Convergence and confrontation: the Balkans and the Middle East in the 21st century

Slobodan Janković (ed.)

CONVERGENCE AND CONFRONTATION: THE BALKANS AND THE MIDDLE EAST IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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FOREWORD

Balkans and the Middle East are two regions of different size but abashed on the shores of the same Mediterranean Sea. Middle East and the Balkans are often under the same arch of crisis like in times of the Balkan pact and similar Baghdad Pact, and more recently in 1990s. Both Balkan and Middle East have Turkey connecting two regions, but also changing influences of USA, Russia and China. Examination of the policies of local acters and in particular of regional powers, of conflicts and economy in the two regions and at their periphery, with focus on Turkey and Iran are subject of this collection of papers.

Eleven papers treat political, security and economic trends in these parts of the world, including the non-papers announcing the newest turn in Balkans crisis now manifested in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkish maritime strategy, Israeli Middle East strategy, weapons of mass destruction, issue of the international cooperation in the covid-19 period, Iran`s economic cooperation with East and South Eastern Europe, and the neglected and growing Chinese role in the politics and economies of the mentioned regions.

Turkey connects two regions, and while its continental engagement has been object of the number of studies its maritime power projection is something that needs to be further examined in particular after Libyan engagement and constant row with Greece. Iran has been often at the centre stage of various Middle Eastern crisis. Case of Israel is studied as a regional power *sui generis*, and here a author discusses different definitions of the regional power, proposes the new one and offers reconstruction of Israeli Middle East strategy.

Analysis of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) application for the development of the Middle Eastern countries offers well studied approach addressing one of the main socio-economic characteristics of the region – development lagging.

Iranian understanding of its economic development and opportunities, and its view of the changed world with application of the Theory of Resistance of the Iranian Supreme leader will help understand Iranian understanding of the world economic and political processes. Iran's vision of the Middle East is also foremost studied as aimed at political and military consolidation, and then towards economic and infrastructural connection among the countries of the region.

The concept of centripetal imperialism is used to explain Beijing projection of power by adopting neo-colonial policies to protect its own national interests, studied in its Balkan engagement.

Wide array of subjects differs from the most of approaches, as usually focus is on the role of the great powers. Their policies and actions are also studied but within the topics mentioned above. Chinese policy as non-traditionally present great power in the Balkans and in the Middle East is part of the volume as it addresses less researched subject.

Have a good reading,

Slobodan Janković

THE "BLUE HOMELAND" AND ERDOĞAN'S RHETORIC: STATE DOCTRINE OR POPULIST NARRATIVE?

Anthony Deriziotis[1]

Abstract: Rtd Adm Cem Gürdeniz's "Blue Homeland" dogma was first presented in June 2006, and later it was refined into state doctrine by former RAdm Cihat Yaycı. It was aiming to increase Turkey's control of the three seas surrounding it, to consolidate its regional and international influence, and to get access to energy sources that would support its economic growth without dependence on other countries. The doctrine represents a nationalist, irredentist approach to Turkey's maritime position that lies within the neo-Ottomanist narrative that has emerged since the Justice and Development Party has been in power. The Blue Homeland doctrine is in complete contrast with the "zero problems with neighbours" approach, theorised by former P.M. A. Davutoğlu and adopted by AKP leader R.T. Erdoğan. Domestic and regional developments have led the Turkish President to reposition Ankara's foreign policy following the Arab Spring developments and the AKP's switch to close partnerships with the far-right Nationalist Movement Party.

The aim of this paper is to question how much of this doctrine that has been driving conflictual bilateral relations with Greece, has indeed been incorporated into Ankara's foreign policy.

Keywords: Turkey, Blue Homeland, Greece, tension, Aegean Sea, East Mediterranean Sea, irredentism, AKP, foreign policy.

INTRODUCTION

On June 14, 2006, Adm. Cem Gürdeniz presented a new, rather radical approach to Turkey's sea borders on all three seas surrounding it, namely the

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[1] Faculty of Turkish and Modern Asian studies, N.K. University of Athens. aderiziot@turkmas.uoa.gr

Meditarranean Sea, the Aegean Sea, and the Black Sea, calling it "Mavi Vatan".[2] A few years later, this was refined into state doctrine by former RAdm Cihat Yaycı and was strongly supported by a number of other navy officers[3]. Eventually, this doctrine became the basis for a comprehensive foreign policy.

The "Blue Homeland" was aiming to achieve Turkish control of the three seas surrounding it, to consolidate its regional and international influence, and to get access to energy sources that would support its economic growth without dependence on other countries. Beyond the doctrine's declared goals, there are further implications. The doctrine represents a nationalist, irredentist approach to Turkey's maritime position that lies within the neo-Ottomanist narrative that has emerged since the Justice and Development Party has been in power.

The aim of this paper is to question how much of this doctrine that has been driving conflictual bilateral relations with Greece has indeed been incorporated into Ankara's foreign policy.

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[2] Mavi Vatan means "Blue Homeland", and from this point onwards in this paper, it will be referred to as such.

[3] Admirals Soner Polat, Özden Özer, Mustafa Özbey and Cem Aziz Çakmak have defended the doctrine publicly. See S. Polat, *Mavi Vatan için jeopolitik rota: Doğu Akdeniz, Kıbrıs ve Ege'deki kavgayı anlatan tespitler ve öneriler* [A geopolitical course to Blue Homeland: findings and proposals on the conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus and the Aegean], Istanbul: Kaynak, 2019; C. Gürdeniz, "Amiral Cem Aziz Çakmak'ı 'Mavi Vatan'ın sonsuzluğuna uğurlarken" [Our farewell to Adm Cem Aziz Çakmak who has departed to the eternal Blue Homeland], *Aydınlık*, July 4, 2015; Ö. Örnek, *Milgem'in öyküsü* [The Milgem history program], Istanbul: Kırmızı Kedi, 2016 and "Tümamiral Mustafa Özbey'den çağrı: Mavi Vatan okul müfredatına girsin" [An appeal by RAdm Mustafa Özbey: that Blue Homeland is included in school programs], *Aydınlık*, April 21, 2020.

THE "BLUE HOMELAND": FROM THEORY TO DOCTRINE

In the early years of the 2000s, Prime Minister and AKP leader, R.T. Erdoğan, implemented A. Davutoğlu's, at the time his foreign policy advisor[4], "zero problems with neighbours" policy. This marginalised the previous "forward defence" policy — a security-oriented foreign policy introduced in the early post-Cold War years — and essentially side-lined the emerging "Blue Homeland" doctrine. Davutoğlu's foreign policy approach was aimed at substantially boosting Turkey's influence in former Ottoman Empire lands through soft power, in contrast to the 1990s increased use of military force in foreign policy.

