farhad Khosrokhavar, "Radicalization in Prison: The French Case," *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 14, no. 2 (2013): p. 289.

5 James Brandon, "The Danger of Prison Radicalization in the West," *CTC Sentinel*, 2, no. 12, (2009): pp. 1-4.

6 GLOBSEC, "Who are the European jihadis? From Criminals to Terrorists and Back?," *Project Midterm Report*, September 2018: p. 9.

7 Seena Fazel and Achim Wolf, "A Systematic Review of Criminal Recidivism Rates Worldwide: Current Difficulties and Recommendations for Best Practice," *PLoS One*, 10, no. 6, June 18, 2015.

8 Jim Howcraft, "The Prison Terrorism Nexus: Recommendations for Policymakers," *Marshall Center Perspectives*, no. 2, September 2017.

probation supervision.[9] Many of the jihadist inmates specifically chose to sit out their whole sentence since they viewed this simply as part of their journey – or a calculated strategy to maximise recruitment opportunities.[10]

Timeline

9 Thomas Renard and Rik Coolsaet (eds.), *Returnees: Who are They, Why are They (not) Coming Back and How Should we Deal with Them? Assessing Policies on Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands* (Brussels: Egmont – Royal Institute for International Relations, February 2018).

10 Fabien Merz, "Dealing with Jihadist Returnees: A Tough Challenge," *CSS Analyses in Security Policy*, no. 210 (June 2017).

CHAPTER 4

WHAT IF…THE SUN LED TO A CYBERWAR?

by
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Brussels Executive Officer, EUISS
NATHALIE VAN RAEMDONCK
Associate Analyst, EUISS

On 26 June 2021, the people of Karenia, Timbabu, Sorea and Norea woke up after a night of celebrations following the signature of the Non-Aggression Pact between these major powers. But some got an early wake-up call: the cabinet of Timbabu was assembled at 06.35 after two bullet trains running between the country's major cities of Noronha and Xica crashed into each other following a traffic-control system failure. Power outages then made it difficult for emergency services to operate and respond to calls. With the internet connection seemingly severed, even those vital services with backup electricity generators struggled to provide essential services. Moreover, mobile operators could not provide communication services, making it difficult for crisis management teams to coordinate efforts.

Numerous other accidents were reported – ironically worsened by the reliance on the Internet of Things and the adoption of smart technologies. Both had turned Noronha into the first truly Smart City: a broad reliance on artificial intelligence and robots for basic public service interactions (e.g. responding to phone calls, making appointments, etc.) had reaffirmed Timbabu's leadership in this domain. But with the internet suddenly gone, this all became a liability: with the smart grid down, driverless metros stopped running in the middle of tunnels and traffic accidents surged. The number of casualties reported by 10:30 was 654, with over 700 other people injured. The country's economy also took a hit, with the disruption resulting in significant economic losses for the stock market.

With limited information available, the country's Cyber Defence Group concluded that this crisis could only have resulted from a large-scale Denial of Service Attack (DDoS) that incapacitated power stations, taking out the electricity grids in large regions and bringing internet traffic to a halt. Earlier intelligence reports indeed suggested that minor DDoS attacks testing power grids could be attributed to Norea. With the United States (Timbabu's major regional ally) refusing to get involved, the following day the cabinet decided to launch an airstrike against the military transportation and telecommunications infrastructure of Norea – the first time such an action had been undertaken since the war that tore the whole region apart in the 1930s and 1940s – in an effort to stop what it believed was a cyber attack originating from Norea. Operation 'Eternal Peace' resulted in 132 deaths.

THE CONSEQUENCES

The armed attack by Timbabu on Norea sparked an international diplomatic crisis. When Timbabu's grid remained down for four more days, Karenia called for an emergency session of the UN Security Council, which led to a UN Resolution calling for a dialogue and an immediate cessation of any hostilities. In the absence of a military response from Norea – acting on counsel given by Karenia – and a swift halt of further Timbabuan operations, diplomacy was given a chance when Marja Selin, a Finnish diplomat, was appointed head of the UN Special Commission of Inquiry for Timbabu.

The process spearheaded by Ms Selin – and implemented with full cooperation from the government of Timbabu – reached several important conclusions. First, it appeared that the previous cyber operations which the Timbabuan intelligence services had attributed to Norea were in reality conducted by the Sorean hacktivist group 'Cyberian Tiger'. The group had in the past expressed its discontent over the negotiation of the Non-Aggression Pact, which it opposed due to its supposed 'neglect of the years of injustice caused by the Norean regime to the people of Sorea'. Using 'false flags' – a technique which allows an attacker to hide their identity and leave behind evidence pointing to someone else – the group misled the Japanese intelligence services into falsely attributing the operations to Norea. It appeared that the group had also been scanning and testing the strength of the power transformer substations in Noronha and Xica in the months before the incident.

In the end, however, it transpired that neither Norea nor the hacktivist group were responsible for the 'cyberquake' – the name given to the crisis by the media. An even more troubling truth emerged: the power outages and subsequent malfunctioning of infrastructure that lasted between 26 June and 1 July was caused not by a cyber attack as was commonly believed, but by solar flares. These geomagnetically induced currents that the sun sporadically releases had damaged the power transformer substations and affected power grids, in a similar manner to what had occurred in Quebec in 1989.

It appeared that reports of the upcoming solar flares (and indications about the damage they could potentially inflict) were transmitted to the crisis management centre a week earlier, but their impact had been underestimated by the Timbabuan political leadership. Furthermore, it emerged that similar scenarios had been simulated by Timbabu's government already in 2020 ahead of the Olympic Games in Noronha, but the lessons identified had not been incorporated into the country's crisis management procedures. With this evidence in hand, the military response – in violation of Article 9 of the Timbabuan constitution – led to a constitutional crisis and the resignation of Timbabu's prime minister.

The results of the investigation encouraged Norea to seek compensation from Timbabu in the International Court of Justice (ICJ). In 2025, the ICJ issued its decision siding with Norea. The judgment concluded that a kinetic attack by Timbabu constituted a violation of Articles 2(4) and 51 of the United Nations Charter, pertaining to the prohibition of the use of force and the right to self-defence. The ICJ acknowledged that despite the fact that 'the scale and effects of the damage incurred by Timbabu could have constituted the use of force' and 'amount to an armed attack', if it had truly suffered a cyber attack, the government of Timbabu had not 'sufficiently taken into account all circumstances surrounding the incident'. While a military response might have been considered necessary and proportionate in the event of a cyber attack carried out by another state, the case in question clearly did not meet these criteria.

Major solar storms impacting the earth's electrical systems

extreme space weather events
since the measurement of solar activity

1859
THE CARRINGTON EVENT
The first recorded disruptive solar storm with the biggest geomagnetic activity in the last 160 years. It rendered telegraph lines unusable worldwide.

1921
THE GREAT STORM
Solar storm caused a telephone station in Sweden to burn down and put the New York railroad switching system out of operation.

1940
EASTER SUNDAY STORM
Long-distance communication was disrupted with up to 2,600 volts recorded in an Atlantic cable.

1946
RADIO BLACKOUT
Solar storm caused an almost complete blackout of radio signals in the northern hemisphere.

1958
SOLAR MAX
Highest recorded amount of sun spots, with disturbances in radio signals for days.

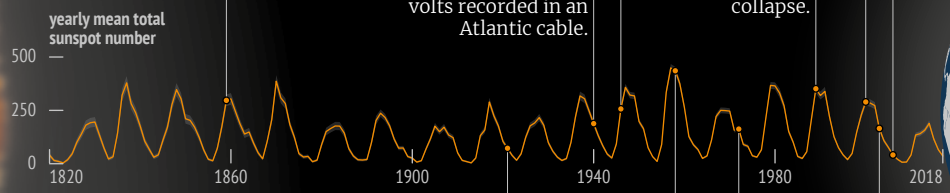
1972
SPACE AGE STORM
The first time a solar storm was predicted to hit earth, global long-distance phone communication was affected for hours.

1989
QUEBEC BLACKOUT
Solar storm disrupted a power transmission station in Quebec, causing the region's power grid to collapse.

2000
BASTILLE DAY STORM
Satellites short-circuit and radios blackout in the US.

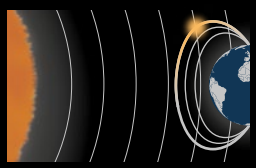
2003
HALLOWEEN STORM
Satellites are disrupted and a power outage occurs in Sweden.

2006
GEOMAGNETIC STORM
In the fastest recorded solar storm to reach earth, satellite to ground communication is disrupted.



SOLAR STORMS...

Solar flares and Coronal Mass Ejections (collectively called solar storms) originate around sunspots, which occur at different frequencies throughout the 11-year solar cycle.



...HIT THE EARTH'S MAGNETIC FIELD...

When solar storms are ejected, clouds of electromagnetic radiation hit earth's magnetic field within several hours, which often results in Aurora Borealis.

...CAUSING DISTURBANCES

This can affect earth's ionosphere (disturbing satellite/radio communication), and can hit the earth's surface, driving geomagnetically induced current into the electrical systems.

Data: Royal Observatory of Belgium, Sunspot Index and Long-term Solar Observations, 2018

Timeline

Building on this judgment and recognising the growing challenges of attribution of malicious activities in cyberspace, UN Security Council Resolution 1979/25 called on all states to abstain from the use of cyberspace for military purposes and declared it a 'military-free-zone' in order to prevent any conflict arising from the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). In order to ensure a proper implementation of UNSC Resolution 1979/25, the UN adopted a set of binding Confidence-Building Measures, including a compulsory consultation mechanism. It also created a UN Dispute Settlement Body for Cyberspace.

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

Even though most discussions about cybersecurity were focussed on man-made malicious attacks, research showed that a majority of incidents were actually caused by natural disasters. Studies have shown that geomagnetically induced currents – from a solar flare or a geomagnetic storm – were among the causes of possible future global shocks due to their capacity to take out conducting networks, such as electrical power transmission grids, oil and gas pipelines, non-fibre optic undersea communication cables, and non-fibre optic telephone and telegraph networks and railways.[1]

A series of high-profile attacks such as the Mirai botnet, WannaCry and NotPetya in previous years had led to a heightened focus on malicious cyber activities and their potential impact on stability in cyberspace. At the same time, the application of existing international law to cyberspace, norms of responsible state behaviour, and Confidence-Building Measures continued to be discussed at the United Nations, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Organisation of American States (OAS), and in other non-governmental formats like the Global Commission on Stability in Cyberspace. The adoption of the Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox led to increased reflection about the EU's possible response, but the challenges linked to the attribution of malicious cyber activities still

1 OECD, *Geomagnetic Storms*, OECD/IFP Futures Project on "Future Global Shocks", January 2011, www.oecd.org/gov/risk/46891645.pdf

limit the options for effective deterrence.[2] Despite the significant progress made by the UN Group of Governmental Experts in 2013 and 2015, issues such as states' due diligence and the use of countermeasures were still unaddressed. In 2018, only a handful of countries – including the US, the UK and Australia – had publicly stated their positions on the application of international law to cyberspace, meaning that the risk of miscalculation and conflict remained high, so long as no global regime was enforced.

2 Erica Moret and Patryk Pawlak, "The EU Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox: Towards a Cyber Sanctions Regime?", *EUISS Brief* no. 24, (July 2017), https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/eu-cyber-diplomacy-toolbox-towards-cyber-sanctions-regime.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

CHAPTER 5

WHAT IF…SERBIA AND KOSOVO EXCHANGE TERRITORIES?

by
MARKO ČEPERKOVIĆ
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When the clock overlooking Republic Square in Belgrade struck midnight on 1 June 2021, heavily-armoured anti-riot police took up positions on the streets of the Serbian capital. Lessons had been learned after the widespread rioting that occurred in December 2019, after the demarcation agreement between Kosovo[1] and Serbia was signed, which included the swap of territories. The agreement entered into force that day, and the authorities in both Belgrade and Pristina braced themselves for the protests announced by the Serbian and Kosovan parties which opposed it.

"This government and this president are nothing but traitors, and we all know how to deal with traitors", said Vojislav Šešelj, the leader of the Serbian Radical Party. Addressing the thousands of protesters gathered in the square, wearing a *šajkača*, a traditional Serbian cap, with a Chetnik emblem on it, he was joined on stage by representatives from the Serbian Orthodox Church and other nationalist movements such as Dveri, Treća Srbija and Movement 1389. Some of the leaders of the recently formed Alliance for Serbia (*Savez za Srbiju*), which united most of the opposition groups in the country, were also present.

