

*"Those who have the privilege to know, have the duty to act."— Albert Einstein*

# GEOSTRATEGIC PULSE

No. 308 May - June 2026 | [www.pulsulgeostrategic.ro](http://www.pulsulgeostrategic.ro)

## DEFENSE INDUSTRY

**Industry Must Serve Force Design: Building Defense Capability Beyond Platforms**

P. 55

## CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL SITUATION

**The Geopolitics of AI: Why Artificial Intelligence (AI) and National Security are Becoming More Intertwined?**

P. 28

## CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL SITUATION

**From Oil Geopolitics to Critical Mineral Competition: Energy Transition and the Emerging World Order**

P. 43

## CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL SITUATION

# When Power Makes You a Target:

**The Paradox at the Heart of the Nuclear Revolution**

P. 06



## CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL SITUATION

**The Resizing of Alliances and Conflicts at Regional and Global Levels: Minilateralism vs. Multilateralism**

P. 32

## CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL SITUATION

**The Arctic and the Indo-Pacific as Divergent Geopolitical Systems: A Comparative Analysis of Spatial Competition in the Contemporary International Order**

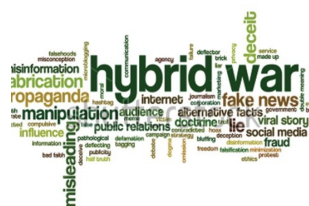
P. 18

## CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL SITUATION

**China's Maritime Strategy and Perceptions of Threat: Historical Context, Naval Modernisation, and Global Port Influence**

P. 39

## CONTENT



04

## EDITORIAL

Europe vs. Hybrid War Strategy



06

CONTEMPORARY  
SITUATIONWhen Power Makes You a  
Target: The Paradox at the  
Heart of the Nuclear Revolution

12

CONTEMPORARY  
SITUATIONFrom the Black Sea to the  
Indo-Pacific: India-Romania  
Strategic Convergence in a  
Fragmenting World Order

18

CONTEMPORARY  
SITUATIONThe Arctic and the Indo-Pacific  
as Divergent Geopolitical  
Systems: A Comparative  
Analysis of Spatial Competition  
in the Contemporary  
International Order

28

CONTEMPORARY  
SITUATIONThe Geopolitics of AI: Why  
Artificial Intelligence and  
National Security Are  
Becoming More Intertwined?

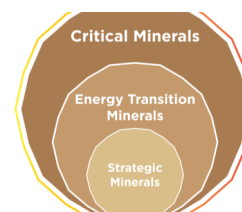
32

CONTEMPORARY  
SITUATIONThe Resizing of Alliances and  
Conflicts at Regional and  
Global Levels: Minilateralism  
vs. Multilateralism

35

CONTEMPORARY  
SITUATIONFrom the Charlemagne Prize to  
the Defence of Europe, by  
Europeans!

39

CONTEMPORARY  
SITUATIONChina's Maritime Strategy and  
Perceptions of Threat:  
Historical Context, Naval  
Modernisation, and Global Port  
Influence

43

CONTEMPORARY  
SITUATIONFrom Oil Geopolitics to Critical  
Mineral Competition: Energy  
Transition and the Emerging  
World Order

## CONTENT

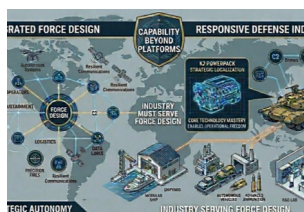


49

### CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

### GLOBAL

China – Moving from Discretion to a Bold and Assertive Approach in the Context of Today's Chaotic World



55

### DEFENSE INDUSTRY

Industry Must Serve Force Design: Building Defense Capability Beyond Platforms



60

### DEFENSE INDUSTRY

NATO's Eastern Flank: Integrating the Defence Industry into the European Security Architecture



65

### PRIVATE COMPANIES

### MILITARY

Private Military Companies in Modern Conflict

# EDITORIAL



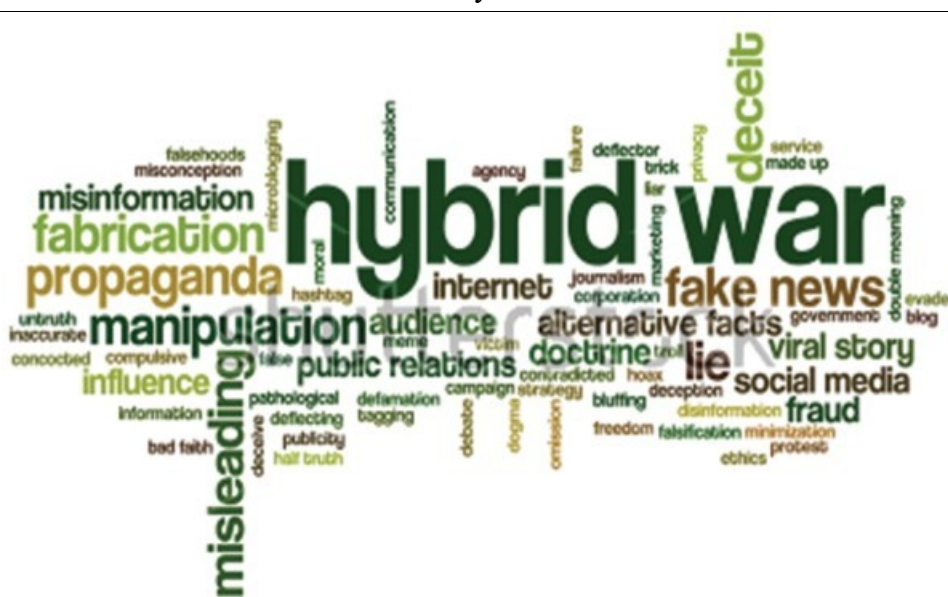
## Europe vs. Hybrid War Strategy

PhD. Eng. Stelian TEODORESCU (Romania)

Hybrid warfare strategy has dozens of definitions, with no universally accepted consensus among theorists. The concept is defined differently by experts, academia, NATO, and the European Union (EU), but focuses on the harmonious combination of conventional military means with unconventional tactics.

One of the many definitions that can be given is that hybrid warfare strategy can be defined as a sophisticated mix of military actions, disinformation, sabotage, and hybrid tactics (jamming, electoral political interference, symbolic provocations) to weaken democracies and extend influence.

At the EU level, the approach to the definition emphasizes the impact on democracy and critical infrastructure, defining it as a mix of conventional and cyber threats, broadcasting, economic, and diplomatic measures that create confusion and erode public trust in institutions.



Source: <https://ukraine-analytica.org/hybrid-warfare-as-a-threat-to-international-security/>

We chose these definitions because, analysing the accelerated developments at regional and global levels, we can say that following the developments of recent years, the security environment of the whole of Europe has become gloomy and uncertain. The transatlantic relationship is under exceptional pressure in the context in which diplomacy and negotiations to end the war in Ukraine have so far proven unsuccessful due to the fierce competition between many regional and global actors to install a new world order. In such a context, Russia has intensified its aggressive posture towards Europe and continues to launch actions specific to hybrid warfare across the continent. In the face of these converging pressures, as expected, a broad process of searching for an exact answer to the following question has arisen: *what would be the chronological order of importance for resolving the threats that should constitute a list of priorities for political decision-makers of all member states of the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance?*

Analysing the numerous studies conducted and the points of view expressed at the analytical and decision-making level worldwide, it was concluded that in 2026 the main risks identified by experts are: threats to critical infrastructure at the EU and NATO level, Russia's continued aggression in Europe, the withdrawal of US security guarantees towards European allies, but also the probable consequences generated by a military conflict between China and Taiwan. All of these would create an immensurable domino effect for Europe.

On the other hand, internationally speaking, there are four risks considered of the utmost importance in the Middle East but they have been cast aside by the effects of the European developments listed above: This change may simply reflect a short-term decrease of conflict escalation in the Middle East after a violent 2025 – a development driven by deterrence, military action and rapid crisis management – rather than a real stabilization of the region.

As such, the main risk for Europe in 2026 is not a land invasion of Europe – but a disruptive hybrid attack on critical infrastructure. This is considered both the most likely scenario and the one with the most overwhelming impact. Such an attack would not aim to defeat Europe militarily, but to sharply divide both the EU member states and, implicitly, NATO, politically and economically and socially, actions that could paralyze daily life, shake financial markets and trigger political crises.

Detering such hybrid actions and their effects in 2026 will depend on ensuring redundancy and rapid restoration of critical infrastructure, on streamlining intercontinental coordination, preparing societies for crisis situations and on the military instruments used.

As a result, it should not be overlooked that Russia remains at the centre of attention as far as threats to Europe in 2026 are concerned – although most experts do not expect a direct NATO-Russian war. Instead, the greatest risk lies in slow hybrid actions aimed at the constant degradation of Europe's security environment, while Moscow's main objective is to maintain the evolution of the overall situation at a level that allows avoiding reactions under the auspices of NATO's Article 5 provisions.

The main tactics that will continue to be used to divide EU and NATO member states are:

- *Sabotage and infrastructure attacks*: Covert physical attacks on critical infrastructure - to drain security resources and induce panic.

- *Disinformation and information manipulation*: The use of AI-generated content, fake news and social media tools to amplify anti-establishment movements, polarise elections and erode trust in democratic institutions.

- *Armed migration*: Channelling undocumented migrants across borders (such as Europe's eastern and south-eastern flanks) to fuel social tensions and inflame domestic political debates.

- *Espionage and recruitment through targeted tools*: The use of local criminal elements, fringe groups and even teenagers for local vandalism, arson and reconnaissance.

Information warfare is the core of the hybrid strategy, through the manipulation of public perception, destabilizing a state from within.

- *Disinformation*: The intentional distribution of false news to create panic and distrust in authorities.

- *Propaganda*: The amplification of narratives that divide society on sensitive issues (ethnic, religious or political).

- *Psychological operations (PsyOps)*: The demoralization of the civilian population through threatening or manipulative messages.

- *Trolls and bots*: The use of automated fake accounts on social networks to simulate a majority opinion.

- *Deep fake*: The use of artificial intelligence to create fake videos or audio recordings of political leaders.

Beyond the Euro-Atlantic theatre, it should also be noted that the risk of a military conflict between China and Taiwan has increased this year compared to 2025, moving to a high risk level and reflecting both Beijing's increasing assertiveness and the significant impact that a blockade of Taiwan would have for Europe. However, it is significant to mention here that it is necessary to assess and quantify the probability of a US-China military conflict over Taiwan, which can now be classified as the least likely scenario, but which generates an additional alarm signal for increasing trust between European states and the development of Europe's own defence capabilities. Moscow's preferred tactic remains the use of pressure, coercion and military moves against less powerful targets, where the costs are lower and the ambiguity is higher.

Overall, the picture emerging for 2026 is quite bleak: Europe will continue to face a prolonged competition and attrition rather than a single decisive confrontation.

## CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL SITUATION



### When Power Makes You a Target: The Paradox at the Heart of the Nuclear Revolution

Emilia STEFANKIEWICZ (Poland)

#### Introduction: A Revolution the World Was Not Ready For

The creation and use of nuclear weapons during World War II introduced a form of destructive capability for which the international system was not prepared at the time nor is fully equipped to manage today. The year 1945 marked the beginning of a new strategic reality, in which technological advancement enabled the rapid and large-scale destruction of entire societies. Such a transformation has been widely conceptualized as a „revolution”, not only in military affairs, but in the broader logic of international security. The theory of the nuclear revolution, most prominently associated with Robert Jervis, rests on the premise that nuclear weapons fundamentally altered the relationship between power and security. In a system defined by mutual vulnerability, the accumulation of military capability does not necessarily translate into greater security. Instead, it may impose constraints on state behavior and reshape the conditions under which deterrence operates. Yet the stability often attributed to this framework has always depended on the management of uncertainty, perception, and restraint.

This article examines the internal tensions of the nuclear revolution and evaluates their relevance in the contemporary strategic environment. First, it reconstructs the core logic of the theory, focusing on mutual vulnerability and the security dilemma. Second, it analyzes the paradox of deterrence, demonstrating how attempts to increase security can generate instability. Third, it assesses the principal critiques of the theory, particularly in the context of a changing technological and geopolitical landscape.



Finally, the article situates these insights within the current moment, arguing that the erosion of arms control mechanisms, most notably the expiration of New START, signals a shift from managed vulnerability to a condition of heightened uncertainty.

By linking theoretical foundations with contemporary developments, the article argues that the nuclear revolution remains an incomplete and contested process. As the mechanisms that once structured nuclear stability erode, the system begins to resemble a form of strategic interaction without clear rules. This matters because, in the absence of effective arms control, the conditions that once stabilized nuclear competition are eroding, increasing the risk of miscalculation, escalation, and strategic instability turning what was once a managed system into one where the costs of error are borne not only by states, but by societies.

### **Power and Vulnerability: When Stability Leads to Instability**

Robert Jervis is considered the specialist who contributed most to the spread of knowledge about the particular type of revolution, the nuclear revolution, which, as he argued, was „the result of mutual vulnerability.”<sup>1</sup> The political scientist distinguished two components indispensable for correctly understanding the theory. The first is the recognition of the fact in the form of „second-strike capability, where neither side can launch a first strike that is successful enough to prevent retaliation from the other.”<sup>2</sup> This requirement can be considered an attempt to awaken the awareness of policymakers operating a nuclear arsenal. This awareness is intended, in particular, to contribute to maintaining humility and refraining from using the bomb during the heat moments. Jervis' wish was to sensitize nuclear states to the fact that „any extreme crisis and, even more, any use of force between the superpowers creates a chance of mutual destruction.”<sup>3</sup> Possessing a nuclear arsenal is a sign of the high level of intelligence and technological development of a given country. However, according to Jervis' suggestions, it is also a burden that can effectively prevent its owner from taking action during a tense situation. As Nikolas Gvosdev, professor of national security affairs at the US Naval War College, states, „nuclear weapons create self-interest in all nuclear states to act with restraint and to keep conflicts limited both in terms of weapons and objectives.”<sup>4</sup>

However, as the history of the Cold War arms race shows, the non-conventional weapons may also present reality in a distorting mirror. An unusual case of such a misunderstanding would be the situation when „we take actions for our own security but in so doing decrease the perception of security on the part of others, even though we claim our actions are defensive.”<sup>5</sup> Jervis called this phenomenon the „security dilemma” and pointed to its elimination as the second component of the nuclear revolution. In his opinion, the more a country increased its production of nuclear weapons, the less security the expanded arsenal was supposed to provide. The reason for this paradox lay in „the fact that under many circumstances an increase in one state's security will automatically and inadvertently decrease that of others.”<sup>6</sup> These circumstances, in the case of nuclear arsenal, put the country in a hazardous position both in relation to enemies and allies. The former might perceive this reinforcement as a sign of willingness to attack; the latter could begin to fear for their position in the alliance. Thus, no matter which direction, „the attempt to gain unilateral security will inadvertently set off spirals of tension and hostility.”<sup>7</sup> Jervis was aware that in the political world of interests, it would be difficult to convince other participants in the international arena that our „intentions are benign.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, he proposed an alternative. Instead of rushing to acquire more and more nuclear weapons, „statesmen should try to design policies and postures that will protect their security without excessively decreasing the other's security.”<sup>9</sup> Interstate cooperation in the form of general refraining from ostentatiously expanding the arsenal would be a means to overturn the security dilemma and thus achieve stability in the international arena. After a superficial acquaintance with the idea, it may seem that it is a utopian wish for irrational harmony between hostile forces. However, this perspective changes when the situation is divided into smaller parts. Jervis explains that „even if each side's preferred choice is to take advantage of the other, mutual cooperation is possible if big transactions are broken up into a series of small ones, if defensive postures are stronger than and different from offensive ones, if in any single instance exploiting the other does not produce overwhelming gains and being exploited by the other does not inflict overwhelming losses, and if each side can tell what the other is doing.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon*, 14.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 50-51.

<sup>4</sup>Nikolas Gvosdev, „Introducing Robert Jervis,” lecture, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, October 30, 2023.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon*, 53.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 54.

In other words, it is easier to obtain the higher ground while maintaining transparency by taking smaller steps. The policymakers need to recognize in time the possibility of getting lost in the trap of an arms race. Jervis gave them a tip that „when offense and defense cannot be distinguished and when the former is more powerful than the latter, the security dilemma is greatly heightened.”<sup>11</sup>

While the dilemma describes the structural conditions of mutual vulnerability, instability in practice is often driven by how states attempt to manage these conditions through deterrence. A key driver of instability in the nuclear age is not deterrence itself, but its incorrect application. As political scientist Nina Tannenwald explains, „policymakers in nuclear-armed states have sought to escape vulnerability by pursuing both missile defenses and nuclear superiority.”<sup>12</sup> This pursuit of advantage has led to the previously mentioned spiral of uncertainty and tension. According to Keir Lieber, the professor in the School of Foreign Service and Department of Government at Georgetown University, the presence of the security dilemma has created a political reality in which „typically there is a set of competitive behaviors.”<sup>13</sup> Staying ahead of the race and having a significant nuclear advantage to deter enemies has been a priority for nuclear states for almost eighty years. Fighting for an advantage over one's opponent is „the kind of competition we've seen in world politics forever.”<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Jervis makes a point when he states „that it is difficult to determine the other side's intentions, and trying to determine a state that is primarily seeking security is likely to create unnecessary conflict.”<sup>15</sup> In his mind, part of the nuclear revolution, which was the elimination of the security dilemma, was also to influence changes in the perception of the concept of deterrence. The political scientist's idea was to include a psychological element to introduce an entirely new perspective. First, it was necessary to cool down emotions - the worst advisor. In a moment of anxiety, it is easy to „overestimate the hostility of others.”<sup>16</sup> Misjudgment was often the fuel that ignited the security dilemma. The increased emphasis on expanding the nuclear arsenal resulted from the state's worries „that their situation is deteriorating badly.”<sup>17</sup> This, in turn, led to the mobilization of other countries concerned about their security, which caused even greater fear for everyone. In this sense, the paradox emerges from within the very logic it seeks to stabilize. That was a paradox where more deterrence meant less deterrence. In Jervis' assessment, „the credibility of deterrent threats may be greatly overestimated by the state making them or greatly underestimated by the state being threatened.”<sup>18</sup> In order to achieve balance, the role of eliminating the security dilemma should be emphasized once again. Instead of sole deterrence, Jervis proposed „deterrence and cooperation.”<sup>19</sup> The common recognition by all nuclear-weapon states of the certainty of a massive attack in the event of a first-strike experiment was intended to be a kind of deterrence, keeping everyone's hand off the button. In this way, Jervis tried to convince the policymakers that „the state does not need the ability to take militarily meaningful action in order to deter depredations.”<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the stabilizing logic of the nuclear revolution proves far more fragile than its theoretical foundations suggest.

### Limits of the Theory: Strategic and Empirical Critiques

Jervis' theoretical framework has generated both endorsement and critique. While he openly challenged the decisions of policymakers, his own arguments were likewise contested by both academic and policy communities. Notably, Jervis maintained that political authorities frequently failed, or were unwilling, to fully understand the logic of the nuclear revolution, a point echoed by Lawrence Freedman, the expert of war studies, who argued that by „justifying weapons programs by the need to manipulate the perceptions of others.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the arms race may also have been intended to reassure public opinion to some extent by unveiling an ever newer and more powerful arsenal. These dynamics operate across multiple levels, strategic, political, and societal, often reinforcing one another. However, people unfamiliar with military strategy or nuclear physics might have often fallen short to understand that the number of warheads may be of secondary importance to nuclear-armed states. Policymakers and military strategists

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 246.

<sup>12</sup>Nina Tannenwald, „The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: 75 Years of Non-use,” *Texas National Security Review*, accessed November 7, 2023, <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/book-review-roundtable-the-meaning-of-the-nuclear-revolution-30-years-later/>.

<sup>13</sup>Georgetown University Center for Security Studies, „CSS Speaker Series | Keir Lieber on The Myth of the Nuclear Revolution,” 8:48-8:52.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 9:13-9:17.

<sup>15</sup>Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon*, 54.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 65.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Gvosdev, „Introducing Robert Jervis.”

<sup>20</sup>Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon*, 50.

<sup>21</sup>Lawrence Freedman, „A Book of Its Time and for Today,” *Texas National Security Review*, accessed November 7, 2023, <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/book-review-roundtable-the-meaning-of-the-nuclear-revolution-30-years-later/>.

also accused Jervis of inaccuracies. For example, political scientist Charles L. Glaser argued that „maintaining an assured retaliatory destruction capability is more difficult than Jervis and other theorists of the nuclear revolution believed.”<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the rather brutal scenario of mass destruction that the theory assumed at worst did not facilitate the situation that „during the Cold War was ‘more delicate, and its meaning more fluid’ than the theory of the nuclear revolution admits.”<sup>23</sup>

Another objection concerns the number of international combinations that Jervis looked into. Much of history after 1945 was based on a bipolar system, which, over time, transformed into an increasingly wider network of nuclear states with infinite possible interactions between them. Jervis’ thoughts, however, were mainly concerned with a world divided into two parts, with a lesser degree of consideration of „nuclear logic beyond the U.S.-Soviet dyad.”<sup>24</sup> Currently, the world is anxiously looking at another player, namely China, but other countries possessing weapons of mass destruction should not be underestimated either as it does not solely take an American or Russian arsenal to achieve „mass destruction.”

Critics of the nuclear revolution also point out to „many important technological developments.”<sup>25</sup> Former US Secretary of Defense, Ash Carter, emphasizes that improvements related to science (creating new, more precise types of bombs) and management (building new strategies) lead to inevitable changes „as we get into new domains, like cyber and space, and we try to situate old and very solid ideas like deterrence in those new domains.”<sup>26</sup> Perhaps technology will advance so much that one day, we can construct a reliable anti-nuclear shelter covering the entire United States. Then MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) will most likely become history, and so will the theory of nuclear revolution. Taken together, these critiques suggest that the stabilizing logic of the nuclear revolution is increasingly under strain in the current strategic environment, marked by renewed great-power competition.

### Game Theory Without Instructions

Even if the theoretical logic of the nuclear revolution remains analytically valid, its practical effectiveness is increasingly constrained by the erosion of institutional mechanisms that once sustained it. This shift does not invalidate the logic of deterrence itself, but rather exposes its dependence on institutional constraints. The expiration of New START in February 2026 marks the collapse of the last remaining institutional framework governing the world’s two largest nuclear arsenals. Originally signed in 2010 and extended in 2021, the treaty imposed limits on deployed strategic warheads and delivery systems while establishing a verification regime designed to enhance transparency and predictability. For the first time in over half a century, the United States and Russia operate without legally binding limits on their strategic nuclear forces ipso facto constituting a shift described by nuclear security senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations Erin D. Dumbacher as the possible beginning of „end of an era of arms control and limits.”<sup>27</sup> This moment represents a crack in the architecture of nuclear stability and directly challenges the assumptions underlying the nuclear revolution.

The significance of New START extended beyond numerical ceilings. Its verification mechanisms, including on-site inspections and data exchanges, were designed to reduce uncertainty and stabilize expectations. As analysts emphasize, the treaty’s most important contributions to strategic stability were transparency and predictability. However, this system had already begun to erode prior to the treaty’s formal expiration. Russia’s decision to suspend participation in 2023 effectively stopped inspections, undermining the agreement before its legal end.

From a more theoretical perspective, the collapse of New START indeed can be interpreted through the lens of Robert Jervis. The treaty functioned as a mechanism that made mutual vulnerability manageable. It reduced uncertainty about capabilities and intentions. Its disappearance therefore amplifies precisely those conditions that fuel the security dilemma: opacity, mistrust, and worst-case scenario planning. Indeed, early assessments suggest that the absence of arms control may encourage competitive behavior. Without agreed limits or verification, both states face incentives to assume the worst, increasing the likelihood of arms racing and miscalculation. The post-New START environment may resemble a world of „nukes without limits.”<sup>28</sup> In this sense, the end of the treaty actively transforms the strategic environment into one more closely aligned with the dynamics Jervis warned against. At the same time,

<sup>22</sup>Charles L. Glaser, „Nuclear Revolution Theory Marches Forward,” *Texas National Security Review*, accessed November 7, 2023, <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/book-review-roundtable-the-meaning-of-the-nuclear-revolution-30-years-later/>

<sup>23</sup>Nina Tannenwald, „The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: 75 Years of Non-use.”

<sup>24</sup>Glaser, „Nuclear Revolution Theory Marches Forward.”

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup>Vox, „How Deterrence is Changing, Explained by Defense Secretary Ash Carter,” April 13, 2016, interview video, 1:24-1:35, <https://youtu.be/Wp4fKplfGRc?si=TZcJzRvbASZAxN7v>.

<sup>27</sup>Erin D. Dumbacher, „Nukes Without Limits? A New Era After the End of New START,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 9, 2026, <https://www.cfr.org/articles/nukes-without-limits-a-new-era-after-the-end-of-new-start>.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

attempts to negotiate a successor agreement have so far failed. While proposals for a broader framework, including additional nuclear powers, have been discussed, no formal treaty has emerged. The result is a transitional period defined not by a new equilibrium, but by institutional absence.

Therefore, the implications are both practical and theoretical. Practically, the erosion of verification mechanisms increases the risk of misperception and escalation. Theoretically, it exposes the limits of the nuclear revolution: mutual vulnerability alone does not guarantee stability when the mechanisms that render it observable and predictable disappear. In this sense, the expiration of New START can be understood as a critical test of Jervis's argument. If nuclear stability depends not only on deterrence, but also on the management of its paradoxes, then the current moment represents a shift from managed vulnerability to unmanaged uncertainty.

### **Conclusion**

The nuclear revolution fundamentally transformed the relationship between power and security, introducing a system in which survival depends on restraint. As Robert Jervis argued, mutual vulnerability has the potential to stabilize international relations by discouraging the use of force. Yet, as this article has demonstrated, such stability has never been automatic. It has depended on a fragile combination of perception, cooperation, and institutional constraints. The paradox at the heart of the nuclear revolution lies in the fact that the very instruments designed to enhance security can, under certain conditions, undermine it. Efforts to strengthen deterrence, through accumulation, technological advancement, or strategic signaling, may intensify uncertainty, reinforce the security dilemma, and increase the likelihood of miscalculation. In this sense, nuclear stability is not a fixed condition, but a continuously managed equilibrium.

The expiration of New START reveals the extent to which this equilibrium has relied on formal mechanisms of control and transparency. Without them, mutual vulnerability becomes less predictable and more dangerous. The absence of constraints transforms deterrence into a less stable and more opaque form of strategic interaction. This suggests that the nuclear revolution is entering a new phase in which its stabilizing logic is no longer supported by the structures that once made it manageable. As a result, the international system increasingly resembles a condition of strategic competition without clear rules, where the risks of escalation are harder to anticipate and control.

Ultimately, the central question is no longer whether nuclear weapons deter conflict, but under what conditions deterrence remains stable. If the mechanisms that once sustained transparency and predictability continue to erode, the paradox identified by Jervis may intensify instability. The challenge is no longer to understand the logic of deterrence, but to reconstruct the conditions under which it can function in an increasingly unconstrained strategic environment.