Following the Arab Spring and the swift demise of Davutoğlu's doctrine, as well as his ousting from the AKP in 2016, Turkey adopted a new version of

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[4] Ahmet Davutoğlu served as Foreign Minister (2009-14) and Prime Minister (2014-16) of Turkey.

the 1990s "forward defence" doctrine, once again focusing on a security-oriented foreign policy, the re-securitization of the Kurdish issue, and relations with neighbouring countries.[5] Apart from regional developments, changes on the domestic front have also influenced Ankara's repositioning of its foreign policy. It appears that the political actors with whom the AKP collaborated after 2015 to rule the country, in the form of the AKP's close partnership with the far-right Nationalist Movement Party, have consolidated kemalist and nationalist influence, as well as the involvement of the Turkish Armed Forces in foreign policy implementation.[6]

Clearly, a security-oriented foreign policy is not a new idea in Turkish history. However, a maritime doctrine of the calibre of the 'Blue Homeland', despite its flaws and its lack of coherent analysis, was something new. Ankara's maritime policy for more than 30 years has been limited mainly to bilateral disputes with Greece over territorial waters, the continental shelf, the Cyprus issue and the search-and-rescue jurisdiction over the Aegean Sea. The developments in the East Mediterranean Sea in the early 2000s, with the natural gas discoveries in Israel (1999 and 2000) and Egypt (2003), followed by Cyprus' EEZ delineation agreements with neighbouring states[7], augmented Ankara's long-lasting geopolitical concerns and, together with its energy deficit[8], aggravated a multi-layered maritime dispute between Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus. This dispute was also directly related to the 2004 Cyprus EU accession and, later that year, to the rejection of the Annan Plan by the Greek-Cypriots and the unsurprising freezing of Turkey's EU accession. The latter

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[5] The dominant idea here is that Turkey needs powerful armed forces to employ hard power in order to protect its interests and security. This was clearly implemented in Syria and Libya. See, Nebahat Tanrıverdi Yaşar, "Syria and Libya's contributions to the evolution of the Turkish "Forward Defence" doctrine", *Syria Transition Challenges Project: Research Project Report 7*, Geneva Centre for Security Policy: 2021, pp. 6-10.

[6] These political actors are, apart from the Islamists, the MHP, the Eurasianists, and the Vatan Party.

[7] 2003 with Egypt, 2007 with Lebanon, 2010 with Israel. See, Ayla Gürel, Fiona Mullen, Harry Tzimitras, "The Cyprus Hydrocarbons Issue: Context, Positions and Future Scenarios", PCC Report 1, *Peace Research Institute Oslo*, 2013, pp. 3, 14-15.

[8] At the time, energy was the main cause of the country's budget deficit. Galip Dalay, "Turkey, Europe, and the Eastern Mediterranean: Charting a Way Out of the Current Deadlock", *Brookings Doha Center Policy Briefing - January 2021*, pp. 3-4.

would have been possible only with a positive result in the Annan Plan referendum. Another twist was added with the Libya controversy, further complicating the dispute with a new geopolitical dimension.[9]

The "Blue Homeland" has essentially evolved as the maritime segment of Ankara's "forward defence" policy and has added to the friction in Turkey's bilateral relations with its maritime neighbours. In March 2006, geographers Juan Luis Suárez de Vivero and Juan Carlos Rodríguez Mateos, from the University of Seville in Spain, published their article "Maritime Europe and EU Enlargement: A Geopolitical Perspective"[10], which included a map of the EU-member states' Exclusive Economic Zones, thus validating Cyprus's territorial claims[11] that have been strenuously disputed by Ankara.[12] This "map of Seville" was an EU-funded project[13] that has been used by the EU in numerous official documents and has received strong criticism from Turkey for serving the EU's- especially Greece and Cyprus'- interests, while it ignored Turkey's claims in the Aegean and the East Mediterranean Seas.[14] Certain ultra-conservative parts of Turkey's political scene went on to express their

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[9] Galip Dalay, pp.5-6.

[10] The article was received by Elsevier on 8 October 2004 and was accepted on 29 November of the same year.

[11] J. R. Mateos and J. L. Suárez De Vivero, "Maritime Europe and EU Enlargement: A Geopolitical Perspective", *Marine Policy*, Vol. 30, No. 2, March 2006, pp. 167-172. See also, Aurélien Denizeau, "Mavi Vatan, the "Blue Homeland": The Origins, Influences and Limits of an Ambitious Doctrine for Turkey", *Ifri*, April 2021, pp. 6-7.

[12] Cyprus, at that time, had been in the process of delineating its EEZ, drawing on the principles of the 1982 UNCLOS and having already signed a maritime border agreement with Egypt in 2003.

[13] The EU, prior to the 2004 enlargement, wanted to invest in maritime spatial planning, therefore, it needed a clear view of its member states' EEZs in order to invest in wind power, fish farming, tourism, ports, and shipyards. See, Cem Gürdeniz, "The Map of Seville and the plot to cut Turkey off from the Aegean and Mediterranean seas", *United World*, https://uwidata.com/13877-the-map-of-seville-and-the-plot-to-cut-turkey-off-from-the-aegean-and-mediterranean-seas/

[14] The criticism focused on two issues. First, the map was based on the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) principle that every island has territorial waters and that if it also has a social life, this gives it a continental shelf and an exclusive economic zone (EEZ), but it did not engage the doctrine of fairness that is also included in the same Convention. Second, criticism stresses the fact that Turkey is not a member of the 1985 UNCLOS.

disbelief in the EU, considering the creation of the map and its use as a plot against Turkey, created in a way to serve maximalist claims by Greece and Cyprus, which Turkey would eventually be persuaded or forced to accept.[15]

During a symposium organised in Ankara by the Turkish Naval Forces Command on October 14, 2006, Admiral Cem Gürdeniz, responsible for strategic planning at sea, strongly criticised the EU for adopting the "Seville map". As a follower of the Vatan Party, a group defined by its affection for Russia and its categorical opposition to the United States, Gürdeniz asserts that Washington intends to undermine Turkey's sovereignty in a coalition with other regional powers[16], using Greece as a means towards that goal. Gürdeniz views Greece as a country that has a long history of allying itself with Western imperial powers. He went on to call on Turkey to defend a larger EEZ, which he named the "Blue Homeland".[17] This proved to be the starting point for the formulation of a new doctrine for Turkey's territorial claims in the Aegean and the eastern Mediterranean seas.

Another high-ranking officer of the Turkish Navy, Rear Admiral Cihat Yaycı, published an article in 2009, building upon Gürdeniz's ideas and profoundly extending them to the point of a common maritime border between Turkey and Libya.[18] In 2011, he further elaborated on this concept and on his interpretation of the international maritime legal framework as it is set out in the 1982 UNCLOS in a book he co-authored with a retired Colonel of the Turkish Armed Forces, Ali Karamahmut.[19] There was a growing list of

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[15] Cem Gürdeniz, "The Map of Seville and the plot to cut Turkey off from the Aegean and Mediterranean seas", *United World*, https://uwidata.com/13877-the-map-of-seville-and-the-plot-to-cut-turkey-off-from-the-aegean-and-mediterranean-seas/

[16] Ryan Gingeras, "Blue Homeland: the heated politics behind Turkey's new maritime strategy", *War on the Rocks*, June 2, 2020, https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/blue homeland-the-heated-politics-behind-turkeys-new-maritime-strategy/

[17] Aurélien Denizeau, "Mavi Vatan, the "Blue Homeland": The Origins, Influences and Limits of an Ambitious Doctrine for Turkey", *Ifri*, April 2021, p. 7.

[18] C. Yayci, "Doğu Akdeniz'de deniz yetki alanlarının sınırlandırılmasında Libya'nın rolü ve etkisi" [The role and influence of Libya in maritime security in the Mediterranean], *Güvenlik Stratejileri [Journal of Security Studies]*, Vol. 7, No. 14, 2011, pp. 17-41.

[19] See, A. Kurumahmut and C. Yayci, *Deniz subayları için temel deniz hukuku : Barış ve savaş dönemi* [Fundamental maritime law for navy officers: in times of peace and war], Çanakkale: Deniz Kuvetleri Kültür, 2011.

publications in support of the 'Blue Homeland' concept in the following years; to name but a few, Adm Soner Polat's book "Mavi Vatan için jeopolitik rota: Doğu Akdeniz, Kıbrıs ve Ege'deki kavgayı anlatan tespitler ve neriler", Adm Cem Gürdeniz' "Mavi Vatan yazıları" and "Anavatandan Mavi Vatan'a"[20], etc.