Elsewhere, hundreds of organised buses filled with protesters headed from all over Serbia towards the Preševo valley, a region in the south of the country which officially joined Kosovo on 1 June, with the aim of blocking roads and preventing the Serbian army and police from withdrawing from the territory. Meanwhile, the majority Albanian population of the valley also took to the streets, waving Kosovan and Albanian flags and welcoming Kosovan special forces.

But the Serbian government was not the only one to experience strong opposition to the implementation of the agreement. The Kosovo authorities faced two daunting tasks simultaneously: establishing a presence in the newly acquired territories,

1 This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

and preserving the peace in Pristina as they withdrew from northern Kosovo, which was set to (re)join Serbia. The huge rally in Pristina, led by the *Vetëvendosje* ('self-determination') movement and its leader Albin Kurti, and supported by Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) veterans, sparked the most serious political crisis in Kosovo since it declared independence. "Today is not a day of victory as our government is trying to portray it. Today, we are giving away what we fought for in exchange for something that was already ours", proclaimed Kurti. Minutes after, crowds chanting "Down with the government!" began setting cars on fire as they made their way from Mother Teresa Square to the government quarter. In response, the police had to hastily erect barricades to protect the government headquarters in the Kosovan capital.

Territorial exchanges

districts swapped between Kosovo and Serbia in this scenario

Data: Natural Earth, 2018; Database of Global Administrative Areas, 2018

Many minority Albanians living in the Serb-controlled municipalities in northern Kosovo and minority Serbs living in south Kosovo and the Preševo valley had already left their homes when the deal was signed back in 2019. The UN observer mission that had visited the region in the previous months reported how many had hoped that the agreement would not come to fruition; but as it became a reality there was no other choice but for people to leave. The new borders were therefore being crossed by two different groups – police and military actors moving in to secure the new territories, and columns of civilians pouring out, leaving their homes behind. As Associated Press reported from the scene: 'It seems unlikely that normalcy will return to Kosovo, Serbia, and the rest of the Balkans any time soon.'

THE CONSEQUENCES

When Belgrade and Pristina agreed to the terms of the territorial exchange in 2019, no one could truly predict what the repercussions of the process would be; it was only after its implementation that its regional impact became clear. Political movements soon emerged in Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro which called for similar deals, arguing that multi-ethnicity had failed in the Balkans. They posited that the only way to establish long-term security was to fully redraw borders in the Western Balkans in order to create states which were as homogenous as possible. Across the region, people began to move in search of safety within their own ethnic communities.

The most drastic move occurred in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Miroslav Dodik, the Bosnian Serb leader, quickly organised an independence referendum in the Serb-dominated Republika Srpska in the immediate aftermath of the territorial exchange between Kosovo and Serbia. The Eurasian Observatory for Democracy and Elections, a Russia-based non-governmental organisation, was invited to observe the referendum, the result of which saw 72% of ballots cast in favour of independence. Dodik had an ally in this endeavour, one of the Bosnian Croat leaders, Dragan Čović, who argued that the Bosnian Federation indeed needed two entities in order to function – one Bosniak, and one Croatian. Čović warned that if the result was not

Timeline

respected, the Bosnian Croats would have to follow the example of the Bosnian Serbs and hold their own referendum on independence.

Both Čović and Dodik had argued that the Serbia-Kosovo agreement should be used to solve other frozen conflicts in the region. They were quickly joined by numerous Russian (or Russophile) analysts who used a variety of media channels to spread the message that 'the will of the people' should be the principal criteria for resolving and settling issues in other contested areas, such as in Crimea, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia. The European Union was directly affected once the Greek minority in southern Albania began to call for a referendum in order to join Greece. In response, the EU had to act on multiple fronts in order to address the situation at large, as the spill-over effect sparked trouble far from the Balkans as well. The Union had to deploy all its diplomatic force to stop the domino effects of the deal – from comprehensive coordination mechanisms in the Balkans, to appointing special representatives for the Caucasus, and intensely cooperating with UN Security Council members.

WHERE DID IT ALL GO WRONG?

Negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina took a surprising twist once Kosovan President Hashim Thaçi and his Serbian counterpart Aleksandar Vučić started to advocate a 'border correction' and swap of territories between Kosovo and Serbia in the autumn of 2018.[2] The idea to swap territory involved two mainly Albanian municipalities in south Serbia, Preševo and Bujanovac, which would join Kosovo, and four municipalities with a Serb majority in north Kosovo that would (re)join Serbia. Publicly presented at the European Forum Alpbach in September 2018, the outlines of the idea thereafter started to gain traction in the international arena.

2 Andrew Gray and Ryan Heath, "Serbia, Kosovo Presidents Broach Border Changes for Historic Deal," *Politico*, August 25, 2018, https://www.politico.eu/article/aleksandar-vucic-hashim-thaci-serbia-kosovo-balkans-eu-enlargement-alpbach-forum/.

Ever since Kosovo declared independence in 2008, it had struggled with the lengthy process of international recognition: ten years after the declaration, just over half of the nations of the international community recognised it as an independent state.[3] Its main obstacle to full recognition was, of course, the fact that it could not reach an agreement with Serbia. A seven-year long negotiation process under the supervision of the European Union, known as the Brussels Dialogue, made progress in many areas, but a solution to the issue of recognition remained elusive.

Both sides understood, however, that resolving the conflict was an important stepping stone to eventual EU membership. Faced with growing international and domestic pressure to resolve the issue, the two presidents came up with a proposal that could be interpreted by their respective parties and voters as a win-win situation for both sides – the exchange of territories.

3 Andrew Testa, "Kosovo Finds Little to Celebrate After 10 Years of Independence," *New York Times*, February 15, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/15/world/europe/kosovo-independence-anniversary.html.

CHAPTER 6

WHAT IF…THERE IS ANOTHER ARAB SPRING?

by
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In 2021, the football world began gearing up for the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar once the qualifiers started. The tournament was highly anticipated by Arab football fans, especially given that three Arab states had qualified for the previous cup, and there were two Arab bids to host the 2030 event (Egypt by itself, and a joint bid by Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco).[1]

For its opening match, the Egyptian team had been drawn against Ghana. A few minutes after kick-off, the unthinkable happened: star striker Mohammed Salah was brutally tackled and fell to the ground in agony. Controversially, the guilty Ghanaian defender received only a yellow card from the Algerian referee. As Salah was carried off the field, Egyptian fans reacted angrily – primarily online, as only 10,000 people had been allowed to watch the match live (Egypt had banned the attendance of football matches in the years after 2012 due to regular clashes between fans and security forces and only gradually began to lift it in 2018).[2] Only seconds later, social media – Facebook and Twitter and Instagram – exploded with images of Salah crying as he left the pitch. Just as in 2009, when Algerian and Egyptian fans clashed after a qualification match, emotions ran high.[3]

Within two hours, #justiceforMo was trending with nearly a million tweets and more than half a million Instagram posts – most were originally from Egypt, but the hashtag quickly spread to Tunisia, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and then to the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy and France. The global football community was in uproar, and when Egyptian fans congregated outside the Algerian embassy on Gezira Island in Cairo, authorities initially did not intervene as they saw the outrage as a healthy expression of nationalism. But

* The author would like to thank Jakob Penner of 'We Play Forward', Sascha Hahn of Sport1, as well as Christian Dietrich, Daniel Fiott and John-Joseph Wilkins of the EUISS for their input to this chapter.

1 "Egypt Planning Bid to Host 2030 World Cup Despite Economic Woes," *The New Arab*, July 11, 2018, https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2018/7/11/egypt-planning-2030-world-cup-bid-despite-economic-woes; Ramy Allahoum, "Algeria Mulls Joint 2030 FIFA World Cup Bid with Morocco, Tunisia," *Aljazeera*, July 4, 2018, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/07/algeria-mulls-joint-2030-fifa-world-cup-bid-morocco-tunisia-180704091136178.html.

2 Hend El-Behary, "Egypt Football Fans Gradually Allowed to Return to Stadiums," *Egypt Independent*, August 7, 2018, https://egyptindependent.com/egypt-football-fans-gradually-allowed-to-return-to-stadiums/.

3 Abigail Hauslohner, "The Political Fallout of Egypt's Soccer War," *Time Magazine*, November 22, 2009, http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1942089,00.html.

when protesters headed to Tahrir Square chanting "he wants justice, we want justice", and #justiceforMo turned into #justiceforMasr (Egypt in Arabic), the government began to understand that the sports-related unrest was taking a political turn.

Security forces were deployed and began to crack down violently on the football fans. Twitter and Facebook were blocked, but it took a full nine hours to block Instagram – a social media network previously seen as apolitical. Police forces tried to disperse the increasingly large crowds, but despite an enforced internet blackout, the networks of the disbanded Cairo football fan clubs Ultra White Knights and Ultras Ahlawy quickly found alternative methods to mobilise.[4]

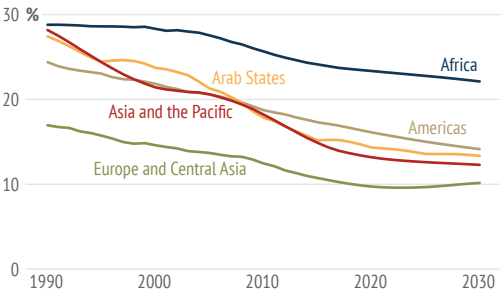
THE CONSEQUENCES

24 hours after the incident, thousands of protesters gathered on the streets of Cairo, as well as Tunis, Amman and Beirut. Before sunset, #justiceforMiddleEast and #justiceforME had gone viral. In the face of mass protests, security forces either resorted to violence or melted away. While international observers – including football players and commentators – called for restraint, hackers attacked the government websites of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, plastering them with images of Salah and the caption 'Red card for this government'. A video message by Mohammed Salah, in which he called on his fans to remain calm, only made matters worse – the rumour that the authorities had forced him to record it spread faster than any other element of the story, and #FreedomforMo began to trend online.

Governments in the region reacted differently to the outbreak of large-scale unrest, but none of them could curb it; increased violence was met with increased resistance. In Tunisia, police forces repeatedly clashed with demonstrators, with four people killed in the first week. In Egypt, both police and military forces used excessive violence, but struggled to maintain this stance in the face of sustained protests; at the end of the first week, Egypt mourned more than 300 victims. By the end of the second week, when it became clear that an escalation of violence would not solve the problem, President Sisi's calls for dialogue fell on deaf ears. Even in Libya, where swathes of the country remained outside government control, citizens took to the streets demanding the disarmament of the militias in charge. In Syria, insurgents flooded entire streets with footballs, severely disrupting traffic, and hackers attacked the government's website, posting a picture of Abdul Baset al-Sarout (a Syrian player who had joined the opposition during the civil war) next to the words "Every game has two halves". A series of car bombs exploded across Syria, killing at least 21 Russian and Iranian troops. Demonstrations also took place in Algiers and Baghdad, but no casualties were reported.

Youth labour force trends and projections

share of 15- to 24-year-olds in total labour force by regions



Data: International Labour Organization, 2018

4 James Dorsey, *The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer* (London: Hurst, 2016); John Duerden, "Football and the Arab Spring," *ESPN*, February 4, 2012, http://www.espn.co.uk/soccer/columns/story/_/id/1017428/duerden:-football-and-the-arab-spring.

As violence entered its third week and security forces proved unable to put an end to it, both regional and European decision-makers understood that this was no longer a flash in the pan. The choice for regional decision-makers was clear: resort to greater violence and repression and throw the region into an even worse decade of instability, economic downturn and insecurity – or reform.