**Bibliography:**

- Dumbacher, Erin D. „Nukes Without Limits? A New Era After the End of New START.” Council on Foreign Relations. February 9, 2026. <https://www.cfr.org/articles/nukes-without-limits-a-new-era-after-the-end-of-new-start>.
- Freedman, Lawrence. Texas National Security Review. „A Book of Its Time and for Today.” Accessed November 7, 2023. <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/book-review-roundtable-the-meaning-of-the-nuclear-revolution-30-years-later/>.
- Georgetown University Center for Security Studies. „CSS Speaker Series | Keir Lieber on The Myth of the Nuclear Revolution.” September 24, 2020. Educational video, 1:22:36. <https://youtu.be/reEjWpbcSRk?si=LpKGS70b0jrSfDsH>.
- Glaser, Charles L. Texas National Security Review. „Nuclear Revolution Theory Marches Forward.” Accessed November 7, 2023. <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/book-review-roundtable-the-meaning-of-the-nuclear-revolution-30-years-later/>.
- Gvosdev, Nikolas. „Introducing Robert Jervis.” Lecture, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. October 30, 2023.
- Jervis, Robert. *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989.
- Tannenwald, Nina. Texas National Security Review. „The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: 75 Years of Non-use.” Accessed November 7, 2023. <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/book-review-roundtable-the-meaning-of-the-nuclear-revolution-30-years-later/>.
- Vox. „How Deterrence is Changing, Explained by Defense Secretary Ash Carter.” April 13, 2016. Interview video, 10:44. <https://youtu.be/Wp4fKplfGRc?si=TZcJzRvbASZAxN7v>.

## CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL SITUATION



### From the Black Sea to the Indo-Pacific: India-Romania Strategic Convergence in a Fragmenting World Order

PhD. Monojit DAS (India)<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. Introduction

The world order that took shape after the Cold War is giving way to a more fragmented and contested landscape. Globalization, once organized around efficiency and interdependence, is being reshaped by geopolitical rivalry, supply chain nationalism, and a return of hard power to the center of international relations. Two theatres capture this shift most vividly: the Black Sea, where a grinding war in Ukraine has entered its fifth year without a durable ceasefire, and the Indo-Pacific, where great power competition between the United States and China continues to define the strategic environment.

India and Romania sit at opposite ends of this fragmenting order, yet their positions are increasingly linked. India has emerged as a leading Indo-Pacific power, a net security provider in the Indian Ocean, and an indispensable partner for any strategy aimed at diversifying global supply chains away from a single dominant power. Romania, meanwhile, anchors NATO's eastern flank on the Black Sea and serves as a frontline state in the confrontation with Russia.

The central argument of this article is straightforward. Despite the geographical distance separating New Delhi and Bucharest, the two countries share converging interests in maritime security, resilient supply chains, energy diversification, and a rules-based international order. As the Black Sea and the Indo-Pacific become more strategically entangled, a pragmatic India-Romania partnership offers both sides tangible benefits, and offers the wider transatlantic and Indo-Pacific communities a useful bridge between two theatres that are too often analyzed in isolation.



Source: <https://www.forbes.ro/relatiile-comerciale-dintre-romania-si-india-ating-1-miliard-de-euro-in-2024-449933>

<sup>1</sup>Independent Geopolitical Analyst

## 2. The Black Sea and the Indo-Pacific: Connected Strategic Theatres

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has not produced the quick resolution many hoped for. As of mid-2026, the conflict remains a high-intensity positional war concentrated in eastern Ukraine, with repeated ceasefire attempts collapsing within days. The expiry of the New START treaty in February 2026, for the first time since 1972 leaving the United States and Russia without treaty-bound limits on strategic nuclear weapons, has added a further layer of instability to European security<sup>2</sup>.

The Black Sea itself remains contested space: mine warfare, drone strikes on port infrastructure, and disputes over grain corridor security continue even amid periodic negotiations. Any future maritime security arrangement will have to operate within the constraints of the 1936 Montreux Convention, which limits the presence of non-littoral naval forces in the Black Sea and places outsized responsibility on littoral states such as Romania, Bulgaria, and Türkiye<sup>3</sup>.

This is not simply a regional European problem. The war has driven a fundamental re-ordering of European defense spending, accelerated NATO's enlargement, and pushed European capitals to look outward for partners who can help diversify energy supplies, defense production, and critical technology inputs. At the same time, the Indo-Pacific has become the center of gravity for global manufacturing, semiconductor supply chains, and maritime trade.

Disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz following renewed conflict between the United States, Israel, and Iran in 2026 have illustrated how quickly instability in one maritime chokepoint can ripple through global energy and shipping markets, forcing European and Asian planners alike to think about alternative, resilient trade corridors<sup>4</sup>.

The result is that developments in the Black Sea and the Indo-Pacific are no longer separable. A Europe anxious about dependence on any single external power for energy, technology, or defense inputs has strong incentives to deepen ties with a large, democratic, non-aligned Indo-Pacific power such as India. Conversely, India's own strategic calculus, balancing relations with the United States, Russia, and the Gulf states while pursuing an independent foreign policy, benefits from a wider set of European partners not defined solely by their relationship with Brussels, Berlin, or Paris. Romania, sitting at the crossroads of the Black Sea, the wider Mediterranean, and the overland routes connecting Central Europe to Asia, is well positioned to be one of those partners.

## 3. India-Romania Strategic Convergence

### Maritime and Security Cooperation

Both countries have a direct stake in freedom of navigation and the protection of maritime trade routes from coercion, whether in the Black Sea, the Indian Ocean, or the wider Mediterranean and Gulf. Romania's position on NATO's eastern flank gives it firsthand experience of hybrid threats, ranging from sabotage of undersea infrastructure to disinformation campaigns, that India also confronts in its own maritime neighborhood.

The two countries have already taken initial steps to formalize defense ties: a bilateral defense co-operation agreement provides a legal framework for cooperation on defense medicine, cyber defense, research, and the co-development and co-production of military hardware, and a second defense ministry-level meeting was held in New Delhi in mid-2026, following an earlier session in Bucharest. Expanding this dialogue to include cyber security, maritime domain awareness, and joint exercises would give substance to what Romanian officials have publicly described as a growing "complete partnership" between the two countries<sup>5</sup>.

### Connectivity and Trade

Romania's Port of Constanța, the largest port on the Black Sea, gives the country a natural role as a gateway linking Western Europe, the Black Sea region, and, increasingly, trade flows oriented toward the Indo-Pacific<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>2</sup>Haggag, K. (2026, February 4). *After New START expires, Europe needs to step up on arms control*. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/essay/2026/after-new-start-expires-europe-needs-step-arms-control>

<sup>3</sup>Jensen, B. & Montgomery, M. (2025). *Remote Visualization Center for Strategic and International Studies*, "How to Secure the Black Sea During a Russia-Ukrainian Ceasefire," <https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-secure-black-sea-during-russia-ukrainian-ceasefire>

<sup>4</sup>Chitkara, A. & Sutton, S. (2026). "With Hormuz Under Strain, a Trade Corridor Built for Resilience Faces a Real-World Test," *Fortune*, <https://fortune.com/2026/04/17/imec-india-middle-east-europe-corridor-hormuz-trade-supply-chain/>

<sup>5</sup>Pandey, S. "India-Romania Ties 'Complete Partnership' Growing Stronger Daily, Says Envoy Sena Latif," <https://aninews.in/news/world/asia/india-romania-ties-complete-partnership-growing-stronger-daily-says-envoy-sena-latif20260605232025/>

<sup>6</sup>Vij, J. (2025). "India-Romania Ties Have Enormous Potential, Businesses Should Take Note," <https://blog.ficci.com/archives/9547>

For India, this matters because New Delhi has been actively pursuing overland and maritime connectivity projects that reduce its historic dependence on routes vulnerable to disruption in contested waters. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, envisioned as a multimodal network of rail, ports, and digital and energy infrastructure linking India to Europe through the Gulf, remains the most ambitious such initiative, though its implementation has slowed considerably amid regional tensions in West Asia and friction in India-United States trade relations<sup>7</sup>.

Even in its stalled state, the corridor illustrates the logic that should also inform India-Romania ties: a more multipolar world rewards states that build redundant, bilateral, and pragmatic connectivity links rather than relying on any single corridor or partner.

Trade between India and Romania reached roughly 1.2 billion United States dollars in 2025, an increase of more than 20 percent over the previous year, and both governments are preparing for the prospective EU-India free trade agreement, which could substantially expand opportunities in defense industry, renewable energy, steel, automotive components, and port infrastructure<sup>8</sup>.

Beyond logistics, Romania possesses the potential to serve as India's principal gateway into Central and Eastern Europe. As an EU and NATO member located at the crossroads of the Black Sea, the Balkans and Central Europe, Romania offers Indian businesses and strategic industries access to regional markets extending from the Western Balkans to Moldova and Ukraine's future reconstruction. As India seeks to diversify its European partnerships beyond traditional Western European economies, Romania can emerge as an important anchor for long-term commercial, industrial and strategic engagement.

### Energy Security

Romania's Black Sea offshore gas reserves, together with its ambitions in nuclear energy, including ongoing work at the Cernavodă nuclear power plant, position it as an increasingly important player in European energy diversification<sup>9</sup>.

India, for its part, continues to seek diversified and resilient energy supplies as it balances economic growth with energy security concerns heightened by instability in the Gulf. While large-scale India-Romania energy cooperation remains at an early stage, the shared interest in reducing dependence on any single supplier, whether Russian gas for Romania and the wider region, or Gulf hydrocarbons for India, creates space for cooperation on nuclear energy technology, liquefied natural gas trade, and renewable energy investment.

### Technology and Strategic Dialogue

Beyond hard security and trade, both countries have signaled interest in deepening cooperation on digital technology, artificial intelligence, and people-to-people ties. Romanian companies have expanded IT and software service exports to India, and the two countries have discussed cooperation in green hydrogen and sustainable agriculture<sup>10</sup>.

Educational exchanges, such as the Erasmus+ collaboration that brought Indian students to Romania for a Shakespeare festival in Craiova, and Romania's expanded work-permit framework for skilled and semi-skilled Indian workers, are modest but meaningful building blocks for a broader relationship grounded in human capital as well as strategic calculation. Strengthening academic and think tank linkages between Indian institutions and Romanian universities and research centers would help institutionalize this cooperation beyond the current reliance on high-level diplomatic visits.

## 4. The Way Forward

Translating this convergence of interests into a durable partnership will require sustained effort on both sides, spanning not only diplomacy and defense but also education, disaster resilience, youth engagement, and culture. Several concrete steps stand out.

First, political and strategic dialogue should be elevated beyond periodic ministerial visits toward a structured, annual strategic dialogue that explicitly addresses both Black Sea and Indo-Pacific security

<sup>7</sup>Al Nuaimi, H. A. (2026). *IMEC on pause: How and when the corridor can regain momentum amid India-U.S. friction*. Trends Research & Advisory. <https://trendsgroup.org/insight/imec-on-pause-how-and-when-the-corridor-can-regain-momentum-amid-india-u-s-friction>

<sup>8</sup>ETV Bharat, "India-Romania Trade Jumps 20%; Jaishankar, FM Oana Discuss EU-India FTA, Strategic Partnership in Cyprus," <https://www.etvbharat.com/en/bharat/india-romania-trade-jumps-20-percent-jaishankar-romanian-fm-oana-discuss-eu-india-fta-strategic-partnership-in-cyprus-enn26052900569>

<sup>9</sup>Romanian Business Journal, "Romania-India Economic Partnership Exceeds 1 Billion Euros and Aims to Expand into IT and Innovation," <https://www.romanianbusinessjournal.ro/romania-india-economic-partnership-exceeds-1-billion-euros-and-aims-to-expand-into-it-and-innovation/>

<sup>10</sup>The Indian Panorama, "India-Romania Economic Partnership Advances," <https://www.theindianpanorama.news/world-news/india-romania-economic-partnership-advances>

concerns, allowing each side to better understand how the other's regional environment shapes its global posture.

Second, defense and maritime cooperation should move from framework agreements toward practical cooperation, including joint training, exchanges on cyber defense, and exploration of co-production opportunities in defense manufacturing, building on the existing bilateral defense agreement.

Third, trade and investment should be expanded by using the prospective EU-India free trade agreement as a springboard, with particular attention to sectors where Romania's manufacturing base and India's engineering and software capabilities are complementary, including automotive components, pharmaceuticals, and IT services.

Fourth, scholarship diplomacy deserves greater emphasis. India already extends training seats to Romanian nationals under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Program and cultural and educational scholarships through the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), including the Cultural Exchange Program and Education Exchange Program schemes open to Romanian applicants<sup>11</sup>. A dedicated, ring-fenced annual quota of ICCR scholarships for Romanian students, alongside an expanded slate of ITEC training slots tailored to Romanian priorities such as public administration, disaster management, and digital governance, would give the relationship a stronger educational backbone and complement the academic exchanges and joint university partnerships, such as the University of Craiova's collaboration with Indian institutions, that are already emerging<sup>12</sup>.

Fifth, think-tank and track-two collaboration should be formalized through joint research programs and regular dialogues between Indian institutions and Romanian universities and research centers, focused specifically on the Black Sea-Indo-Pacific linkage, an area that remains underexplored in both countries' foreign policy communities.

Sixth, track-two youth diplomacy should be built into a standing feature of the relationship rather than a one-off initiative. The Erasmus+ collaboration that brought Indian students from the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences to Craiova for a Shakespeare festival is a useful template; this could be expanded into an annual India-Romania youth forum, student parliamentary exchanges, model diplomacy simulations, and structured internship placements in each other's foreign ministries and embassies, giving the next generation of policymakers on both sides direct exposure to the other's strategic environment before they reach senior positions.

Seventh, disaster management cooperation offers a concrete and politically low-cost avenue for joint action. India's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has extensive experience in cyclone, flood, and earthquake response and in coordinating the National Disaster Response Force, while Romania's disaster management system is coordinated by the Department for Emergency Situations (DSU) and the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations (IGSU) under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, both of which operate within the European Union's civil protection mechanism<sup>13</sup>. A structured NDMA-DSU/IGSU cooperation framework, including joint tabletop and field exercises on flood response, wildfire management, and earthquake preparedness, exchange of best practices on early-warning systems, and participation of Romanian civil protection officials in India's disaster response training programs and vice versa, would build practical interoperability between two systems that each sit at the frontline of climate-linked hazards in their respective regions<sup>14</sup>.

Eighth, cultural and film diplomacy under the ICCR umbrella should be expanded to include audiovisual cooperation, including film shooting and co-production. Romania's revamped cash rebate scheme, which reimburses up to 30 percent of eligible local production expenditure and has already drawn major international productions to its studios and locations, is actively promoted by the Embassy of India in Bucharest as an incentive for Indian production houses to consider<sup>15</sup>. With Romania's extension of its cash rebate program through 2029 providing long-term certainty for producers, and India's own single-window film facilitation mechanism, India Cine Hub, open to reciprocal international shoots, there is a genuine opportunity to develop an India-Romania audiovisual co-production arrangement, using Bucharest's studios and Transylvania's castles and landscapes for Indian<sup>15</sup> productions, and India's diverse locations for Romanian and wider European crews, alongside joint film festival showcases and co-funded documentary projects on shared historical and cultural themes<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>11</sup>Embassy of India, Bucharest, "ITEC Scholarship," <https://www.eoibucharest.gov.in/page/itec/>

<sup>12</sup>Embassy of India, Bucharest, "ICCR Scholarship," <https://www.eoibucharest.gov.in/page/iccr/>

<sup>13</sup>Civil Protection Knowledge Network, "Department for Emergency Situations, Romania," <https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/organisations/departement-emergency-situations-romania>

<sup>14</sup>Interreg Danube Region Programme, "Project Partner: General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations," <https://interreg-danube.eu/projects/safety4tmf/news/project-partner-general-inspectorate-for-emergency-situations-gies>

<sup>15</sup>Embassy of India, Bucharest, "Film Incentives in Romania," <https://www.eoibucharest.gov.in/docs/1613383702Film%20Incentives%20in%20Romania.pdf>

<sup>16</sup>Vourlias, C. (2026). Romania approves three-year extension of revamped 30% cash rebate program. *Variety*. <https://variety.com/2026/film/global/wednesday-romania-extension-cash-rebate-1236785903>

Ninth, cooperation on emerging technologies and energy security should be pursued through targeted initiatives in artificial intelligence governance, digital public infrastructure, and nuclear and renewable energy technology, areas where both countries have growing but still underutilized capacities.

### **Building an Institutional Architecture for an Enduring India–Romania Strategic Partnership**

While India and Romania have identified several promising avenues for cooperation, the long-term success of the relationship will ultimately depend on the development of robust institutional mechanisms capable of sustaining engagement beyond changes in political leadership or shifting geopolitical circumstances. Strategic partnerships endure not merely through shared interests, but through regular dialogue, institutional memory, and networks connecting governments, industry, academia, and civil society. A comprehensive institutional architecture should therefore complement existing diplomatic initiatives. At the governmental level, an annual India–Romania Strategic Dialogue at the foreign and defense ministry level could provide a structured platform to review developments in the Black Sea and Indo-Pacific regions, coordinate positions on emerging security challenges, and identify new areas for bilateral cooperation. This could be supported by sector-specific working groups focusing on defense industrial collaboration, cyber security, maritime security, energy transition, critical technologies, and resilient supply chains.

Defense industrial cooperation should also leverage India's growing indigenous innovation ecosystem under the **Atmanirbhar Bharat** and **Make in India** initiatives. Platforms such as the Innovations for Defense Excellence (iDEX), which foster collaboration between start-ups, industry, academia, and the armed forces, could explore opportunities for joint innovation challenges, technology incubation, and co-development of dual-use and defense technologies with Romanian partners. Similarly, collaboration between Indian public and private defense manufacturers and Romania's expanding defense industrial base could promote joint research, co-production, maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO), and technology transfer in areas such as unmanned systems, cyber defense, military electronics, aerospace, and advanced manufacturing. Defense industrial collaboration should also encourage partnerships between Indian defense manufacturers and Romanian aerospace, shipbuilding and defense technology firms. Joint ventures in unmanned systems, maintenance and overhaul (MRO), military electronics, cyber security solutions and dual-use technologies would complement both India's "Make in India" initiative and Romania's ongoing defense modernization program.

Beyond government-led initiatives, institutionalized Track 1.5 and Track 2 engagement should become a central pillar of the partnership. Regular exchanges, joint policy dialogues, researcher fellowships, and collaborative publications involving leading strategic institutions such as Centre for Joint Warfare Studies (CENJOWS), Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies (CAPSS), National Maritime Foundation (NMF), United Service Institution of India (USI), and Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), for the private players Observer Research Foundation (ORF), and Chintan Research Foundation (CRF) can be good partners, together with Romanian universities, defense academies, and policy institutes, would help generate sustained policy dialogue on Black Sea security, Indo-Pacific geopolitics, maritime governance, cyber resilience, emerging technologies, and defense economics. Such institutional partnerships would not only deepen strategic understanding but also cultivate enduring professional networks capable of supporting long-term bilateral cooperation. Such collaboration should extend beyond bilateral exchanges to include joint participation in international policy platforms, security dialogues and research consortia. Indian and Romanian think tanks could jointly organize annual Black Sea & Indo-Pacific Dialogues, co-author policy papers, undertake exchange fellowships for researchers, and collaborate on externally funded projects supported by the European Union, NATO's public diplomacy initiatives, and multilateral research programs. Partnerships involving universities, policy institutes, defense academies and strategic studies centers would institutionalize cooperation and generate sustained policy engagement.

Economic and technological cooperation would similarly benefit from dedicated institutional platforms. The establishment of an India-Romania Business and Innovation Council involving chambers of commerce, industry associations, start-up ecosystems, technology parks, and investment agencies could facilitate greater private-sector participation in emerging sectors including defense manufacturing, digital technologies, renewable energy, pharmaceuticals, logistics, and advanced manufacturing. Such engagement would complement governmental initiatives while encouraging long-term commercial partnerships and investment flows.

People-to-people engagement should constitute another pillar of this institutional framework. Expanding academic partnerships through joint degree programs, faculty exchanges, collaborative doctoral research, and dedicated centers for Black Sea & Indo-Pacific studies would strengthen educational ties, while annual youth leadership forums, parliamentary exchanges, cultural festivals, and professional exchange programs would cultivate a new generation of stakeholders committed to advancing bilateral relations.

Finally, India and Romania should seek greater collaboration through regional and multilateral platforms where their interests converge. Joint participation in European research programs, international disaster management initiatives, maritime security dialogues, innovation partnerships, and projects supporting regional connectivity and post-conflict reconstruction would enable both countries to leverage their respective comparative advantages while contributing to wider regional stability. By embedding bilateral cooperation within a broader network of institutional partnerships, India and Romania can transform a relationship rooted in goodwill into a resilient, multidimensional strategic partnership capable of adapting to an increasingly complex international environment.

Additionally, both countries should also explore greater coordination within multilateral institutions and regional forums where their interests converge. While Romania contributes through the European Union and NATO and India through platforms such as the G20 and Indo-Pacific initiatives, greater consultation on issues including maritime security, cyber governance, resilient supply chains, disaster resilience and critical infrastructure protection would strengthen their diplomatic alignment.

## 5. Conclusion

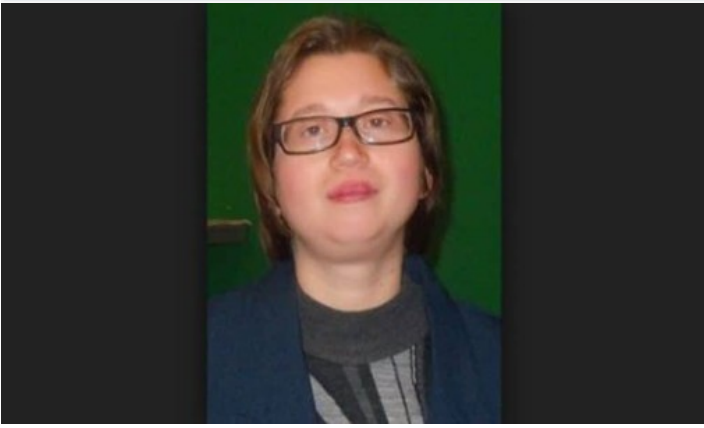
The Black Sea and the Indo-Pacific are no longer isolated strategic theatres but increasingly interconnected spaces shaped by evolving geopolitical competition, economic interdependence, and shared security challenges. The war in Ukraine has fundamentally altered European security calculations, while instability across the Gulf and intensifying strategic rivalry in the Indo-Pacific continue to reshape global trade, energy flows, and critical technology networks. In this evolving strategic landscape, India and Romania, despite their geographical distance and historically modest bilateral engagement, occupy positions of growing strategic relevance. Their convergence is driven not merely by shared political values but by complementary geopolitical interests in maritime security, resilient supply chains, energy diversification, digital governance, and the preservation of a rules-based international order.

By leveraging Romania's position as a key Black Sea and Eastern European gateway, and India's emergence as a leading Indo-Pacific power and trusted economic and technological partner, both countries have the opportunity to transform a traditionally cordial relationship into a comprehensive strategic partnership. Such a partnership should extend beyond conventional diplomacy to encompass defense industrial cooperation, cyber and emerging technologies, maritime domain awareness, disaster resilience, energy security, academic collaboration, innovation ecosystems, and people-to-people exchanges. Equally important will be the institutionalization of regular strategic dialogue, stronger engagement between think tanks and universities, closer business-to-business partnerships, and greater collaboration within multilateral and regional frameworks where their interests converge.

Looking ahead, Romania can serve as an important bridge connecting India with Central and Eastern Europe, while India can offer Romania deeper engagement with the wider Indo-Pacific and the Global South. As Europe diversifies its strategic partnerships and India expands its engagement with the European continent beyond its traditional partners, bilateral cooperation is likely to acquire greater strategic significance. Emerging opportunities - including Ukraine's future reconstruction, resilient connectivity corridors, critical infrastructure protection, artificial intelligence governance, green technologies, and defense manufacturing provide practical avenues through which both countries can translate strategic convergence into tangible outcomes.

Ultimately, the success of India-Romania relations will depend not only on government initiatives but also on the ability of academic institutions, research organizations, industry, civil society, and young leaders to build sustained networks of cooperation. In an era increasingly defined by strategic uncertainty and fragmented global governance, partnerships that bridge regions rather than reinforce geopolitical divides will become increasingly valuable. An ambitious and forward-looking India-Romania partnership has the potential to evolve into an important pillar linking the Black Sea and the Indo-Pacific, contributing not only to bilateral prosperity but also to a more resilient, connected, and balanced international order.

## CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL SITUATION



### The Arctic and the Indo-Pacific as Divergent Geopolitical Systems: A Comparative Analysis of Spatial Competition in the Contemporary International Order

Monica AGRIGOROAIEI (Romania)

#### Abstract

This study develops a comparative framework for analyzing the Arctic and the Indo-Pacific as two emerging geopolitical systems, with different structures of competition, temporality and governance. The central argument is that the two regions do not represent variations of the same type of international rivalry, but two distinct regimes of organizing global strategic space. The Indo-Pacific is conceptualized as a system of dense, synchronic, and institutionalized competition, characterized by frequent military and economic interactions and an active multipolarity. The Arctic is defined as an asynchronous, climatically conditioned, and anticipatory system, in which competition is structured by environmental and infrastructural transformations rather than direct confrontation. The study uses a comparative-structural methodology and integrates the literature on critical geopolitics, international political economy, and Arctic security to demonstrate that climate change introduces a new constitutive dimension of global power.



Source: <https://www.projectstatecraft.org/post/transition-balancing-evolution-of-traditional-balance-of-power>

Below is an expanded, academic-style version of the introduction section, preserving your conceptual logic but developing it on multiple levels (theoretical, structural, and methodological by default).

#### 1. Introduction

The contemporary international order is marked by a profound reconfiguration of strategic spaces, which goes beyond the traditional logic of classical geopolitics centered on the fixed distribution of power between states. In classical literature, from Mackinder to Spykman, geopolitical space was conceived as relatively stable and competition between great powers was analyzed in relation to geographical positioning, control of territory, and access to sea routes or resources. This approach assumed a certain

constancy of the physical environment and a relatively clear separation between natural factors and political dynamics.

However, recent developments in the international system indicate the emergence of regions whose strategic relevance can no longer be understood exclusively through the lens of traditional geostrategy, since they are directly dependent on exogenous variables with accelerated dynamics, especially climate change, technological innovation, and the reconfiguration of global infrastructures. In this sense, the physical environment no longer functions as an inert framework of international politics, but becomes an active factor in transforming the distribution of power. The melting of Arctic ice, the digitalization of global logistics, the expansion of energy networks, and the militarization of critical infrastructures are examples of this structural mutation.

This transformation generates an important conceptual shift: from a geopolitics of stable space to a geopolitics of dynamic space, in which the strategic value of regions is no longer fixed, but conditioned by the variability of the environment and the capacity of actors to anticipate and exploit structural changes. In this framework, the Arctic and the Indo-Pacific appear as two types of emerging strategic spaces, but with fundamentally different logics for the constitution of geopolitical relevance.

In this context, the Indo-Pacific and the Arctic represent two limit cases of contemporary geopolitical transformation, useful for understanding the new architecture of the international order. The Indo-Pacific is a space already consolidated as a central theater of competition between great powers, characterized by a high density of actors, infrastructures, and strategic interactions. It is a mature geopolitical system, in which rivalry is continuously manifested, and the balance of power is produced through repeated and institutionalized interactions.

The Arctic, by contrast, represents an emerging frontier of the international system, where the material conditions of geopolitical competition are still being formed. Unlike the Indo-Pacific, where the strategic infrastructure is already established and intensively used, the Arctic is in a phase of structural transition, in which climate change is simultaneously altering the accessibility, economic value, and military relevance of space. In this sense, competition in the Arctic is not simply about controlling an existing space, but about defining the very conditions under which that space becomes geopolitically relevant.