The narrative of this doctrine serves to legitimise domestically the government's eastern Mediterranean policy, which has focused on the perceived threat that Turkey is being limited to Anatolia and its territorial waters. Therefore, it needs to maintain access to the Black, the Aegean, and the Mediterranean Seas by projecting a high profile.[21] But at its core, this is a geopolitical concept that has been perceived and supported by the Turkish Navy, which claims through this a leading role in policy formation and implementation in the East Mediterranean Sea. The above is one of three ideas presented by the "Blue Homeland". The Libya case is an actual manifestation of Ankara's perception of expanded maritime boundaries. The second idea is the Turkish Navy's call to reimagine and reposition the country as a naval power.[22]The augmentation and large-scale modernization of the Turkish Navy is a clear sign that it aims further than coastal deterrence. The third idea is about reimagining Turkey's position in the world and realigning the country away from the West and towards China and Russia. This is attributed to the nationalist and ultra-nationalist segments of the armed forces and the so-called Eurasianists.[23] It also underlines the lack of trust in US impartiality in the eyes of the Turkish public and, from 2021, the anticipation that Turkey-US relations will deteriorate further under the Biden administration.

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[20] S. Polat, *Mavi Vatan için jeopolitik rota: Doğu Akdeniz, Kıbrıs ve Ege'deki kavgayı anlatan tespitler ve öneriler* [The route to the Blue Homeland: Observations and recommendations from the conflict in the East Mediterranean Sea, Cyprus and the Aegean], Istanbul, Kaynak: 2019; C. Gürdeniz, *Mavi Vatan yazıları* [Writings on Blue Homeland], Kırmızı Kedi, 2018; C. Gürdeniz, Anavatandan Mavi Vatan'a [From Motherland to Blue Homeland], Kırmızı Kedi, 2021

[21] Al Sharq Strategic Research, "The Eastern Mediterranean Crisis: Scenarios and Implications," Webinar Report, December 18, 2020, p. 8, https://research.sharqforum.org/2020/12/18/webinar-report-the-eastern-mediterranean-crisis-scenarios-and-implications/.

[22] Galip Dalay, p. 6.

[23] Cem Gürdeniz and Cihat Yaycı are leading figures in this.

THE "BLUE HOMELAND" AND THE TURKISH GOVERNMENT

There is an understanding between the government and the ultra-nationalist and Eurasianist supporters of the "Blue Homeland", as far as the extended maritime borders and Turkey's role as a naval power are concerned. However, this does not extend to the third idea. The government seems to understand that there are limits to its relations with Russia. Economic ties and trade have been the driving forces behind them. However, in the arena of regional politics, their interests diverge and they are defined by a mixture of cooperation, competition, and conflict. This was exemplified in the cases of Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh.

In Syria, Turkey's support for the opposition allowed Russia to dominate the Assad regime and reduce Iran's influence. The same pattern was used in the Libya conflict. Ankara's support for the Tripoli regime increased the reliance of Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar's forces on Russia's military backing in comparison to the other countries supporting his Tobruk-based Libya National Army (LNA). In the 2020 Armenia-Azerbaijan war, Turkey's increased support for the Azeri offensive led Yerevan to turn to Russia for help, thus consolidating Moscow as the dominant external power over Armenia.[24] As it has been shown after the November 2015 Sukhoi incident, Russia is the dominant member in this asymmetric partnership.[25] Moscow's measures against Turkey proved that Russia has significantly more ways to hurt Turkey, economically and politically, than the other way round.[26] It was Ankara that sought Russia's cooperation after the Sukhoi incident, as a way to get out of a difficult regional and international diplomatic isolation branded "precious loneliness" by Ibrahim Kalin.[27] Bilateral relations are bound to become more complicated in the coming years since the new administration in the White House aims to get the US once again involved in the East Mediterranean regional politics, in contrast with former President Trump's approach of

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[24] Güney Yıldız, "Turkish-Russian Adversarial Collaboration in Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh", *SWP Comment*, No. 22, March 2021, p. 1.

[25] On 24 November 2015, a Turkish F-16 jet shot down a Russian Sukhoi Su-24 near the Turkey-Syria border.

[26] Güney Yıldız, p. 3.

[27] By 2014, Turkey's "zero problems with neighbours" policy had collapsed, and the country was left with only a few neighbours with which it did not have problems. Major

indifference to the level of contempt in certain cases of the developments in Syria and Libya.[28]

Relations with China are mainly economic-oriented. Trade volume has been growing steadily from 2000 onwards. Turkey is a member of China's Belt and Road Initiative[29] and China is Turkey's biggest import partner. Turkey's lira crisis in 2018 and Erdoğan's commitment to avoid IMF intervention due to the negative political weight that it carries[30], in addition to the "cold" relations with the USA and the EU as a product of Ankara's de-Europeanization and de-Westernization policies that followed the western actors' tepid reaction to the 2016 failed coup attempt[31], led to statements by the Turkish President about seeking alternative power centres to balance the West.[32] President Erdoğan claimed that Turkey might be forced to look for other friends and allies, citing apart from US reaction to the 2016 coup attempt, the non-extradition of Fethullah Gülen, US partnership with the PYD/YPG in Syria and the Andrew Brunson case.[33] Regardless of the fact that warnings in the form

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disagreements with Israel, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and also with Saudi Arabia and Iran (albeit less severely), major disagreements with the US and the EU, together with anti-western outbursts from government members, have alienated many countries that used to admire the Turkish model of the early 2000s. See, David Gardner, "Turkey's foreign policy of precious loneliness", *FT*, 16 November 2015, https://www.ft.com/content/69662b36-7752-11e5-a95a-27d368e1ddf7

[28] Ian O. Lesser, "The Trump administration and Mediterranean", *IEMED Mediterranean Yearbook 2017- Geopolitical turmoil and its effects in the Mediterranean region*, pp 101-102. See also, Philip Stephens, "Home truths in the East Mediterranean", *Financial Times*, 3 September 2020, in https://www.ft.com/content/9ce8847f-6fe8-4208-8a1d-2d6b3425ad42

[29] "Turkey's Multilateral Transportation Policy." Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-multilateral-transportation-policy.en.mfa.

[30] Resorting to an IMF bailout would remind the Turkish public of the 2001 economic crisis and the political conditionality that Turkey had to consent to. The Turkish president, after Turkey paid-off the IMF debt, had promised to build a strong economy; a new IMF bail-out would undermine the AKP government's credibility.

[31] Ziya Öniş, "Turkey under the challenge of state capitalism: the political economy of the late AKP era", *Southeast European and Black Sea studies*, 2019, p. 10.

[32] Gözde Yılmaz, Nilgün Eliküçük Yıldırım, (2020) "Authoritarian diffusion or cooperation? Turkey's emerging engagement with Chine", *Democratization*, 27:7, p. 1208.

[33] R. T. Erdoğan, "Erdogan: How Turkey Sees the Crisis With the U.S.", *New York Times*, 10 August 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/10/opinion/turkey-erdogan-trump-crisis-sanctions.html

of political statements about Turkey drifting away from the West are not new, there is a sense that after 2015, the AKP has been constructing a policy to support such a possibility. The 2018 currency crisis and eroded relations with the West presented an opportunity for Beijing to invest in Turkey's and China's overlapping interests. The Chinese Foreign Minister at the time, Wang Yi, stated that China was supporting Turkey's efforts for security, stability, and the economy. He added that China has remained ready to protect developing countries and the legitimate rights of rising economies.[34] A threefold rise in China's Foreign Direct Investment in Turkey in 2017 could be a reflection of Beijing's increasing interest in capitalising on Turkey's lukewarm relations with the West, thus extending the economic collaboration to the political level. Such cooperation, however, does not come without cost; in the past, Turkey has been critical of Beijing's repression of the Uyghur minority[35], but in recent years there have been no anti-China activities within Turkey's borders, although there were statements made after official high-profile visits, where mutual respect for safeguarding national security and stability was underlined as the main focus of the bilateral cooperation.[36] The growing criticism of the Turkish government for adopting increasingly authoritarian policies could also interpret this convergence between Ankara and Beijing's authoritarian regime as an outcome of Turkey's distancing from the West.