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

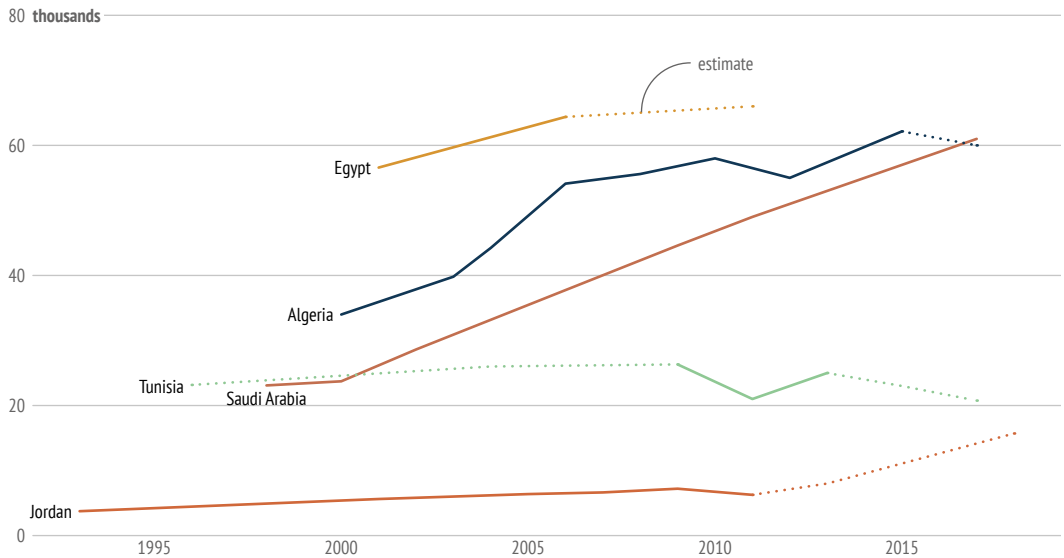
Sustained repression in the years following the Arab Spring created the illusion that protests in the region were simply no longer possible; in 2018 in Egypt alone, more than 60,000 activists were in jail, more than 500 websites blocked, and collective entities – from football fan groups to pharmacists' associations – were placed under government surveillance or disbanded.[5]

The end of military operations in Syria in 2019 only added to the perception that, at least for now, democracy had been stopped in its tracks in the region.

Regional decision-makers therefore saw no pressing need to reform the labour market, foster a business environment which encouraged the creation of the 27 million jobs needed, or engage in inclusive politics. The Egyptian military's economic activity, for instance, had suffocated the private sector, contributing to even lower levels of job creation than seen before the Arab Spring. In Tunisia, the monopolies

It's getting crowded

Prison populations in selected MENA countries, 1998–2018



Data: World Prison Brief, 2018

5 Arabic Human Rights Network, "There is Room for Everyone... Egypt's Prisons Before & After January 25 Revolution," September 2016, http://anhri.net/there-is-room-for-everyone-egypts-prisons-before-after-the-25-of-january-revolution/?lang=en#.W-LaljFRe70; Arabic Human Rights Network, "The Battle is not Over... Internet and the Arab Governments," September 2017, http://anhri.net/battle-not-internet-arab-governments/?lang=en#.W-LZ0zFRe70.

Timeline

which had been created under President Ben Ali remained in place, causing similar problems. An international environment which often myopically focussed on terrorism and migration to the detriment of democracy and economic reform did little to reverse this regressive dynamic.[6]

Meanwhile, all of the principal factors which sparked the Arab Spring in 2011 had grown progressively worse. Youth unemployment, for instance, increased from 28% in 2010 to 34% in 2017 in Egypt, from 29% to 35% in Tunisia, from 30% to 39% in Jordan and from 22% to 24% in Algeria.[7] Crucially, income disparity also grew worse: 10% of the region's population owned 61% of its wealth, making it the least equal area in the world. At the same time, the region's youth bulge continued to grow – in the ten years after the Arab Spring, Egypt's population grew by 20 million, with 57% of the population under 24 by 2021. The cohort between 15 and 29 (also called the 'fighting age') numbered 24 million – an amount simply too large to control. To keep discontented groups in check, most governments in the region tightened their grip on the media; Egypt fell by 34 places in the Freedom of Press Index between 2010 and 2018, for instance.[8]

Yet the region's governments could not bar access to the internet completely: 35% of Egypt's population were internet users in 2011, growing to 55% by 2019, while half the country had a Facebook account.[9] And the uncontrollability of the internet was especially visible when it came to Instagram, which overtook both Twitter and Facebook as the Egyptians' favourite social media network. Football fans in particular found this an ideal outlet for their passion since being under political pressure after the Arab Spring. More than 21% of Instagram users (some 146 million people) were football fans, but the authorities in the region perceived the social media channel as a non-threatening medium

6 Andrew England, 'Middle East Jobs Crisis Risks Fueling Unrest, IMF Warns," *Financial Times*, 12 July, 2018, https://www.ft.com/content/3daf3d5a-8525-11e8-a29d-73e3d454535d.

7 Arjun Kharpal, "'Alarming Scale' of Youth Unemployment in Middle East, OECD Official Warns'," *CNBC*, February 12, 2017, https://www.cnbc.com/2017/02/12/oecd-youth-unemployment-gender-inequality-middle-east.html; Stratfor, "Youth Unemployment: The Middle East's Ticking Time Bomb," February 28, 2018 https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/youth-unemployment-middle-east-teen-jobless.

8 Reporters without Borders, "Freedom of Press Index 2018," 2018, https://rsf.org/en/ranking#.

9 Mohamed Alaa El-Din, "Egypt is the Largest Arab Country Using Facebook with 17 Million Users," *Daily News Egypt*, October 12, 2018, https://dailynewsegypt.com/2017/06/14/egypt-largest-arab-country-using-facebook-17-million-users/.

due to the predominant mixture of fashion, travel and sports posts – underlining the fact that authorities will always be one step behind when it comes to policing the online realm.[10]

Ultimately, it was a mixture of discontent and a lack of socio-economic progress, combined with strong online and offline social networks, which inevitably led to the events of 2021.

10 Andrew Hutchinson, "How Facebook and Instagram Users Engaged with the World Cup," *Social Media Today*, July 17, 2018, https://www.socialmediatoday.com/news/how-facebook-and-instagram-users-engaged-with-the-world-cup/527891/.

CHAPTER 7

WHAT IF…TURKEY AND RUSSIA CLASH IN THE CAUCASUS?

by
RODERICK PARKES
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The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) rail line ploughs its way from Azerbaijan to Turkey, cutting across Georgia. And by 2021 it had begun to establish itself as the key valve in the long East-West trade corridor running from China to Western Europe – labelled in Beijing as the 'new artery of global trade and transport'. But on 28 August, the BTK rail line was hit by four huge explosions. Coordinated detonations destroyed freight trains just as they were crossing vital connecting bridges on Georgia's borders, not to mention causing the loss of 17 lives and 16,000 tons of luxury cargo.

Although the attacks were centred on Georgia's borders, most of the 17 fatalities were Azeri and Turkish: on this Orthodox holiday, most Georgian rail workers were at home. This was the first clue that this atrocity had a religious dimension. Sure enough, it turned out the explosives had been stockpiled by a dissident Georgian sect, driven to extremes by Tbilisi's recent concessions to Baku. Their Orthodox monastery, Piros Breteli, sat plum on the border, and a proposed border demarcation would have tipped it into Azerbaijan under the deal. The BTK line, constructed in Georgia with a $775 million Azeri loan, was an obvious revenge target.

The self-styled 'Crusaders' of Piros Breteli were not acting alone.[1] The sect's grievances were local, but it quickly became clear it carried out the bombings with help from nearly a dozen foreign fighters (right-wing extremists and white supremacists, mainly from the US). But there was speculation, too, that the 'Crusaders' and their helpers were armed and directed by an outside government: a Georgian leaks website soon published a web chat suggesting the religious novices had broken with the Georgian Orthodox Church's usual Russo-scepticism and contacted the head of 'external relations' in the Russian Orthodox Church and, through him, the Kremlin.[2]

1 For a real life parallel see Maja Zivanovic *et al.*, "Serbian Monarchists, British Right-Wingers Plot Kosovo 'Resistance'," *Balkan Insight*, November 5, 2017 https://tinyurl.com/yb8wqnkj.

2 For background see Shota Kakabadze and Andrey Makarychev, "A Tale of Two Orthodoxies: Europe in Religious Discourses of Russia and Georgia," *Ethnopolitics*, vol. 17, no. 5 (2018): pp. 485-502.

Rival corridors
competing transport projects in the Caucasus

Data: Natural Earth, 2018

If it was indeed to have been working with the Kremlin, the sect made a dangerous pact: the bombings put the East-West BTK line out of service for the foreseeable future, leaving Russia's rival International North-South Transport Corridor well-placed to be the great winner. This corridor ran down through Russia via South Ossetia and Armenia into Iran, branching off east and west along the way. In other words, the destruction of the BTK could well provide a lifeline to the Islamist Iran's new regime in Tehran – hardly what the 'Crusaders' would have intended.

But the 'Crusaders' cited Vladimir Zhirinovsky's[3] geostrategic tome advocating Russia's *Last Thrust South*, parroting his claim that "the historic destiny of Orthodox countries is to dominate the Islamic south". As they saw it, Russia's north-south rail line only strengthened Orthodox nations, while pushing Turkey aside and bringing Iran under Moscow's yoke.

THE CONSEQUENCES

In the initial days after the BTK bombings, European commentators made overwrought comparisons to Sarajevo in 1914. The months before the attacks had already been rife with lurid speculation about hidden international alliances and a reshuffling of the world order. But there was no explosion of violence in the Caucasus tinderbox, and no outside powers were sucked in. Georgia and Azerbaijan kept a lid on things, and Tbilisi made a show of cracking down on the extremists. Within a few days, the world's attention had begun to wander.

3 Celestine Bohlen, "Zhirinovsky Cult Grows: All Power to the Leader," *New York Times*, April 5, 1994, https://tinyurl.com/y7zvuuk3.

But the cocktail of religious prejudice and geostrategic competition proved too toxic to dissipate entirely, and tensions flared up elsewhere – in the long-strained relationship between Russia and Turkey.

In Ankara, the enfeebled Prime Minister Erdoğan (Bilal Erdoğan, that is, the 40-year-old son of former President Recep Tayyip) presented evidence that the Kremlin had "sponsored this economic sabotage" and formally declared the two countries' friendship dead. In Moscow, Foreign Minister Alikhanov (Anton Alikhanov: young, reality-TV looks and anointed as one of the successor generation to Vladimir Putin) denied the "outrageous charges", and responded by abruptly strangling the flow of Russian tourists to Turkey's Black Sea resorts.

A cash-strapped Erdogan reacted just like his father did in 2015, when the flow of tourists was cut following Turkey's downing of a Russian fighter jet, and sought new markets among 'our Turkic brethren'. He led a high-level delegation to the Caucasus, before heading east to Central Asia and, with Beijing's blessing, right out to western China and the border to Siberia.

Alikhanov responded to this diplomatic blitz by chastising Erdogan for "trying to create a Muslim axis" along Russia's underbelly and, in a show of strength, announced that Russian muftis were withdrawing from the summit of the Eurasian Islamic Council in Istanbul. So Erdogan used the Council as the backdrop for an announcement of his own: his government would help revitalise the Archbishopric of Alexandria. Thanks to Erdogan's announcement, the centre of gravity in the family of Orthodox churches lurched towards Istanbul, their historic seat, and away from Moscow. Alikhanov, son of a Caucasus Greek, muttered darkly to the press about the Orthodox Church being used as a pawn.

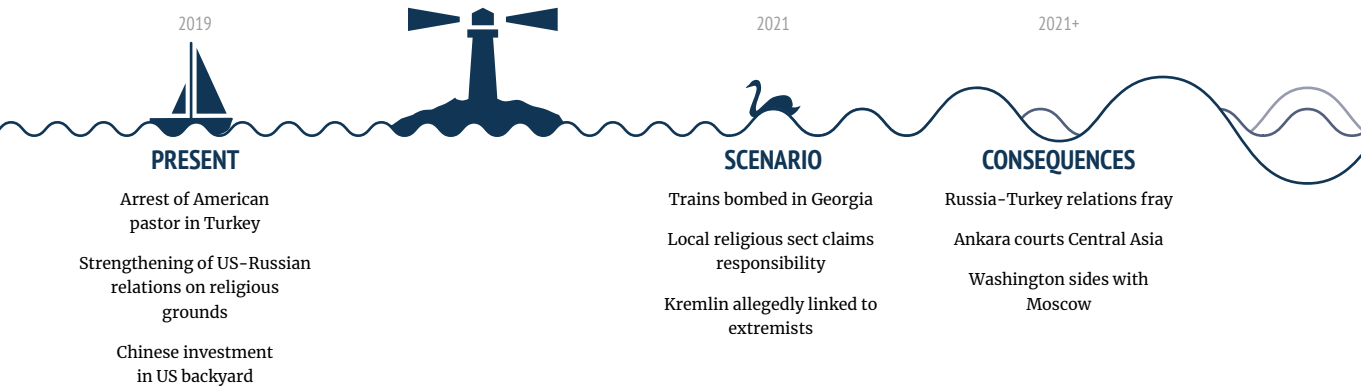
A short hiatus. And then Russian authorities announced they had detained a number of terrorists at the border between Georgia and Dagestan, the Russian province to Georgia's north. Among the arrests was a young Chechen who spent time as a refugee in Turkey. He claimed, under obvious duress, to have been acting for the Turkish security services. On public television he mumbled that he was not the only one: "the new refugee camps are hotbeds of Islamic extremism", he said, and young Middle Eastern "refugee-warriors"[4] had been recruited, radicalised and relocated from Turkey worldwide.