The central hypothesis of this study is that the difference between the two regions is systemic and not gradual. In other words, the Arctic and the Indo-Pacific do not represent variations of the same type of international competition, but two distinct forms of organizing geopolitical space. The Indo-Pacific functions as a system of dense, synchronous, and institutionalized competition, while the Arctic functions as an emergent, asynchronous, and climatically conditioned system, in which strategic relevance is produced anticipatory, through projections into the future rather than through immediate use of space.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The present analysis is based on an interdisciplinary theoretical architecture, built at the intersection of critical geopolitics, international political economy and Arctic security studies, complemented by concepts from social geography and global systemic change theory. The aim of this framework is not only to describe the two regions, but to provide a set of analytical tools capable of explaining why the Arctic and the Indo-Pacific function as two distinct forms of emergent geopolitical order.

The first tradition is critical geopolitics, mainly associated with the work of Klaus Dodds and Simon Dalby, which rejects the classical assumption of traditional geopolitics that space is an objective, stable and pre-political given. In this perspective, geopolitical space is not a neutral framework in which international politics unfolds, but a simultaneously material and discursive product. In other words, regions such as the Arctic or the Indo-Pacific do not simply “exist” as strategic entities, but are constituted through an ongoing process of representation, institutional practice, and material intervention.

In the case of the Arctic, this dimension is particularly relevant, because the region does not become geopolitical solely through the presence of resources or geographical position, but through the way it is “discovered” and discursively reconfigured as a climate change frontier, as an energy reservoir, or as a space for new sea routes. Similarly, the Indo-Pacific is not simply a geographical extension between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, but a recent strategic construction that reorganizes perceptions of great power competition. In both cases, critical geopolitics allows us to understand that space is simultaneously material and conceptual, and power operates through both dimensions at the same time.

The second theoretical tradition is structural international political economy, represented in particular by Robert Keohane and Susan Strange, which analyzes how global economic structures generate and stabilize power distributions among actors. In this perspective, power is not defined exclusively by military capabilities, but by control over structures of interdependence: trade flows, financial networks, logistical and technological infrastructures.

Applied to the Indo-Pacific, this approach highlights the central role of maritime infrastructure and

chokepoints in structuring the global economy, where control over transport routes becomes equivalent to influence over the global economic system. In the case of the Arctic, international political economy allows the region to be interpreted not as a marginal space, but as a potential reconfiguration of global transport and energy networks, in which emerging infrastructure (Arctic ports, seasonal routes, offshore energy infrastructures) can modify the future distribution of interdependencies.

In this framework, the Arctic and the Indo-Pacific are not just geographical regions, but potential nodes in a global architecture of flows, in which infrastructure becomes a direct instrument of structural power. This perspective allows for overcoming state-centric analysis and introduces the idea that power is exercised through control of the material conditions of global connectivity.

The third theoretical tradition is the Arctic security literature, represented by authors such as Oran Young, Kristian Åtland and Rolf Tamnes, which conceptualizes the Arctic as a partially institutionalized international regime. In this approach, the Arctic is characterized by an institutional paradox: on the one hand, there is a relatively high level of cooperation in areas such as the environment, scientific research and sustainable development; on the other hand, there is a structural deficit in terms of military security and conflict management.

The Arctic Council is the main example of this institutional architecture, functioning as a forum for technical cooperation, but explicitly excluding hard security issues. This functional separation has allowed the region to remain relatively stable in the post-Cold War period, but at the same time has generated structural vulnerability in the context of growing strategic interest and intensifying competition between great powers.

This literature is essential for understanding the Arctic not as an anarchic space, but as an incomplete regime, where governance is fragmented between sectoral cooperation and the absence of collective security mechanisms.

These three traditions are complemented by two analytical concepts with an integrative role. The first is the concept of “time-space compression”, developed by David Harvey, which describes how technological and infrastructural innovations reduce functional distances in the global system, changing the relationship between space and time in economics and politics. In the context of the Indo-Pacific and the Arctic, this concept is essential for understanding how sea routes, digital infrastructure and logistical capacity redefine the strategic relevance of geographical distances.

The second concept is that of “anticipatory geopolitics”, used in contemporary security and political economy literature to describe the competition between states for control of spaces whose strategic value is not yet fully realized, but projected onto the future. This concept is crucial for the analysis of the Arctic, where much of the current geopolitical competition is not based on actual use, but on the anticipation of future conditions of accessibility, resources and navigation.

This theoretical framework allows for the articulation of an integrated perspective on the two regions, in which geopolitics is no longer understood as a simple distribution of power in space, but as a dynamic process of simultaneous production of space, infrastructure and strategic temporality.

### 3. Methodology

The study uses a qualitative comparative-structural methodology, designed to overcome the limitations of state-centric analyses and to capture the emerging dynamics of strategic regions as complex geopolitical systems. The choice of this approach is justified by the nature of the object of study, since both the Arctic and the Indo-Pacific cannot be adequately understood by aggregating individual state behaviors, but by analyzing the relational structure that organizes interactions between actors, infrastructures, and environmental conditions.

The methodology is based primarily on conceptual analysis of the existing literature, which involves a systematic examination of the main theoretical frameworks in critical geopolitics, international political economy, and regional security studies. This stage aims to identify how different academic traditions define and conceptually construct the Arctic and Indo-Pacific regions, as well as to highlight the convergences and divergences between these interpretations. The conceptual analysis is necessary because both regions are strongly “theorized”, that is, they already exist as objects of academic and strategic discourse, which directly influences their geopolitical reality.

The second methodological component consists of comparing the structural dimensions of the two regions, organized into four main analytical axes: the actorial, infrastructural, military and temporal dimensions. The actorial dimension refers to the distribution and typology of relevant actors in each region, including riparian states, extra-regional actors and the international institutions involved. The infrastructural dimension analyzes the material networks that allow or limit access and circulation in the respective space, such as maritime corridors, ports, energy infrastructure and communication systems. The military dimension examines the forms of presence and projection of armed power, with a focus on the differences between conventional

militarization in the Indo-Pacific and infrastructural militarization in the Arctic. The temporal dimension, on the other hand, investigates how the strategic relevance of each region is distributed between the present and the future, respectively between the current competition and the anticipation of structural transformations.

This comparative structuring allows the identification of not only descriptive, but also ontological differences between the two regions, in the sense that each dimension contributes to the constitution of a distinct type of geopolitical order. The analysis does not only aim to describe empirical variations, but to capture the internal logic of organization of each regional system.

The third methodological component consists of identifying patterns of emerging geopolitical order. This involves a process of analytical abstraction through which empirical and conceptual observations are synthesized into structural models of the organization of strategic space. In the case of the Indo-Pacific, this process allows the identification of an order characterized by density, synchronicity and institutionalization of conflict. In the case of the Arctic, the same approach highlights an emerging order characterized by rarity, asynchronicity and dependence on climatic and technological transformations.

Epistemologically, the study adopts an interpretative-structural perspective, in which geopolitical reality is understood as the result of the interaction between material constraints and conceptual constructions. This implies the recognition that the regions analyzed are not fixed entities, but dynamic systems in the process of being constituted, and their analysis must capture both the material and the representative-discursive dimensions.

Regarding the unit of analysis, the study explicitly rejects the state as a primary unit and adopts the “strategic region as a system” as the fundamental level of analysis. This methodological choice is motivated by the fact that both the Arctic and the Indo-Pacific are structured by interdependencies that go beyond state borders and involve complex networks of infrastructure, institutions and transnational flows. In this sense, regions are treated as emergent systems, whose properties cannot be reduced to the sum of the behaviors of individual actors, but result from the interactions between them and the physical environment in which they operate.

Through this approach, the methodology allows for capturing the profound structural differences between the two regions and provides an analytical framework capable of explaining not only the current state of geopolitical competition, but also the potential transformation trajectories of the international order.

#### **4. The Indo-Pacific as a System of Dense Competition**

The Indo-Pacific must be conceptualized as a geopolitical system of the type “high-density strategic environment”, in which space does not function as a backdrop for international politics, but as an active infrastructure of competition between powers. Unlike the classical regions of geopolitics, where geographical distance produced strategic damping and delays in the propagation of political effects, the Indo-Pacific is characterized by a functional compression of strategic space. This compression is not only the result of naval or air technological progress, but of the simultaneous integration of maritime infrastructure, global production chains and advanced military architectures into a single interdependent regional system.

From this perspective, the Indo-Pacific can be understood as a “continuous strategic field”, in which the separation between zones of peace and zones of conflict becomes diffuse to the point of operational indistinction. Interactions between actors are not episodic, but permanent and layered, taking place simultaneously on multiple levels: naval, air, underwater, cyber, economic and informational. This layering produces a form of multi-domain competition, in which each action in one register generates reactions in other registers, which amplifies the complexity of the system and reduces the linear predictability of the behavior of the actors.

Structurally, the Indo-Pacific functions as a system of saturated multipolar interdependence, in which no actor can unilaterally control the entire space, but each actor has the capacity to produce significant disruptions. This characteristic creates a form of unstable equilibrium of a dynamic type, in which the stability of the system is not the result of a normative consensus or a clear hegemony, but of a permanent recalibration of relative positions. In this context, power is not a static attribute, but a relational function dependent on the ability to simultaneously influence several levels of the regional system.

A central element of this structure is represented by infrastructural density. The Indo-Pacific is one of the most densely integrated maritime spaces of the global economy, where port infrastructure, trade routes and logistics chains form an extremely complex network of interdependencies. This infrastructure is not geopolitically neutral, but deeply politicized, as control of logistics nodes equates to the ability to influence global economic flows. In this sense, ports, straits and maritime centers function as “condensation points of structural power”, where economic infrastructure simultaneously becomes strategic infrastructure.

This infrastructural density is directly linked to the region’s geoeconomic architecture, which is dominated by fragmented but globally interdependent supply chains. Industrial production is distributed

across multiple states, and value added is dispersed across the Indo-Pacific. This functional fragmentation produces a structural dependence on the stability of maritime and air routes, which makes infrastructural security a central component of global economic security.

In this context, maritime chokepoints are not mere geographical accidents, but constitutive elements of the global economic order. The Strait of Malacca, for example, is not just a transit route, but a filtering mechanism for energy and trade flows between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Similarly, the Strait of Hormuz functions as a critical node in the global energy system, while the South China Sea represents a space of overlap between economic infrastructure, territorial claims, and military projection.

This configuration generates a form of distributed systemic vulnerability, in which geopolitical risk is not localized marginally, but integrated into the very architecture of the functioning of the global system. In analytical terms, the Indo-Pacific can be described as a system of “optimized structural fragility”, in which global economic efficiency is maximized by concentrating flows, but this concentration simultaneously produces critical points of potential destabilization.

The military dimension of the region reflects and amplifies this structure. The Indo-Pacific is characterized by an advanced, persistent and overlapping military presence, in which the great powers operate simultaneously through networks of bases, naval strike groups, nuclear deterrence capabilities and integrated surveillance systems. This presence is not episodic, but permanent, which transforms the region into a space of continuous strategic contact. In this context, deterrence does not function as a state of equilibrium, but as an active process of signaling and counter-signaling, in which each demonstration of force is simultaneously an act of strategic communication.

Another essential element is the temporal nature of the competition. The Indo-Pacific is a system with compressed temporality, in which the interval between decision and reaction is extremely reduced. This temporal compression is the result of the combination of the operational proximity of military forces, the speed of information flows and deep economic integration. Consequently, the system operates on the basis of a logic of rapid reaction, in which anticipation becomes a central component of strategic behavior.

Overall, the Indo-Pacific cannot be reduced to a simple region of rivalry between great powers, but must be understood as a complete geopolitical system, characterized by extreme relational density, integrated infrastructure, systemic vulnerability and permanent multi-domain competition. Its relative stability is the product of a continuous structural tension, in which order is not the absence of conflict, but the permanent management of a high level of strategic interdependence.

## 5. The Arctic as an Emerging Climatic and Asynchronous System

In comparison with the Indo-Pacific region, the Arctic must be conceptualized as an emerging geopolitical system of the type “climate-structured and temporally decoupled strategic environment”, in which geopolitical relevance is not a stable property of space, but a contingent result of the interaction between climatic transformations, technological capabilities and strategic projections of state actors. Unlike classical geopolitical regions, in which the relative stability of the physical environment allows the gradual accumulation of infrastructure, institutions and sovereignty regimes, the Arctic is characterized by a structural instability of the basic conditions of access. This instability is not a marginal variable, but the very ontological condition of the region as a geopolitical space.

In analytical terms, the Arctic does not function as a region in the Westphalian or even post-Westphalian classical sense, but as a space of “continuous geopolitical constitution”, in which the functional boundaries of human activity are in constant recalibration. Climate change plays here the role of a systemic factor reconfiguring the global strategic geography. The reduction of the Arctic ice cap does not only produce gradual changes in accessibility, but also induces a qualitative transformation of the structure of space, by progressively expanding the navigable areas, redefining the functional distances between global economic nodes and reconfiguring the relative value of energy and mineral resources.

This dynamic generates a form of asynchronous geopolitics, in which the temporality of strategic interactions is not continuous, but fragmented and dependent on rhythms exogenous to the international system. Unlike the Indo-Pacific, where competition is permanently active and characterized by high relational density, the Arctic operates through cycles of geopolitical activation and deactivation, determined by seasonal, interannual and long-term variations in climatic conditions. This produces a structure of the “episodic-strategic regime”, in which the intensity of competition varies not according to the dynamics of relations between actors, but according to the physical opening or closing of the operational space.

This asynchronicity introduces a fundamental break in the classical logic of geopolitical analysis, as it partially decouples the relationship between strategic intent and execution capacity. In the Arctic, states’ geopolitical intentions can exist in the long term without the immediate material possibility of implementation, which generates a separation between strategic planning and operating conditions. Thus, the system becomes dominated by a form of extended structural anticipation, in which actors operate on the

basis of climatic and technological scenarios that are not yet realized, but are considered likely to emerge.

This characteristic determines the emergence of a distinct geopolitical rationality, which can be described as “anticipatory-infrastructural rationality”. In this logic, decisions are not optimized for immediate gain, but for positioning in a space of future possibilities. Actors invest in infrastructures, capacities and symbolic presence in an environment that is still partially inaccessible, precisely in order to ensure their competitive advantage when the conditions of access will structurally change. This transforms the Arctic into a space of strategic accumulation of options, rather than immediate use of resources.

From the perspective of international political economy, the Arctic can be interpreted as a system of “latent geopolitical value”. The energy, mineral and biological resources of the region are largely known from a geological point of view, but their strategic value is suspended between potential and realization. This suspension is determined by the interaction of three main constraints: physical accessibility, economic viability and climatic stability. None of these dimensions is stable in the long term, making the strategic assessment of the region deeply dependent on scenario projections.

Similarly, the Arctic transport infrastructure must be understood as an intermittent system of global connectivity. The Northeast Passage and the Northwest Passage do not yet constitute stable global trade routes comparable to the chokepoints in the Indo-Pacific, but seasonal corridors whose use depends on annual variations in sea ice. This feature introduces a form of “non-continuous” infrastructure, in which functionality is conditioned by the state of the natural environment. Consequently, global logistics cannot fully integrate these routes into its stable architecture, which limits their ability to become structural alternatives to existing maritime systems.

This intermittent infrastructure produces a form of geo-economy of structural uncertainty. Economic and state actors do not invest in the Arctic according to immediate use, but according to the probability of future transformation of the climate regime. Thus, the region becomes a space of “extended strategic hedging”, in which investments are distributed to cover multiple scenarios of evolution, including scenarios of complete opening of sea routes or intensification of exploitation of offshore resources.

From a military point of view, the Arctic is characterized by a logic of persistent infrastructural presence in extreme conditions, rather than a logic of direct confrontation. Military power is not expressed predominantly through the capacity for offensive projection, but through the capacity to maintain operability in an environment where logistical and technological costs are exceptionally high. In this sense, military infrastructure itself becomes a form of power, since the ability to maintain bases, communication systems and surveillance platforms in polar conditions represents a strategic advantage in itself.

This form of infrastructural militarization produces a distinct geopolitical hierarchy, in which geographical proximity becomes a decisive factor of power. Arctic riparian states benefit from significant structural advantages, as they can reduce logistical costs and maintain a continuous presence. In this context, Russia occupies a dominant position due to the combination of its Arctic geographical extension, the continuity of investments in polar infrastructure and historical experience in operating in extreme environments. Other riparian states operate in a regime of partial capacity, while extra-regional actors are constrained by disproportionate costs of access and maintaining a presence.

The Arctic must be understood as an emergent, asynchronous and climatically conditioned geopolitical system, in which competition is not defined by the intensity of present interactions, but by the anticipatory distribution of strategic positions in a space undergoing continuous structural transformation. Unlike the Indo-Pacific, where power is exercised through the control of existing flows and already consolidated infrastructures, in the Arctic power is exercised through the ability to anticipate, influence and shape the process of transformation of the space itself before it becomes fully geopolitically “active”.

In this context, Greenland can be interpreted as one of the clearest concrete expressions of geopolitical competition for the Arctic, as it concentrates in a single space three types of dynamics that are normally dispersed at the regional level: strategic control of Arctic positioning, access to critical resources and infrastructural-military projection in a changing climatic environment.

From the perspective of classical geopolitics, Greenland is not important primarily through its population or economy, but through its geostrategic position between North America, the North Atlantic and the Arctic Ocean. This positioning transforms it into an intermediate node between the Euro-Atlantic space and the emerging Arctic space. In terms of power projection, the island functions as an indirect control point over air and sea corridors linking America to Northern Europe and, increasingly, to the opening Arctic routes. This “access platform” function explains why Greenland is relevant to both the United States and Denmark and, indirectly, to NATO as a strategic entity.

From a resource political economy perspective, Greenland is relevant because it holds significant reserves of critical minerals (rare earths, uranium, zinc, graphite, and other strategic resources), which are becoming increasingly important in the context of the global energy transition and technological competition. As climate change makes the northern areas more accessible, these resources move from the category of “geological potential” to the category of “geopolitical asset,” which moves Greenland from a

peripheral space to a space of global strategic interest.

From a military perspective, Greenland is already integrated into a transatlantic security architecture through surveillance and early warning infrastructures, especially in the context of airspace and ballistic missile monitoring systems between the Arctic and the North Atlantic. This dimension transforms the island into an element of the global, not just regional, security infrastructure. In the logic of competition between great powers, control or influence over such points does not necessarily aim at territorial occupation, but at ensuring access and positioning in an extended strategic detection and response system.

In the logic of emerging Arctic geopolitics, Greenland functions as a “pivot space” between two order regimes: the consolidated North Atlantic order and the emerging Arctic order. This interface position gives it a strategic value disproportionate to its demographic or economic size. In structural terms, it is not a marginal territory, but a transition node between two geopolitical systems with different logics.

Therefore, the geopolitical interest in Greenland cannot be reduced to a single vector (resources, military or symbolic), but must be understood as a convergence between several levels of competition. The United States, for example, perceives it mainly through the prism of Arctic strategic security and North Atlantic access control, while the European Union and Denmark integrate it more into a logic of governance, resources and regional stability. In the background, the emergence of Russia as a dominant Arctic actor and China’s growing interest in the Arctic amplify the global value of this space. In synthetic terms, Greenland is less an “object” of competition and more an “interface” through which competition for the Arctic itself is projected. It concentrates in a single point the tensions between climate, infrastructure, sovereignty and military projection, thus becoming one of the clearest expressions of the transition towards an Arctic geopolitics structured by climate change and the anticipation of future transformations of the global space.

## 6. Conceptual Model

The analysis proposes a comparative structural-relational model that aims to go beyond the conventional regional description and operate at the level of a theory of the emerging geopolitical order. The Indo-Pacific and the Arctic are treated not as regions in the geographical sense, but as two distinct regimes of strategic space production, each defined by the way in which space, time, conflict and infrastructure are articulated in a coherent system of power. In this sense, the model does not compare just two empirical cases, but two ontological logics of contemporary geopolitics: the geopolitics of saturation and the geopolitics of emergence.

### Spatial Dimension: Saturated Space vs. Space in the Process of Being Constituted

The Indo-Pacific represents a “hyper-saturated spatial field” system, in which space has already been completely integrated into the logic of global flows. This integration is not just a matter of physical density, but one of the total functionalization of space. Almost every relevant geographical unit is included in a network of economic, military or technological interdependencies. Space no longer functions as an external framework for international politics, but as an internal environment of it. In other words, geopolitics does not “take place in the Indo-Pacific”, but is produced by the structure of the Indo-Pacific itself.

This condition produces a form of functional spatial continuity, in which geographical distances are reduced by infrastructure, and traditional separations between regions are absorbed into a continuous network of flows. Space thus becomes “functionally compressed”, even if it remains geographically extended.

The Arctic, on the other hand, represents an “emerging spatial field” system, in which the functionalization of space is incomplete and dependent on exogenous variables. Here, space is not yet fully integrated into the global logic of flows, and certain segments of it remain in a state of geopolitical latency. This latency is not passive, but active, in the sense that the strategic potential of the region is constantly re-evaluated according to climatic and technological transformations.

Thus, the Arctic is not a “peripheral” space, but a “pre-activated” space, in which geopolitics exists as a conditional possibility, not a stable realization.

### The Temporal Dimension: Absolute Synchrony vs. Climatic Asynchrony

The temporal dimension introduces the fundamental rupture between the two systems, as it defines the way in which time is organized as a geopolitical resource. The Indo-Pacific operates as a system of intensified geopolitical synchrony, in which temporality is compressed to the maximum. Interactions are continuous, simultaneous, and interdependent, which produces a regime of “permanently extended present.” In this system, the past is archived as strategic experience, and the future is integrated into immediate power calculations, which eliminates the functional separation between temporal dimensions.

This synchrony generates a rapid feedback system, in which strategic decisions are almost

instantaneously absorbed into the regional structure. Time thus becomes a competitive resource, and the speed of reaction becomes a determinant of power.

The Arctic operates in a regime of climatic asynchrony, in which geopolitical temporality is decoupled from operational temporality. Interactions are not continuous, but episodic, activated by changes in the physical environment. This structure produces a disjunction between natural time (climatic, seasonal, geological) and strategic time (political, military, economic).

The result is the emergence of a system of “asymmetric double temporality”, in which actors operate simultaneously in two incompatible temporal registers: one immediate, but limited by physical inaccessibility, and one future, but dominant in strategic planning. Thus, the future is not an extension of the present, but a functional substitute for it.

### **The Dimension of Conflict: Continuous Density vs. Disproportionate Point Impact**

The Indo-Pacific is characterized by a state of continuous structural conflict. Conflict is not an exceptional event, but a condition for the functioning of the system. This conflict does not necessarily manifest itself in the form of open war, but through a wide spectrum of competitive interactions: naval militarization, technological competition, economic rivalry and constant diplomatic pressure. The system functions as an environment of permanent tension, in which stability is the result of continuous management of friction.

This structure produces a type of order based on “stabilized tension,” in which conflict is integrated and normalized.

The Arctic, in contrast, functions as a system of conflict with low frequency but disproportionate structural impact. Interactions are rare, but each episode of intensification has the potential to significantly reconfigure the geopolitical architecture of the region. This characteristic transforms the Arctic into a system of “critical event geopolitics,” in which the importance is not given by the frequency of conflict, but by the magnitude of its potential effects.

Conflict is thus latent, but not marginal; it is suspended in the structure of the system, activating only under conditions of major exogenous transformation.

### **The Infrastructural Dimension: Controlling Nodes vs. Producing Access**

The Indo-Pacific is structured around a mature, highly integrated global infrastructure, in which maritime chokepoints function as control points for global flows. These nodes are stable, identifiable, and strategically saturated, and geopolitical competition revolves around their control, influence, or security.

This structure generates a form of power called the “nodal control regime,” in which actors compete for positions in an already existing network. The infrastructure is relatively fixed, and geopolitics operates within a pre-defined framework.

The Arctic represents the opposite system, in which infrastructure is not a given but a construction in progress. Power does not derive from controlling existing nodes, but from the ability to create nodes where the physical environment does not naturally allow it. This involves not only material investment, but also advanced technological capabilities, operational resilience, and control over environmental conditions.

In this sense, the Arctic introduces a form of “infrastructural genesis power”, in which power consists in the capacity to produce infrastructure in the absence of geographical stability.

### **Conceptual Synthesis: Two Ontologies of Geopolitics**

The conceptual model converges on a fundamental distinction between two ontological regimes of geopolitical order.

The Indo-Pacific represents a “fully operationalized geopolitical system”, characterized by saturated space, synchronized time, continuous conflict and consolidated infrastructure. In this system, power is a function of optimal positioning in an already stabilized network, and geopolitics is, in essence, a competition for control of existing flows.

The Arctic represents an “emergent conditional geopolitical system”, characterized by incompletely activated space, asynchronous time, episodic conflict and contingent infrastructure. In this system, power is not a function of controlling the present, but of the capacity to shape the conditions of emergence of the geopolitical future.

The essential difference between these two regimes is not one of intensity or scale, but one of structural logic. The Indo-Pacific belongs to a geopolitics of the hyper-integrated present, in which order is maintained by the permanent management of interdependence. The Arctic belongs to a geopolitics of the conditional future, in which order is negotiated by anticipating and accelerating climatic and technological transformations that have not yet stabilized.

In synthetic terms, the Indo-Pacific is a system of “control of existing flows,” while the Arctic is a system of “production of flow conditions.” This distinction marks the transition from the geopolitics of

occupied space to the geopolitics of space made possible.

## 7. Discussion

The structural difference between the Indo-Pacific and the Arctic must be interpreted as the expression of a deeper transformation of the contemporary international system, which goes beyond the simple reconfiguration of the balance of power and enters the sphere of changing the way in which space itself produces geopolitics. The Indo-Pacific represents, in this sense, the adaptive continuity of classical geopolitical logic in the conditions of accelerated globalization. It preserves the fundamental elements of modern geopolitics — the competition for control of sea routes, the importance of geographical positioning, the centrality of naval power and logistical infrastructure — but reconfigures them in an environment of extremely dense global interdependence. Globalization does not eliminate geopolitical logic, but intensifies and compresses it, transforming it into a system of permanent interaction.

In this framework, the Indo-Pacific can be understood as a form of “hyper-modernization of classical geopolitics,” in which Mahan’s principles of maritime control remain relevant but are embedded in a much more complex global economic architecture characterized by fragmented supply chains, transnational technological integration, and systemic competition between great powers. The result is a geopolitics of the extended present, in which power is exercised through the simultaneous control of economic, military, and information flows.

The Arctic, on the other hand, introduces a conceptual rupture in this tradition, as it transforms the physical environment from a stable framework into an active geopolitical variable. If in classical geopolitics the environment was a relatively fixed constraint on state action, in the Arctic the environment becomes an indirect actor in the transformation of the international order. Climate change not only alters the operating conditions, but structurally redefines the geography of power itself. Melting sea ice, the extension of the navigation season, and the accessibility of offshore energy resources are transforming the Arctic from a geopolitical periphery into an active frontier of the international system.

This mutation marks the emergence of a “climate geopolitics,” in which ecological variables become structural components of strategic calculation. Unlike traditional geopolitics, where climate was treated as a stable backdrop, climate geopolitics integrates ecological change into the very logic of power production. Access to resources, control of sea routes, and the expansion of sovereignty are no longer determined exclusively by military or economic capacity, but by the ability to anticipate and exploit long-term climatic transformations.