All of the above would cast the question of Erdoğan's attitude towards the "Blue Homeland" narrative and the doctrine as a rhetorical one, considering the fact that Ankara's '"defence" policy seems to be using the narrative of the doctrine to legitimise its eastern Mediterranean policy. However, a careful look into Erdoğan's use of populism since the AKP's ascendance into power, proves

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[34] "China reiterates support for Turkey's economy", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 19 August 2018, https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/china-reiterates-support-for-turkeys-economy-135953

[35] The Uyghurs are a Turkic Muslim minority in the Xinjiang region that has been suffering from a decades-long crackdown by government officials. From 2014, Beijing has initiated a re-education effort – in reality a mass detention of Muslims policy – in so-called "vocational training centres". In 2017, there was a major expansion of the Xinjiang re-education efforts. See, Lindsey Maizland, "China's repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang", *Council on Foreign Relations*, 1 March 2021, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-repression-uyghurs-xinjiang

[36] Gözde Yılmaz, Nilgün Eliküçük Yıldırım, p. 1214.

that the Turkish leader has been constantly shaping his foreign policy on different definitions of the "people". In his early years, he was committed to the Western Alliance and he modelled the European Christian Democrats, targeting EU membership, while the AKP rose to power as an anti-elite movement, targeting the decades-long Kemalist regime, by summoning the support of conservative pious Muslims, Islamists, a large segment of the Kurds and several liberals. In the AKP's second term, the "people" were redefined as a Muslim nation and foreign politics took a turn towards a proactive Islamist foreign policy and neo-Ottoman aspirations, while the failure to gain full EU-membership triggered a de-Europeanization process and rising anti-EU sentiments. Within this period that includes the 2011 Arab Uprisings, the 2013 Gezi Park protests, and the 2016 coup attempt, Erdoğan began to refer to "western imperialists" and "crusaders" after the 2013 fall of his close ally and ideological comrade, Mohammed Morsi, and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, essentially using anti-Western rhetoric to consolidate his position within Turkey as "a founding father that will unite the people against their enemies"[37] but also as a way to promote himself as a leading figure within the Muslim world.

In the post-2016 years, Erdoğan changed the definition of "people" once again, this time limiting it to the Turkish nation, excluding the Kurds. He adopts a new narrative where some global elites are targeting Turkey, aiming to divide and weaken the country. He turns to the far right political parties and commits to a close alliance with the MHP, adopts an anti-western discourse in foreign policy and reduces Turkey's relations with the EU and the US to transactionalism.[38]

From the "Strategic depth" to the "Blue Homeland"

Ahmet Davutoğlu's "Strategic Depth" doctrine, termed the "zero problems with neighbours" policy, is aimed at establishing good relations with all neighbouring states based on strategic cooperation, increased trade, and solidarity.[39] According to Michaël Tanchum, this policy was just one

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[37] Hakkı Taş, "The formulation and implementation of populist foreign policy: Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean", *Mediterranean Politics*, DOI: 10.1080/13629395.2020.1833160, p. 5.

[38] Hakkı Taş, p. 6.

[39] Ryan Gingeras, "Blue Homeland: the heated politics behind Turkey's new maritime strategy", *War on the Rocks*, June 2, 2020, https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/bluehomeland-the-heated-politics-behind-turkeys-new-maritime-strategy/

manifestation of a broader aim to create a "zone of peace and stability, starting from her neighbours"[40], using "soft power" together with security for all, political dialogue, economic interdependence, and cultural harmony as its building blocks.[41]

The failure to realise the vision, due to the rapid changes in regional politics and Turkey's isolation in the international scene, as well as Davutoğlu's disagreements with Erdoğan, led to his resignation in May 2016, two months before the failed coup attempt. Within this period of time, Turkey took a sharp turn towards a strategic approach compatible with the Blue Homeland's spirit. This included a substantial increase in "hard power", an aggressive foreign policy, and a post-coup "witch hunt", initially against the supporters of Fethullah Gülen, gradually expanding to all of Erdoğan's political opponents.

As it has been mentioned earlier in this paper, the "Blue Homeland" has been around since 2006, but 10 years later, it is still considered rather radical for the government and marginal for the AKP and the elites, as a result of the failed coup attempt that has seriously impaired civil-military relations. In the meantime, the father of the "Blue Homeland" narrative, Adm. Cem Gürdeniz, was arrested along with scores of other senior officers as a part of the broader "Sledgehammer" trials of 2011; he was convicted and sentenced to 18 years in prison, but he was released in 2015.[42] After 2016, the "Blue Homeland" narrative started proliferating rapidly in Turkish politics, and by 2019, lieutenant colonel Engin Ağmış, Commander of the Gökçeada frigate, in his address to the Turkish president during a ceremony marking the anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish Republic, said: "I pledge that we are ready to protect every swath of our 462.000 square metre of Blue

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[40] Michaël Tanchum "The Logic Beyond Lausanne: A Geopolitical Perspective on the Congruence between Turkey's New Hard Power and its Strategic Reorientation", *Insight Turkey, 22*(3), pp. 41-54, 2020. doi:10.25253/99.2020223.03

[41] "Policy of Zero Problems with our Neighbours", Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/policy-of-zero-problems-with-our-neighbors.en.mfa

[42] Ryan Gingeras, op.cit.

Homeland with great determination and undertake every possible duty that may come".[43] A picture of President Erdoğan in front of a Blue Homeland map, while he signed the visitors' book at the National Defence University in Istanbul that circulated widely in the media, added to the symbolism.

The other "Blue Homeland" theorist, former Chief of Staff of the Turkish Navy and the mastermind of the controversial Libya policy, RAdm Cihat Yaycı was demoted on May 15, 2020;[44] Yaycı responded to his demotion by resigning only three days later. Apart from his involvement in the "Blue Homeland" and the Libya policy, which included the maritime boundaries and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) MoU[45] between Libya's GNA and Turkey, he has also been heavily involved in Erdoğan's fight against the Gülenist network in the aftermath of the 2016 failed coup attempt[46] and has been praised by the Turkish president for his role in the Libya pact. This was the first time a high-ranking officer was demoted by presidential decree instead of at the biannual Supreme Military Council. Yaycı's demotion was interpreted as Erdoğan's effort to distance himself from the anti-Western front because of Turkey's need for the support of its western partners in order to control its increasing dependency on Russia and the economic hardships blamed on the COVID-19 pandemic. As Yaycı is a popular figure within Turkey's influential anti-Western and Eurasianist groups, his resignation caused a stir both in the pro-government and the opposition blocks, leading to criticism and calls for Erdoğan to reverse the admiral's demotion.

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[43] Nikos Moudouros, ""Blue Homeland" and Cyprus: The "Survival of the State" Coalition and Turkey's Changing Geopolitical Doctrine in the Eastern Mediterranean", *Vestnik RUDN*, 21:3, 2021, p. 460

[44] Aytunç Erkin, "İşte Tümamiral Cihat Yaycı'nın istifa dilekçesi!", Sözcü, https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2020/gundem/son-dakika-iste-tumamiral-cihat-yaycinin-istifa-dilekcesi-5822043/, 18 May 2020

[45] For the full text of the MoU, see: al-Marsad, https://almarsad.co/en/2019/12/05/exclusive-full-text-of-the-gna-turkey-agreement-claiming-to-be-an-mou-revealed/

[46] Metin Gurcan, "Top admiral's resignation rattles Turkey", *Al-Monitor*, https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2020/05/turkey-anti-western-admiral-yayci-resignation-rattle-ankara.html, 20 May 2020.