Turkey, sensing that Alikhanov was trying to stir trouble in Trump's Washington, called on its NATO ally, the US, for political support. But then so too did Alikhanov himself. And, next, came the shock images from the US: Alikhanov, accompanied by a small coterie of Russian geostrategic thinkers, was photographed meeting the new US Ambassador to the United Nations, Jared Kushner, on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York. This was followed by a glitzy press conference in Trump Tower, where the US president gripped Alikhanov in a firm handshake and announced the "deal of the millennium" and, with it, the "end of the post-Cold War era".

In a move which delighted his Evangelical lobby and electrified his white working-class base, Trump disavowed his country's treaty commitments to "Islamist Turkey", wrote off the trans-Caucasian BTK as a "terrible project" and announced investment in a whole series of north-to-south transport corridors along Eurasia to break up the Chinese-European east-west corridor. Under the anodyne concept of

4 For background on the term see Aristide Zolberg et al., *Escape from Violence: Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Marina Eleftheriadou, "The Dawn of the 'Refugee-Warriors': Rebel Recruitment Among the Syrian Refugee Population in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon," *Middle Eastern Bulletin*, 27 (2015): pp. 9-14.

Timeline



'north-south connectivity', a full-blown reshuffle of international alliances was underway, and Europe was at risk of being frozen out.

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

Already in 2018, analysts in Brussels had read the runes: the tensions in the unnatural friendship between Russia and Turkey; the likelihood of their clashing in the historical buffer zone of the Caucasus; Washington's anger about the economic corridor from China to Europe and the US's broader frustration about providing a security umbrella to wealthy Europe; the *rapprochement* between Russia and the US. But these analysts operated in a secular EU, and one where 'connectivity' seems apolitical. They missed how religious geopolitics would cross-fertilise with geostrategic competition over trade routes.

Even when the Trump-Alikhanov deal was announced, analysts missed its full geopolitical significance. After all, on the face of it, the 2021 US-Russian initiative for a set of north-south corridors was nothing more than a copy-and-paste version of the pragmatic proposals set out a decade earlier by the Obama administration – proposals which were meant to link Afghanistan back to its northern neighbours and allow for military withdrawal.[5] But this new version, in which Russian and American investment vehicles cooperate, was both bigger and sharper, mixing geostrategic ambition with religious prejudice.

By 2019, the earlier detention and trial of Pastor Andrew Brunson by Turkey began to fuel a religiously-infused new geostrategy in the US.[6] At the newly-created Brunson Institute in Whiteville, North Carolina, analysts exploited this. They wrote a paper on 'global connectivity' pointing out that Russia and the US, between them, already wrap their way around the circumference of the globe, east to west. If the two cooperated, they could dominate world trade routes, and 'sideline those countries

5 James McBride, "Building the New Silk Road," *Council for Foreign Relations*, May 22, 2015, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/building-new-silk-road.

6 Demetri Sevastopulo, "Donald Trump Uses Dispute with Turkey to Rally Evangelicals," *Financial Times*, August 17, 2018, https://www.ft.com/content/3c0b59d8-a16e-11e8-85da-eeb7a9ce36e4.

currently leaching off the US'. By building north-south routes they would 'gridlock' Turkey, China and western Europe.

Vice President Mike Pence was the initial driving force, and struggled to interest his boss in this new geostrategy.[7] Until, that is, Chinese firms irked Trump by announcing funding for a 'Second Panama Canal', which would run east-west through Nicaragua and effectively split the US from its southern neighbourhood. Chinese-European 'connectivity' had finally become a problem in the US's own backyard, a problem which the US could solve only by switching the axis of world politics from east-west to north-south.

7 "The Axis between Russian Orthodox and American Evangelicals is Intact," *The Economist*, July 14, 2017, https://www.economist.com/erasmus/2017/07/14/the-axis-between-russian-orthodox-and-american-evangelicals-is-intact.

CHAPTER 8

WHAT IF…BELARUS AND KAZAKHSTAN QUIT THE EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION?

by
STANISLAV SECRIERU
Senior Analyst, EUISS*

It was in November 2021 when the leader of the Russian opposition, Alexey Navalny, led street protests in Moscow against the rigged parliamentary elections which had taken place in late September. President Putin had not been seen in public for a month, and it was rumoured that he was being treated in a Swiss clinic. Sensing the long-awaited arrival of post-Putin Russia, competition between elites flared up in Moscow: its first victim was the deputy finance minister, who was arrested on trumped-up charges of embezzlement of nearly $44 million. While domestic mass media speculated that the days of the prime minister were numbered, the power vacuum in the Kremlin, the inter-clan squabbles, and the revival of mass politics in Russia did not go unnoticed in the neighbourhood.

On 29 November, the presidents of Kazakhstan and Belarus emerged in Astana in front of TV cameras to issue short statements. "We set up the Eurasian Economic Union [EEU] six years ago with the hope that it would become a vehicle of comprehensive and mutually beneficial economic integration. Regretfully, despite our joint efforts to make it work, the EEU failed to deliver on the ambitious targets set and all of us are to blame for this", declared the president of Belarus. His recently-elected Kazakh counterpart followed: "In accordance with article 118 point 1 of the treaty,[1] this morning we notified the Eurasian Economic Commission about our decision to discontinue membership. Although we shall leave the EEU in 12 months, we will remain Russia's close military allies and therefore will respect all commitments undertaken within the Collective Security Treaty Organisation [CSTO]."

THE CONSEQUENCES

The announcement came as a bombshell for Russian governing elites, and provoked an intense debate about how to

* The author would like to thank Marius Troost for collecting data for the diagram that features in this chapter.

1 "The Treaty of Eurasian Economic Union," May 29, 2014 http://www.un.org/en/ga/sixth/70/docs/treaty_on_eeu.pdf.

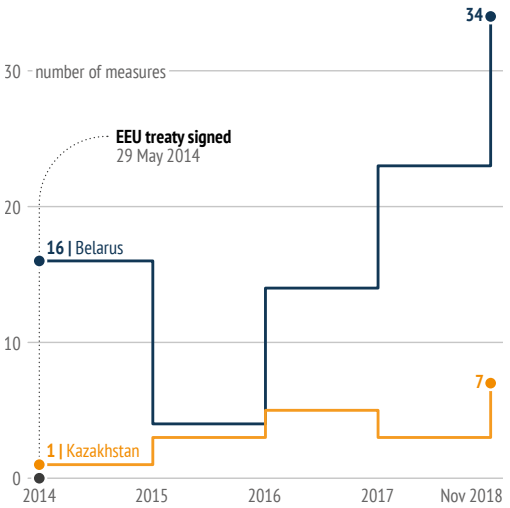
react. Young technocrats in the Russian government, who preponderantly saw the EEU as a liability and the idea of a common currency as dangerous for Russia's macro-economic stability, advocated for a swift and peaceful divorce. However, the prevailing outlook was one shared by the security elites: a double exit may trigger a domino effect among other members, and if the EEU disintegrates, the CSTO, the Russian-sponsored military alliance designed to maintain and augment Moscow's influence in the post-Soviet region, might follow suit. Given that any security and economic vacuum left would be filled by 'hostile powers', the reaction was to be firm so that no government would take post-Putin Russia lightly: disloyal EEU members were to be brought back to the fold, and the rest deterred from breaking rank. In the absence of the president, an informal meeting of the Russian security council quickly endorsed this approach.

Military options were rapidly discarded, as Russia's military was visibly overstretched. Over the last two years, Moscow had sent more troops to Syria, deployed special forces to Libya, and beefed up its presence in Tajikistan to repel a potential Daesh offensive from Afghanistan (after the terrorist group expanded its foothold to the north of the country). Lacking the firepower and political will to launch another military adventure, Moscow decided to employ a combination of political and economic sabotage techniques, with a heavy reliance on cyber statecraft.

In line with this approach, documentaries were aired on Russian TV channels containing *kompromat* (compromising material) on the presidents of Belarus and Kazakhstan, import bans on food products were put in place due to alleged violations of phytosanitary standards, while the police conducted raids to expel hundreds of Kazakh and Belarusian citizens from Moscow. In parallel, the banking sector, airports, refineries, gas and oil pipelines and electricity distribution networks in Kazakhstan and Belarus were struck by a wave of cyberattacks. In response to calls for assistance from Minsk and Astana, several EU member states deployed Computer Emergency Readiness Teams (CERTs) to help deal with the repercussions of these cyber-assaults. Shortly after, Gazprom announced that North Stream 2 gas pipelines were to be temporarily closed for 'planned' maintenance works. At the same time, several EU member states experienced waves of cyberattacks against commercial banks, power grids and e-health infrastructure.

Increase in Russian economic restrictions against allies

Measures that have impeded trade, transportation or energy supply, 2014 - November 2018



Data: 365info.kz, 2016; Fsvps.ru, 2018; GordonUA.com, 2018; Informburo.kz, 2017; Kommersant.ru, 2014-2018; NG.ru, 2014 & 2016

Russia's response had a number of intended and unintended strategic implications. First, when cyberattacks hit the Kazakh and Belarusian populations (and both governments attributed them to Moscow), Russia's popularity in both countries plummeted. Second, coercive measures took a heavy toll on local economies (energy resources made up 20% of Belarus' and 75% of Kazakhstan's exports), forcing both countries to speed up economic diversification. Third,

instead of acting as a deterrent, Russia's heavy-handed approach prompted other members to consider leaving the EEU, too. Fourth, the disruption of oil and gas deliveries entrenched the image of Russia as an unreliable energy provider. Fifth, massive cyberattacks in Europe, and the related financial losses, eroded Europeans' trust in the digital economy and e-solutions. Last but not least, Russia's response made any attempts to put the EU-Russia relations on a new positive footing in the short and medium-term impossible.

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

The original sin of the EEU was that the Kremlin designed it more as a vehicle to institutionalise Russia's geopolitical pre-eminence in the post-Soviet region rather than to foster horizontal economic integration. For Moscow, regardless of the legal provision which allows for a state to exit the Union, once a country had joined the EEU there was no turning back. This logic of geopolitical patrimonialism led Russia to retaliate in a way which inflicted losses on its own economy, precipitated the collapse of the EEU and deepened mistrust with its main trading partner – the EU.

Russia had focussed more on what it wanted and less on what its allies needed. With the economy stagnating, Moscow increasingly relied on ever-larger sticks and ever-smaller carrots to keep ranks closed, nurturing frustration among EEU member states. While Russia's direct and indirect support for Belarus amounted to 26% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2006, in 2016 it stood at little over 5% of GDP.[2] And in 2017, Belarus's trade turnover with Russia amounted to $26 billion, some $2 billion less than in 2010.[3] Russia's trade with Kazakhstan had also been on a downward trajectory for some time, decreasing by 37% between 2011 and 2016.[4] Despite these trends, Russia continued to develop and press ideas on how to deepen integration (the introduction of a common currency, for instance) without delivering on previous commitments (such as the elimination of non-tariff trade barriers). Unsurprisingly, EEU members pondered gradual economic diversification (for example, Belarusian President Lukashenko's proposed geographic formula 30-30-30, whereby the country's exports are divided equally between Russia, the EU and the rest of the world[5]) in order to avert what is seen in Astana and Minsk as a creeping attempt to swallow them economically, disguised as 'mutually beneficial' integration.

The EU, for its part, would have been better positioned to soften the impact of Russia's coercive measures against Belarus and Kazakhstan if trade relations and infrastructure connections had been deeper with each respective country, and if emerging digital economy sectors had been better protected against malicious cyber intrusions. EU-Belarus relations, for instance, were still governed by the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA)

2 Ivan Tkachev and Anton Feinberg, "Skrytii schiot na 100 mlrd: kak Rossia soderjit belorusskuiu ekonomiku [Hidden account for 100 billion: How Russia sustains Belarus' economy]," *RBK*, April 2, 2017 https://www.rbc.ru/economics/02/04/2017/58e026879a79471d6c8aef30.

3 "Tovarooborot mejdu Rossiei i Belarusiu v 2017 godu dostig $26 mlrd [The Trade Turnover Between Russia and Belarus in 2017 Reached $26 Billion]," *BelTa*, December 26, 2017 http://www.belta.by/economics/view/tovarooborot-mezhdu-rossiej-i-belarusjju-v-2017-godu-dostig-26-mlrd-282082-2017/.