In this sense, the Arctic functions as a laboratory of a new form of international order, in which strategic temporality is radically expanded. Geopolitical decisions are made in a horizon in which the physical conditions of space are not yet stabilized, which introduces a form of structural uncertainty into international planning. This uncertainty is not a deficit of knowledge, but a constitutive property of the system.

In contrast, the Indo-Pacific remains anchored in a logic of relative stability of the physical environment, which allows for intense but predictable competition in structural terms. The Arctic, on the other hand, functions as a system in which the very material basis of competition is in transformation, which generates a fundamentally different geopolitical dynamic.

Therefore, the difference between the two regions is not only one of geopolitical intensity or maturity, but one of the ontological regime of space. The Indo-Pacific operates in a regime of geopolitics of consolidated flows, while the Arctic operates in a regime of geopolitics of transforming flow conditions. This distinction suggests that the contemporary international system is no longer defined exclusively by the distribution of power among states, but by the interaction of infrastructure, climate, and strategic temporality.

## 8. Conclusion

The Indo-Pacific and the Arctic represent two distinct and complementary ways of organizing international competition in the 21st century. The Indo-Pacific is a mature, dense, and hyper-integrated geopolitical system, in which competition between great powers takes place in an environment saturated with infrastructures, economic flows, and constant military presence. It is a space of continuous but structured conflict, in which order is produced by managing existing interdependencies.

The Arctic, by contrast, is an emergent system, incompletely constituted, and deeply dependent on climatic and technological transformations. It is a space of anticipation, in which competition is not based on controlling the present, but on positioning itself in relation to a geopolitical future yet to be realized. Power in the Arctic is therefore a function of the capacity to transform environmental conditions into future strategic opportunities.

Together, these two systems point to a broader structural transition in international order, in which

geopolitics can no longer be reduced to the relationship between state and territory. Instead, it becomes the result of the complex interaction between global infrastructure, climate change, and differentiated strategic temporality. The contemporary international system is thus structured around a fundamental duality: on the one hand, spaces of dense and stabilized competition, and on the other, emergent spaces in which the very geography of power is still being formed.

This duality suggests that the future evolution of global geopolitics will depend not only on the distribution of military and economic power, but also on the capacity of actors to operate simultaneously in two different regimes of order: one of the hyper-integrated present and one of the climatically conditioned future.

## CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL SITUATION



### The Geopolitics of AI: Why Artificial Intelligence and National Security Are Becoming More Intertwined?

Gargi AWASTHI (India)

It has been more than sixty years since the concept of Artificial Intelligence (AI) took its initial form. Since then there have been several discussions and debates on AI and its future as the focal point. It can be inferred that the day has come when AI has started operating almost all facets of human life. Such a change possesses drastic potential when the perspective of the global south comes into picture. Apart from mundane activities of humankind, another pertinent aspect of contemporary society is that of national security.

Every country of the global south is quite proactive when it comes to strengthening its internal security and countries try to ward off hurdles and mitigate them largely through every possible way. Furthermore, in light of the development and increase in the usage of AI, it is worth pondering on the future of AI in the domain of national security with perspective of the entire domain of the global south. Indeed every concerned government entities like the military of such nations are focusing more on AI based technologies with an objective to enhance their overall capabilities.

For instance, the facets of surveillance, cyber security, and venturing towards autonomous equipment are some key areas where nations are focusing on and AI has seen an appropriate enabler towards such cause. Through this review paper, an analytical discussion has been made towards the fact that how the postulate of AI can be used to analyze large stock of data, evaluate the connected patterns, and detect potential security threats. This paper narrows down the discussion to the perspective of the global southern part of the world and analyses the entire situation of AI and its prospective future in the realm of cyber security and national security of the connected nations. The discussion also considered the existence of several concerns with regard to the congruence of AI and national security. By reviewing various existing literature, it projects a discussion and analyzes various pertinent aspect connected to this domain.

## THE GEOPOLITICS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Source: <https://jpolitic.com/the-geopolitics-of-artificial-intelligence/>

Eventually, it makes an attempt to put forward suggestions to the question at hand as to whether AI in national security can be seen as a facilitator that can help in strengthening the nation's internal security or are we overlooking a hurdle that it may entail and is still a far sighted dream.

The US government's intervention in the rollout of Mythos and Fable should not surprise anyone, because the conditions for it were already in place. Anthropic may well be right that these models are unusually capable at vulnerability discovery and cyber offence, but the way Mythos was marketed created an obvious national security alarm. One cannot present a model as powerful enough to find and exploit weaknesses in critical systems, restrict access on the grounds that it must be kept away from hostile actors, and then be surprised when the state intervenes.

This is where the geopolitics angle comes in, especially with the US operating in a tense conflict environment with Iran, where conventional military power is being met with asymmetric tactics, drones, proxies, cyber activity and pressure on critical regional infrastructure. Put yourself in the position of a national security adviser or counter-intelligence official in Washington. If a US AI company says it has a model that can accelerate vulnerability discovery across industrial systems, the immediate concern will be whether Iran, its proxies, or another hostile actor could get access to it and use it against US interests both at home and abroad.

The foreign-national restriction looks blunt, discriminatory and probably counter-productive. If the fear is hostile-state access, nationality is not a reliable test. A hostile state does not need to send an obvious foreign operative through the front door; it can use contractors, domestic workers, front organisations or laptop farms. The recent North Korea laptop-farm cases make that point clearly enough.

"The issue is not only whether Mythos and Fable are as powerful in cyber offence as advertised. The issue is that the rollout made government intervention predictable. If a company tells the world it has a system with strategic cyber capability, and then presents access control as a way to stop hostile states from getting it, Washington is unlikely to treat that as normal product marketing. It will ask who can use it, who can copy it, who can route access to it, and whether the company should be the only one making those decisions.

Quantum computing companies should take this as a warning shot. If near-term quantum hardware is marketed as though it is already close to breaking existing cryptography or giving one country a decisive advantage, governments may act on that language."

This is one reason Abstract Space will cover geopolitics alongside mathematics, AI, quantum computing, cryptography, security and society.

Technical capability does not sit outside power. Once a technology is sold as strategically important, it will be pulled into geopolitics, whether its developers intended that or not.

### **Who Writes the Rules? The Contest Over AI Governance**

The contest for AI advantage is also a contest over rules and standards—the ethical architectures, interoperability requirements, and governance frameworks that determine which AI systems are trusted, traded, and deployed globally. Unlike past technology races, where engineering breakthroughs often set the pace, the geopolitics of AI will also be decisively shaped by who writes the rules.

The stakes are high. Absent some level of shared governance, the world risks a slide into fragmented AI blocs—walled-off ecosystems where incompatible standards drive up costs, choke innovation, and undermine the trust needed for AI-infused products to move across borders. The regulatory landscape is already becoming more complex across international, national, and even subnational levels.

This year, U.S. states have ramped up their involvement in A.I. oversight, with 38 states passing or enacting about 100 new regulations. Conversely, agreement on baseline principles could establish a "zone of trusted AI" covering most of the global economy, marginalizing outliers, and creating an enforceable foundation for global trade. Shared norms also offer an important opportunity for AI to be developed and deployed responsibly, and for the promotion of technologies that are appropriately riskmanaged, safe, secure, trustworthy, and values-aligned with global human rights and other significant social conventions shared by like-minded nations.

### **Competition and Cooperation: The U.S. and China**

The most important frontier lies between Washington and Beijing. As Thomas Friedman has argued, AI's ubiquity and potential for misuse should force the two AI superpowers not only to compete but also to cooperate. Without some degree of trust architecture, consumers may reject foreign AI-enabled goods, collapsing high-tech trade between the world's two largest economies.

While experts continue to trade notions of how such objectives may be accomplished, the frequent comparisons to Cold War arms control is apt: just as nuclear weapons demanded guardrails, so too may AI. The difference is that AI is developed primarily by private firms, often open-sourced and globally

distributed, making governance far more diffuse, contested, and complex.

### **Europe's Regulatory Assertiveness**

The EU has already moved to fill the vacuum, using the AI Act as a template for global norms. Brussels views standards as both a sovereignty issue and a competitive lever, exporting its rules through the compliance requirements of its large single market. The EU's push toward tech sovereignty is also widening transatlantic friction, particularly as Washington criticizes European regulation as disguised protectionism. Yet the EU's framework is rapidly becoming the default reference point for some smaller economies seeking guidance.

### **India's Emerging Role**

India is trying to position itself as both a production base and a governance hub. The upcoming India-AI Impact Summit 2026 in New Delhi will convene global leaders around AI's role in economic development and ethical governance. Domestically, New Delhi has launched 30 AI labs, expanded its fellowship program to train more than 13,000 scholars, and announced eight indigenous foundation models tailored to Indian data. These moves reflect India's ambition to act as a rule-maker for the Global South, offering firms that align with its standards early access to one of the world's fastest-growing markets.

### **New Multilateral Forums on AI At the September 2025 UN General Assembly**

UN leaders announced plans to position the organization as the central hub for global artificial intelligence governance, launching a "global dialogue on artificial intelligence governance" and the intention to form a 40-member panel of scientific experts to assess AI risks and opportunities, similar to existing UN panels on climate and nuclear policy. This initiative will helpfully bring together member states, tech companies, academics, and nonprofits to exchange ideas and best practices, though lacks any enforcement power.

### **Why It Matters?**

The next phase of AI geopolitics will hinge as much on credibility as capability. For businesses, alignment with emerging governance frameworks will shape market access and licensing, while misalignment risks exclusion from key markets. Regulatory fragmentation threatens market access for small and medium-sized players, potentially cementing incumbents and creating significant complexities for multinational organizations striving to serve diverse international markets. Companies that engage proactively in shaping ethical, interoperable standards can not only safeguard their own operations but also help define the operating system of the 21st-century global economy.

India's strengths are distinct. Its digital public infrastructure, expansive data ecosystems, and deep reservoir of human capital offer a foundation that few can replicate. The real challenge lies in converting these assets into strategic leverage without being locked into hardened technological blocs. Partnerships with like-minded countries are indispensable for access to frontier technologies and resilient supply chains. But India's foreign policy tradition of strategic autonomy will not be easily abandoned; alignment will remain issue-based rather than absolute.

At home, however, the balancing act is even more complex. Innovation must not come at the expense of inclusion. AI must serve India's developmental trajectory, enhancing productivity, governance, and service delivery rather than exacerbating inequalities or deepening social fault lines. Globally, India is well placed to articulate a middle path in AI governance: one anchored in democratic accountability but sensitive to the aspirations of the Global South. Whether India becomes a shaper of emerging norms or merely adapts to standards set by others will depend on its ability to marry ambition with prudence.

In the unfolding geotech churn, that balance will define its standing.

### **Data Centres: From Backrooms to Battlegrounds**

Data centres are now critical infrastructure in the global digital economy. These sprawling server farms handle over 95% of the world's internet traffic, underpinning everything from streaming video to cloud AI services.

Once viewed as back-end infrastructure, data centres have evolved into strategic assets – the digital age's equivalent of power plants or ports. The United States alone hosts roughly 51% of the world's data centres, a concentration that highlights both the country's digital dominance and the reliance of other countries on US-based clouds. This dominance has prompted other nations and regions to race to build up their own data centre capacity, eager to ensure their data resides on home soil.

Data centres have thus become a focus of industrial policy. Around the world, countries are offering

tax incentives and fast-track permits to attract new server farms. Emerging economies view data centres as the bedrock of future growth, luring big tech firms to set up regional hubs, particularly in Asia, where a data centre “gold rush” is under way.

The goal is not just economic; it is also about digital resilience. Hosting a major data centre can attract related industries such as cloud services and AI research, while reducing dependence on foreign connectivity. In a crisis, controlling domestic data storage could be as important as controlling energy supplies.

Nevertheless, with this new importance comes new vulnerability. Geopolitical tensions cast a shadow over the data centre industry, as the supply chains for critical components – from advanced chips to fiber-optic cables – are now entangled in trade disputes.

Export controls and sanctions can choke off access to the latest processors needed to operate modern data centres. For example, high-performance AI chips made by US firms have been caught up in export bans, leaving operators in China scrambling for alternatives.

Such restrictions underscore that a data centre is only as advanced as the components it can import, moving these facilities from the backrooms of tech to the foreground of global security concerns.

### **Trade Wars and Tech Decoupling Intensify**

The US and China’s strategic rivalry over AI has deepened, giving rise to talk of a new “digital Cold War”. Both superpowers view leadership in AI as a defining element of national power and are marshalling state resources to secure it.

Washington has pursued an aggressive strategy of “tech decoupling” aimed at slowing China’s technological rise. Beginning with sweeping export controls in 2022, the US has systematically tightened the flow of advanced chips and equipment to China.

This campaign peaked by mid-2025 when US authorities banned even specialized AI chips designed to meet earlier export rules, effectively closing the last major chokepoint for top-tier AI hardware. The message was clear: the US intends to maintain a hardware advantage in AI at all costs.

The result is an increasingly fragmented global tech ecosystem. US allies in Europe and Asia find themselves pressured to choose sides or split their supply chains. Many have aligned with US export curbs on China to some degree, yet few are comfortable with a complete rupture, given China’s role as both a market and supplier.

New tech alliances are emerging, such as the “Chip 4” alliance – comprising the US, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea – to coordinate semiconductor strategy, while China cultivates partners through its Digital Silk Road.

This tit-for-tat climate has observers worrying about a complete decoupling of the US and Chinese tech spheres, which could force other countries to navigate two separate technology universes with incompatible standards and restricted flows of hardware and data.

### **The Road Ahead: Cooperation or Fragmentation?**

As of mid-2025, the geopolitics of AI stands at a crossroads. On one path, the world could slide further into fragmentation, with a digital iron curtain separating US-led and China-led tech spheres. In this scenario, data centres, networks and AI ecosystems would be divided by incompatible standards and mutual suspicions.

## CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL SITUATION



### The Resizing of Alliances and Conflicts at Regional and Global Levels: Minilateralism vs. Multilateralism

Aldo MUNGO (Belgium)

The multilateral order born in 1945 is not collapsing — it is fragmenting. What we have been witnessing for a decade is not a passing crisis of universal institutions, but a structural mutation of global governance. The UN Security Council is paralyzed by cross-cutting veto rights, the WTO struggles to arbitrate the proliferating trade wars, and the G20 produces communiqués that lead nowhere. Into this growing institutional void, a new logic is steadily asserting itself: minilateralism — cooperation between a limited number of actors sharing convergent interests and genuine capacity for action. This is not a new concept. It is a pragmatic, sometimes brutal response to the collective impotence of the great universal forums.

To grasp the full extent of this mutation, one must first measure the depth of the multilateral failure. The UN system, designed in the euphoria of 1945 to prevent the return of war between great powers, rests on a postulate that no longer holds: the possibility of consensus among the permanent members of the Security Council. The war in

Ukraine has definitively buried that fiction. Russia, a permanent member, is conducting a war of territorial aggression in Europe while China provides it with systematic diplomatic cover. The Security Council has proven structurally incapable of acting — not through accidental failure, but by design. The veto, conceived as a safeguard against unilateralism, has become the instrument of its paralysis.

The WTO fares no better. Its trade dispute settlement mechanisms have been grinding to a halt since Washington blocked the renewal of Appellate Body judges in 2019 — a decision maintained across several successive administrations. The Sino-American trade war, punitive tariffs, openly avowed national industrial policies: all practices that violate the spirit of multilateral free trade without the organization being able to offer anything beyond ineffectual condemnations. The G20, meant to provide a forum for global macroeconomic coordination, runs into the same logic: final communiqués, painfully negotiated, reflect the lowest common denominator rather than any shared political will.



Source: <https://gulfnews.com/opinion/op-eds/minilateralism-a-concept-that-is-changing-the-world-order-1.95096716>

It is in this context of institutional decay that minilateralism has established itself — not out of ideological conviction, but out of operational necessity. Where the great universal forums debate, restricted formats decide. Where the UN deliberates, coalitions of interest act. The question is no longer whether minilateralism is theoretically desirable — it is to understand why it has prevailed in practice, and what that tells us about the real state of the international system.

The most spectacular manifestation of this logic is undoubtedly AUKUS, the trilateral agreement concluded in September 2021 between the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Within hours, three Anglo-Saxon powers bypassed not only the UN framework but also their own allies within NATO — France foremost among them, which found itself abruptly stripped of a submarine contract worth 56 billion dollars. AUKUS is not a defensive alliance in the classical sense: it is a pact of technological and industrial deterrence, centered on the transfer of nuclear propulsion technology for submarines, explicitly oriented against China's growing naval power in the Indo-Pacific. It operates outside any multilateral mandate, without prior consultation of regional partners, without any pre-existing international legal framework. It is minilateralism in its purest form: efficient, rapid, sovereign — and profoundly destabilizing for those it excludes.

In the same geographical space, the Quad — the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue — brings together the United States, Japan, Australia, and India around an Indo-Pacific security agenda that does not always speak its name. Formally relaunched in 2017 after an abortive first attempt in 2007, the Quad took shape as a direct response to Chinese maritime assertiveness in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. It has no formal treaty, no integrated command, no collective defense mechanism in the sense of NATO's Article 5. It operates on the basis of regular consultations, joint naval exercises, and a convergence of interests vis-à-vis Beijing. Its strength lies precisely in its informality: it adapts, it does not get bogged down in institutional procedures. It represents a model of post-multilateral security cooperation — functional because limited, coherent because homogeneous in its interests.

In Europe, the dynamic is different but obeys the same logic. Faced with the Russian threat, NATO remains the reference framework — but its cumbersome decision-making processes, internal divergences, and political ambiguities have pushed the most exposed countries to develop parallel formats. The Nordic-Baltic group — Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania — now constitutes one of the most coherent security architectures on the continent. These countries share a common threat perception, rapidly growing military capabilities, and the political will to act without waiting for Brussels consensus. The integration of Sweden and Finland into NATO in 2022- 2023 reinforced this Nordic-Baltic bloc while embedding it within the Atlantic framework — a rare example of minilateralism that merges into multilateralism without dissolving into it.

The Weimar Triangle — France, Germany, Poland — represents a different, more laborious attempt. Born in 1991 to anchor Poland in the post-Cold War European architecture, it long operated in low gear. The war in Ukraine gave it sudden renewed relevance: the three countries together represent the bulk of the European Union's demographic, economic, and military weight. But their strategic divergences — over the level of support for Ukraine, the relationship to maintain with Washington, the pace of European rearmament — limit its ability to produce a common line. It is a minilateralism in potential, not yet in practice.

In the Middle East, the Abraham Accords signed in 2020 constitute perhaps the most politically audacious example of contemporary minilateralism. By normalizing relations between Israel and several Arab states — the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan — without resolving, or even directly addressing, the Palestinian question, the Abraham Accords deliberately bypassed the UN framework and the international resolutions that had traditionally conditioned any normalization on progress in the Palestinian file. The result is a recomposition of regional balances based on shared interests — containing Iran, economic modernization, access to Israeli technologies — rather than on principles of international law. It is pure pragmatism, assumed as such, effective in the short term, and carrying fractures in the medium term.

Faced with this Western minilateralism, the Global South is structuring its own response. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the enlarged BRICS function as counter-alliances of circumvention — not to build a coherent alternative order, but to erode the Western pretension to universalism. The BRICS expansion in 2024, with the integration of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iran, Ethiopia, and others, reflects less a genuine strategic convergence than a shared desire for a non-Western legitimizing forum. It is defensive minilateralism — a shield against hegemony rather than a project for world order. Its internal coherence is weak, its contradictions numerous, but its symbolic and political function is real.

The lesson to be drawn from this survey is both simple and troubling. Minilateralism does not replace multilateralism — it fills its fractures, exploits its failures, and bypasses its paralysis. It is more reactive, more immediately effective — and structurally more dangerous, because it enshrines the primacy

of power relations over common rules. Every minilateral agreement is a victory of interest over principle, of efficiency over universal legitimacy.

The global security architecture is thus reorganizing itself not around shared norms, but around interests that coalesce provisionally. This is not a new order — it is a competition of partial orders, unstable by nature, conflictual by vocation. The major risk is not that multilateralism formally disappears: the institutions will survive, emptied of their substance. The risk is that the proliferation of restricted formats makes it impossible to collectively manage global crises — climate, health, nuclear — which, by definition, cannot be resolved in a closed committee.

The challenge of the next quarter century will be to reconcile the efficiency of coalitions of interest with the necessity of a common framework of rules. This is not impossible — but it requires that the great powers accept constraining their own sovereignty in favor of a common good whose very existence they are the first to deny. For now, nothing suggests they have the will to do so.

## CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL SITUATION



### From the Charlemagne Prize to the Defence of Europe, by Europeans!

PhD. Jean MARSIA (Belgium)

Mr Draghi's speech, delivered on 14 May in Aachen, after the award of the Charlemagne Prize, began by updating certain aspects of his 2024 report, considering the new crises and Trump's hostility towards the European Union (EU). Mr Draghi rightly pointed out that American tariffs, raised to levels not seen in a century, have caused European exports to the United States of America to fall by around 17% and that the closure of the Strait of Hormuz is disrupting our supply chains; repairing them could take months, or even years, according to Mr Draghi.

He then criticised the EU for having opened up to the world without having completed the unification of its internal market, which has led to excessive dependence on external demand, energy and strategic vulnerability and a technological lag, particularly in artificial intelligence. He noted that our energy networks remain insufficiently integrated and our capital markets too fragmented, whilst our investment needs have risen from €800 billion per year to nearly €1,2 trillion per year on average, considering the additional defence budgets of recent years.

According to Mr Draghi, economic growth is therefore the *sine qua non* for everything the EU now claims it must do: fund the energy transition, defend us, build the industries of the digital age and support ageing populations. However, he notes that the global context is not conducive to growth: the United States of America no longer seems willing to guarantee our security; they behave more like competitors than partners; China generates industrial surpluses on a scale that the world cannot absorb without emptying our own productive base of its substance; it directly supports Russia, our adversary according to him. In Europe, he said, productivity is not growing fast enough and there are too many regulations. This is why, he argued, the IMF has revised its growth forecasts for 2027 upwards for the United States of America, whilst lowering those for Europe. Mr Draghi said, however, that according to the European Central Bank, EU Member States have very disparate levels of integration. If all were to move closer to the highest level, long-term welfare gains could exceed 3%.



Source: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DZhtDnJNQ2Q/>

## Article 42 of the EU Treaty, a Solution?

For Mr Draghi, it seems possible to give operational substance to Article 42 (7) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) – the Union’s mutual defence clause – whilst noting that, although it is legally defined and has already been invoked, it has not yet been translated into concrete plans, capabilities and command structures. This § 7 of Article 42 provides:

“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 Charter of the United Nations. This shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States.

**Commitments and cooperation in this area shall be consistent with the commitments under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization**, which, for those States which are members of it, remains the foundation of their collective defence and the forum for its implementation.”

To understand the scope of the Union’s mutual defence clause, it should be borne in mind that Article 42 (2) provides:

“The common security and defence policy shall include the progressive framing of a common Union defence policy. This will lead to a common defence, **when the European Council, acting unanimously, so decided.** [...]”

**The policy of the Union** in accordance with this Section shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States and shall **respect the obligations of certain Member States, which see their common defence realised in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), under the North Atlantic Treaty** and be compatible with the common security and defence policy established within that framework.”

In addition, § 4 of Article 42 provides:

“**Decisions relating to the common security and defence policy**, including those initiating a mission as referred to in this Article, **shall be adopted by the Council acting unanimously** on a proposal from the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy or an initiative from a Member State.” [...]”

For the S&D, subordination to NATO, on the one hand, and the requirement for unanimity within the European Council, on the other, make the implementation of the Union’s mutual defence clause illusory.

## A Sham “Pragmatic” Federalism

In the institutional field, Draghi, noting that European governance was designed to prevent the concentration of power and that it is ill-suited to face today’s challenges, reiterated the call for “pragmatic” federalism that he had made in 2022, arguing that the Union’s lack of legitimacy makes joint action more difficult.

I share his view that the Union’s legitimacy is weak, or even very weak, and that this makes joint action more difficult, but the fact remains that his ‘pragmatic’ federalism, which is supposed to restore both effectiveness and democratic legitimacy, lacks institutional relevance.

In Mr Draghi’s view, countries with the will to act should deepen their cooperation in concrete areas, using instruments that deliver results which citizens can see and measure. And each country should commit itself through a deliberate national choice, approved by its electorate, so that citizens know what their government has committed to and can hold it to account. Implementation reinforces legitimacy. Legitimacy makes closer cooperation possible. And as the habit of acting together develops, the feeling of having a common objective becomes stronger. This approach will necessarily be experimental. Some initiatives will work; others will not. This is why he rightly describes his approach as pragmatic.

Mr Draghi, then Prime Minister of Italy, had already called on 3 May 2022 at the European Parliament in Strasbourg for “the establishment at the European level of a pragmatic federalism, which would also be a federalism of values”, without, however, specifying these concepts, which he did on 14 May in Aachen. He said that his approach is also federalist - because for him, these experiences are not random. They are guided by a common destination: the conviction that Europeans must learn to exercise power together if they wish to preserve their values.

The euro, he said, shows how this can happen. Those who had the will to do so have gone ahead. They have built common institutions with real authority. When that commitment was tested to the point of near collapse, the required solidarity proved to be far greater than many had imagined. The framework held firm, countries continued to join, and support for the euro is now at a record level. For the societies that share it, leaving it has become almost unthinkable.

For Mr Draghi, this is what makes European commitments lasting. These are not words written once and for all in a treaty, but the experience of acting together, of being tested together and of

discovering, through success, that solidarity can work.

Our task, he said, is now to recreate that same dynamic in the fields of energy, technology and defence. European leaders know what needs to be done. They must now decide whether they are prepared to put substance before form and choose the instruments that will achieve the desired results.

Mr Draghi believes that we have reached a point where the decisions that Europe must take can no longer fit into the institutional framework we have inherited. Some require a scale that only Europe can offer. Others require a degree of democratic legitimacy that must be built from the ground up. Together, they demand that European leaders go a step further.

Finally, Mr Draghi notes that, everywhere on our continent, Europeans are showing that they want Europe to act. They want the European Union to defend their freedom, prosperity and solidarity. And they continue to defend, with passion, the values that make Europe worth building and that, today, make it unique. The task now is to respond to this confidence with courage and to show that Europe can once again turn crisis into unity.

All this seems positive to me, but it is not federalism. I deplore the fact that Mr Draghi is now showing Europeans an inadequate institutional path, whereas in 2018, when he was President of the European Central Bank (ECB), he said in Florence that in Europe, the provision of supranational public goods, such as security, defence or migration, should be financed by European taxation. A European federal State could, in his view, at first establish inter-state and inter-regional solidarity, via its budget, provided that it is substantial. Only a European federal State could, in his view, define a common fiscal policy and better integrate the financial market, which would decouple consumption from income at the local level. I applauded these words, here are my reasons.

### Why Federalism?

Federalism is the only relevant mode of organisation that a pan-European State could adopt, especially with a view to implementing the recommendations of the 2024 Letta, Draghi and Niinistö reports, which aim to halt Europe's economic and scientific decline, and reduce its dependence on the Americans for peacekeeping.

Only four paths are open to the states of Europe to intensify their union: cooperation, integration, confederation and federation.

Cooperation consists for states of making joint decisions, as is the case in NATO, but let us note that in more than 75 years, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has failed to remove Europe's internal borders for the military, and to improve the efficiency of our defence spending.

Integration refers to states agreeing to submit to the directly applicable rules laid down by supranational institutions that they have created, such as the European Communities or the EU. These institutions have stimulated economic growth, but they are poorly suited to manage crises and are incapable of setting up a European defence: they have been talking about it in vain since the Pleven Plan of 1952.