Foreign policy de-Europeanization and de-westernization

The 2016 failed coup attempt was the locus of several changes in Turkey, related to internal and external politics. President Erdoğan had already engaged in anti-western rhetoric as early as 2013, blaming foreign elements for the Gezi Park protests and the popular uprising in Egypt that led to the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood from power – two developments that he thought were linked. However, as Turkey sought greater independence in pursuit of its foreign policy aims, it sharply increased its anti-western discourse and engaged in a series of crises with the West that led to its eventual isolation.

The arbitrary detention of western nationals in Turkey, which was used as a political bargaining chip and termed Turkey's "hostage diplomacy"', strained its bilateral relations with several western countries, including Germany, the US, France, the Netherlands, and Greece, to name but a few.[47] The purchase of the Russian-made S-400 anti-missile defence system rocked further Turkey-US relations and led to Turkey's expulsion from the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter consortium, a de-facto arms embargo, and in December 2020, the sanctioning of Turkey's SSB and key individuals under the 2017 C.A.A.T.S.A.[48]

The anti-Western crescendo was complemented by a de-Europeanization process that started after 2011 but was accelerated in 2014, which was a presidential election year in Turkey. The AKP's victory was followed by the

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[47] More than 30 Western nationals have been jailed in Turkey following the coup attempt. See, Aykan Erdemir and Eric Edelman, "Erdoğan's hostage diplomacy – Western nationals in Turkish prisons", *Foundation for Defence of Democracies*, https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2018/05/31/erdogans-hostage-diplomacy-western-nationals-in-turkish-prisons/#easy-footnote-bottom-3-35064, June 2018, p. 6.

[48] Yörük Işık, "CAATSA sanctions are hurting Turkey's military readiness at a time when NATO can't afford it", *Middle East Institute*, https://www.mei.edu/publications/caatsa-sanctions-are-hurting-turkeys-military-readiness-time-when-nato-cant-afford-it, 6 May 2021. See also, Michael Pompeo, Secretary of State, December 14, 2020 Press statement, *US Embassy in Athens*, https://gr.usembassy.gov/the-united-states-sanctions-turkey-under-caatsa-231/; Stephen Reisinger, "US imposes CAATSA sanctions on Turkish SSB and related officers", *Norton Rose Fulbright*, https://www.nortonrosefulbright.com/en/knowledge/publications/852a1100/us-imposes-caatsa-sanctions-on-turkish-ssb-and-related-officers, 17 December 2020

construction of 'a new Turkey in its own image, in a fashion that was increasingly indifferent and inconsiderate of oppositional groups'[49], which essentially introduced a socio-political process that aspired to an all-inclusive hegemonic narrative of the country.[50] In foreign policy terms, the Arab uprisings worked as a catalyst for the "geographic imagination" of Turkey and the formulation of a new agenda.[51] They actually provided the space for the AKP to promote Turkey as a "model" in the Arab world (and the Balkans) by instrumentalizing the narrative of official Turkish history, culture, and Sunni Islam.[52] As a result, Turkey's position towards the EU was reconfigured, putting more distance in an already strained relationship after the EU's attitude towards Turkey's membership bid and the AKP's efforts towards that goal in its early years in power. As Kemal Kirisçi argued, resentment towards the EU in Turkey was fuelled by "the EU's failure to respond promptly to the coup attempt and lend support to the government" and was further aggravated by the European Parliament's recommendations in November 2016 to suspend Turkey's membership negotiations.[53] Additionally, the European refugee crisis was another factor in the strain between Turkey and the EU. The EU accused Ankara of manipulating the refugee crisis by deliberately lacking border control along its Aegean coastline. The Turkish president, on the other hand, repeatedly threatened to open Turkey's borders and flood Europe with migrants to extract concessions.[54]

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[49] Barış Alp Özden, İsmet Akça and Ahmet Bekmen, "Antinomies of authoritarian neoliberalism in Turkey: the Justice and Development Party in Turkey", C. B. Tansel (ed.) *States of Discipline: Authoritarian Neoliberalism and the Contested Reproduction of Capitalist Order*, London: Rowman & Littlefield, p. 203.

[50] Nikos Christofis, "'Securitizing the Aegean': de-Europeanizing Greek-Turkish relations", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 22:1, 2022

[51] Nikos Christofis, Op. cit.

[52] Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, *Religion, Identity and Power: Turkey and the Balkans in the twenty first century*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021.

[53] Kemal Kirişçi, *Turkey and the West: fault lines in a troubled alliance*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2018, p. 172.

[54] Agence France-Presse in Ankara, "Turkish president threatens to send millions of Syrian refugees to EU", *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/12/turkish-president-threatens-to-send-millions-of-syrian-refugees-to-eu, 12 February 2016.

As Turkey proceeded with its de-Europeanization process, it also abandoned its zealous ideological ambitions to promote the country as a "great power"[55], as stated in Davutoğlu's "Strategic Depth" and pursued as the point of reference of the country's foreign policy during his involvement in AKP politics.[56] Foreign policy switched to an "ad hoc" and transactional profile, defined by expediency, which led to high unpredictability and flip-flopping in decisions.[57]

Essentially, Erdoğan's populism voiced a more antagonistic civilizational discourse, depicting Turkey as the heir to the Islamic and Ottoman civilizations, but also in a war of liberation from the West.[58] He portrayed the turmoil in EU-Turkey relations as a "clash of civilizations" by accusing EU politicians Kati Piri, Federica Mogherini, and Johannes Hahn of being enemies of Islam.[59] During an interview with the pro-government Ülke TV, he stated, "They [K. Piri, F. Mogherini, and J. Hahn] are not honest, they are not sincere. We should not forget this: We are Muslims and they are enemies of Islam".[60] MEP Kati Piri, in her response to Erdoğan's remarks, said that "by claiming that the West and the EU are enemies of Islam, he is trying to pit people against each other. He is laying the groundwork for massacres".[61]

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[55] Katerina Dalacoura, "A new phase in Turkish foreign policy: expediency and AKP survival", *MENARA Future Notes 4*, Middle East and North Africa Regional Architecture, February 2017, p. 2.

[56] Ahmet Davutoğlu has been involved in AKP politics as a foreign policy advisor, as Foreign Minister and as Prime Minister, from 2003-2016.

[57] Hakkı Taş, p. 10.

[58] Alper Kaliber, Esra Kaliber, " From de-Europeanisation to anti-western populism: Turkish foreign policy in flux", *The International Spectator*, 54:4, p. 12, DOI:10.1080/03932729. 2019.1668640

[59] This was a statement made by Erdoğan in his critique of a report that favoured the official freezing of negotiations with Turkey.

[60] SCF, Stockholm Centre for Freedom, *Erdoğan calls some EU politicians 'Enemies of Islam'*, https://stockholmcf.org/erdogan-calls-some-eu-politiciansenemies-of-islam/, 25 March 2019.

[61] "Erdoğan calls some EU politicians 'enemies of Islam'", *Turkish Minute*, https://www.turkishminute.com/2019/03/23/erdogan-calls-some-eu-politicians-enemies-of-islam/, 23 March 2019.

THE "BLUE HOMELAND" DOCTRINE AND THE CRISIS
IN THE EAST MEDITERRANEAN SEA

The post-2016 years constitute a new period in Turkey's foreign policy. One where the "Blue Homeland" doctrine was increasingly reflected in its strategic posturing. The failure of Davutoğlu's "Strategic Depth" by 2012 left the field open for Cem Gürdeniz's strategic vision for the country's future.