4 Roman Mamchitz, "Pochemu sokratilasi torgovlia mejdu Rossiei i Kazakhstanom? [Why did Trade Between Russia and Kazakhstan Decrease?]," *Invest-Forsight*, November 24, 2017 https://www.if24.ru/torgovlya-rossia-kazahstan/.

5 "Belarus Invites Belgium to Partake in Great Stone Projects", *BelTa*, March 3, 2016 http://eng.belta.by/economics/view/belarus-invites-belgium-to-partake-in-great-stone-projects-89344-2016/.

Timeline

concluded by the European Community with the Soviet Union in 1989, so a new bilateral economic agreement was long overdue. And although Minsk had awoken to the need to rationalise and reduce energy consumption, the EU's limited financial assistance in this domain had no real strategic impact. Meanwhile, the 2018 Convention on the legal status of the Caspian Sea brought new opportunities for energy projects with Kazakhstan (ones which circumvented Russia), but the EU had been slow to seize the moment.

Finally, Russia had shown a growing predilection for the use of cyber tools against its neighbours since 2007. Still, little was done to assist Belarus and Kazakhstan in terms of capacity building so that they could have detected intrusions and recovered more swiftly from major cyberattacks against national critical infrastructure.

FURTHER AFIELD

CHAPTER 9

WHAT IF…SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA IS HIT BY A CONTINENTAL DEBT CRISIS?

by
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Senior Analyst, EUISS

The sovereign debt crisis, also known as the 'African Black Hole', began when South Africa declared that it would default on debt payments on 16 February 2021. Shortly after the announcement, Standard and Poor's downgraded its rating to 'default', citing 'amplified contagion risks to neighbouring countries' and adding that 'as policy options for a quick recovery are very narrow, it is expected that South Africans will have a long, hard road ahead.' On 18 February, South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa travelled to Washington, DC, to negotiate the terms of a bailout with the International Monetary Fund (IMF); however, the South African government refused IMF conditions as it was unwilling to undergo painful structural reforms that would trigger public protests. The IMF Managing Director criticised the move in a press conference on 19 February, predicting that it would "further aggravate the crisis, plunging millions into poverty." Ramaphosa then turned to the BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) for support. He returned to Pretoria on 22 February 2021, cheerfully waving the BRICS bailout agreement while stepping off the plane. However, while providing short-lived relief to the economy, the agreement failed to deal with underlying issues, such as the need for reform, and hence could not restore the market's confidence. What followed was the beginning of the most severe continental economic crisis Africa had ever suffered, the shockwaves of which had humanitarian, security and geopolitical implications, halting economic growth and opening an era characterised by widespread instability and uprisings.

THE CONSEQUENCES

South Africa first dragged neighbouring countries into a recession spiral due to the high vulnerability of the southern African regional bloc.[1] The contagion then expanded to the rest of the African

1 African Development Bank, "Southern Africa Economic Outlook 2018," 2018: pp. 3-15, https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/African_Economic_Outlook_2018_-_EN.pdf.

Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)[2] during the summer and autumn of 2021. It was aggravated by the reliance on market instruments and on non-concessional debt (60% of total African debt) of many African economies; and by the higher risk of joint default of economies belonging to the same trade area, which is linked to the speed with which a shock is transmitted.[3]

Within a few months, Kenya defaulted, followed by Zambia, Mozambique, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Cameroon and Ghana were the first West African countries to be exposed. By the winter of 2022, Africa's economic outlook was 'back to square zero': one in four countries in the AfCFTA were either experiencing default or in extreme financial distress, impacting banking systems, the stability of currencies and the real economy.

In middle-income countries, the engines of Africa's growth, governments adopted austerity measures to receive conditional emergency support by the IMF. South Africa ended up accepting IMF conditionality in March 2022. But it was too late: austerity prompted the rise of organised protest movements, which led to riots, vandalism, civil disobedience and the emergence of urban guerrillas. In Kenya, the shilling registered a 40% depreciation against the US dollar and inflation increased to 19.8% in the two years following the debt crisis. This raised daily living costs up to 40% and pushed many households into poverty, with the percentage of the population living on less than the international poverty line growing from 35.6% in 2015/2016 to 55% in 2021.[4]

In low-income countries, the crisis, combined with the weakening of state institutions, dragged societies towards extreme fragility. Cameroon's economic troubles were exploited by the Anglophone region of the country, with Ambazonia eventually seceding in December 2022. In the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, the debt crisis led to a spike in radicalisation and extremist recruitment (particularly among the youth), as state authorities were perceived by the local populations as the entities responsible for their economic misfortunes and lack of prospects. In Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad, the debt crisis overlapped with severe food and water shortages, which affected more than 13 million people and required emergency assistance. The humanitarian toll of the crisis was devastating, as it became clear that public finances, and not just conflicts, could be at the root of famine: according to the International Committee of the Red Cross, three million children in West Africa suffered from acute malnutrition, and two-thirds of households urgently needed food.

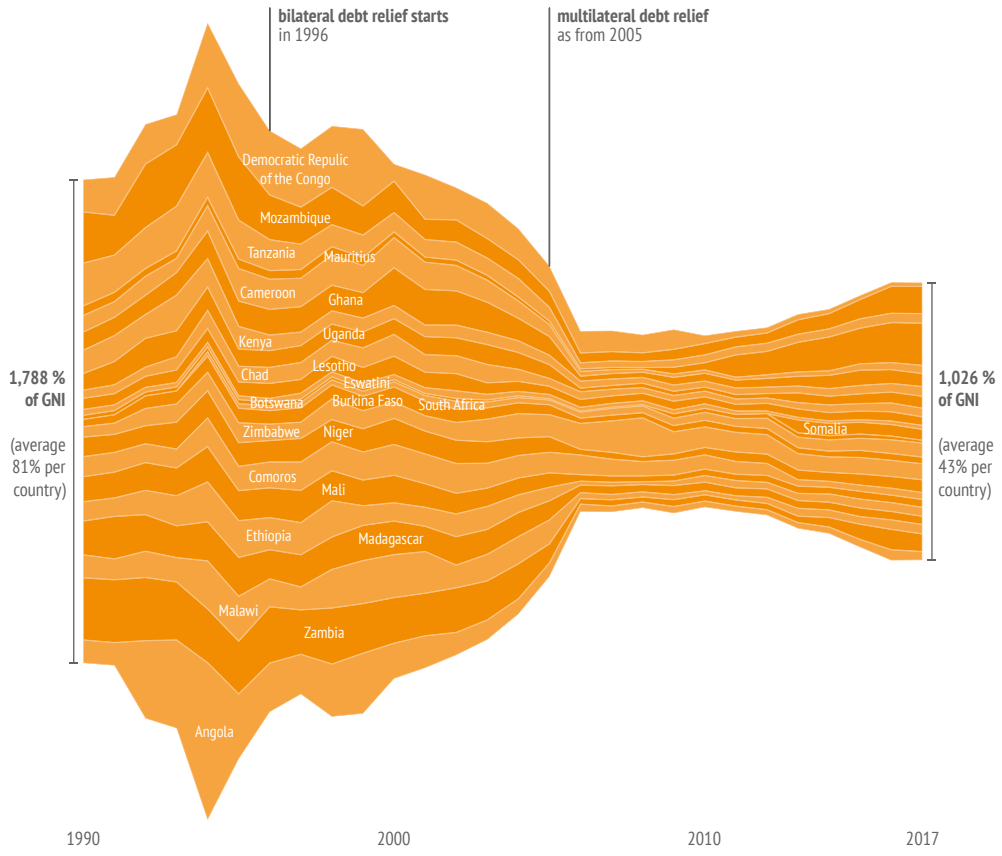
To contain the humanitarian consequences of the crisis, an Integrated Assistance Framework (IAF) worth $400 billion was launched by the United Nations, the World Bank, the IMF, the BRICS CAR, the European Union and the African Union. It included a financial package for sovereign state bailout and stability measures; a humanitarian package for the provision of assistance to populations suffering from the resulting food and health crises; a politico-security package, including stabilisation and crisis response instruments in areas where conflict or violence intensified in connection with the crisis; and a development package to foster resilience. However efficient, the IAF could not prevent approximately 2 million deaths in 2 years (2021-2023), which were directly or indirectly related to sovereign defaults.

2 The AfCFTA was signed on 21 March 2018 and officially entered into force on 1 September 2019.

3 Denis Gorea and Deyan Radev, "The Euro Area Sovereign Debt Crisis: Can Contagion Spread from the Periphery to the Core?," *International Review of Economics and Finance*, 30 (2014): pp. 78-100.

4 World Bank Group, "Policy Options to Advance the Big 4: Unleashing Kenya's Private Sector to Drive Inclusive Growth and Accelerate Poverty Reduction," *Kenya Economic Update*, no. 17 (April 2018).

External debt stocks
cumulative % of GNI per country



Data: World Bank, 2018

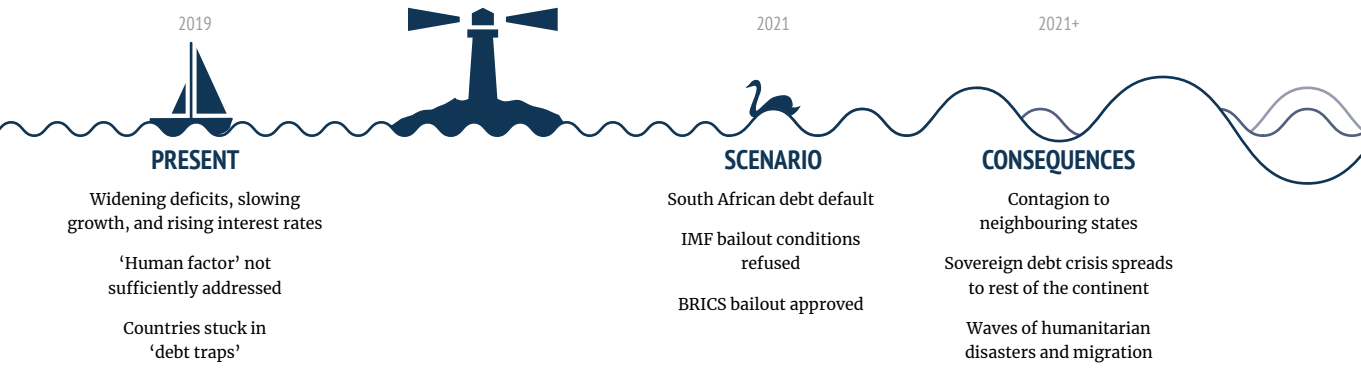
Finally, implications were felt not only in Africa: a new migration and refugee crisis again reached Europe's southern borders. Twice the number of refugees and migrants travelled across the Mediterranean to reach the coasts of Malta, Italy and Greece than in the 2015 crisis – two million arrivals by sea in 2022 according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). A survey by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency also recorded that the number of economic migrants increased from 18% in the 2015 crisis, to 35% in 2022.[5] This new migration crisis, combined with economic woes, bolstered extremist forces in many countries, and anti-EU sentiments grew alongside 'ultra-nationalist' movements.

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

The crisis happened in the wake of the Second Great Recession, a period of global

5 Alessio d'Angelo et al., "Mapping Refugee Reception in the Mediterranean", *Report of the Evi-Med Project*, June 16, 2017, p. 15, https://www.mdx.ac.uk/___data/assets/pdf_file/0023/409055/EVI-MED-first-report-final-15-June-2017.pdf?bustCache=885776.

Timeline



financial downturn triggered by the financial crisis that hit the US in 2020.[6] But the international community started ringing the early warning bell on African economies already in 2018, as analysts witnessed a widening gap between the continent's expanding sovereign debts and the 'Africa Rising' narrative.

A report from the Brookings Institution published in April 2018 found that for most countries in Africa the cost of borrowing exceeded the rate of growth, and that debt dynamics had become adverse for much of Africa as a result of widening primary deficits, slowing growth, and rising interest rates.[7] According to the Center for Global Development, since 2010 African countries started re-accumulating significant debts, with lending shifting from traditional multilateral institutions to commercial lenders and new actors, such as China, which offered higher interest rates.[8] Such debt accumulation made Africa more vulnerable to the Great Recession, and revealed the extent of the limits of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC), which provided 100% debt relief for 30 African countries.[9]

If the signs were there, why was the crisis not prevented? First, the risk of a crisis was seen by policymakers only through an economic lens, with little consideration for political, security and humanitarian consequences. The 'human factor', meaning what a default could mean for the real economy and societies, including effects on conflicts, violence and famine, was not sufficiently addressed, reducing the incentives for decision-makers to take early action.