The confederation is a group of states that pool certain political and economic resources whilst retaining their sovereignty. History shows that confederations either turn into federations or dissolve. The Swiss Confederation, founded in 1291, became a federal state in 1848 after the *Sonderbund* Civil War. The confederal organisation of the „United Provinces“ of the Northern Netherlands in the eighteenth century was calamitous. As the United States of America had suffered from inadequate governance during the Revolutionary War, George Washington, with the support of James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay, succeeded in replacing the confederal constitution of 1776 with the federal constitution of 1787. Austria became a federal state in 1920 and Germany in 1949, having finally learnt the lessons of their past. As for the Confederation of Independent States, conceived by Mr. Gorbachev in 1990 as the successor to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, it very quickly became dysfunctional and then broke up. Professor of constitutional law Francis Delpérée used to tell his students that „le confédéralisme, c'est le fédéralisme pour les cons“, confederalism is federalism for imbeciles. It was concise and clear.

The first federation dates back to 1787. The first federal constitution established a republic based on the separation and balance of powers, as advocated by Montesquieu, as well as their collaboration (checks *and* balances); an executive branch, the President of the United States; a legislative branch, the Congress, composed of the House of Citizens' Representatives, and the Senate, which represents the federated states; a judicial branch, with the Supreme Court at its summit, which ensures that the Constitution is respected by laws, the federated states and the organs of the federal State. To have it ratified by the 13 federated states, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay published 85 articles in 1788, *The Federalist Papers*. Everyone should therefore know what the words “federal”, “federation” and “federalism” mean, but it is clear that these terms have been used without rhyme or reason, particularly in France.

The Fête de la Fédération took place on the Champ-de-Mars in Paris on 14 July 1790. It is at the Mur des Fédérés (Wall of Federates) in the Père-Lachaise cemetery where the dead of the Paris Commune are commemorated. At the Congress of Europe, held in The Hague from 7 to 10 May 1948, the pseudo-

federalists were unable to agree on the definition of federalism. The Democrats, led by Spinelli, said they wanted a constitution of the American or Swiss type, but they never drafted one.

The philosophical or integral federalists had Henri Brugmans and Alexandre Marc as their spokesmen<sup>1</sup>; together with the technocrats inspired by Monnet<sup>2</sup>, they had the project of entrusting power to the economic, trade union and intellectual elites, out of rejection of democracy and universal suffrage. In the 1950s, "La Fédération" was a reactionary French monarchist movement<sup>3</sup>. None of this corresponds to the *Federalist Papers*.

For my part, I am a federalist in the sense of the *Federalist Papers*, because I believe that the federation is the only way left for Europe to carry weight on the world stage, to face the current threats and challenges. To federate, states would have to transfer to the Federation or share with it a part of sovereignty, by adopting a constitution that would allocate state competences between the Federation and the federated entities. Depending on their needs and history, the distribution of competences varies considerably from one country to another. That is why there are as many variants of federalism as there are federal states, but if these do not respect certain principles, it is no longer federalism. What are these principles?

Democracy, to be sustainable, requires that no one is able to abuse power. It is therefore necessary that, by the arrangement of things, power should stop power. Legislative, executive and judicial powers must be separated, at all levels of government, namely the European Federation, its Member States, for some of these, the Regions, Provinces, Länder or Cantons, as well as local authorities.

The federated entities would possess State powers which they would exercise without being subject to the supervision of the European Federation. They would be equal in law: there would be no distinction according to their seniority, population size, economic weight, etc. They would have the opportunity to cooperate with each other and with the federal level. They would participate in the governance of the federal level through their representatives in a legislative chamber, called the Senate, *Bundesrat*, etc.

The establishment of the European Federation announced on 9 May 1950 by Robert Schuman, but never realised, is the *conditio sine qua non* for a European defence, because only it could appoint a democratically legitimate European supreme commander.

This only requires a little political will. In Europe, we already have the essential bicameral legislative power, which is still imperfect, but easily improvable. The European judiciary is embryonic, but not negligible. Its mode of operation is federal, as does the European Central Bank. What we lack most is a federal executive branch, which should consist of a head of State - commander-in-chief of the federal armed forces. His election by universal suffrage would give him the indispensable democratic legitimacy. A government, accountable to the federal legislative power, would be responsible in particular for defining a European security policy and organising a European deterrent army.

To achieve this, it remains to form a coalition of the willing, which would spread like wildfire, as the Six did, then the EU, then the Schengen and euro zones. The European Society for Defence INPA is working tirelessly toward this and is ready to support it once it is created, if desired.

---

<sup>1</sup>Philosophical or integral federalist thought is close to personalism, it is of Christian and anti-communist inspiration. See Henri Brugmans, *Panorama de la pensée fédéraliste*, Paris, La colombe, 1956, p. 10; Robert Aron, Alexandre Marc, *Principes du fédéralisme*, Paris, Le portulan, 1947, pp. 146-147; Gianfranco Martini, "Federalism and political thought of Christian inspiration" in *Le fédéraliste, revue de politique*, XXXe année, 1988, n° 1, <https://www.thefederalist.eu/site/index.php/fr/notes/1748-federalisme-et-pensee-politique-dinspiration-chretienne>, p. 30 ff.

<sup>2</sup>For various researchers, Monnet wanted to keep people as far away as possible from decision-making. He was never elected, but a merchant and banker, a civil servant in France and internationally. He distrusted politics, democracy and especially the people, whom he considered versatile. Wanting to put an end to the nation states, which were too warlike, he practiced the method of small steps, binding them together by treaties, to take away their competences, sector by sector, to limit sovereignty in an almost irreversible way. It reduced politics to the application by supranational institutions of the rules laid down by the treaties on which they are based or established by them. See Coralie Delaume, *Europe, les États Désunis*, Paris, Michalon, 2014, <http://blogdenico.fr/entretien-avec-coralie-delaume-sur-leurope-de-monnet-a-draghi/>.

<sup>3</sup>See Antonin Cohen, *De Vichy à la Communauté européenne*, Paris, PUF, 2012, p. 291 and 293-298; Denis de Rougemont (ed.), François Saint-Ouen (ed.), *Dictionnaire international du fédéralisme*, Brussels, Bruylant, 1994, p. 67-91.

## CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL SITUATION



### China's Maritime Strategy and Perceptions of Threat: Historical Context, Naval Modernisation, and Global Port Influence

Krzysztof ŚLIWINSKI (Hong Kong )

#### Abstract

This study explores China's maritime strategy within the broader context of its historical experiences and contemporary geopolitical perceptions. Rooted in the legacy of the "Century of Humiliation," China's foreign policy is shaped by collective trauma and a desire to restore national sovereignty and strength.

This study analyzes China's perception of strategic threats posed by the United States through its alliances and military presence in the Asia-Pacific, which Beijing interprets as containment efforts. It further examines China's transition from a coastal defense naval posture to a blue-water navy capable of power projection, driven by economic interests, national rejuvenation, and the protection of vital sea lanes. Naval modernisation, including anti-access/area-denial capabilities, supports China's assertive yet cautious regional posture.

The study also highlights China's global port investments in critical maritime chokepoints and strategic harbours across Asia, Europe, Africa, and Latin America, reflecting a pragmatic approach to securing resource access and logistics. These developments underscore China's ambition to become a major maritime power while balancing regional stability and economic prosperity.



**Keywords:** China, Century of Humiliation, Maritime Strategy, Naval Modernisation, Strategic Threat Perception

#### Introduction

The author of this paper aligns with a group of researchers who adhere to a fundamental epistemological assumption: reality is objective; thus, all individuals experience the same reality. However, context

is crucial in shaping how we interpret this reality. Similarly, it is posited that although states exist within the same world and participate in the same international system, they possess distinct historical, cultural, political, and institutional experiences or practices. Therefore, it is essential to examine these contexts to gain a deeper understanding of foreign policy. In the case of China, a prominent historical experience is the “century of humiliation.”

### **Historical Context**

China’s “Century of Humiliation” refers to the period from the First Opium War (1839–1842) to the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. During this time, successive military defeats by Western powers and Japan led to unequal treaties, territorial losses, extraterritorial privileges, and the erosion of sovereignty, transforming China’s traditional Sinocentric worldview into one of national weakness and fragmentation (Kaufman, 2010; Scott, 2008). Key episodes, including the Opium Wars, the 1894–1895 Sino-Japanese War, and Japan’s Twenty-One Demands (1915), crystallised collective trauma and prompted assertive nationalist responses (Luo, 1993).

This narrative of humiliation and salvation has become a cornerstone of modern Chinese identity and the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party, framing foreign imperialism as the catalyst for revival through strength and unity (Callahan, 2004; Wang, 2012). It continues to inform elite perceptions of the international order and domestic mobilisation.

### **Why Does China Feel Threatened and Surrounded?**

China perceives itself as strategically threatened and surrounded by the United States, primarily through Washington’s network of alliances, forward military deployments, and post-2011 “pivot to Asia” policies, which Chinese elites interpret as a deliberate containment strategy aimed at limiting Beijing’s rise and sovereignty (Zhao, 2019; Chan, 2017). US treaty alliances with Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines, combined with enhanced partnerships through the Quad and AUKUS, create a perceived “C-shaped encirclement” along China’s maritime periphery and land borders, reinforced by freedom-of-navigation operations and support for Taiwan (Zhao, 2019). This framing echoes the historical narratives of external pressure, prompting Beijing to view US actions as hegemonic efforts to preserve dominance rather than defensive balancing. In response, China has pursued soft balancing (e.g., via the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank) and military modernisation to break perceived encirclement and assert regional influence (Chan, 2017). Such threat perceptions remain central to China’s strategic doctrine and foreign policy.

### **Chinese Maritime Strategy**

This section examines China’s maritime strategy, focusing on its strategic objectives, naval modernisation efforts, and regional implications. Scholars working in the field have noted a comprehensive transformation from coastal defense to blue-water capabilities, driven by economic interests, national rejuvenation goals, and the need to secure vital sea lanes. The findings highlight China’s shift toward a more assertive maritime posture while maintaining economic pragmatism.

China’s maritime strategy has undergone significant transformation in the 21st century, evolving from a defensive coastal posture to a comprehensive approach emphasising both traditional and non-traditional security concerns. The 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road initiative marks a pivotal shift, expanding China’s maritime concept from negative threat elimination to positive cooperation and regional peace, with policy developments now prioritising economic development and transnational crime management alongside traditional military objectives (Tang, 2016). This strategic evolution reflects Xi Jinping’s vision of national rejuvenation and China’s ambition to become a “maritime power” capable of protecting global economic interests and securing critical trade routes (Thomas, 2018; Antczak, 2020).

Naval modernisation is a central pillar of China’s maritime strategy. The People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has experienced remarkable growth, becoming the world’s largest navy through investments in anti-ship missiles, submarines, aircraft carriers, and advanced offensive weapons systems (Gerard, 2011). This modernisation focuses on developing blue-water capabilities and anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) systems designed to counter potential US military intervention in regional conflicts, particularly in the context of Taiwan (Martinson, 2021). China’s defence spending has increased substantially, making it the second-largest global military spender, with annual increases reaching up to 20% (Bateman, 2010).

The regional implications of China’s maritime expansion are profound. Increased naval presence and assertive actions in the South China Sea have heightened tensions with neighbouring states and prompted security concerns among East Asian countries (Antczak, 2020). China’s strategy of establishing dual-use ports abroad and militarising disputed features reflects a pragmatic “active defence” posture aimed at projecting power while securing core interests (Thomas, 2018). However, despite this assertiveness, China remains cautious about military conflicts that could jeopardise economic prosperity, maintaining a

delicate balance between power projection and regional stability (Antczak, 2020). The interactive nature of naval developments in Northeast Asia suggests an emerging arms race dynamic, with China's modernisation occurring within a complex regional security environment characterised by uncertainty and evolving power balances (Castro, 1995).

### **The Harbours**

China's modern maritime strategy centres on ensuring resource security and power projection. Driven by fears of blockades at chokepoints, such as the Strait of Malacca, Beijing actively secures equity in and operational control of critical "non-Chinese" harbours to ensure economic resilience and support global naval reach (Chan, 2024).

China's global port footprint is largely bifurcated. Wealthy terminal investments generate commercial revenue and political legitimacy, whereas strategically located ports provide logistical depth, resource proximity, and operational access. State-backed companies operate extensive logistics nodes across several regions (Itimoudis, 2026). These ports include:

- The Indian Ocean & South Asia: key assets include Gwadar in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, and Kyaukphyu in Myanmar, offering China direct access to the Indian Ocean without passing through narrow, vulnerable chokepoints (Romaniuk, Csicsmann and Fabe, 2026; Feith, 2019)
- Europe: China holds varying stakes in over 20 European harbours, including majority control over the Port of Piraeus in Greece, as well as investments in the Ports of Hamburg and Rotterdam. These serve as vital endpoints for its global export supply chains (Gieseke, Dekker and Haenicke, 2026; Myles, 2026).
- The Middle East & Africa: China maintains a prominent naval and commercial presence at the Doraleh Multipurpose Port in Djibouti, directly near major global shipping lanes leading to the Suez Canal (Tang, 2016; Devermont, Cheatham, Chiang, 2019)
- Latin America and the Caribbean: Chinese state entities have funded or acquired significant port projects near the Panama Canal and across South America to embed themselves deeply into the Western Hemisphere's logistics network (Ziemer, Han and Powers-Riggs, 2025).

### **Conclusion**

This short paper highlights how China's historical trauma from the "Century of Humiliation" deeply shapes its contemporary foreign policy and maritime strategy. Perceiving strategic encirclement by the United States and its allies, China has adopted a comprehensive maritime approach, evolving from coastal defense to blue-water capabilities to secure vital sea lanes and project power. Naval modernisation and global port investments form critical pillars of this strategy, balancing assertiveness with economic pragmatism to maintain regional stability. This multifaceted strategy reflects China's ambition for national rejuvenation and global influence while navigating complex security dynamics in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

The emerging international system appears to be evolving toward a multipolar structure. Although the United States remains a significant actor, its "unipolar moment" has concluded. Consequently, the future is as much associated with China as it is with the United States, Russia, and India.

**Bibliography:**

- Antczak, A. (2020). China's quest in the South and East China Sea: The struggle between realism, liberalism and constructivism. *Revista Mexicana de Análisis Político y Administración Pública*, 9(1), 4-16.
- Bateman, W. (2010). *Conclusion: Do rough seas lie ahead? (Version 1)*. University of Wollongong. <https://hdl.handle.net/10779/uow.27776793.v1>
- Callahan, W. A. (2004). National insecurities: Humiliation, salvation, and Chinese nationalism. *Alternatives*, 29(2), 199–218. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030437540402900204>
- Castro, R. C. (1995). Interactive Naval Developments of Three Northeast Asian States. *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs*, 17(3), 319-336. [https://doi.org/10.1355/CS17\\_3E](https://doi.org/10.1355/CS17_3E)
- Chan, E. S. Y. (2025). China's Discourse of Maritime Power: A Thematic Analysis. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 34(153), 432–450. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2024.2319064>
- Chan, L.-H. (2017). Soft balancing against the US 'pivot to Asia': China's geostrategic rationale for establishing the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 71(6), 568-590. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2017.1357679>
- Devermont, J., Cheatham, A., & Chiang, C. (2019, June 4). *Assessing the Risks of Chinese Investments in Sub-Saharan African Ports*. Centre for Strategic & International Studies. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/assessing-risks-chinese-investments-sub-saharan-african-ports>
- Feith, D. J. (2019, October 18). *China's Maritime Strategic Challenge*. National Review. <https://www.hudson.org/national-security-defense/china-s-maritime-strategic-challenge>
- Gerard, David (2011) "The Rise of the Chinese Navy: What the World can Expect from Asia's Emerging Maritime Power," *Sigma: Journal of Political and International Studies*, 28(5), 43-52. <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/sigma/vol28/iss1/5>
- Giesecke, J., Dekker, K. R., & Haenicke, J. (2026, March 4). *China must not hold the key to our ports*. The Group of the European People's Party (EPP Group). <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/china-must-not-hold-the-key-to-our-ports>
- Itimoudis, A. (2026, March 11). *From corridors to system: China's maritime strategy enters a new system*. Container News. <https://container-news.com/from-corridors-to-system-chinas-maritime-strategy-enters-a-new-dimension/>
- Kaufman, A. A. (2010). The "Century of Humiliation," then and now: Changing Chinese perceptions of the international order. *Pacific Focus*, 25(1), 1–33. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1976-5118.2010.01039.x>
- Luo, Z. (1993). National humiliation and national assertion: The Chinese response to the Twenty-one Demands. *Modern Asian Studies*, 27(2), 297–319. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00011501>
- Martinson, R. D. (2021). Counter-intervention in Chinese naval strategy. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 44(2), 265–287. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2020.1740092>
- Myles, D. (2026, February 18). *Leaked EU ports strategy targets Chinese FDI*. FDI Intelligence. <https://www.fdiintelligence.com/content/956bfef3-e687-4905-a7c3-82d69d007ec5>
- Romaniuk, S. N., Csicsmann, L., & Fabe, A. P. (2026, May 26). *China and Maritime Chokepoints: Hormuz, Malacca, and Indo-Pacific Vulnerability*. The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2026/05/china-and-maritime-chokepoints-hormuz-malacca-and-indo-pacific-vulnerability/>
- Scott, D. (2008). *China and the international system, 1840–1949: Power, presence, and perceptions in a century of humiliation*. State University of New York Press.
- Tang, J. (2016). The New Development of China's Maritime Security Strategy. Thoughts Based on the View of 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road. *2016 International Conference on Politics, Economics and Law (ICPEL 2016)*.
- Tang, X. (2016). The New Development of China's Maritime Security Strategy Thoughts Based on the View of 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road. Proceedings of the 2016 International Conference on Politics, Economics and Law (ICPEL 2016) <https://doi.org/10.2991/ICPEL-16.2016.29>
- Thomas, M. (2018). Strategic liminality in the U.S.-China security dilemma: how conflicting philosophies of world order can establish points of productive cooperation (T). University of British Columbia. Retrieved from <https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0368941>
- Wang, Z. (2012). *Never forget national humiliation: Historical memory in Chinese politics and foreign relations*. Columbia University Press.
- Zhao, M. (2019). Is a new Cold War inevitable? Chinese perspectives on US–China strategic competition. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 12(3), 371–394. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/poz010>
- Ziemer, H., Han, J., & Powers-Riggs, A. (2025, June 26). *No Safe Harbor. Evaluating the Risk of China's Port Projects in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Centre for Strategic & International Studies. <https://features.csis.org/no-safe-harbor-china-ports/>

## CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL SITUATION



### From Oil Geopolitics to Critical Mineral Competition: Energy Transition and the Emerging World Order

Zaryab NUTKANI (Pakistan)

#### Abstract

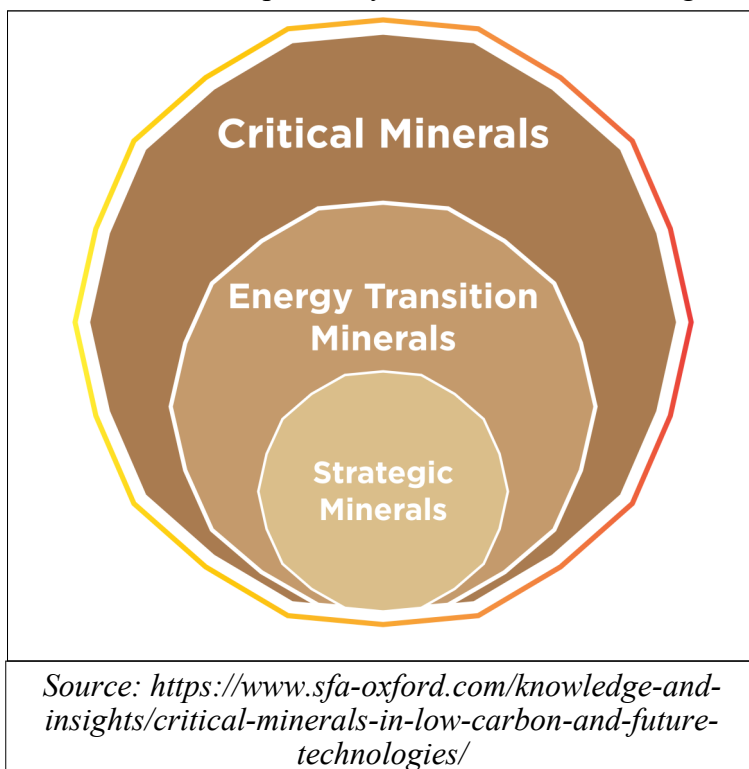
The global energy transition commonly viewed as a developmental pathway to a peaceful and co-operative global order is actually reordering geopolitical competition. This article examines the transition from energy dependency on fossil fuels toward critical mineral dependency, which is restructuring the global power structure. This shift is transferring critical points from oil reservoir areas to lithium, cobalt, and rare earth mines. Based on geopolitical theory, geo-economic analysis, and real-world data from states' behavior and global institutions, the article finds how the energy transition is shaping new rivalries among major powers like the US, China, and the EU. At the same time, it creates new challenges and strategic points for resource-rich developing states. The emerging world order is not beyond geopolitical global dynamics but it's a renewed geopolitical competition.

**Keywords:** Energy Transition, Critical Minerals, Geopolitics, Geo-economics, Emerging World Order

#### 1. Introduction

During the 20th century, the term 'Energy Security' was closely tied with oil. The Arab oil embargo of 1973, the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the 1991 Gulf War, and Iraq's invasion in 2003 were all based on oil politics. Access to oil was the reason that made alliances, triggered conflicts, and sustained authoritarian regimes.

The global transition toward renewable energy, electric vehicles and modernizing technology is putting hydrocarbon energy geopolitics under pressure. Solar panels, wind turbines, batteries and fuel cells doesn't need oil. They run on critical minerals like copper, lithium, cobalt, nickel, graphite, manganese and rare earth elements. Rising demands for these minerals to decarbonize the world, open up a question: Is the world leading toward a cooperative energy order, or just swapping resource competition from one form to another?



This article states that the energy transition is not weakening geopolitical structure; it is restructuring it. Attention and power is shifting from oil production fields towards minerals mines and supply chains. Power holders, strategic landscape and sources of power are changing but the patterns of rivalry over strategic resources remains unchanged and are further intensifying. The United States, China and European Union are in competition to secure critical minerals and processing infrastructure that will shape the next energy system. Resource-Rich developing states in Africa, Latin America and South East Asia became central to emerging competition for resources, balancing between competing great powers while trying to convert resource wealth into developmental progress. International institutions developed for hydrocarbon world are facing adaptation challenges.

## **2. Theoretical Framework: Resource Competition and World Order**

### **2.1 Geopolitics, Geo-economics, and Strategic Resources**

Geopolitical theory has extensively documented the linkage between the resources and state power. The traditional perspective, from Mackinder's heartland thesis to Spykman's rimland concept situated power in control over territory and its resources including minerals. Offensive Realism, concept of Mearsheimer's states that great powers consistently aim to optimize strategic capabilities and command over strategic resources that makes up a core element of that calculus. Oil, in this context was not just a economic benefit, it was a strategic asset that enhanced military capabilities and economic security.

The concept of geo-economics constructed by Luttwak (1990) and extended by Blackwill and Harris (2016) pushes this logic further into economic domain. Geo-economics represents the use economic tools such as trade policies, export control, sanctions to attain geopolitical objectives. Geo-economic shift is specifically related to critical mineral competition because the struggle over these minerals is through supply chain framework, trade agreement and infrastructure standard not militarily. Critical minerals are economic at the same time a strategic issue.

Resource Curse Theory by Sachs and Warner introduces internal political factor. Mineral wealth if poorly governed can establish coercive regime, civil conflicts and hinder economic growth. States like Democratic Republic of Congo rich with cobalt and Bolivia with vast reserves of lithium raises a question about whether the energy transition will generate political and institutional problems in new territorial settings.

### **2.2 The Structural Logic of Chokepoint Competition**

Competition for strategic resources shares a common pattern no matter it is oil or lithium. States control resource rich lands or infrastructure from where strategic resources can be supervised, controlled, taxed and weaponized. The Strait of Hormuz, Soviet Union's pipelines and OPEC output decisions were the choke point of oil era. In the 21st century, the critical mineral era mining area, processing infrastructure, and supply chain emerged as a choke points.

The study of Hirschman (1945) of trade as a strategic lever of political influence is directly relevant in this context. Where states command unequal share of supply of rare resources. China having control over 85-90 percent of processed product of rare earth elements is the best example of this phenomenon.

### **2.3 Beyond "Resource Wars": The Institutional Dimension**

Competition over resources does not end in conflict necessarily. Theoretical structure of states that economic interdependency and institutional connection can diminish conflict based on resource competition. The critical mineral transformation can establish institutions that manage competition peacefully. It's not guaranteed that institutions managing will be successful if the competition heightened.

## **3. The Geography of Critical Mineral Dependence**

### **3.1 What Are Critical Minerals and Why Do They Matter?**

Critical minerals are those which are essential for modern technology, industries and economic activity. Their absence have notable economic and security implications. They vary from state to state according to their needs, but key critical minerals are following:

- Lithium: is a essential component of batteries, electric vehicles, and for larger energy storage.
- Cobalt: a mineral useful for magnets, rechargeable batteries, alloys, electronics and for medical uses.
- Nickel: key player in alloys, stainless steel production, batteries, coins, electronics and chemicals.
- Rare Earth Elements: these are 17 elements necessary for wind turbines, electric vehicles, smart phones, electronics, military equipment, renewable energy, medical technology, and petroleum refining.
- Graphite: form of carbon used in lithium batteries, pencils, steel making and nuclear reactors.

- Copper: a metal used in renewable energy system, electronics, construction, industries, transportation, and coins.
- Gallium, Germanium, Manganese and other are important for defense weapons, semi conductors and modern energy technology.

According to International Atomic Energy Agency demands for critical minerals will 20 times by 2050<sup>1</sup>. 150 million tones of critical minerals will be required yearly by 2050 for energy transition<sup>2</sup>.

### 3.2 Geographic Concentration: The New Chokepoints

The production of critical minerals is localized in specific regions in a way that it creates interdependencies, like oil before it. 60% of global lithium reserves are present only in Chile, Argentina and Bolivia<sup>3</sup>. Nearly 70% of global cobalt mining is within Democratic Republic of Congo, while Indonesia holding world's largest nickel reserves. China commands largest share of rare earth elements. Australia being largest producer of lithium is dependent on China for processing.

This uneven distribution of critical minerals give rise to a supply chain map with geopolitical implications. Compared with oil, where producer states take advantage by coordination arrangements and export policies, critical minerals are operating on two levels: mining and processing. China dominates critical minerals not because of holding mines, but because of processing supremacy. China holds capacity to transform raw ore into usable material.

### 3.3 Similarities and Differences with Oil Dependence

Comparison of critical minerals with oil is not perfect but useful. Critical minerals are also found in limited areas like oil, very hard to find there alternative in short time and essential for military and economic purposes. States can manage, disrupt, control their exports or use them as a instrument of political gains, like oil. In 2010 China restricted the supply of rare earth elements to Japan after South China Sea dispute<sup>4</sup>. It shows that minerals can also act as a instrument of power.

However, critical minerals varies from oil in it's use. When crude oil is burned it is fully used up but critical minerals can be recycled. If advanced technology managed to use batteries on large scale and for long time it can reduce the need of further lithium and cobalt. Mineral reserves are still under exploration and world have more hidden reserves in different regions. However these differences further intensifies competition.