The "Blue Homeland" has been gaining prominence both domestically and as a component of Turkey's foreign policy, which in the last five years has become increasingly aggressive and securitized, with an anti-Western and anti-U.S. outlook as the central organising principle.[62] It had established the defence of Turkey's maritime sovereignty as its first objective and set three goals: a) to ensure it possesses the capacity and capability to protect Turkey's interests in the surrounding seas. b) to strengthen Turkey's regional maritime boundary claims in order to gain access to new energy resources, increased influence, and economic growth, and c) to prevent the West from confining Turkey.

This last aim is referred to, colloquially, as the "second Treaty of Sevres", essentially drawing a parallel between the aim of the victors of World War I to dismantle the remnants of the Ottoman empire with the Treaty of Sevres and Turkey's perceived threat, where Greece, the US, the EU, and their allies in the east Mediterranean sea are aiming to sever the link between Turkey, its maritime jurisdictions, and the pseudo state of the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.[63]

As Ryan Gingeras argues, the shift in Turkey's foreign policy was not simply a matter of political discourse but a very drastic change in Turkey's geostrategic vision, and apparently, the idea is shared by many in Turkish politics and the military.[64] Evidence of that is in abundance. The most striking

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[62] Jeff Jager, Andrew Norris, "The Mavi Vatan doctrine and Blue Homeland anthem: a look at Turkey's maritime worldview", *Centre for International Maritime Security*, https://cimsec.org/the-mavi-vatan-doctrine-and-blue-homeland-anthem-a-look-at-turkeys-maritime-worldview/, 27 September 2021.

[63] Füsun İkikardeş, "Mavi Savaş'ta Kıbrıs düğümünü Ankara-Şam teması çözer", *Aydınlık*, https://www.aydinlik.com.tr/mavi-savas-ta-kibris-dugumunu-ankara-sam-temasi-cozer-turkiye-kasim-2019-1, 18 November 2019.

[64] Ryan Gingeras, op.cit.

ones are the "Blue Homeland 2019" naval exercise and Turkey's Naval College journal, called "Mavi Vatan".[65]

Natural gas discoveries in the East Mediterranean Sea and Cyprus's EEZ delineation agreements sparked new trouble in the region, roughly in the last decade. Ankara has built five drilling and seismic research vessels and, in a direct reference to its neo-Ottoman narrative, it has symbolically named them after the influential Ottoman sultans and admirals who secured Ottoman naval dominance in the Mediterranean Sea during the 16th century.[66]

The 2019 MoU with Libya escalated the regional tensions immensely, in the middle of heightened gas exploration and drilling, overlapping NAVTEXs from Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus, naval standoffs in international waters, and the involvement of third-party states. The Med7[67] signed a joint declaration in June 2020, expressing their support for Greece and Cyprus against Turkey's belligerence in the region.[68] The launching of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) on September 22, 2020, which included seven members – Egypt, Israel, Greece, Cyprus, Jordan, Italy, and the Palestinian Authority – but excluded Turkey,[69] was the peak of the latter's isolation in the East Mediterranean energy developments. As the "Blue Homeland" started dominating Turkey's geostrategic vision in the aftermath of the 2016 failed coup attempt, Ankara's foreign policy adopted an increasingly assertive and militarised character.

CONCLUSION

President Erdoğan, has been constantly reconfiguring his foreign policy, manoeuvring through domestic hardships and regional developments.

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[65] Hakan Yapar, "From Strategic Depth to Blue Homeland and Beyond: Underst;anding Turkey's drift towards greater strategic autonomy", *Instituto Espanol de Estudios Estratigicos*, 40/2021, p. 9.

[66] These were the Fatih, the Yavuz, the Barbaros Hayrettin Paşa, the Oruç Reis and the Kemal Reis. See, Nikos Moudouros, p. 468.

[67] A group comprised of the foreign ministers of southern EU member states (Greece, Cyprus, Malta, Italy, France, Spain, and Portugal).

[68] "Med7 calls on Turkey to respect law of the sea", *Ekathimerini*, https://www.ekathi merini.com/news/253441/med7-calls-on-turkey-to-respect-law-of-the-sea/, 4 June 2020.

[69] Pınar İpek, V. Tibet Gür, "Turkey's Isolation from the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum: ideational mechanisms and material interests in Energy Politics", *Turkish Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/14683849.2021.1925884

Although he has embraced Blue Homeland, his attitude suggests that he does not want Turkey's geopolitical posturing to be completely subjugated to the reign of the left-wing, ultranationalist circles that have conceptualised the doctrine. As such, he made some moves to downgrade their profile, as seen by the demotion of Cihat Yaycı. His replacement, Adm. Yankı Bağcıoğlu, is said to have told a French naval delegation that Turkey sticks to Blue Homeland along with its NATO commitments. This can be interpreted as Erdoğan's Turkey trying to avoid any decisive rupture with the West while asserting itself in the region at the same time.

There is criticism that Turkey's growing ties with Russia and China constitute a radical reorientation towards non-Western powers at the expense of Ankara's long-term allies. However, this shift should not be interpreted as a full-steam reorientation towards non-Western powers. Instead, Erdoğan's Turkey aims at achieving a higher status within the West by emphasizing its importance to the West through instrumentalizing tactical cooperation with non-Western powers, the likes of Russia and China. It is important to highlight that Turkey's relations with them are mostly transactional arrangements managed at a leader-to-leader level, as Aydın-Düzgit, Balta, and O' Donohue argue for Turkey's relations with Russia.[70]

Nevertheless, Turkey has been in dire straits for the last 5 years and has multiple challenges to address, including domestic, regional, and international issues. President Erdoğan is showing that he could be willing to manipulate a radical doctrine, such as the "Blue Homeland", to pursue his vision of Turkey, keeping it, however, under his complete control. It is unclear whether such a feat is possible; what is clear is that in a volatile area that has been under strain for several years, tampering with delicate balances that could destabilise an entire region is risky.

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[70] Senem Aydin-Düzgit, Evren Balta, Andrew O' Donohue, "Turkey, Russia, and the West: Reassessing persistent volatility, asymmetric interdependence, and the Syria conflict", *Istanbul Policy Centre*, April 2020, pp. 9-10.

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THE ENLARGED MEDITERRANEAN, CHINA'S CENTRIPETAL IMPERIALISM, AND THE CASE STUDY OF THE BALKANS

Matteo Marconi and Francesco Barbaro[1]

Abstract: Understanding China's presence in the Mediterranean can only start by bearing in mind the peculiarity of the region, given its political, cultural, and economic divisions. Considering Westerners' failures based on the theory of the Greater Middle East, we would rather support the concept of an enlarged Mediterranean and analyse it in its various facets. After discussing the main scholarly positions on the topic, we propose an interpretation of China's impact in the region by introducing the concept of centripetal imperialism: pushed by geopolitical reality to project itself beyond its borders, Beijing is ready to offer its capitals in exchange for a penetration that, despite its neo-colonial aspect, does not seek to impose a predetermined political and cultural formula. We then support our view by analysing the case study of the Balkans, which seems to confirm that Chinese investments are primarily driven by economic interests (with problems caused more by planning mistakes rather than by malevolent intentions) and that the Dragon intervenes in the internal affairs of the recipient countries only if strategically necessary.

Keywords: enlarged Mediterranean, China's centripetal imperialism, Balkans.