Second, the international architecture for preventing and resolving debt crises was inadequate to deal with the diverse composition of creditors in Africa. Multilateral institutions were also unable to adopt effective quick response and containment

6 Nouriel Roubini and Brunello Rosa, "The Makings of a 2020 Recession and Financial Crisis," *Project Syndicate*, September 13, 2018, https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/financial-crisis-in-2020-worse-than-2008-by-nouriel-roubini-and-brunello-rosa-2018-09?barrier=accesspaylog.

7 Indermit Gill and Kenan Karakulah, "Sounding the Alarm on Africa's Debt," *Brookings Institution*, April 6 2018, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2018/04/06/sounding-the-alarm-on-africas-debt/.

8 Justin Sandefur and Divyanshi Wadhwa, "Chart of the Week: A New African Debt Crisis?," *Center for Global Development*, March 2, 2018, https://www.cgdev.org/blog/chart-of-the-week-new-african-debt-crisis.

9 "Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative," *World Bank Brief*, January 9, 2018, http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/debt/brief/hipc.

measures, as shown by the lack of coordination between the IMF and the BRICS in handling the first response to South Africa's default. The picture was further complicated by irresponsible lending practices by new geopolitical actors (such as China), which pushed African nations into a 'debt trap'.[10]

Additionally, European leaders largely underestimated the implications of a debt crisis in Africa. Concerned with short-term policy priorities, EU and member state decision-makers failed to understand the implications of a collapse of African economies and did not use their diplomatic instruments or political influence to mitigate such a risk. The 'Black Hole' reversed the progress Africa had made towards the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the development trajectory initiated through debt relief programmes in migration countries of origin, creating new waves of population displacements that ended up reaching Europe's borders.

10 Anzetse Were, "Debt Trap? Chinese Loans and Africa's Development Options," *South African Institute of International Affairs Policy Insights*, no. 66, August 2018, https://saiia.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/sai_spi_66_were_20190910.pdf.

CHAPTER 10

WHAT IF…THE UNITED STATES PULLS OUT OF EUROPE?

by
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Recently re-elected in November 2020, President Trump addressed the December 2021 NATO Rome Summit where he outlined changes to US force posture in Europe. "It's a great day for America!" bellowed the president. "No more unfair burden on the United States. We are making the Europeans pay their fair share for their defence. Now we can finally focus our attention and resources elsewhere", he added. President Trump had kept his word: while on the campaign trail, he had announced that if re-elected, he would redeploy two-thirds of the roughly 60,000 troops[1] and associated capabilities stationed with US European Command (USEUCOM) to the Central and Indo-Pacific Commands. However, the US president dedicated a further $1 billion to the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI), albeit with the different objective of assisting European allies purchase US military equipment. Although USEUCOM would continue to undertake reassurance measures in eastern Europe, President Trump explained that US forces would be repositioned to Afghanistan, Thailand, Japan, Philippines and the Gulf in response to the growing militarisation of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

There was initially some confusion over President Trump's announcement at the Rome Summit, particularly as the US Department of Defense and the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) did not immediately confirm the policy shift. In a bilateral meeting with the NATO Secretary General, however, the newly sworn-in Secretary of Defense explained that the downsizing of USEUCOM would take effect immediately, but that the US commitment to Article 5 and its nuclear and missile defence posture in Europe would remain unchanged. Despite such reassurances, European NATO allies held a special meeting in Brussels with SACEUR to discuss the way forward (the US had boycotted a meeting of the North Atlantic Council). Furthermore, an emergency session of the European Council was convened with a number of EU member states calling for increased deployments in Europe under the auspices of NATO command.

1 US European Command, "EUCOM Posture Statement 2018," March 8, 2018, http://www.eucom.mil/mission/eucom-posture-statement-2018.

THE CONSEQUENCES

Despite the significance of the US decision for NATO, the policy shift affected the EU, too. First, non-NATO EU member states pushed for a shift in the character of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Ankara's offer to send more Turkish troops to mainland Europe left non-NATO EU partners uneasy about an increased Turkish presence on NATO/EU soil. While many European NATO allies either called up and/or re-directed troops from overseas missions to make up the troop and capability shortfalls left by the US in Europe, a new Protocol of the EU treaties was adopted in 2022 to assuage the fears of non-NATO EU member states and please NATO/EU members that wanted to enhance Europe's strategic autonomy.

While some member states had wanted a broader EU treaty change following the US decision and Brexit – including changes to the use of qualified majority voting in the area of foreign, security and defence policy – Protocol 38 on 'The European Defence Union' was ultimately seen as the most viable way of amending the EU treaties. In essence, Protocol 38 altered Article 42[2] of the EU treaties in order to allow CSDP missions and operations to be deployed on the territory of the EU. (Until the point that the amendment was made, CSDP missions and operations could only be deployed outside of the Union).

Protocol 38 led to a number of associated initiatives by the EU. First, in 2022 the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) was renamed the 'Military Headquarters of the EU' (MILIEU). Although the MPCC had been entrusted with the strategic command of executive missions and operations under the CSDP in 2020, MILIEU would now have to plan for internal EU missions and operations. Second, a revised concept for the EU Battlegroups (EUBG) was unveiled which replaced the six-month rotation model with a permanent combined force, as well as introducing a new funding approach to EUBG deployments. This new concept was heralded as a long-term project under Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO).

Yet despite agreement on Protocol 38, the establishment of MILIEU and the new EUBG concept, the EU faced a dilemma related to force generation. With many EU member states channelling troops and capabilities into NATO, the Union found it increasingly difficult to deploy CSDP military missions and operations outside the EU. For example, the EU naval operation deployed to the Gulf of Guinea (EUNAVFOR Oshun) in November 2020 to counter piracy and instability in the Niger Delta also had to be considerably downsized. Naval vessels were required for maritime deterrence activities in the Mediterranean Sea since Russia had expanded its activities in Europe's southern neighbourhood.

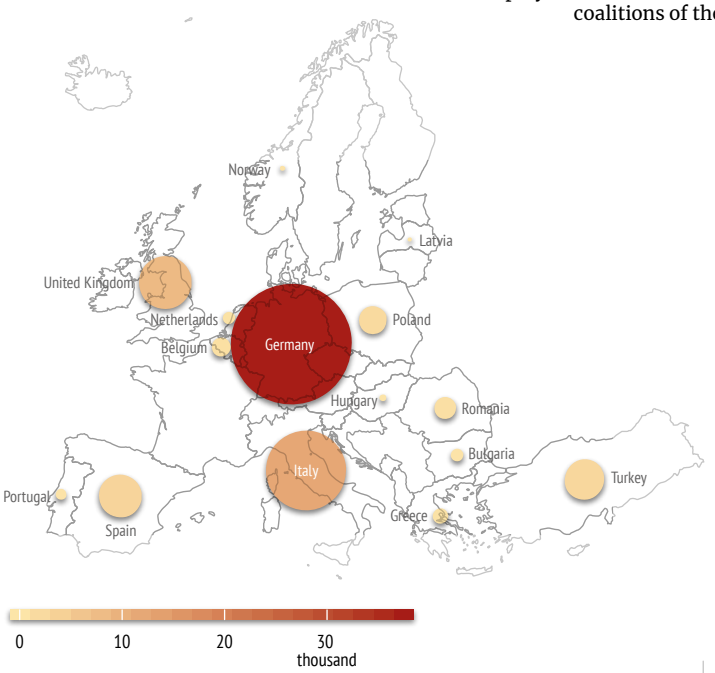
However, one positive aspect of the EU's efforts was the successful inauguration of the 'Suwalki line' in 2023, which opened following the EU and NATO's military mobility efforts. Building on existing EU rail modernisation projects, the Suwalki line extended the Poznan railway connection between Czerwonka and Suwalki in Poland with a fully electrified line designed for a higher load bearing. As a result, the EU joined its first ever military exercise ('Noble Warrior 24') with NATO on EU territory in December 2024 to showcase the ease of manoeuvrability through the 100-plus kilometre 'Suwalki gap' joining

2 Article 42 of the Treaty on European Union states 'The common security and defence policy shall be an integral part of the common foreign and security policy. It shall provide the Union with an operational capacity drawing on civilian and military assets. The Union may use them on *missions outside* the Union [...]' (emphasis added). See https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12008M042&from=EN.

the Polish and Lithuanian borders. The combination of enhanced infrastructure and military exercises displayed the EU's growing strategic autonomy in defence since 2021.

USEUCOM troops deployments in Europe

In 2017, over 69,000 troops were deployed by US European Command in Europe, with the highest level of deployment to Germany (more than 37,000 troops) and the lowest to Latvia (up to 60 personnel).



Share of deployed troops

This data shows what share of overall active duty personnel have been deployed by individual EU and/or NATO members on missions and operations for the EU, NATO, OSCE and the UN, plus other national deployments and contributions to coalitions of the willing.

Data: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2018

Timeline

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

Ever since the NATO Summit on 11 July 2018, European states had been put on notice by Washington. President Trump's call for European allies to increase their defence spending to 4% of GDP[3] was initially scoffed at. But when the president himself realised that a 4% target was unrealistic, he turned his attention towards US forces and capabilities in Europe. There was not much European allies could do to stop the US from downsizing USEUCOM and NATO Europe, and EU NATO member states had considerable problems fulfilling their force commitments under both Article 5 and CSDP. Nevertheless, EU member states had used the period after the 2018 NATO Summit to hedge against potentially volatile behaviour by President Trump, especially given Russia's continued activities in eastern Europe and the Mediterranean, as well as China's growing military presence in the Gulf region.

Under the banner of the 'European Defence Union', EU member states had already agreed to change the remit of the MPCC to include executive missions and operations. Member states also substantially increased the staffing levels and budget of the MPCC in line with its enhanced responsibilities. Furthermore, it was clearly prudent of many EU member states to table a non-paper on the EUBGs and a modified Article 42. Finally, while it would take many years to develop capabilities a number of member states launched ambitious projects in 2018/2019. In particular, the negative messaging by President Trump on NATO in 2018 led a number of member states to launch the European Future Combat Aircraft System programme through PESCO and the European Defence Fund in 2020. EU members also agreed that it was time for the Europeans to jointly develop a next-generation main battle tank and frigate. Despite such developments, Europe struggled to deal with the downsizing of the US force presence in Europe.

3 "Trump Tells NATO Leaders to Up Military Spending to 4 Percent of GDP," *CNBC*, July 11, 2018, https://www.cnbc.com/2018/07/11/trump-tells-nato-leaders-to-up-military-spending-to-4-percent-of-gdp.html.

CHAPTER 11

WHAT IF…FISH WARS BROKE OUT IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA?

by
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Senior Analyst, EUISS

"C*húng bay sẽ bị đánh tơi bời*!" were the last words of Ly Nguyên Giáp, the 15-year-old son of a captain of a Vietnamese fishing trawler before he was shot dead by a member of a Chinese maritime militia. This incident, the latest in a series of clashes between China and Vietnam, took place on 15 July 2021, about one hundred nautical miles west of Fiery Cross Reef.

Video footage, filmed on a phone by one of the witnesses, showed a Chinese vessel ramming into one of three Vietnamese fishing trawlers. The fishermen, some of them armed, were heard shouting a sentence from a famous 10th century poem which asserts Vietnamese sovereignty and resistance to Chinese invasion: "*húng bay sẽ bị đánh tơi bời*", commonly translated as "you bastards will be beaten to pieces!" Often used in anti-Chinese protests, the taunts visibly angered the Chinese, who then opened fire on all three fishing vessels, leaving seven Vietnamese dead and a dozen injured. The slain teenager, named after the Vietnam People's Army general and great military strategist Võ Nguyên Giáp, died a hero in the eyes of his compatriots.

The video went viral on social media networks in Vietnam and quickly spread to the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia under the hashtags #JusticeforNguyenGiap and #StopChinabullying. Since 2015, Vietnamese official sources had reported nearly 3,000 cases in which Vietnamese fishermen had been killed or injured, or gone missing,[1] with hundreds of similar cases recorded by neighbouring countries. A wave of popular protests then swept across the region, with demonstrators urging their governments to take military action against China, lest they "take justice into our own hands".