## 4. Great Power Competition in the Critical Mineral Arena

### 4.1 China's First-Mover Advantage

China is working on critical minerals supply chains and long term industrial strategy from over two decades. Since 1990s China is developing it's critical minerals processing capacity. Deng Xiaoping stated that Middle East has oil; while China has rare earths. It was not just statement, it was policy on which China was working from decades. "Belt and Road" Initiative, launched in 2013 strengthened this policy and China secured mining rights in Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia, Chile, Zambia and Zimbabwe. With BRI China established it's production capacity and dominated supply chains. In 2023 Chinese companies owned significant shares of global reserves of nickel, cobalt and lithium at very low price.

Chinese policies focused on domestic industries, giving subsidies to EV manufacturers including BYD, CATL, NIO and many others which played a crucial role in clean energy transition and ended the dependency on hydrocarbons. Now China has the largest market of EV, solar panels and batteries. CATL, a Chinese company alone holds 45.2% as of February 2026 of lithium-ion battery production globally<sup>5</sup>. China is not just commanding raw material but dominating supply, processing, and manufacturing as well; controlling entire supply chain.

### 4.2 The United States' Response

In post-cold war era United States resource policy was influenced by liberals, which made a late arrival of Washington into critical mineral strategy. In between 2010-2012 China's restrictions on export

<sup>1</sup>International Energy Agency. (2025). *Global Critical Minerals Outlook 2025*. IEA. <https://www.iea.org/reports/global-critical-minerals-outlook-2025>

<sup>2</sup>Lee, L. Y., & Glynn, J. (2023, February 22). *Q&A: Critical minerals demand growth in the net-zero scenario*. Center on Global Energy Policy, Columbia University SIPA. <https://www.energypolicy.columbia.edu/qa-critical-minerals-demand-growth-in-the-net-zero-scenario/>

<sup>3</sup>World Population Review. (2026). *Lithium reserves by country 2026*. World Population Review. Retrieved August 2, 2026, from <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/lithium-reserves-by-country>

<sup>4</sup>Mancheri, N. A. (2015, September 18). *Revisiting the China-Japan rare earths dispute of 2010*. VoxEU, Centre for Economic Policy Research (CEPR). <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/revisiting-china-japan-rare-earths-dispute-2010>

<sup>5</sup>Longbridge. Title of article. Longbridge. <https://longbridge.com/en/news/278022576>

reveled the US defense industry dependency on Chinese raw material. Same happened again during COVID-19. it was assessed as consequences of neglecting critical minerals.

With beginning of 2020, US started responding to China's dominance in critical mineral supply chain<sup>6</sup> initially by reforming it's own structure. In June 2021 White House ordered detailed 100 days review of critical mineral dependencies<sup>7</sup>. On November 15, 2021 US government signed The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) focused on expanding clean energy. Following the pattern The Chips and Science Act 2022 was signed, dedicating \$280 billion for domestic semiconductor manufacturing. US signed a landmark law on 16 August 2022 to make heavy investment in clean energy and climate actions, investing \$369 billion in energy security<sup>8</sup>. The Minerals Security Partnership was established in 2022 including US, EU, Japan, South Korea, Australia and some other states to invest in critical minerals to break Chinese monopoly in supply chain. US also signed bilateral agreements with Latin American states, DRC, and Zambia. Establishing processing units requires years of permits, heavy investment and workforce. Mountain Pass in California is the only rare earth mine of US which sends it's raw material to China for processing.

### 4.3 EU Strategic Autonomy Agenda

The European Union is importing 100% of it's requirement of lithium, cobalt and rare earth, mostly processed in China. Currently 97% of EU magnesium is imported from China with 60% of cobalt refining in China. Russia's invasion on Ukraine in 2022 exposed the EU dependency on Russia's oil and gas. This lesson forced EU to move from hydrocarbons towards critical minerals.

In March 2023, EU adopted Critical Raw Material Act aimed for starting domestic extraction, processing and recycling. It targets to extract more than 10% of annual consumption of required raw material by developing local mines, process more than 40% of annual consumption domestically and recycle 15-25% of consumption by strengthening circular economy by 2030<sup>9</sup>. To counter Chinese BRI project EU launched Global Gateway Initiative in December 2021. The program is aimed to invest \$300 billions in infrastructure, research, energy, transport, health and education in exchange for access to critical minerals<sup>10</sup>. EU framework is most advanced, if implemented effectively, have potential to establish a soft power in critical minerals domain.

## 5. Resource Rich Developing States: Between Leverage and Dependence

### 5.1 The New Scramble and It's Discontents

In 19<sup>th</sup> century access to raw materials and markets provoked European powers to colonize Africa. Same is ongoing competition among great powers for critical minerals which will have consequences for developing states. The current competition for lithium, cobalt and other minerals differ from past experiences, as it operates under international law and with commercial contracts rather than colonizing.

The case study of DRC represents a concerning situation. it produce 70-75% of global cobalt, around 247.7 kilotons in 2026<sup>11</sup>. DRC have lowest per capita income of \$1122, while other developed mineral-rich states have per capita income in between \$20,000-100,000. The state is facing mining abuses, environmental challenges and underdeveloped infrastructure. The government is renegotiating the contracts, as early contracts were exploiting and unfavorable.

### 5.2 Mineral Nationalism as a Geopolitical Instrument

Many of the developing resource-rich states are following the policy of mineral nationalism under which they are trying to impose state's ownership of resources, increasing taxes and royalties, promoting domestic processing and developing national companies.

Indonesia in 2020, banned the export of raw nickel. China, South Korea and European states were compelled to establish processing units within Indonesia, which created employment, strengthened local

<sup>6</sup>The White House. (2021, February 24). Executive Order 14017 of February 24, 2021: America's supply chains. Federal Register. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/03/01/2021-04278/america-s-supply-chains>

<sup>7</sup>The White House. (2021, June). Building resilient supply chains, revitalizing American manufacturing, and fostering broad-based growth: 100-day reviews under Executive Order 14017. Executive Office of the President. <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/100-day-supply-chain-review-report.pdf>

<sup>8</sup>Senate Democrats. (2022). Inflation Reduction Act: One-page summary. U.S. Senate Democratic Caucus. [https://www.democrats.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/inflation\\_reduction\\_act\\_one\\_page\\_summary.pdf](https://www.democrats.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/inflation_reduction_act_one_page_summary.pdf)

<sup>9</sup>European Commission. (2024). European Critical Raw Materials Act. European Commission. [https://commission.europa.eu/topics/competitiveness/green-deal-industrial-plan/european-critical-raw-materials-act\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/topics/competitiveness/green-deal-industrial-plan/european-critical-raw-materials-act_en)

<sup>10</sup>European Commission. (n.d.). Global Gateway. European Commission. Retrieved August 2, 2026, from [https://commission.europa.eu/topics/international-partnerships/global-gateway\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/topics/international-partnerships/global-gateway_en)

<sup>11</sup>Daniels, P. (n.d.). Top 10 cobalt producers. Critical Minerals News. <https://critical-minerals-news.com/top-10-cobalt-producers/>

industry and gave a boost to GDP. Indonesia expanded its policy of resource nationalism by banning export of raw bauxite.

Following the pattern Bolivia holding world's largest deposits of lithium rejected the deals with majority control of foreign companies. Instead, it insisted on partnership with state owned Yacimientos de Litio Bolivianos (YLB). This policy strengthened local battery and electric vehicles production. Chile holding 40% of global lithium deposits followed a more pragmatic policy. In 2023 it announced a state led lithium model under which private companies have must to be partner with state owned companies.

### **5.3 The Development Dilemma**

Resource Curse emphasize that without transparent governance, institutional capacity and effective policies resources will empower only elites, instead resources will emerge as a curse. Cobalt mining in DRC have generated soil and water contamination challenges. Nickel extraction leading towards toxic waste streams, while lithium and brine extraction causing water scarcity.

The question is still left behind that whether energy transition will beneficial for producing states or global powers will exploit the producing states for their advantages.

## **6. Governance Frameworks: Adequacy and Limitations**

### **6.1 The Institutional Gap**

Comparing the governing structure of oil sector with mineral sector, mineral sector is yet underdeveloped. oil sector is globally governed by international organizations like OPEC, IEA, International Energy Forum. Oil sector is legally bound by treaties and agreements as Energy Charter Treaty and many others. It is governed by overlapping structure. While the mineral sector is emerging and governing structure is not developed as oil sector. There are frameworks like Intergovernmental Forum on Mining's Policy Framework (MPF), Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and Africa Mining Vision. This institutional gap is the reason of exploitation of developing producing states.

To develop a global governing structure takes time, and mineral framework is under way. In 2023, Critical Minerals and Clean Energy Summit by IEA brought producing and consuming states on a dialogue to frame supply chain, market transparency and sustainability. The African Union presented African producer states as a coordinated single bloc rather than scattered states vulnerable to external forces.

### **6.2. Technology as a Governance Variable**

Technological revolution is fueling competition among global powers for critical minerals. With time minerals like lithium and cobalt can be replaced by lithium iron phosphate and sodium ion. Deep Sea mining will also reshape the demand for critical minerals. Circular Economy and recycling can reduce the leverage of mineral supplier and reduce competition as well. EU's battery regulation is focusing on recycled content. Technological innovation will reshape the minerals landscape.

## **7. The Emerging World Order**

### **7.1 From Oil to Mineral Order**

Hydrocarbon world order emerged in 20th century was defined by Middle Eastern oil producers, supply lines, choke points like Strait of Hormuz and Persian Gulf and oil import dependent states. After the collapse of Soviet Union, oil reserves maintained the power structure of Russia. Similarly, Gulf states transformed their oil reserves into wealth and influence.

This developing mineral competition will not replace existing oil structure but will form new competitive structure overlaying existing hydrocarbon architecture. The energy transition is time taking process though oil and gas will remain significant for a long time. But the oil and gas will keep declining it's importance and minerals will become more significant. In the new world order in process due to this energy transition, China will maintain it's influence due to its processing, manufacturing, investment and technological supremacy. United States having a ambiguous standpoint in this mineral competition, holding a military advantage but closing the gap of technology and industry. European Union due to it's framework maturity will have moral power in this mineral era that US and China both haven't developed yet.

### **7.2 Bloc Formation**

The contest over minerals for batteries have made EU to sign free trade agreement, China's direct engagement and investment with help of BRI project and US as well signing agreements. This contest is shaping alliances and forming blocs, which will later emerge as two critical mineral supply chain; one with western alliances and second with Chinese bloc. The developing producer states will be forced to join one, as seen in history. This contest will have consequences. Increased competition will heighten the cost of energy transition and will hinder the process of decarbonization. The challenge will be for the states like DRC and Central Asian states in which interests of these two blocs will collide.

### **7.3 Redefining Energy Security**

The traditional concept of energy security was based on 4As framework; availability, accessibility, acceptability and affordability of hydrocarbons. The energy transition will redefine the concept of energy security. Now the energy security will be based on raw material, processing, manufacturing and it's supply with lowest environmental consequences.

### **8. Conclusion**

The global energy transition is the macro-structural change in contemporary period. It will promise decarbonization of world with at the same time change the whole economic structure. But this competition will not abolish geopolitical competition. The main idea in this article is that the energy transition is not eradicating the geopolitical competition but just reshaping it. It is shifting chokepoints and leveraging states. New rivalries are emerging.

The center of attention is being shifted from oil producing states towards minerals hosting states. Significance of states like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq and Venezuela is started declining and states like DRC and Bolivia got attention in new international order. China has already developed a structure to control emerging world order. The US in response is under way. Resource-rich states have opportunity to transform their mineral wealth into actual development, at the same time this mineral wealth can emerge as a curse for producing states.

The governance structure to manage contest over critical minerals is not sufficient to overcome challenges. Without frameworks on exports, price controlling, environmental standards, supply chain and market access, the geopolitical competition will further intensify. This competition will hinder process of energy transition. The emerging order will be dependent on response of states and international institutions to mineral politics. Power is being shifted, not staying static.

## CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL SITUATION



### China – Moving from Discretion to a Bold and Assertive Approach in the Context of Today's Chaotic World

PhD. Eng. Stelian TEODORESCU (Romania)

China's foreign policy has shifted from Deng Xiaoping's cautious strategy of "hiding capabilities and biding our time" to a proactive and assertive posture. In today's chaotic world, Beijing is actively reshaping global governance, securing its borders, and challenging perceived Western dominance.

The main shifts in China's approach are:

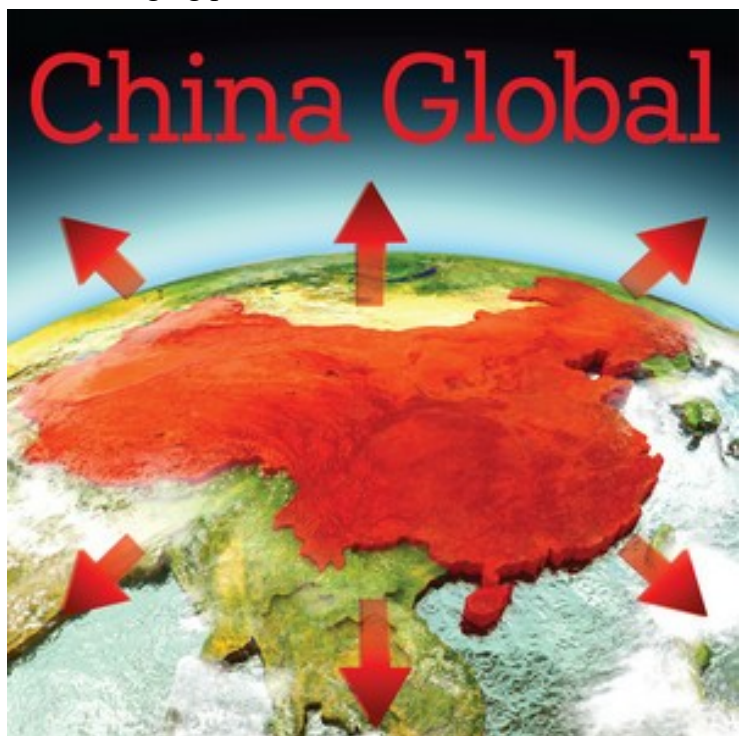
- From a reactive to a proactive stance: Rather than simply responding to global events, China is initiating policies such as the Belt and Road Initiative and global security pacts to expand its influence.
- The new art of economic governance: China is using regulatory tools such as export controls on critical minerals and the "unsafe entity list" to punish or warn foreign companies and governments.
- Asserting territorial claims: Beijing is aggressively defending its maritime borders. One example is the use of coast guard and gray area tactics to deter rival claimants.
- Global leadership aspirations: China positions itself as a champion of the "Global South." It uses organizations such as the United Nations and the BRICS coalition to promote an alternative to Western-led alliances.

A real-world analogy might be the "Game of Go."<sup>1</sup>

To understand this shift, look to the ancient Chinese game of Go.

Past: For decades, China played like an amateur learning the game. It focused entirely on defending its own corner of the board to build internal strength.

Present: Today, China plays like an expert. It places strategic "stones" across the board (through trade, infrastructure, and diplomacy) to surround competitors. China no longer waits for its opponents to make the first move. Instead, Beijing is acting to shape the global playing field to its advantage. China sees the current global environment as extremely unstable, citing the political overstretch of several major



Source: <https://open.spotify.com/show/3IPzYNMWWpwHQszzEyG9Gf>

<sup>1</sup>Go is a two-player strategy game that originated in ancient China between 2000 BCE and 200 BCE. The game takes its name from the Japanese word igo, which is now known as go. In short, the object of the game is to score as many points as possible with your pieces. The rules are very simple and easy to learn. However, it is a complex game, comparable only to chess.

international actors, the disintegration of some states and international alliances. Beijing calculates that a declining Western hegemony presents a historic opportunity to take a step forward. By offering Chinese solutions to global problems, Beijing aims to protect its national security and ensure that its political system survives.

It is a fact that China has always pursued global preeminence, initially seeking to be discreet and to progress more covertly and with less access for other states to knowledge of its real profile. However, for some time now it seems that, in the context of new developments at the global level, China is seeking to signal more and more often and intensely that the era of discretion is gradually being replaced by a bolder and more assertive approach.

As a result, we can say that, in recent times, China has shown that it likes to position itself as a global leader, especially in the developing world, but also among the world elites. It is known that in its National Security Strategy, published on October 2022, the Biden administration stated that the greatest challenge to US interests comes from a rising China. Washington's main emphasis has been on supporting and strengthening the US's potential for action, in competition with China, especially in the context of China's increasingly visible and stronger connections with states in all regions of the world.

The notion of "soft power", introduced by Joseph Nye in 1990, refers to "the ability to obtain what is desired primarily through attraction, rather than through coercion, constraint, or payment". It has become very clear that a country obtains its "soft power" mainly from three resources: culture, internal values and foreign policies - when these are seen as legitimate and lead to moral authority, prestige and, ultimately, to creating the image of a desirable partner.

Thus, analyzing the economic, political and diplomatic activities carried out by China and the investment capital offered to many states around the world, we can say that all of this clearly contributes to China's reputation worldwide; but, in reality, the imposition of the Asian giant's economic power lies between "soft power"<sup>2</sup> and "hard power"<sup>3</sup>, the two forms contrasting each other, because the first comes, as we emphasized, from diplomacy, culture and history. An eloquent example is that China is trying to expand its influence in the Middle East to secure oil resources and reduce the influence of the United States in the region, because this is its essential objective in the competition in which it is engaged to change the world order. As a result, Beijing uses in most cases a "soft power" strategy, that is, it gets involved diplomatically, economically and even politically, but not through war.

Expert analyses highlight several important pillars of this strategy:

- *Economic interests*: China has a pressing need for a lot of oil from Saudi Arabia and Iran and, therefore, needs peace in the region so that its energy resource shipments are not stopped.
- *Peace mediator*: Beijing plays the role of a "peacemaker", a major example being the 2023 agreement when it contributed to the restoration of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran.
- *Active diplomacy*: China frequently sends special envoys to mediate conflicts and lobby dialogue to de-escalate crises in the area.
- *Relationship with Iran*: China is a close ally of Iran, supporting this state's sovereignty, but at the same time avoiding to affect relations with Israel or the other Gulf states.

But here, on June 8-9, 2026, the Chinese President Xi Jinping paid a visit to North Korea, an event that followed the summits and official meetings that took place in Beijing with US President Donald Trump (May 14-15) and Russian President Vladimir Putin (May 20). International observers strongly believe that the Chinese President Xi Jinping paid an important visit and meeting to North Korea, promising to deepen ties and expand cooperation with Kim Jong-un. It is significant to note that Xi called this last-mentioned summit a "new historic starting point."

Beijing has traditionally played the role of a main partner in relations with Pyongyang, with North Korea heavily dependent on China for about 95% of its trade, according to 2022 estimates by the National Committee on North Korea, a US-based non-profit organization.

However, it should not be overlooked that this dynamic has changed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, with North Korea providing Russia with weapons, artillery equipment and manpower, all of which are classified as essential and recognized by observers for their contribution to keeping Moscow's war machine running.

It is necessary to emphasize here that, according to diplomatic rules, President Xi's visit to Pyongyang was reciprocal. The North Korean leader Kim Jong-un visited Beijing in September 2025, when China organized a huge military parade to mark the 80th anniversary of Japan's unconditional surrender to the Allied forces, ending World War II. Most likely, Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Pyongyang also allowed him to give Kim Jong-un some insight into his meetings with the US and Russian

<sup>2</sup>The ability of a country to attract and persuade through culture, values, and foreign policy, without using military force or money.

<sup>3</sup>A mix of military, economic, and soft power. It means using the media and investments to create a positive image of an entity.

presidents. Xi's visit to North Korea was his third visit to the country - the first was as vice president in 2008, and the second was in June 2019. However, the coverage of the event was largely opaque and the Chinese and North Korean media focused mainly on its symbolism with little information about the substance of the talks between Xi Jinping and Kim Jong-un or the current state of relations between Beijing and Pyongyang.

But now, amid much speculation about a possible upcoming meeting between President Trump and Kim Jong Un, there is some speculation that discussing and mediating some kind of US-North Korea contact could have even been on President Xi's agenda when he met with Kim Jong Un in Pyongyang. While this seems unlikely, given Beijing's reluctance to confirm discussions on the subject so far and the reports that the US and Chinese leaders "confirmed their shared goal of denuclearizing North Korea," it is unlikely that President Xi would have put much political effort, if any, into possibly bringing Kim Jong Un back to the denuclearization table—an effort that Xi likely sees as unlikely to bear fruit.

Yet if an analyst in 2016 had suggested that, less than a decade later, China would serve as the economic and logistical backbone that would enable Russia to wage a full-scale war against Ukraine, such a prediction would have seemed unlikely or even extravagant to most analysts at the time. If other analysts had firmly predicted that China and Russia, as part of this major military effort, would also cooperate with Iran to mass-produce lethal drones and thereby kill thousands of Ukrainians, the scenario might have seemed equally far-fetched at the time.

Even a bold and seemingly clairvoyant expert would probably have dismissed the idea or a possible forecast that thousands of North Korean soldiers could fight alongside the Russian military and learn new lessons and methods of modern warfare, and that Pyongyang's ammunition would represent about half of Russia's artillery spending on the Ukrainian front in the second half of 2025. However, by analyzing very carefully and objectively the data and information currently available, we can say that, at a macro level, Chinese President Xi already has a very important role as a dynamic leader on the international stage - especially within the new grouping of autocracies with revisionist conceptions of the world order called CRINK (China, Russia, Iran, North Korea) - while also generating the perception that US influence globally is currently in significant decline. Although, at some point, the themes of China's importance to North Korea will be recognized, Xi may not be strongly motivated by any urgent need to counter Russia's growing influence in North Korea, as some international analysts point out.

South Korea's Institute for National Security Strategy, a government-funded think-tank, estimates that as of 2023, Moscow has paid North Korea up to \$14.4 billion for the deployment of troops and the export of "artillery equipment, shells, and guided and ballistic missiles." The report, however, suggests that North Korea may have received a sum between \$580 million and \$1.5 billion of the aforementioned amount in the form of "goods," meaning that there is a "significant possibility that the majority of Moscow's payment was in the form of 'sensitive military technology or related precision parts and materials that are difficult to observe via satellite.'"

However, it is significant to note here that from Kim Jong-un's perspective, the meeting with Xi would support Pyongyang's broader diplomatic efforts to normalize the country's nuclear power status. The meeting also demonstrates that the two states, North Korea and China, can explore improving relations despite Kim Jong-un's growing rapprochement with Russia.

Why do we say this? Because Chinese President Xi Jinping, after the conclusion of this visit to North Korea, stressed that he had established a deeper and more comprehensive understanding, providing a clearer path for the development of ties and relations bilateral.

For Beijing and Pyongyang, this could be exactly the kind of outcome that would validate a long-held thesis: overwhelming American military force, when deployed against a determined adversary willing to absorb the effects and escalate asymmetrically, produces strategic costs that outweigh tactical gains. Xi's decision to make Pyongyang his first stop in 2026—ahead of any Western capital—can be interpreted as a signal from Beijing that it intends to learn, understand, and act on this lesson, rather than simply observe it.

As a result, we can say that China is nevertheless proving to be and will continue to be cautious about how far Russia's influence over North Korea extends, as Lee Sang Yong, a Seoul-based journalist and researcher who closely follows Pyongyang, has suggested. "Beijing likely wants to reassert its influence over North Korea and prevent Pyongyang from leaning too much toward Moscow," he said, referring to Xi's visit. One way China could try to limit Russia's influence over North Korea is by increasing its own economic support for Pyongyang. "Providing economic incentives to North Korea" could be China's plan, as Rachel Minyoung Lee, a senior fellow at the Stimson Center's Korea Program, put it. So it's natural to think that China won't just be watching Russia's influence over North Korea closely. While China has a mutual defense treaty with North Korea, it is also wary of North Korea's acquisition of new military technology, as Crisis Group's Yang pointed out.

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and Xi agreed to expand cooperation in politics, economics and culture at their meeting in Pyongyang, which opened a new chapter in relations between the two countries,

according to North Korean media. China is North Korea's largest trading partner, so Xi's visit is likely to have focused much more on trade and tourism. A key argument could be that the Chinese president told his hosts at a luncheon before his departure: "The mutual understanding between China and North Korea has become deeper and more comprehensive, and the direction of future development has become clearer and more defined." In turn, figures in Pyongyang stressed: "North Korea has eliminated elements that could make it appear as a subordinate, dependent or beneficiary party and rewritten the relationship as one between equals," said Hong Min, a senior researcher at the Korea Institute for National Unification. "I feel that sometimes the two countries may seem quite friendly on the surface, but in reality there are still many problems," said Zhu, a 43-year-old doctor from Beijing who declined to give her full name.

In the same context, it is significant to emphasize that Kim Jong Un nevertheless told Xi that he would fully support the "One China" principle, which Beijing considers to be a reality, claiming that both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one country, regardless of changes in the international situation. As is well known, China considers democratically governed Taiwan to be its own territory and would never give up the use of force to bring the island under Beijing's control.

Analyzing the news that appeared in the media, it was concluded that the North Korean press did not specify whether Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program or relations with the United States were included in the agenda of the talks. Such an absence of topics mentioned in the China-North Korea talks suggests that Beijing would like the visit to be presented in terms of neighborhood ties, as noted by Ja Ian Chong, a professor of political science at the National University of Singapore.

It is well known that during his first term, US President D. Trump met with Kim Jong-un three times, before the unprecedented diplomatic effort failed due to US demands that North Korea also give up its nuclear weapons. However, D. Trump has stated his willingness to resume talks. However, we can say that "it is doubtful that Xi will serve as a catalyst for US-North Korea talks," as Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha University in Seoul, said. Beyond the visual aspect and carefully choreographed messages from the Chinese and North Korean governments, we could say that the perception is strengthening that the real motivation for Xi's visit was to monitor Kim Jong-un - his nuclear-armed neighbor.

"Never before have the Chinese dealt with a North Korea that has any arrogance in its step," said Bob Carlin, a former U.S. State Department official. He added that while North Korea has long felt "subdued by the great powers, that is not Kim Jong-un's perspective these days." "Since 2023, Kim Jong-un has completely changed the focus of North Korea's strategic policy," Carlin said. "For so many years, the goal was to engage with the U.S., to normalize relations with the U.S. That has disappeared. They want to confront the U.S.". Kim Jong-un sees himself as "a leader in this movement, and sooner or later he will have to change his mind with the Americans," Carlin said.

This presents Xi with a problem, he said, because China knows that if Kim Jong-un gets into a conflict with the United States, "it will involve the Chinese in one way or another, and they need to know what he is up to and they need to advise him and prevent him when they can."

Xi's visit to Pyongyang was also seen as an attempt to balance Russian influence in North Korea, which has grown significantly since Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

In exchange for weapons and thousands of North Korean soldiers, Russia has offered Pyongyang financial assistance that it has proven to desperately need. Moscow has also recognized North Korea as a nuclear-armed partner, giving Kim Jong-un confidence as he redoubles efforts to expand his country's weapons program, which is considered far more advanced than Iran's.

"China doesn't want Russia and North Korea to be in a corner, plotting something between them," Carlin said. Beijing wants to "be the control rod... they want to stabilize things and prevent them from getting out of control."

Just days before Xi's visit, Kim Jong-un unveiled a new nuclear production plant and toured a uranium enrichment facility. On the eve of the Chinese leader's arrival, Kim Jong-un's sister, (Kim Yo Jong)<sup>4</sup>, declared that North Korea's nuclear weapons status was "irreversible."