THE ENLARGED MEDITERRANEAN AND ITS GEOPOLITICAL SPACES

China's presence in the Mediterranean has now become apparent: the new global politics' rules themselves push Beijing (as well as other players)

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[1] Affiliation: Sapienza University of Rome.
 matteo.marconi@uniroma1.it; francesco.barbaro@uniroma1.it.

to go beyond its regional space. The international environment does not allow for clear boundaries, leading to new opportunities and new critical issues at the same time. Understanding the possible impacts of the Chinese projection towards *Mare Nostrum* can only start by considering the identity of the latter.

The Mediterranean, as the theatre of Western culture, has been considered a cohesive area for millennia. However, with the modern age, it has lost its centrality to the benefit of the Atlantic Ocean. As a result, the concept of Mediterranean marginality came to dominate in the twentieth century.[2] The limits of this interpretation have been confirmed by Westerners' failures to address the regional geopolitical issues.

The EU's indecisiveness worsened the instability, leaving free rein to national interests. European countries have thus delegated their strategic and military responsibilities to NATO, which, despite being aware of the multiplicity of regional threats[3], has not managed to put forward a comprehensive approach due to international divisions.

The Mediterranean's divisions have been accentuated by the United States under the George W. Bush administration with the adoption of the theory of the Greater Middle East: *Mare Nostrum* is reduced to a mere passageway between the oceans and a dividing line between the two shores. The grouping of North Africa and the Middle East under the MENA area is based on the idea of a "clash of civilizations" between Westerners and Muslims.[4]

The Greater Middle East was put into question by the theory of the enlarged Mediterranean. Presented as early as the 1980s by Livorno's *Istituto di Guerra Marittima*, this theory includes the adjacent basins in the current Mediterranean one.[5] In elaborating it, the *Marina militare* has resumed at

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[2] See Andrew Hess, *The Forgotten Frontier: A History of the Sixteenth Century Ibero-African Frontier*, University Chicago Press, Chicago 1978; Alexandre Koyré, *Dal mondo del pressappoco all'universo della precisione*, Einaudi, Turin 2000.

[3] See the speech by the then Secretary General of NATO at the 2011 *Forum for New Diplomacy*: Anders Fogh Rasmussen, *NATO and the Arab Spring*, Speech by the NATO Secretary General during the Forum for New Diplomacy hosted by Carnegie Europe, Bruxelles, June 1, 2011.

[4] See Samuel Phillips Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, New York 1996.

[5] See Pier Paolo Ramoino, *Fondamenti di strategia navale*, Edizioni Forum Relazioni Internazionali, Rome 1999. See also Pier Paolo Ramoino, *La NATO e il "Mediterraneo*

least two criteria presented in the 1930s by the *Capitano di Vascello* of the *Regia Marina*, Francesco Bertonelli: 1) because the Mediterranean is an enclosed sea, players compete for the control over it and are interested in everything that happens in it, as evidenced by the international relevance of local conflicts; 2) it is necessary to protect bottlenecks in order to ensure the correct and crucial flow of supplies[6]. This is still an issue if one considers that a large portion of global goods and energy resources pass through the Mediterranean, and in particular, through the Suez Canal.[7]

Nevertheless, the multiple spaces of the Mediterranean are dominated by reasons for division. Starting from the political level, apart from the clear distinction between the liberal model of the northern shore and the authoritarian one of the southern shore, the division and the loss of power of the Arab world also emerge.[8] North Africa and the Middle East are still dealing with the consequences of the "Arab Spring", an expression used by journalists to describe the protests that took place in 2011 against the ruling leaderships in the areas that had lost popular support in recent decades because of the fading away of ideologies and nationalistic pressures and the effects of "socialistic" policies.[9] An Islamism that considers Western political

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allargato": primavera araba, intervento in Libia, partnerships*, in "Quaderni del Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche. Università del Sacro Cuore", II, 4, 2013, pp. 73-84; Giorgio Giorgerini, Riccardo Nassigh, *La relatività delle forze nell'area del Mediterraneo Allargato*, in C. M. Santoro (ed.), *Il XXI Secolo*, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, Milan 2002.

[6] Francesco Bertonelli, *Il nostro mare: studio della situazione politica militare dell'Italia nel Mediterraneo*, R. Bemporad & Figlio editori, Florence 1930.

[7] See SRM, *MED & Italian Energy Report. Risorse, flussi e strategie energetiche dell'Italia tra Europa e Mediterraneo.* First Annual Report, 2019; SRM, *Resilienza e Sviluppo nel Mezzogiorno: settori, aree e linee prospettiche*, Report prepared for the Aspen Institute Italia Conference of December 3, 2020 "Il Mezzogiorno d'Italia: chiave di rilancio per l'economia italiana?", 2020.

[8] See Salvatore Capasso, *Introduzione. I paesi del Mediterraneo tra disuguaglianza e convergenza: sviluppo economico, sostenibilità e migrazioni*, in Eugenia Ferragina (ed.), *Rapporto sulle economie del Mediterraneo. Edizione 2018*, Istituto di Studi sulle Società del Mediterraneo, Rome 2018; Roberto Aliboni, *L'evoluzione geopolitica nel Medioriente*, in Eugenia Ferragina (ed.), *Rapporto sulle economie del Mediterraneo. Edizione 2018*, Istituto di Studi sulle Società del Mediterraneo, Rome 2018.

[9] See Alberto Ventura, *Le Rivoluzioni prevedibili. Per una analisi storica delle "Primavere arabe"*, in Guerino D'Ignazio, Nicola Fiorita, Silvio Gambino, Francesco Raniolo, Alberto

and economic solutions foreign has found its way into traditionalist public opinion, resulting in movements as well as clandestine military organisations. The governments in office reacted with harsh repression, often with the connivance of Western countries, which (especially after the September 11 attacks) regarded them as a source of stability.[10]

Because of the EU's political mistakes, foreign players like China have more possibilities in the Mediterranean. True, Brussels has always attempted to take an interest in the region; in fact, as early as the 1970s, the then-European Economic Community (EEC) finalised bilateral commercial agreements with some southern shore countries[11]. However, the "Global Mediterranean Policy" launched in 1972 was stopped by the oil shock of the following year.[12] The Redirected Mediterranean Policy of 1990 and the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements at the end of the decade looked like signals of recovery, but the real chance for a turning point was provided by the Euro-Mediterranean partnership launched by the Barcelona Conference in 1995, whose objectives remained, however, largely unfulfilled.[13] In 2003, the EU granted the benefits of the internal market to a circle of "friend" countries through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP); finally, in 2008, it promoted the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), focusing on economic

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Ventura (eds.), *Transizioni e democrazia nei Paesi del Mediterraneo e del vicino Oriente*, Edizioni Periferia, Cosenza 2014, pp. 333-344. See also Carlo Almirante, *Considerazioni interlocutorie su uno stimolante convegno internazionale*, in Guerino D'Ignazio, Nicola Fiorita, Silvio Gambino, Francesco Raniolo, Alberto Ventura (eds.), *Transizioni e democrazia...*, pp. 401-411.

[10] See Alberto Ventura, *Le Rivoluzioni prevedibili...*

[11] See Giuliana Laschi, *La Cee e il Mediterraneo: l'avvio delle politiche verso i paesi terzi della sponda sud*, in Sante Cruciani, Maurizio Ridolfi (eds.), *L'Unione Europea e il Mediterraneo. Relazioni internazionali, crisi politiche e regionali (1947-2016)*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 2017, pp. 89-110.

[12] See Massimiliano Trentin, *Le Comunità Europee e gli Stati arabi nei «lunghi anni settanta»: economia, politica e potere*, in Sante Cruciani, Maurizio Ridolfi (eds.), *L'Unione Europea e il Mediterraneo...*, pp. 129-148; Alessandro Isoni, *Da Barcellona a Marsiglia. Le politiche dell'Unione europea nel Mediterraneo*, in Susanna Cafaro (ed.), *Le relazioni euro-mediterranee. Dai primi accordi all'Unione per il Mediterraneo*, ESI, Naples 2013, p. 1 and ff.