As the incident occurred in the middle of a summer-long fishing ban, Chinese authorities dismissed all allegations, declaring it a legitimate act of self-defence and part of the fight against illegal fishing. Ever since China unilaterally imposed the

1 Hoang Chau, "Chinese Ships Attack Vietnamese Fishermen," *AsiaNews,* September 1, 2017 http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Chinese-ships-attack-Vietnamese-fishermen-41670.html. Original article in Vietnamese from July 5, 2016, https://nld.com.vn/thoi-su-trong-nuoc/cap-thiet-bao-ve-ngu-dan-tren-bien-20160507232653 82.htm.

moratorium in 1995, it had been regularly defied by local fishermen from impoverished coastal communities, who risked their lives for profits derived from fish, which tripled in value during the summer season.

As fish stocks depleted, however, weapons became a standard piece of equipment aboard fishing vessels.

THE CONSEQUENCES

By 2021, Beijing already controlled the entirety of the South China Sea (SCS) militarily: large military bases were present on Woody Island, Mischief Reef and Fiery Cross Reef, in addition to advanced outposts on seven other atolls in the Spratly Island group, which were equipped with missile defence systems, airfields and communications facilities.

In a bid to avoid entering into a direct conflict with China, governments of regional littoral countries had encouraged fishermen to use more aggressive tactics and provided them with military training and equipment. Clashes between armed fishermen and maritime militia became ever more frequent and violent, eventually leading to a full-scale fish war in the SCS.

Despite the existence of a binding Code of Conduct in the SCS, adopted in early 2021[2] to prevent the escalation of tensions, diplomatic channels and emergency hotlines were of little value as they only applied to military manoeuvres and governmental vessels. Moreover, maritime militias were organised and managed by local/provincial governments, which were heavily dependent on fishing and motivated purely by economic interests. Regional capitals subsequently lost control of the situation.

Another side effect of the depletion of marine resources was the (re)emergence of piracy. Although the phenomenon was historically present in the Straits of Malacca and around Singapore, the new pirates (often former fishermen using fast and robust ships) started to target commercial carriers, in a similar manner to the Somali pirates who operated in the Gulf of Aden in the early 2000s. International shipping through the SCS's Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), which carry 80% of global trade by volume, therefore became vulnerable, raising the risks and costs for shipping companies.[3]

A reaction from maritime user states in and outside the region did not take long. Japan, an island nation entirely dependent on maritime trade, suggested setting up a Joint South-East Asia Maritime Patrol – a multinational task force composed of navies of littoral countries with the support of major external stakeholders. The idea was officially proposed at the 'Symposium on Maritime Security Cooperation in East Asia' in Tokyo in January 2022, and gathered strong support of the remaining countries of the Quadrilateral Security Partnership – the US, India and Australia, but also other shipping actors, including South Korea and the European Union.

Rejecting the proposal, China pledged to restore order and stability in the strategic waterways, and assumed sole responsibility over what Beijing claimed were its territorial waters. Navies of interested parties were invited to take part in patrolling the SCS – under the strict supervision of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN).

2 "China Hopes to Complete Talks on S. China Sea Code of Conduct in 3 years," *Xinxua*, November 13, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-11/13/c_137603619.htm.

3 "The State of Maritime Piracy 2017: Assessing the Economic and Human Cost. Executive Summary," *Oceans Beyond Piracy*, 2017, http://oceansbeyondpiracy.org/reports/sop/summary.

Disputed waters

fishing activity in the South China Sea

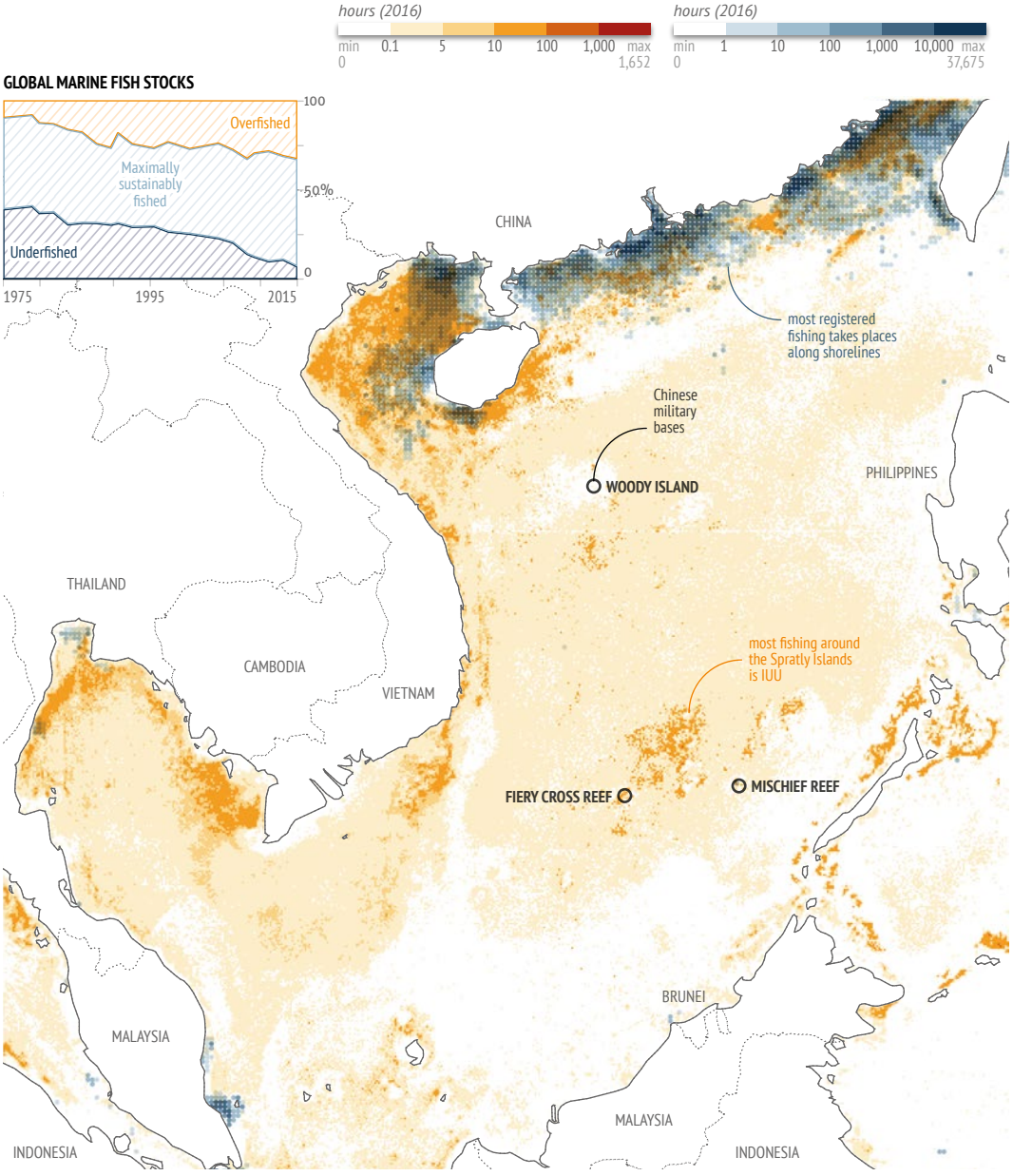
According to the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation, China is the world's top fish producer. It also leads in exporting fish and fish products since 2002. Meanwhile, global marine fish stocks are shrinking.

NIGHTTIME FISHING

The majority of lights detected at sea at night come from commercial fishing vessels. Cumulative fishing effort is measured in hours by vessels at sea that satellites have detected by the light that they emit at night. The data thus shows individual vessels and entire fishing fleets that are not broadcasting on their Automatic Identification System, and therefore can be attributed to Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing activity.

AUTOMATIC IDENTIFICATION

Cumulative fishing effort measured in hours by vessels identified through their Automatic Identification System in 2016. These are known or possible commercial fishing vessels. The underlying data applies a fishing detection algorithm to determine "apparent fishing activity" based on changes in vessel speed and direction.



Data: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2018; National Centers for Environmental Information, 2018; Global Fishing Watch, 2018.

The South China Sea had not only turned into an undersea desert; it was now no longer open and free.

HOW DID IT HAPPEN?

Decades of unresolved sovereignty disputes and the militarisation of the SCS had decimated regional fish stocks. In 2017, experts estimated that 70%-95% of SCS fish stocks had been lost since the 1950s, and that catch rates had declined by 66%-75% over the last 20 years.[4] Already in 2016, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) reported that 90% of global fish stocks were either overfished or at the limit of sustainability.[5]

Global fish consumption doubled from 10kg in the 1960s to 20kg in 2016,[6] and by 2018, production was already failing to meet the growing demand. Seafood was the main source of protein in South-East Asia, which consumed a total of 208kg of fish per capita per year in 2015.[7] China alone consumed almost 30% of global fish stocks in 2017 – a trend that intensified with the expansion of its middle class.

China was also the world's largest fish exporter. Thanks to heavy governmental subsidies, China commanded the world's biggest commercial fishing fleet in 2018, with hundreds of super trawlers and so-called 'factory ships' capable of processing 547,000 tons of fish per year. The traditional fishing industry (consisting of minor fishermen using small crafts and fishing multiple species), which constituted 90% of the region's production at the beginning of 2000s, was replaced by large-scale industrial fishing. Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing became commonplace, and accounted for an estimated 25% of the legal market value ($36 billion in 2018).[8] The decline in the number of fish led fishermen to turn to increasingly 'efficient', yet painfully unsustainable techniques such as deep-sea trawling, and dynamite and cyanide fishing.

The expansion of aquaculture (also known as aquafarming) along the shores of the SCS did not provide a solution either. On the contrary, it contributed to the progressive loss of the region's precious mangrove ecosystem, which provided vital breeding grounds for fish and birds, as well as a natural protection against land erosion. A United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) regional study warned that 35% of South-East Asia's mangroves will be lost by 2050 if current trends continued, entailing severe environmental, but also economic, social and health security risks.[9]

Despite repeated warnings from ecologists, marine biologists and fisheries experts on the critical state of the SCS's marine livestock, narrow national interests ignored environmental concerns and dismissed calls for collective management regimes. Growing nationalism and a focus on short-term gains prevailed over

4 CSIS Expert Working Group On The South China Sea, "A Blueprint for Fisheries Management and Environmental Cooperation in the South China Sea," *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI)*, September 13, 2017 https://amti.csis.org/coc-blueprint-fisheries-environment/.

5 "The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture," *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*, 2016 http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5555e.pdf.

6 *Ibid.*

7 Steve Needham and Simon Funge-Smith, "The Consumption of Fish and Fish Products in the Asia-Pacific Region Based on Household Surveys," *FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific*, December 2015, p. 6 http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5151e.pdf.

8 Zhang Hongzhou, "Averting Asia's Fishing Crisis: China's Fishing Policies Need to be Reformed," *RSIS Policy Report*, May 2015 https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/PR150602_Averting-the-Fishing-Crisis.pdf.

9 Norman Duke, Ivan Nagelkerken, Tundi Agardy, Sue Wells and Hanneke van Lavieren, "The Importance of Mangroves to People: A Call to Action," *UNEP*, 2014, p. 8 and p. 69 https://www.unep-wcmc.org/system/dataset_file_fields/files/000/000/275/original/DEPI_Mangrove_ES_report_complete_Low_Res.pdf?1416237427.

sustainability and cooperation, leading to long-term losses for all parties involved.

Timeline

PRESENT

Unresolved sovereignty disputes and nationalism

Decimation of fish stocks

Lack of collective management regimes

SCENARIO

Violent clash between Vietnamese fishermen and Chinese militia

Popular protests spread across South-East Asia

Governments of littoral countries lose control of situation

CONSEQUENCES

Civilian 'fish war' in South China Sea

Piracy threatens the Sea Lanes of Communication

China controls the sea militarily and tightens surveillance

CHAPTER 12

WHAT IF...NEW DELHI'S 'POLLUTION SEASON' IS HERE TO STAY?

by
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Delhiites were no strangers to the greyish haze that aggravated their eyes, but the Hindu festival of Diwali which fell on 4 November 2021 heralded the arrival of an unusually dense cloud of toxic matter over the National Capital Territory (NCT) – an area roughly the size of greater London. While not a single day of 'satisfactory' air quality had been recorded by monitoring stations in the NCT for over a year, the extremely high levels of particulate matter with a diameter of less than 2.5 micrometres (PM2.5), which can enter the blood stream when inhaled, sparked a public health crisis.

Despite India's Supreme Court reintroducing a ban on firecrackers, tens of thousands of explosives were sold illegally and were set off around the capital. The resulting pollutants then mixed with the smoke from 35 million tons of crop stubble which had been burned in neighbouring agriculture-intensive states in the weeks prior to the festivities. Once this had combined with dust blown from the Thar Desert and from construction sites, as well as industrial pollutants and fossil fuel emissions, India's National Air Quality Index began (not for the first time) to record the maximum PM 2.5 level possible.