"Kim Jong-un is building new enrichment facilities, producing plutonium, which is very dangerous," B. Carlin also predicted. "So he is building an extremely large nuclear arsenal. And he has enough missiles to launch all those nuclear weapons at all of South Korea and Japan. So he feels he has a lot of power, and the question is how and when he thinks the time will come to use it." B. Carlin believes that Kim Jong-un has three goals, however: *to diminish the position of the United States on the world*

---

<sup>4</sup>Kim Yo Jong[a] (born 26 September 1987) is a North Korean politician and diplomat, the sister of General Secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea, Kim Jong Un. Since February 2026, she has been the Director of the General Affairs Department of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK). This high-level appointment took place during the first plenary session of the 9th Central Committee, held concurrently with the 9th Party Congress in Pyongyang. Since March 2026, she has also been an alternate member of the Politburo of the Workers' Party of Korea. Between September 2021 and March 2026, she was a member of the State Affairs Commission of North Korea.

stage, to reunify the Korean Peninsula, and to be considered an equal by both China and Russia, so that they can no longer treat him and his regime as a minor player. As a result, it is significant to note that North Korea has already carried out eight missile launches since the beginning of the year, and in May it made a big surprise with a new tactical cruise missile guided by artificial intelligence, according to North Korean media and the US Naval Institute.

There has been no international report that Xi conveyed a message on behalf of the White House during his visit to North Korea. D. Trump has spoken little on the subject in recent years, although he himself expressed a clear desire after his last talks with Kim Jong Un a long time ago to resume negotiations.

D. Trump and Kim Jong Un met three times during the American leader's first term, but since their last meeting in 2019, North Korea has tested a significant number of intercontinental ballistic missiles, and Kim Jong Un has made it very clear that he is not willing to discuss the notion of denuclearization. B. Carlin believes that the US can offer nothing at this time to convince Pyongyang to give up its nuclear weapons. "We have completely missed this opportunity," he said, when the talks between Trump and Kim Jong Un failed seven years ago.

In all this complex context described above, it should not be overlooked that North Korea has technically been at war with South Korea since 1950, with the conflict suspended by an armistice agreement in 1953. The two countries are divided by a 250-km Demilitarized Zone that divides the Korean Peninsula. Tensions have fluctuated dramatically over the years, reaching a recent low in 2024, when Kim Jong-un abandoned his long-term goal of Korean unification. Since then, observers say, he has largely cut off communications. South Korea's Foreign Ministry said it hoped Xi's visit to North Korea would "play a constructive role in addressing issues related to the Korean Peninsula" – suggesting that Seoul may have been lobbying the Chinese leader to try to mend ties.

South Korean Unification Minister Chung Dong Young told the media that the two leaders are expected to discuss a possible meeting between Kim Jong-un and Trump in late 2026. In the same context, Xi's visit to North Korea may have been based on concerns about other security developments in East Asia, including reports of a possible military-logistical support pact between South Korea and Japan, which was discussed at the Shangri-La Dialogue of regional defense officials in Singapore.

While the relationship between China and South Korea fluctuates, China's ties with Japan are strained by long-standing grievances dating back to the Imperial Japanese occupation of China in the 1930s and 1940s. Beijing has also opposed Tokyo's recent moves to expand its *de facto* military.

In conclusion, we can say that the analysis of the depth and durability of the relationship between Beijing and Moscow, as well as the links of these major international actors with other authoritarian powers such as North Korea and Iran, must be periodically reassessed in the current geopolitical context, which is in an accelerated, rapid and disorderly evolution and marked by unpredictable changes and turbulence. The US and Israeli attack on Iran this year, combined with the continued US pressure on Venezuela and Cuba, exposed the practical isolation of the targeted regimes, despite their long-standing strategic relations with Russia and China. But, as in the case of the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine, lines of support and cooperation can develop and become more visible. In early March 2026, for example, many reports suggested that Russian forces were providing Tehran with information about US military assets in the region.

Meanwhile, Kiev has stepped forward to offer hard-won expertise in countering Iranian drone technology, signaling a potential spiral in which the two conflicts—and their respective belligerents—become increasingly intertwined.

In any case, it would be unwise to assume that recent military developments will be decisive in dispelling the threat posed by cooperation between authoritarian regimes, and particularly between Moscow and Beijing. Attacks on their partners in the Caribbean and the Middle East could ultimately bring the two regimes closer together. The United States and its allies must therefore prepare for a long-term, all-encompassing strategic competition with these authoritarian adversaries. The only safe assumption is that the leaders of Russia and China, both prioritizing the survival of their regimes above all else, will continue to adapt and challenge the interests and security of U.S.

The partnership that emerged under CRINK does not neatly conform to the familiar notions of democratic observers of a NATO-style military alliance or a European-style economic union underpinned by extensive institutional integration. Instead, it is highly contingent and tailored to serve the distinct and shifting interests of each side, leading to both strengths and weaknesses.

Despite obvious frictions and structural asymmetries, the regimes in Beijing and Moscow have steadily developed their partnership since 2012 and, especially, since 2022, cooperating in ways that few anticipated. This closer authoritarian alignment is all the more significant given the shifting and intransigent posture of the US leadership and the growing differences between the allies, who, under the current circumstances, should act with much greater unity, purpose, and strategic coherence.

Russia and China also play an important role in the BRICS, a structure that Iran has also joined. However, while CRINK (China, Russia, Iran and North Korea) is an informal alliance of anti-Western nations focused on disrupting the global order and evading sanctions, BRICS is a massive and formal intergovernmental organization of emerging economies (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Indonesia) focused on economic growth and multipolar global representation. The 2026 BRICS Summit will be held in New Delhi, India, on September 12-13, 2026. With the theme “Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability”, the event will mark India’s fourth tenure of the rotating BRICS presidency.

The final conclusion could be defined by the fierce competition of multilateralism vs. minilateralism, with the design and reset of global state relations likely to be defined by an uneasy lull. Although, in theory, governments around the world want to achieve a constructive strategic relationship, regional and global relations have become so fragile and superficial that they lack ambition or any affirmative and positive vision. From now on, the crucial question will be: *who makes the best use of this interregnum that has transformed the evolution of the entire world today into a disorderly one?*

## DEFENSE INDUSTRY



### Industry Must Serve Force Design: Building Defense Capability Beyond Platforms

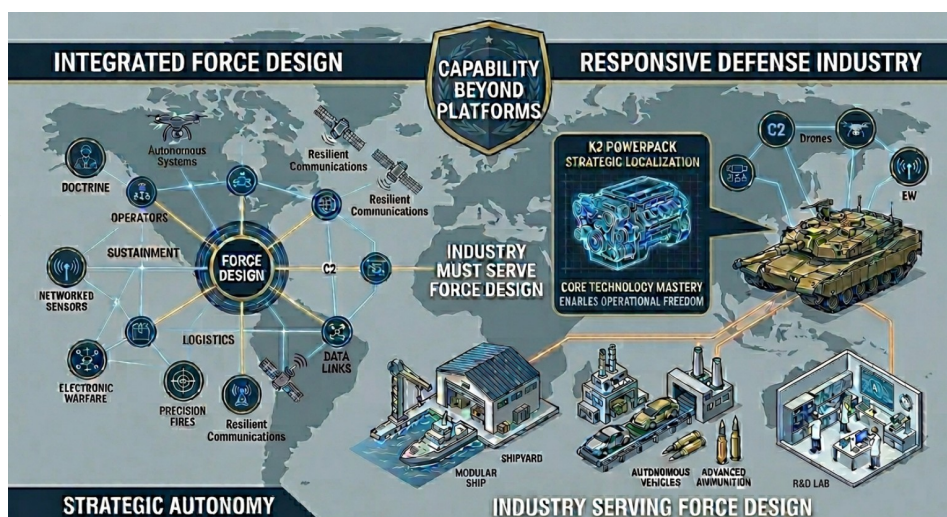
Ph.D. Jae Won JUNG (South Korea)

Modern defense debates often begin with platforms. Nations ask how many aircraft, ships, tanks, missiles, artillery systems, radars, or submarines they need. Industry then responds with production plans, investment proposals, export campaigns, and technology roadmaps. This is understandable. Platforms are visible. They can be displayed, contracted, delivered, counted, and compared.

But defense capability is not created by platforms alone.

A weapon system becomes real military power only when it is connected to doctrine, operators, sustainment, training, logistics, maintenance, ammunition supply, software support, command and control, industrial resilience, and national decision-making. A platform without this wider system may look like capability on paper. In war, however, it can become a stranded asset, a maintenance burden, or a symbol of ambition without operational depth.

For this reason, industry must serve force design. It should not define force design by itself.



*Fig. 1 : Capability beyond platforms - integrated force design, responsive defense industry, and strategic localization illustrated through the K2 powerpack case.*

*Source: Author-created AI-assisted conceptual illustration prepared for this article.*

### From Platform Thinking to Capability Thinking

A platform is an object. Capability is a functioning system.

The difference is fundamental. A platform can be purchased. Capability must be formed, sustained, adapted, and protected over time. A country can buy advanced equipment and still fail to generate combat power if it lacks trained crews, spare parts, repair capacity, test equipment, ammunition, software support, doctrine, secure communications, and a realistic operating concept.

This distinction has become more important in the current security environment. The modern battlefield is no longer shaped only by major platforms confronting other major platforms. It is shaped by sensors, drones, electronic warfare, cyber effects, precision fires, satellite communications, autonomous systems, data links, commercial supply chains, and the speed at which losses can be replaced.

In such an environment, the old question, ‘Which platform is best?’, is not sufficient. The better question is: what force design is required, and what industrial system can sustain it under wartime stress?

This question changes the role of defense industry. Industry is no longer merely a producer of equipment. It becomes part of the national combat-power formation system.

### **The Hidden Layers of Combat Power**

Combat power has visible and hidden layers.

The visible layer includes weapons, vehicles, ships, aircraft, missiles, radars, and sensors. These are the assets that receive attention in public debate. They are also the easiest to compare.

The hidden layer is different. It includes maintenance cycles, production capacity, quality assurance, ammunition stockpiles, repair networks, spare parts, engineering documentation, software update authority, test and evaluation capacity, trained technicians, industrial surge potential, logistics routes, and the ability to recover from damage.

In peace, the visible layer often dominates attention. In war, the hidden layer decides endurance.

A force that cannot repair, reload, refuel, update, replace, and redeploy its systems will lose effectiveness even if its initial platforms are advanced. Conversely, a force with less glamorous platforms may survive longer if it has better sustainment, better doctrine, better maintenance, faster adaptation, and deeper industrial support.

This is why force design must begin with the full life cycle of capability. Acquisition is not the end of capability formation. It is only one phase. A weapon system must be designed, produced, tested, fielded, operated, maintained, upgraded, repaired, and eventually replaced. If industry is involved only at the production stage, the nation will miss the larger system.

### **Industry Must Not Become Its Own Strategy**

Defense companies naturally promote what they can build. Shipyards promote ships. Missile companies promote missiles. Vehicle manufacturers promote vehicles. Electronics firms promote sensors and networks. This is not wrong. Each part of industry has its own expertise and its own economic logic.

But national defense cannot be built by simply adding industrial proposals together.

If each industrial actor defines capability from its own production line, the result may be a collection of platforms rather than a coherent force. A country may acquire impressive systems but fail to integrate them into a survivable operational architecture.

Force design must therefore come first.

A government must define the military problem before industry defines the industrial solution. It must ask what threats must be deterred, what missions must be performed, what losses must be absorbed, what escalation paths must be managed, and what operational concepts must be sustained. Only then should industry be organized to support that design.

Otherwise, the nation risks confusing industrial activity with strategic readiness.

This risk is not theoretical. Defense industry is often connected to regional development, jobs, infrastructure, and political interests. These are legitimate concerns. A defense industrial base must exist somewhere, employ people, and support national economic capacity. But regional industrial claims should not replace force design.

A shipyard, factory, or technology cluster may be valuable, but its value must be measured by how it contributes to national capability. The central question is not which region receives investment first. The central question is what operational capability the country needs, and how the industrial base should be organized to support it.

If industry becomes regional politics before becoming force design, national strategy will be weakened. A country may build industrial monuments instead of combat power.

### **The Battlefield Has Changed**

Many legacy weapon systems were designed for a particular threat environment. They were not wrong in their time. They reflected the assumptions, technologies, and operational concepts of the period in which they were created.

But the battlefield changes.

Missile defense is no longer only a matter of intercepting ballistic missiles. It must now deal with mixed salvos, drones, cruise missiles, decoys, electronic attack, cyber disruption, and attacks on sensors and command systems.

Artillery warfare is no longer only a matter of gun range and shell quantity. It is shaped by drones, counter-battery radar, precision fires, loitering munitions, dispersion, shoot-and-scoot speed, ammunition logistics, automation, and survivability under persistent surveillance.

Armored warfare is no longer only a contest of armor and gun power. It now depends on active protection, drone defense, electronic warfare, thermal signature control, networked reconnaissance, maintenance, fuel logistics, and combined-arms integration.

Naval and submarine capability is no longer only about ship construction. It requires crew generation, nuclear or conventional stewardship, maintenance facilities, dock capacity, supply chains, training pipelines, operational availability, and long-term industrial rhythm.

This does not mean legacy platforms are useless. It means they must be re-evaluated within today's battlefield system.

A weapon that was effective in one era may still be useful, but only if its role is redesigned. Buying more of the same equipment may solve a short-term inventory problem, but it does not automatically solve the problem of future war. A larger inventory is not the same as a better force design.

### **Cost, Endurance, and Asymmetry**

Modern warfare also creates a cost problem.

If a defender uses very expensive weapons to defeat large numbers of cheaper threats, the defender may win each engagement but lose the economic contest. A missile interceptor may defeat an incoming missile, but if the attacker can produce, launch, or combine threats at lower cost and higher volume, the defender faces a long-term disadvantage.

This does not mean high-end systems are unnecessary. Some threats require high-end defense. But high-end systems must be used within a layered architecture. Expensive interceptors should not be wasted on every threat. Some threats should be handled by lower-cost systems, electronic warfare, hardening, deception, dispersal, passive protection, or disruption of the attacker's launch and command network.

The key is not simply to shoot down more incoming weapons. The key is to make the attacker's strategy fail.

That requires a wider view of defense capability. It includes not only interception, but also resilience, deception, recovery, counter-strike options, industrial replacement capacity, and the ability to impose cost on the source of attack.

This is another reason why industry must serve force design. A production increase can be necessary, but production increase alone may reinforce an old answer to a new battlefield problem. The right question is not only how many systems can be produced. The right question is how each system fits into a layered, adaptive, and cost-effective force.

### **A Practical Lesson from System Development**

This is not an abstract problem for me. In Korea's weapon-system development environment, I learned that the most difficult problem is often not the single engineering item that attracts the most attention. The deeper problem may be the development structure itself.

In one air-defense system development experience, people might have expected the hardest issue to be radar integration, electro-optical tracking, fire-control algorithms, turret control, power supply, or live-fire performance. Those were all difficult. But the greatest burden was developing a complex system with too little prototype depth. When a program has only one main prototype, testing, modification, failure analysis, re-testing, safety confirmation, operator feedback, configuration control, and schedule pressure all converge on the same physical asset.

If that asset is under repair, testing stops. If it is modified, comparison with the earlier configuration becomes harder. If it fails, the entire program waits. If it is needed for a live-fire test, other engineering work must pause. A shortage of prototypes therefore becomes more than a management inconvenience. It becomes a system-level risk.

This experience taught me that capability formation requires development capacity, not only final production capacity. Prototypes, test equipment, spare components, engineering documentation, configuration discipline, maintenance access, and realistic trial conditions all belong to the hidden architecture of combat power. They may not be visible in a parade or in a contract announcement, but they decide whether a country can transform a technical idea into a reliable weapon system.

The same principle applies after fielding. A military force needs not only platforms, but the means to test, diagnose, repair, modify, and adapt them as threats change. If this wider structure is weak, even an advanced platform becomes fragile.

### **The K2 Power Pack Lesson: Difficult Technology as Strategic Autonomy**

One lesson from Korea's defense-industrial experience is that difficult technology should not be judged only by short-term acquisition risk. There is always difficulty in developing core defense technology. But without overcoming such difficulty, a nation cannot build real strategic autonomy.

The K2 tank power pack is an important example. The localization of the engine and transmission was technically difficult. There were strong reasons to worry about schedule, performance, reliability, and program risk. In a narrow acquisition view, importing or depending on foreign subsystems could appear easier.

But a main battle tank is not only a vehicle. It is a national combat system. Its power pack affects mobility, operational availability, maintenance, logistics, upgrade freedom, exportability, and wartime sustainment. If the core mobility system remains dependent on external approval, then the platform is not fully sovereign, even if the tank itself is nationally produced.

From my experience in Korea's weapon-system development, defense acquisition review, and defense technology and quality leadership, I have learned that the hardest question is often not whether a technology is difficult. The harder question is whether a nation can afford not to master it.

In the defense acquisition decision process in which I participated, the difficulty of K2 power pack localization was clearly understood. The issue was not whether localization was easy. It was whether Korea should accept long-term dependence in such a core area. The decision to continue localization carried risk, but it also opened the path to acquiring difficult technology.

The later result was strategically important. Korea gained deeper technical capability in a hard subsystem area. It also reduced or removed export-related constraints that would otherwise have limited the freedom to offer the system to international partners. This mattered not only for one tank program, but for the credibility of Korea's defense industry as a supplier of complete, sustainable, and sovereign capability.

This is why force design must come before narrow platform acquisition. A foreign subsystem may solve a short-term schedule problem. But if it creates long-term dependence, export restrictions, maintenance vulnerability, or limited upgrade authority, the apparent solution may become a strategic constraint.

Industrial policy must therefore distinguish between ordinary localization and strategic localization. Not every component must be nationalized. But some technologies are so close to operational freedom, sustainment, and export sovereignty that they deserve a higher level of national effort.

The K2 power pack case shows that the purpose of industry is not merely to produce parts. It is to build the industrial depth required for national force design. Difficult technology, when chosen wisely and pursued persistently, can become strategic freedom.

### **Strategic Localization, Not Blind Localization**

Localization should not become a slogan. It must be strategic.

No country can localize everything. Even large powers depend on international supply chains. Some foreign systems are excellent, and cooperation with allies and partners is often essential. Defense industrial policy should not be confused with isolation.

But dependence must be understood clearly.

There is a difference between importing a replaceable component and depending on a foreign-controlled subsystem that shapes operational availability, upgrade authority, export freedom, and wartime sustainment. There is also a difference between efficient peacetime procurement and resilient wartime capability.

Strategic localization is the national decision to master technologies that are close to operational freedom. It does not mean making everything at home. It means identifying which technologies, subsystems, production processes, test capabilities, and maintenance functions must be under reliable national or trusted allied control.

This requires judgment. It is not simply an engineering issue. It is a question of force design, industrial base, alliance management, export policy, and national strategy.

A country that avoids all difficult technology may look efficient in the short term. But over time it becomes dependent. A country that tries to localize everything may waste resources. The correct answer lies in disciplined selection: which technologies must be mastered, which can be partnered, and which can be imported without strategic vulnerability.

### **The Industrial Base as a Strategic Weapon**

The defense industrial base itself is now a strategic weapon.

A country that cannot produce enough ammunition, repair damaged systems, replace losses, or secure critical components will be constrained in war. A country that depends entirely on foreign supply during crisis may discover that its operational freedom is limited by another country's industrial bottlenecks.

Therefore, industrial base policy must be linked to force design. It is not enough to ask whether a company can manufacture a platform. The deeper question is whether the national industrial system can sustain the force under stress.

This includes several questions. Can the country produce enough ammunition for prolonged

conflict? Can damaged systems be repaired quickly? Are spare parts available? Are critical components dependent on fragile supply chains? Can software and electronics be updated securely? Can production surge in wartime? Can civilian industry support military production without starting from zero? Can the maintenance ecosystem survive beyond peacetime efficiency assumptions?

These questions are not secondary. They are central to deterrence.

An adversary does not evaluate only the first day of battle. It evaluates endurance. If a country appears able to fight only briefly, its deterrence may be weaker than its platform inventory suggests. If it can absorb damage, repair systems, maintain logistics, and continue production, deterrence becomes stronger.

This is why commercial industrial depth matters. Civilian shipbuilding, electronics, automotive systems, precision manufacturing, software, communications, robotics, and energy infrastructure can all become part of national defense resilience if they are connected intelligently to force design. A defense industrial base built only for peacetime procurement efficiency may be too narrow. A broader industrial ecosystem can provide endurance.

### **A Better Approach**

A better approach begins with the operational problem.

First, define the threat environment. Second, define the missions the force must perform. Third, define the endurance required in war. Fourth, define the industrial and sustainment structure needed to support those missions. Fifth, select or design platforms that fit the architecture.

This sequence matters.

If the sequence is reversed, the country may buy platforms first and then try to invent a strategy around them. That is dangerous. A platform-centered approach can create the illusion of progress while leaving critical gaps in sustainment, integration, industrial resilience, and operational availability.

Industry should be involved early, but not as the author of strategy. It should be a disciplined partner in force design.

Industry can tell government what is technically possible, what can be produced, what supply chains are fragile, what production rates are realistic, what maintenance burden should be expected, and what design choices will affect long-term sustainability. Government must then integrate this industrial knowledge into a national force design. The result should not be a shopping list. It should be a capability system.

### **Conclusion**

Modern defense capability cannot be built by platforms alone. Platforms are necessary, but they are not sufficient. The decisive question is whether a nation can turn platforms into sustained combat power under real battlefield conditions.

This requires a shift in thinking.

Industry must not simply sell weapons. It must serve force design. Government must not simply buy equipment. It must build capability. The military must not simply receive platforms. It must integrate, operate, sustain, and adapt them. The nation must not simply fund defense. It must maintain the industrial, technological, and human foundations of endurance.

In today's security environment, the strongest force is not always the one with the most advanced individual platforms. It is the force whose platforms, operators, doctrine, logistics, industry, and national strategy are integrated into a resilient whole.

There is always difficulty in developing and sustaining real capability. But without overcoming difficult technology and difficult system integration, a nation cannot obtain true strategic freedom.

Defense capability begins with force design. Industry must serve that design.

## DEFENSE INDUSTRY



### NATO's Eastern Flank: Integrating the Defence Industry into the European Security Architecture

Eduard VASILJ (Croatia)

#### Russia's War of Aggression against Ukraine and Its Political and Military Consequences for NATO in Europe

Since 2022, the strategic environment facing Europe and its NATO members has undergone the most fundamental change since the end of the Cold War. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shaken long-standing assumptions about the stability of the post-1991 European security order and made it clear that large-scale military force remains a key instrument of state action. Although institutions and governments condemned the aggression, the limited ability to deter or prevent it revealed fundamental weaknesses in the European security architecture. These developments are particularly serious for Eastern Europe and those of its states that belong to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. The region now lies directly on one of the world's most geopolitically sensitive active borders: that with Russia and the Russian sphere of influence.

In particular, NATO members that share a direct border with Russian territory, such as Estonia and Latvia, as well as Poland and Lithuania (which border the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad and Belarus, with close ties with Russia), face acute security risks. Countries such as Slovakia, Hungary and Romania also face a potential military threat due to their shared borders with Ukraine. The remaining NATO states in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, such as the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Slovenia and Croatia are not geographically directly linked to the conflict zone, yet remain within the reach of Russian-Ukrainian escalation dynamics (for example, a misguided Ukrainian drone – a repurposed Tupolev Tu-141 'Strizh' – with an undetonated explosive charge crashed in the Croatian capital, Zagreb, in March 2022, after it had flown over the airspace of Romania and Hungary).



Source: <https://epthinktank.eu/2024/09/19/european-defence-industrial-strategy/>

#### The Current Security Situation Facing NATO and Its Political and Military Implications

The speech delivered by US Vice-President JD Vance at the Munich Security Conference on 14

February 2025, in which he questioned the reliability of the NATO collective defence clause under Article 5 (*"The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be regarded as an attack against them all ..."*), has further eroded confidence in collective defence in Europe. His remarks reflect the United States' growing concerns regarding NATO's ability to act in unison in the face of rising tensions in Eastern Europe, unresolved issues surrounding defence spending, and ongoing debates about burden-sharing and strategic priorities.

Numerous alliance partners have not yet met the agreed target of spending two per cent of their gross domestic product on defence, which reinforces the expectation that the US will no longer be able to bear this burden alone in future.

This is particularly significant in view of Eastern Europe's strategic role within the evolving European security architecture. The region acts as a link between the European Union, NATO and the wider Eurasian sphere of influence. Any doubt regarding the credibility of Article 5 inevitably leads to a gradual erosion of the Alliance's deterrent effect and thus represents one of the key risk factors for stability in Eastern Europe. The response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, as well as the US administration's statements regarding the NATO collective defence clause, have led to a radical rethink within the European part of NATO and resulted in drastic increases in defence budgets, a massive need for rearmament, new weapons systems and the reindustrialisation of the military production base.

Between 2024 and 2025, defence expenditure by the seven key Eastern European NATO member states – Poland, Romania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Croatia – rose significantly, according to NATO's defence expenditure statistics. Poland remains by far the largest single contributor in the group, with around 4% of GDP and a budget of approximately 40 - 45 billion euros. Romania's budget stands at around 8 - 9 billion euros, the Czech Republic at around 7 - 8 billion euros, Hungary at around 5 - 6 billion euros, Slovakia at around 2.7 - 3 billion euros, Bulgaria at around 2 - 2.5 billion euros and Croatia at around 1.8 - 2 billion euros. In total, this results in an aggregate defence budget for 2025 of approximately 70 to 73 billion euros. Compared with previous years, this represents a real increase of around 8 to 10 per cent, driven by accelerated rearmament, NATO capability targets and additional procurement programmes in the wake of the war in Ukraine.

### **The Defence Industry as an Additional Factor in the Industrial and Political Integration of Eastern Europe within NATO and the EU**

Despite more than two decades of the EU's eastward enlargement (beginning in 2004), significant economic and structural differences persist between the EU's western and eastern Member States that are also members of NATO. The Eastern European states often feel that they are not fully equal participants in European integration and frequently see their role reduced to that of labour pools and sales markets for Western producers. From a military perspective, the states on NATO's eastern flank have so far viewed themselves more as a zone of security vulnerability than as equal industrial production partners in European rearmament.

The general trade figures highlight these imbalances. No Eastern European Member State has a trade surplus within the EU's internal market. There also remain significant differences in income and purchasing power. Gross domestic product per capita in purchasing power standards (PPS) serves as a real indicator of economic performance, taking into account price differences between Member States and enabling international comparisons. In 2024, this figure ranged from 66 per cent of the EU average in Bulgaria to 241 per cent in Luxembourg. No Eastern European Member State exceeded the European average.

A similar picture emerges when looking at average annual incomes converted to full-time equivalents. In 2024, the average annual salary in the western Member States stood at around 45,584 euros, whilst the eastern Member States reached only 22,021 euros. The EU average stood at 39,800 euros. These persistent disparities are fuelling a continuous westward migration of the population. In 2024 alone, around 350,000 people left the south-eastern and eastern European Member States for Western Europe.

Without increased immigration or reindustrialisation – such as in the defence industry – Eastern Europe's working-age population could shrink by a further 10 per cent by 2035. Whilst Western Europe currently has a population of around 348.2 million, Eastern Europe is home to approximately 101.4 million people. If this trend continues, there is a risk of increasing demographic depopulation in the eastern part of the EU in favour of the West; consequently, the area along NATO's eastern flank facing a potential threat from the East will also become depopulated.