While the capital's residents had become darkly accustomed to the annual 'pollution season' with the onset of winter, when particulate matter levels are highest due to lower winds and cooler temperatures, the government was forced to declare a public health crisis when breathing became laboured for anyone who ventured outside. Much to the embarrassment of India's government, once the World Health Organisation's (WHO) 'safe' annual target of 10 micrograms per cubic metre of PM 2.5 (which cannot be filtered by cheap surgical or makeshift masks) had been surpassed by more than 19 times, the global health body's Director-General issued an explicit travel warning for India's capital. The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) noted that minimum visibility had been reduced to such a level that all flights and trains in and out of the capital were stopped, and the city's planned half marathon was cancelled on advice from the Indian Medical Association. While Delhi's Chief Minister urged people to stay inside as much as possible, the majority of the 19 million Delhiites were practically confined indoors and forced to wait for the toxic pollution cloud to lift, while those sleeping on the streets had little choice but to endure it.

THE CONSEQUENCES

In the period that followed, levels of pollution in the capital, while fluctuating, did not return to any level below 'severe'. Visibility improved once the acrid fog lifted, allowing for some return to normalcy, but unseen ambient pollution remained even during the next monsoon, which was increasingly affected itself by climate change.

By this stage, even the NCT's middle classes and those that could afford high quality air purifiers could not escape the effects of pollution: breathing Delhi's air became the equivalent of smoking over 50 cigarettes a day, with a similar impact on health. The life expectancy of those constantly exposed, such as Delhi's 90,000 rickshaw drivers,[1] further dropped from already poor levels, while half of Delhi's nearly 5 million children began suffering from permanently stunted lung development.

Although air pollution was an India-wide problem, the highest levels were consistently recorded along the Gangeatic plains in northern India, where a noxious mix of gas and pollution was hemmed in by the Himalayas to the north, particularly when north-westerly winds blow in the summer. Cities like Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh and Patna in Bihar had been suffering from premature mortality rates for some time due to ambient pollution, but northern India saw a marked increase in respiratory infections, as well as cognitive health problems. Disproportionally affecting the young and old, cases of stroke, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, particularly chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma, also began to rise.[2]

India's hitherto impressive economic growth also took a hit: not only was millions of dollars' worth of lost labour output recorded, but foreign direct investment (FDI) also decreased, and students and professionals became increasingly unwilling to relocate to cities dubbed 'uninhabitable' by the world's media. Despite efforts to liberalise the country's visa regime and the launch of another much-vaunted 'Incredible India' campaign by the government, tourism also declined, particularly from two of the top three sending countries, the UK and US, which previously accounted for some 24% of total tourists.[3] Moreover, the lack of natural light caused by the smog began affecting the country's agricultural yields, leading to food shortages and job losses; although the sector made up 14% of Indian GDP, it still accounted for some 50% of its workforce.[4]

Premature deaths per year were rising by tens of thousands in India due to air pollution, up from a staggering 1.1 million deaths per year even before the crisis (around 12% of all deaths in the country).[5] Consequently, India had begun to develop a reputation internationally as a major sending country with a small but steady flow attempting to claim asylum elsewhere (but without citing health grounds), or children being sent abroad

* The author would like to thank Dr Gareth Price of Chatham House for his advice and feedback on the chapter.

1 Business Today, "Vrooming In: 9 Lakh Vehicles Added to Delhi Roads in 2016," December 30, 2016, https://www.businesstoday.in/latest/trends/vrooming-in-9-lakh-vehicles-added-to-delhi-roads-in-2016/story/243261.html.

2 "Source Apportionment, Health Effects and Potential Reduction of Fine Particulate Matter (PM2.5) in India," *Air-Weather-Climate (AWC) Research Group*, May 2018, https://sites01.lsu.edu/faculty/hlzhang/wp.../Source-apportionment-india_V3.2.pdf.

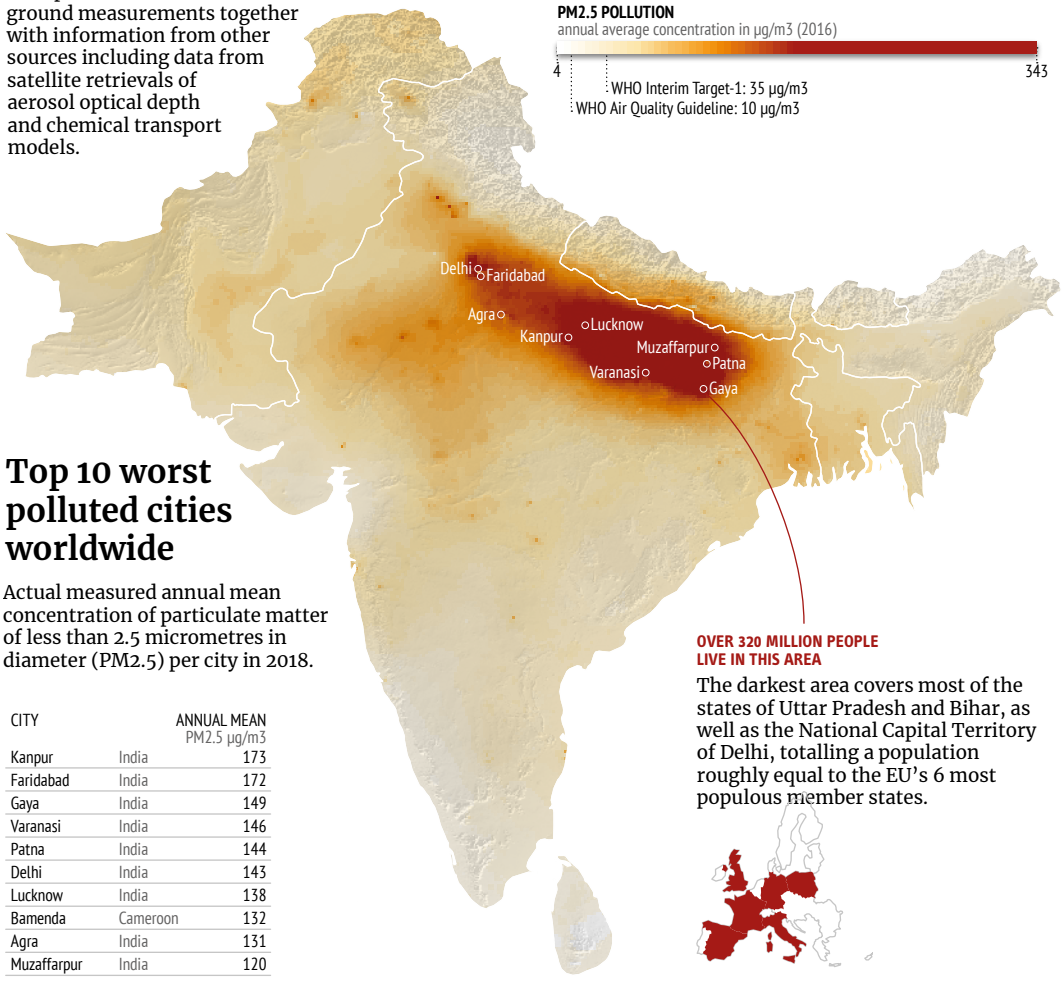
3 Government of India, "India Tourism Statistics," 2018, http://tourism.gov.in/market-research-and-statistics.

4 Avinash Giri and Shristi Sinha, "Devinder Sharma on India's Agriculture Crisis," *The Diplomat*, June 20, 2018, https://thediplomat.com/2018/06/devinder-sharma-on-indias-agriculture-crisis/.

5 "Burden of Disease Attributable to Major Air Pollution Sources in India," *Health Effects Institute*, January 2018, https://www.healtheffects.org/publication/gbd-air-pollution-india.

Modelled ambient air pollution

Estimates at 11x11km resolution extrapolated from data from ground measurements together with information from other sources including data from satellite retrievals of aerosol optical depth and chemical transport models.



Top 10 worst polluted cities worldwide

Actual measured annual mean concentration of particulate matter of less than 2.5 micrometres in diameter (PM2.5) per city in 2018.

CITY		ANNUAL MEAN PM2.5 µg/m3
Kanpur	India	173
Faridabad	India	172
Gaya	India	149
Varanasi	India	146
Patna	India	144
Delhi	India	143
Lucknow	India	138
Bamenda	Cameroon	132
Agra	India	131
Muzaffarpur	India	120

Data: World Health Organization, 2018; Natural Earth, 2018; Government of India, 2011

to countries like Australia in increasing numbers. Yet despite of all this, India still saw its carbon emissions rise even further.

HOW DID IT HAPPEN?

In 2018, nine out of ten of the world's most polluted cities were already in India.[6] But despite the continued dominance of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Indian Parliament (*Lok Sabha*), little action was

6 World Health Organization, "WHO Global Ambient Air Quality Database," 2018, https://www.who.int/airpollution/data/cities/en/.

Timeline

taken to effectively mitigate the effects of ambient pollution.

The government, under pressure from Coal India (the world's largest coal company with over 300,000 employees) and facing a growth in energy consumption of 4.2% per year, continued to build coal-fired power plants. This, compounded by continued power theft and distribution efficiencies, led the Modi administration to pursue its plans to increase coal-power generation by 48 gigawatts (GW). The government did also manage to meet its stated target of installing 175 gigawatts (GW) of renewable-energy capacity, but the growth of energy usage in absolute terms and the continued reliance on coal meant that carbon emissions carried on rising.[7] Already in 2018, some 90% of India's energy mix was fossil fuels, with 75.1% of power generated by coal, and although the energy sources were diversified, the failure to introduce new emissions standards for existing thermal power plants had a huge impact: Indian coal is substandard, meaning an average Indian power plant produced 146% of the emissions produced by an average global coal plant.[8]

The National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), run by India's Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, focussed its efforts on monitoring rather than improving the quality of air. And although the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) had introduced emission standards, the lack– or poor location – of pollution measuring systems across Indian cities hampered efforts to monitor whether or not municipal authorities complied with air quality standards. Laws were put in place, but beyond the planting of roadside vegetation, they were all too rarely applied or enforced.

Inter-sectional cooperation efforts between ministries remained weak, and the plethora of actors involved – including the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) for Delhi and the NCT, an expert-run project enforced by the Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority – failed to overcome special interest groups, especially farmers and industrialists.

Although the Indian government did increase the supply of liquefied petroleum gas to citizens, solid fuels (firewood and

7 Aparajit Pandey, "India's Low Carbon Transition," *Observer Research Foundation*, December 2017, https://www.orfonline.org/research/indias-low-carbon-transition/.

8 "India Shows How Hard it is to Move Beyond Fossil Fuels," *The Economist*, August 2, 2018, https://www.economist.com/briefing/2018/08/02/india-shows-how-hard-it-is-to-move-beyond-fossil-fuels.

cow dung) remained the principal sources of fuel for around 60% of Indian households, contributing to ambient pollution. The country's rapid urbanisation, with approximately 10 million people a year moving to cities, combined with continued population growth, also spurred on construction, which increases dust when not regulated by effective control measures. The dozens of designated industrial areas in and around New Delhi meant that industrial pollution was constantly pumped out into the capital's air, while large-scale crop burning and a reliance on diesel generators and vehicles also continued.[9]

Finally, a general state of denial and suspicion about the motives of non-governmental and international organisations meant that advice and warnings from third parties, however well-intentioned, largely fell on deaf ears.

9 "As South Asians Gasp for Breath, Governments Sit on their Hands," *The Economist*, November 16, 2017, https://www.economist.com/asia/2017/11/16/as-south-asians-gasp-for-breath-governments-sit-on-their-hands.

Foresight is about choice, decision and action – and not, as is repeated time and again, predicting the future and getting it wrong.

This *Chaillot Paper* aims to alert decision-makers to potential developments with significant strategic impact while they can still prepare for, or even avoid them. This is done using two methods combined: horizon-scanning as well as single scenario-building. Taken together, they produce plausible events set in 2021 – with strategic ramifications well beyond that.

All 12 scenarios in this *Chaillot Paper* reflect the expertise and imagination of the researchers who wrote them: some explore potential conflicts, while others look at disruptive political developments, or indeed at crises with significant ramifications. That said, all are designed in the hope of drawing attention to foreign and security policy aspects which are potentially overlooked, and all are extrapolated from ongoing and recent developments.

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