### **The Real Question for the Alliance: Customer or Partner?**

One often gets the impression that Eastern Europe is viewed primarily as a market for Western weapons systems, whilst the region's own highly developed defence industries are given only limited

consideration, even though they are able to offer modern technologies and competitive solutions in numerous areas.

The current rearmament and expansion of regional defence industries represent a market worth billions, from which both domestic companies and international defence contractors could benefit. Greater integration of specialised industries into NATO's supply chains would have far-reaching positive effects on the economies of Eastern Europe. It would expand industrial capacity, create jobs and contribute to political stability in the long term.

It is worth noting that six of the world's ten largest arms-exporting nations – the United States, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy and Spain – are members of NATO. The Alliance must therefore make it clear that it is more than just a common internal market for defence equipment. The disparity between security integration and economic participation remains significant: many states in the region are not only seeking to import Western systems, but also wish to be actively involved in their production, maintenance and supply.

Deeper industrial integration would not only create economic benefits but would also provide tangible incentives for long-term political and military commitment to NATO. The full integration of regional defence industries would thus strengthen both the security and the resilience of Eastern Europe in the long term.

## **Eastern Europe's Most Important Producers: Weapon Systems and Potential Key Roles**

### ***Poland – Industrial Hub for Land Warfare and Systems Integration***

Poland is the central industrial anchor of NATO's eastern flank in the field of conventional land warfare systems. Its industrial structure is largely shaped by Polska Grupa Zbrojeniowa (PGZ) and the WB Group.

PGZ consolidates traditional arms production in the areas of artillery, vehicles, and air defence, while the WB Group has established itself as a leading player in drones, digital warfare, and communication systems. Poland produces a fully integrated systems portfolio that includes the 155 mm Krab howitzer, the Borsuk infantry fighting vehicle, the 120 mm rocket-mortar system, man-portable air defence systems such as Piorun, and loitering ammunition systems such as Warmate. This is complemented by increasingly networked command and control and reconnaissance systems.

Poland combines classic firepower with modern sensor and drone integration and plays a central role in NATO's land-based combat capability.

### ***Czech Republic – Industrial Depth Between Ammunition, Vehicles, and Mobility***

The Czech Republic boasts one of the most historically deep and industrially stable defence industries in Europe. Key players include the Czechoslovak Group (CSG), Sellier & Bellot, and Česká zbrojovka. This structure covers a broad spectrum of ammunition, small arms, and system components.

A crucial industrial factor is Tatra Trucks, which produces heavy military logistics and all-terrain vehicles. These platforms form an essential backbone of NATO's mobility and artillery logistics in Central and Eastern Europe. Among the most important systems are the Dana self-propelled guns, the L-39NG training aircraft platform, and large-scale artillery ammunition production.

The Czech Republic thus functions not only as an ammunition producer but also as a strategic provider of military mobility infrastructure.

### ***Bulgaria – Munitions Industry as a Scalable Supply Hub***

Bulgaria is one of the most important European production sites for conventional munitions within NATO's eastern flank. The industrial structure is supported by Arsenal AD and VMZ-Sopot. The focus is on the production of 122 mm and 152 mm artillery ammunition, small arms of the AK standard, and rocket ammunition for multiple launcher systems.

Bulgaria is not a development site for complex weapon systems, but rather a highly scaled industrial supplier within NATO's munitions supply chains.

### ***Romania – Integration and Sustainment Hub of NATO's Southeastern Flank***

Romania is in a transitional position between its Soviet industrial history and NATO standardization. The industrial base is supported by ROMARM and companies such as Aerostar and IAR Braşov.

The focus is on licensed production, maintenance, and integration of Western systems. Examples include the Piranha V under license and the IAR-330 Puma. This is complemented by maintenance capabilities for Western aviation systems, particularly in the context of F-16 fleets.

Romania thus primarily functions as a sustainment and integration platform within NATO's

Southeast architecture.

### ***Hungary – Emerging Industrial Hub of Western Arms Production***

Through targeted industrial policy and cooperation with Western arms companies, Hungary is developing into a newly emerging production hub within NATO.

Central to this is the collaboration with Rheinmetall for the local production of the KF41 Lynx infantry fighting vehicle. This structure is part of a distributed European production system in which individual components and final assembly are spread across several countries. This is complemented by state-coordinated industrial platforms and the development of national ammunition production capacities for NATO standard calibres.

Hungary is therefore not merely a historical arms production location, but a strategically established manufacturing hub within Western supply chains.

### ***Slovakia – Specialized Artillery Production within the NATO System***

Slovakia is a highly specialized producer of artillery systems. The industrial base is supported by Konstruktia Defence and ZTS-Special.

The focus is on the production of the 155 mm Zuzana-2 self-propelled gun and related systems. These systems are fully NATO-compatible and are increasingly being integrated into international procurement programs, particularly in the context of replacement deliveries for support in Ukraine.

Slovakia thus acts as a clear niche supplier of fire support systems.

### ***Croatia – Niche Industry for Infantry Systems and Autonomous Ground Platforms***

Croatia has a small but technologically specialized defence industry. Key companies include HS-Produkt, Šestan-Busch, and DOK-ING. HS-Produkt is an internationally established manufacturer of pistol and assault rifle systems. Šestan-Busch produces protective systems in the area of ballistic helmets and personal protective equipment. DOK-ING specializes in unmanned ground vehicles, particularly in the areas of mine clearance and hazard prevention.

The RAK-12 system is a lightweight, unguided multiple rocket launcher system that originated from Yugoslavian development lines.

Of particular relevance is the increasing industrial integration in the field of unmanned systems. DOK-ING was acquired by Rheinmetall and operates in areas of autonomous ground vehicles and mine clearance technology. This development demonstrates the growing integration of Croatian niche expertise into larger European defence industries.

### ***Intra-NATO Supply Chains: Eastern Europe as a Production and Replenishment System***

A key structural change since 2022 is the beginning and necessarily greater integration of Eastern European production into Western NATO procurement and replenishment systems.

Poland supplies systems such as Piorun and Warmate, as well as artillery systems, within the framework of Western-funded replenishment programs. The Czech Republic is one of the most important ammunition suppliers within European replacement programs. Bulgaria feeds large quantities of conventional ammunition into NATO-supported supply chains. Romania is directly integrated into NATO system families, particularly through licensed production and maintenance. Hungary produces within a Western-embedded platform system. Slovakia supplies artillery systems within the framework of internationally coordinated support programs. Croatia remains a niche supplier but is indirectly integrated through US and European procurement structures.

This creates a bidirectional NATO industrial architecture in which Eastern Europe can gradually become not only a recipient but also an increasingly important producer and supplier within the Western defence system.

### ***The Overall Dynamic: Functional Industrial Architecture Instead of a Centre-Periphery Model***

NATO's eastern flank is not developing a unified defence industry, but rather a functionally specialized production system with a clear division of labour that needs optimization.

Poland forms the centre for land warfare systems and drone integration. The Czech Republic combines munitions with military mobility via Tatra.

Bulgaria is an industrial-scale munitions producer. Romania serves as an integration and maintenance platform. Hungary is developing into a new production hub for armoured vehicles. Slovakia supplies specialized artillery systems. Croatia complements the system with infantry weapons and

autonomous specialized technology.

In sum, this is no longer creating a geopolitical periphery, but rather an industrially functional extension of the European defence architecture. NATO's eastern flank is increasingly becoming an integrated production area in which security policy roles and industrial value creation structurally coincide.

To achieve genuine integration of Eastern and Western Europe, which can be accelerated through security and economic alliances like NATO and the EU, the full integration of Eastern European industrial potential in the production and maintenance of weapons systems within these alliances is essential. Such a broader distribution of resources would not only strengthen political ties between the two regions but also reinforce the economic bases of Eastern European states and further reduce the currently significant disparities in living standards between them.

## PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES



### Private Military Companies (PMC) in Modern Conflict

Grzegorz SZCZEPANSKI (Poland)

#### Introduction

The privatisation of armed force is not a new phenomenon. In 401 BC, Cyrus the Younger hired an army of Greek mercenaries, the Ten Thousand, to seize the Persian throne from his brother. Byzantine emperors contracted Varangian Norsemen as their personal guard. Swiss mercenaries dominated European battlefields for much of the 15th century, until arquebuses and artillery rendered their formations obsolete - the Swiss Guard has protected the Papacy since 1506 and continues to do so today. States have always found it useful to outsource violence. What has changed is the scale, the sophistication, and the degree to which modern governments have come to rely on private military companies as instruments of foreign policy. The post-Cold War drawdown of Western armed forces created structural demand for contracted military expertise. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan normalised the presence of private contractors on the battlefield. And the two decades that followed produced a global industry worth an estimated \$280 billion annually, one that now operates across every major theatre of conflict, from the Sahel to the South China Sea.



Source: <https://trendsmena.com/exclusive-private-military-companies-look-at-366-8bn-market-as-their-demand-role-in-global-conflicts-rise/>

#### From Contractors to Strategic Actors

The early PMC model was largely logistical. Companies such as DynCorp and MPRI provided training, maintenance, and support functions that freed uniformed personnel for combat roles. Executive Outcomes, the South African firm that operated in Angola and Sierra Leone in the 1990s, was an outlier: a PMC willing to conduct offensive operations. It was dissolved under diplomatic pressure in 1998. The model it pioneered did not disappear with it.

The Iraq War marked the decisive shift. At its peak, the United States employed more private contractors in Iraq than uniformed military personnel. Blackwater, later rebranded as Xe Services and then Academi, became the most visible symbol of an industry that had moved far beyond logistics into direct

security provision and lethal force. The 2007 Nisour Square massacre, in which Blackwater contractors killed 17 Iraqi civilians, illustrated both the operational reach of PMCs and the accountability gaps that came with it.

What followed was not contraction but diversification. The industry restructured, rebranded, and found new clients. Apollo Global Management acquired Constellis, Academi's successor, in 2016. By mid-October 2025, private equity and venture capital investment in the defence and aerospace sector had reached a record \$17.7 billion according to the US Senate Banking Committee. The battlefield had become, in the most literal sense, an asset class.

### **State Sponsors and Strategic Outsourcing**

The most significant development of the past decade has been the use of PMCs as instruments of state foreign policy, deployed precisely because they offer plausible deniability and operational flexibility that uniformed forces cannot.

Russia's use of the Wagner Group is the most extensively documented example. Between 2014 and 2023, Wagner operated in Ukraine, Syria, Libya, Mali, the Central African Republic, Sudan, and Mozambique, providing governments with military capability that Moscow could publicly disavow. The business model combined security provision with resource extraction: in exchange for protecting regimes, Wagner secured access to gold mines, timber concessions, and diamond fields. Following Yevgeny Prigozhin's mutiny and death in 2023, Wagner was absorbed into the Russian Ministry of Defence as Africa Corps. The rebranding carried legal weight: where Wagner operated in a grey zone, Africa Corps functions as an organ of the Russian state, with direct implications for state responsibility under international law. Operationally, the results have not improved. By early 2026, the largest jihadist offensive in the Sahel since 2012 had overrun multiple Malian cities under Africa Corps protection.

Russia is not alone. The United Arab Emirates, with a citizen population of under three million, has systematically contracted foreign military expertise to prosecute its regional ambitions. In Yemen and Libya, UAE-funded operations relied on Academi contractors and, more recently, on Colombian veterans recruited through private networks. Human Rights Watch documented the presence of Colombian mercenaries in Darfur in 2025, recruited via WhatsApp, transported through Somalia, and deployed alongside the Rapid Support Forces during operations in El Fasher. The recruiter, Colombian firm A4SI, was sanctioned by the US Treasury in December 2025.

China has pursued a structurally different model. Frontier Services Group, co-founded by Erik Prince and Chinese conglomerate CITIC, generated approximately \$100 million in revenue in 2024-25, operating across the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Kenya, Nigeria, and South Sudan. Beijing maintains a public posture of non-intervention, and Chinese PMCs are formally prohibited from conducting offensive operations abroad. In practice, they provide the security infrastructure that protects Belt and Road investments, allowing China to project influence while maintaining its diplomatic narrative intact.

The United States has developed what analysts describe as a minerals-for-security model. The April 2025 US-Ukraine minerals agreement, which established a joint investment fund backed by Ukrainian natural resources, has been described by CSIS as a potential template for similar arrangements elsewhere. In the DRC, Erik Prince's firm Vectus Global was deployed to South Kivu province in January 2026 to provide drone and intelligence support to Congolese special forces during the recapture of Uvira from M23 rebels, confirmed by Reuters and Critical Threats. A senior Congolese security official described the deployment as consistent with the broader minerals-for-security logic underpinning US-DRC relations.

### **The Regulatory Vacuum**

The legal framework governing PMCs was not designed for the industry that exists today. The 1989 UN Mercenary Convention defines a mercenary so narrowly, requiring direct participation in hostilities for private gain, that virtually no modern PMC contractor qualifies. Russia has not ratified the convention. The Arms Trade Treaty, which entered into force in 2014, requires states to assess the risk of arms transfers being used to commit violations of international humanitarian law, but contains no mechanism for monitoring what happens when those arms pass through a national military to a co-located PMC. The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime documented this failure in detail, publishing 150 images and videos showing weapons transferred to Mali's armed forces subsequently appearing in Wagner hands.

The EU updated its end-use monitoring standards in May 2025 but stopped short of requiring tracking of the effects of weapons use. The Montreux Document of 2008, the most substantive international effort to address PMC accountability, remains non-binding. PMCs operate in a space where international humanitarian law applies in theory and enforcement mechanisms are absent in fact.

The consequences are concrete. In Sudan, Rapid Support Forces (RSF) commanders implicated in

atrocities in Darfur have continued to recruit and operate through UAE-linked private networks without facing any legal mechanism capable of interrupting that process. In Mali, the weapons that GI-TOC documented in Wagner hands had passed through at least two layers of ostensibly legitimate transfer before reaching them. The paper trail existed. The accountability did not.

### **Conclusion**

The trajectory of the PMC industry over three decades reflects a structural shift in how states conduct armed force. What began as contracted logistics has become strategic outsourcing, with private companies performing functions, from intelligence support to offensive operations, that were previously the exclusive preserve of state militaries. The diversity of models, Russian, Emirati, Chinese, American, makes clear that this is not a marginal phenomenon confined to weak states or failed diplomacy. It is a mainstream feature of contemporary conflict.

The Haiti case illustrates how quickly this dynamic can escalate. Vectus Global's drone operations in Port-au-Prince, running parallel to a UN-backed mission, killed at least 1,243 people between March 2025 and January 2026 according to data reviewed by Human Rights Watch, including civilians and children. The Haitian government defended the contract on cost grounds. No international legal mechanism has intervened.

The regulatory architecture has not kept pace, and this is not an oversight. States that rely on PMCs have limited incentive to build accountability mechanisms that would constrain their own instruments. Until that incentive structure changes, the gap between what international law prescribes and what private military actors do will continue to widen.

**Sources:**

- <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/private-military-companies-and-arms-control-challenges-the-wagner-group-in-mali/>
- <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/atrocities-sudan-backed-colombian-mercenaries-trained-uae-bases-report>
- <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/tplf-eritrea-ethiopia-fardc-m23-drc-splmio-south-sudan-boko-haram-aficom-africa-file-february-12-2026>
- <https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-know-about-signed-us-ukraine-minerals-deal>
- <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/chinese-security-firms-spread-african-belt-road/>
- <https://www.banking.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2026.05.27%20Letter%20to%20Hegseth%20re%20PE.pdf>
- <https://smallwarsjournal.com/2026/06/02/third-generation-gangs-strategic-note-no-61-drone-strikes-from-haitian-task-force-pmsc-vectus-global-kill-over-twelve-hundred-people/>

## **Biographies of the authors**



### **Emilia STEFANKIEWICZ (Poland)**

#### Education:

- October 2020 – July 2023 University of Warsaw, Bachelor of Arts, Interdisciplinary American Studies in English;
- January 2023 – May 2025 Harvard University Master of Liberal Arts, International Relations;
- September 1 - November 30, 2021 European Academy of Diplomacy.

#### Certificates:

- Certificate in Advanced English - April 2019, University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate;
- Diplomatic Skills Masterclass - April 2021, European Academy of Diplomacy, Warsaw;
- Excellence-in-ReSTI training – January - June 2021, Charles University, Prague;
- Certificate in International Diplomacy - July 2022, Washington International Diplomatic Academy, DC;

- Citizen Politics in America: Public Opinion, Elections, Interest Groups and the Media - December 2022, Harvard.

#### Experience:

- January 12 – April 30, 2022 - Research associate “long-term public diplomacy strategy to address tensions in the US and China relationship” project Harvard Belfer Center;
- February 24 - May 24, 2022 - Intern Casimir Pulaski Foundation - Prepared a database of 560 Polish Senators and MEPs, researched the military operations in Ukraine, collected information on over 10 decisions of the European Union authorities after the outburst of the conflict, acquired two sponsors for the annual Warsaw Security Forum conference, welcomed over 200 foreign guests at the airport and logistically planned safe transportation to the conference hotel for each of them;
- January 21 - April 30, 2025 - Professional Observer Congresswoman Beth van Duyne’s office;
- August 1, 2025 – Present - Program Coordinator “American Integrated Deterrence” World Affairs Council of Miami - Coordinated the project focused on U.S. and NATO deterrence strategies, authored analytical briefs and white papers on the US defense posture, liaised with senior fellows and policymakers to promote U.S.–CEE strategic dialogue.





### **Gargi AWASTHI (India)**

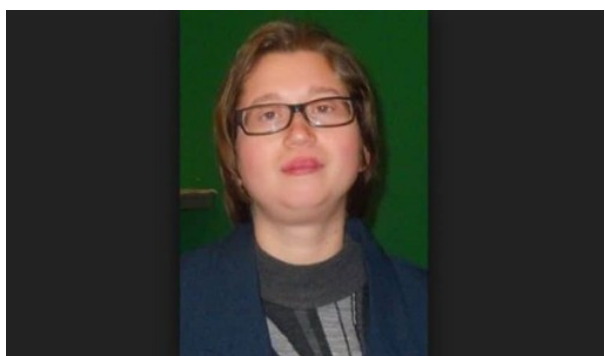
*She is dedicated to assisting community by utilizing area expertise to drive change. She has proficient in devising and managing information gathering systems for collecting data on policies and impacts. She has excellent interpersonal, analytical and public communications skills.*

*Bachelor of Tehnology, Mechanical Engineering at Chandra Shekhar Azad University in Kanpur.*

*She has experience to United Nations, ISPPR, as Policy Analyst and Diplomat, New Delhi, from 12/2022 until now.*

*She participated in multilateral negotiations concerning regional security initiatives sponsored by United Nations. She organized meetings with foreign government officials to discuss areas of mutual interests.*

*She participated to built and updated crisis communication plans to handle diverse situations. She is engaged in public diplomacy activities such as briefings, interviews, lectures and workshops designed for students interested in learning more about Foreign Services careers.*



### **Mona AGRIGOROAIEI (Romania)**

*She graduated in Political Science - Bachelor and Master in Political Marketing and Communication at "Al.Ioan Cuza" University in Iași. In 2023 she also graduated with a second master's degree "Security and Diplomacy" at SNSPA, Bucharest. She followed an internship at the "Center for Conflict Prevention and Early Warning during her studies at SNSPA. She specializes in academic research and exploration of Western Balkan political and security topics, publishing several analyzes in the media of this area*

*in various newspapers in Albania , Kosovo, North Macedonia. Also published two books of poems in Albanian language in Pristina, Kosovo in 2014 and 2022.*



### **Ph.D. Monojit DAS (India)**

*Monojit Das, PhD, is an advocate enrolled with the Bar Council of Maharashtra & Goa and a member of the Armed Forces Tribunal (Principal Bench) Bar Association (AFTPBB), New Delhi. His work engages with issues in security studies and geopolitics.*





### **Aldo MUNGO (Belgium)**

*Aldo Mungo is a recognized specialist in strategic studies and the doctrine of air power employment, with expertise built over more than thirty years in specialized defense journalism. After completing studies in political science and international relations at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB), he quickly turned toward the defense and armaments sector. In 1984, he founded the monthly magazine *Carnets de Vol*, dedicated to military aviation, which he directed and relocated to Paris in 1986. From 1989 onward, he served as editor-in-chief and editorialist of the monthly *Armées & Défense* (the French edition of the Israeli-American*

*magazine *Defense Update*). Both publications rapidly became essential references in military, industrial, and institutional circles. He held these roles until 2011, when he returned definitively to Belgium. His recognized expertise led to his selection as an auditor at the Institut des Hautes Études de Défense Nationale (IHEDN) in Paris (1988–1989 session), where he deepened his knowledge of defense policy, strategy, armaments, and the economics of defense. In 1990, the French Air Force General Staff integrated him into a six-week advanced training program at the US Air Force Weapons School, as part of the Red Flag exercise at Nellis Air Force Base (Nevada). Embedded within a French detachment, he took part in intensive, realistic combat-air training missions, benefiting from cutting-edge real-time performance analysis tools (RFMDS) and access to vast training ranges, including classified areas. Today, Aldo-Michel Mungo is still regarded as one of the leading civilian experts on the military doctrine of air vector employment. His analyses and contributions focus primarily on strategic, tactical, and technological developments in air power and defense.*



### **Col. (Ret.) Ph.D. Jean MARSIA - (Belgium)**



*He is President of the European Defense Society INPA (S€D). He graduated in 1975 from the Royal Military School in Brussels, obtaining a master's degree in Social and Military Sciences. After several posts in the logistics corps of the land forces, he obtained an additional master's degree in Administrative Science. He was then selected for the School of Military Administration. He served in the General Staff of Defense in several positions related to the management of financial resources and procurement. In 1999, he became an advisor to the Minister of Defense, primarily responsible for military procurement, scientific research and education. In 2003, he was appointed director of the Royal Military School, where he served until his retirement in 2009. He then became a PhD student at the Free University of Brussels. From January 2013 to October 2014, he was Defense Adviser to the Belgian Prime Minister.*

*In 2015, he became a Doctor of Political Science at the Free University of Brussels and a Doctor of Social and Military Sciences at the Royal Military School. Since late 2015, he has served as founding president of the European Defense Society, an international non-profit association working to reinvigorate Europe's political union and achieve an effective European defense better suited to burdensharing and the international risk inherent in NATO. He is fluent in French, Dutch, German and English.*





### **Eduard VASILJ (Croatia)**

*Eduard VASILJ holds degrees in Political Science and International Law from Goethe University Frankfurt am Main, as well as in Political Science and Organization from the University of Zagreb. After many years of international experience at executive board level, he advises global corporations and institutions on corporate governance, corporate security, geopolitical security issues, and foreign investments. He splits his time between Croatia and the German-speaking region.*



### **PhD. Jae Won JUNG (South Korea)**

*PhD. Jae Won Jung is a former President of the Korea Defense Agency for Technology and Quality (DTaQ), former Principal Researcher at the Agency for Defense Development (ADD), and former statutory member of Korea's Defense Acquisition Program Committee. At ADD, he worked for decades on ground weapon systems, air-defense systems, and complex precision weapon-system integration, including service as a system architect for Korea's self-propelled anti-aircraft gun capability. His experience spans weapon-system development, defense acquisition, quality assurance, sustainment, localization, export autonomy, force design, and defense industrial-base development.*



### **Zaryab NUTKANY (Pakistan)**

*Researcher focusing on energy geopolitics, strategic mineral competition and emerging security dynamics. Researcher in geopolitics, strategic studies and international security with academic specialization in Defense and Strategic Studies. Research interests include energy geopolitics, strategic mineral competition, great power rivalry, maritime security, South Asian security dynamics and emerging global order transformations. Engaged in independent geopolitical and strategic research focusing on emerging security trends, resource geopolitics and international strategic competition. Producing analytical reports and articles on regional and global developments with a focus on policy relevance.*





### **Grzegorz SZCZEPANSKI (Poland)**

*He is the Vice President of EuroDefense Poland and a member of the Advisory Board of the Organisation for Threat Assessment and Peacebuilding. He is a former soldier of the Military Engineering Corps of the Polish Territorial Defence Forces, a licensed private investigator, and President of the Venator Foundation. His professional experience in defence and geopolitics includes service in the Territorial Defence Forces, work with the Warsaw Security Forum, the Institute for Eastern Studies, the security team of the British Embassy in Warsaw, and as an assistant to a Member of the Polish Parliament. A member of the EPIS think tank, the Millennium Project (Peace & Conflict Program), the Conflict Research Society, the European Guanxi initiative, and the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) Next Gen programme, his research focuses on Middle East defence and security, China's role in global security, international arms trade dynamics, intelligence and strategic competition, and the activities of violent non-state actors in modern warfare.*



### **Prof. Krzysztof Feliks ŚLIWINSKI (Hong Kong)**

*He is an Associate Professor at the Department of Government and International Studies of Hong Kong Baptist University (<https://gis.hkbu.edu.hk/people/prof-krzysztof-sliwinski.html>) and Jean Monnet Chair. He received his doctorate from the Institute of International Relations at the University of Warsaw in 2005. Since 2008, he has been employed at Hong Kong Baptist University. He has regularly lectured on European Integration, International Security, International Relations, and Global Studies. His primary research interests include British foreign policy and Security Strategy, Polish foreign policy and Security Strategy, Security and Strategic Studies, Traditional and Non-traditional Security Issues, Artificial Intelligence and International Relations, European Politics and the European Union, Theories of European Integration, Geopolitics, and Teaching and Learning.*





**PhD. Eng. Stelian TEODORESCU (Romania)**

*He is an aviation engineer and during his doctoral studies he was admitted to the SmartSPODAS Project - "Transnational network for the integrated management of smart doctoral and postdoctoral research in the fields of "Military Sciences", "Security and Information" and "Public Order and National Security" - Continuous training program for elite researchers - "SmartSPODAS", in this context participating in various research activities, among them being those organized by CRISMART in Sweden. During the first part of his career, he performed various executive within the Air Force Staff, and in the second part of his career, he was an executive and leadership positions within the Ministry of National Defence. He participated in various cooperation activities at the national and international level, gaining professional experience in the field of international relations and geopolitics. He carried out teaching activities in the academic environment (undergraduate and postgraduate studies).*

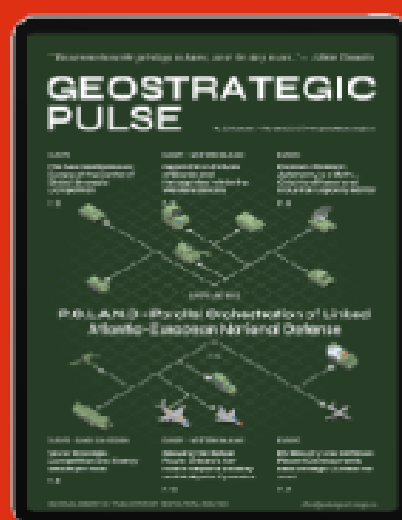




# GEOSTRATEGIC PULSE

EDITORS

**Pompilia VLĂDESCU**  
**Stelian TEODORESCU**



Starting from December 2010, Geostrategic Pulse has been registered in the international catalogue Index Copernicus Journal Master List. This bulletin may not be reproduced or distributed without prior consent. However, the use of certain materials or quotations is permitted, provided that accuracy and the original title are preserved, and the source is explicitly mentioned. The opinions and ideas expressed in the articles reflect the views of the authors.



SCAN IN ORDER TO  
ACCESS:  
[pulsulgeostrategic.ro](http://pulsulgeostrategic.ro)



RIEAS Research Institute for European and American Studies



STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL  
PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