[13] See Maria Eleonora Guasconi, *La politica mediterranea dell'Unione Europea: l'occasione perduta del partenariato euro-mediterraneo*, in Sante Cruciani, Maurizio Ridolfi (eds.), *L'Unione Europea e il Mediterraneo...*

practical initiatives and paying less attention to the political dialogue. After the Arab Spring, Brussels reinforced the "more for more" model, depending on social and economic reforms[14], leading the countries of the southern shore to look for less demanding offers. It is no coincidence that the activities of alternative players have increased in the region.

Turkey has tried to get a Mediterranean projection back[15], especially after the freezing of its accession to the EU. In 2009, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu, proposed its theory of "strategic depth", according to which the country should take advantage of its position in the Mediterranean, leveraging its mixed identity (European and Muslim) to present itself as a bridge between the West and the East.[16] Ankara has therefore supported Serraj in Libya and the opposition in Syria[17], whereas it has been engaged in a thorny dispute with Athens over the extent of their respective Exclusive Economic Zones (ZEEs).[18]

With the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russian activism has increased, also thanks to the United States' disengagement in the area. At the request

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[14] See Stefania Panebianco, *L'Unione Europea nel Mediterraneo: oltre la primavera araba*, in Guerino D'Ignazio, Nicola Fiorita, Silvio Gambino, Francesco Raniolo, Alberto Ventura (eds.), *Transizioni e democrazia nei Paesi del Mediterraneo e del vicino Oriente*, Edizioni Periferia, Cosenza 2014, pp. 287-310. See also Susanna Cafaro, *La dimensione mediterranea nelle relazioni esterne dell'Unione dopo la primavera araba*, in "Cultura giuridica e diritto vivente", I, 1, 2014, pp. 1-18.

[15] See Jana Jabbour, *Le retour de la Turquie en Méditerranée: la «profondeur stratégique» turque en Méditerranée préet post-printemps arabe*, in "Cahiers de la Méditerranée", XLV, 89, 2014, pp. 45-56; Michela Ceccorulli, *La dimensione marittima dell'Unione Europea nel Mediterraneo allargato. Opportunità, rischi e prospettive*, CeMiSS, Rome 2016, pp. 52-53; Giuseppe Gagliano, *Mediterraneo orientale: una disputa geoeconomica e geopolitica*, in "Rivista marittima", CLIV, 2, 2021, pp. 48-55.

[16] See Angelo Francesco Carlucci, *La Turchia e le "Primavere arabe"*, in Guerino D'Ignazio, Nicola Fiorita, Silvio Gambino, Francesco Raniolo, Alberto Ventura (eds.), *Transizioni e democrazia...*; Aleksandr Irkhin, Olga Moskalenko, *Russia's Foreign Policy in the Great Mediterranean: Prospects and Constraints*, in "Geopolitics Quarterly", XV, 4, 2020, pp. 110-121.

[17] See Giuseppe Gagliano, *Mediterraneo orientale...*

[18] See Fabien Merz, *Trouble with Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean*, in "CSS Analyses in Security Policy", 275, CSS ETH Zürich, December 2020, pp. 1-4; Anna Maria Delvecchio, *Grecia e Turchia in competizione nel Mediterraneo orientale: il caso emblematico di Cipro*, in "Cultura giuridica e diritto vivente", VII, 3, 2020, pp. 1-10.

of President Bashar al-Assad, who relied on historically good relations between the two countries, Putin intervened in its defence in the Syrian civil war in September 2015 (someone underlined that Moscow had its two bases in Tartus and Hmeimim to protect).[19] Moreover, political and military cooperation with Cairo was strengthened through the sale of weapons. For Russia, Egypt also represented a gateway to Libya, where it supported Haftar. The Kremlin tried to create a *Russian balance*, promoting a sense of reliability. However, with the attempts to regain influence in the Balkans, Moscow is returning to the Mediterranean with similar objectives (*mutatis mutandis*) to those of the Cold War.[20]

Another element highlighting the division in the Mediterranean is the religious one: despite the context of post-secularism[21], the secular model stands strong on the northern shore, whereas the clash between Sunnis and Shiites is an important key to understanding the divisions in North Africa and the Middle East. Power is not strongly legitimised in Sunni-majority countries, except for Turkey and Morocco. Apart from important ramifications in Lebanon and Iraq, most Shiites are in Iran, and the regional politics of these countries is strengthened by a strong mix of civil and religious power.[22] Arab countries are home to many Christian churches, which are "inaccurately grouped under the expression "Christians of the East"".[23] Historically, they tolerated them by subduing their believers, as well as the Jews, to the *dhimma*, a set of restrictive legal provisions provided by *Sharia*. However, a division is represented by the persecutions suffered by Christians in various local contexts.

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[19] See Francesco Cirillo, *Interessi russi nel Mediterraneo Orientale*, in *Mediterranean Sea: Current Trends and Future Challenges*, Association of Studies, Research and Internationalization in Eurasia and Africa, "Geopolitical Report", III, 4, 2018, pp. 69-82; Chiara Lovotti, *La Russia in Medio Oriente. Una presenza destinata a durare?*, in "Osservatorio di politica internazionale", 79, 2018.

[20] See Aleksandr Irkhin, Olga Moskalenko, *Russia's Foreign Policy*…, p. 120.

[21] See Paolo Naso, *L'incognita post-secolare. Pluralismo religioso, fondamentalismi, laicità*, Guida Editori, Naples 2015.

[22] See Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York 2016.

[23] See Antoine Courban, *Essere cristiani in Medio Oriente*, in "Aggiornamenti sociali", LXVII, 1, 2016, pp. 28-38. See also Bernard Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens au Proche-Orient*, Payot et Rivages, Paris 2013.

Finally, economic divisions are also serious in the Mediterranean. It is true that in the last twenty years, the income gap between the two shores has narrowed, also thanks to a higher flow of foreign direct investments (FDI) and an increase in manufacturing activities in the south. However, the economic gap is still considerable and difficult to narrow down, especially when it comes to trade. While proposing an open market, the abovementioned EU initiatives offered European industrial products without accepting the agricultural products of the counterparties[24]. There are also numerous internal inequalities in the North African countries, most notably the rural exodus and a very high urban concentration (above all along the coasts and the rivers), high rates of demographic growth and unemployment, and gaps regarding access to health and education.[25] Water scarcity and climate change have worsened the situation and have caused the migration flows to increase. As a consequence, the agreements promoted by European countries in recent years have changed their goal, going from selective policies to contrasting ones through a securitarian approach, such as the latest European initiatives (Mare Nostrum, Triton, Frontex, etc.).[26]

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[24] See Samir Makdisi, *Sulle disparità economiche e politiche prevalenti e sulle prospettive di una stretta integrazione di una regione euro-mediterranea*, in Eugenia Ferragina (ed.), *Rapporto sulle economie del Mediterraneo. Edizione 2018*, Istituto di Studi sulle Società del Mediterraneo, Rome 2018; Luca Forte, Giovanni Canitano, Maria Rosaria Carli, *Crescita economica, produzione manifatturiera e commercio estero nei paesi del Mediterraneo: differenze e complementarità tra paesi euromediterranei e paesi della sponda sud ed est del Bacino*, in Eugenia Ferragina (ed.), *Rapporto*…

[25] See Anna Maria Ferragina, Giulia Nunziante, *Disparità e ineguaglianze tra i territori all'interno dell'area Mediterranea*, in Eugenia Ferragina (ed.), *Rapporto*…

[26] See Michele Colucci, *Accordi bilaterali in campo migratorio tra Italia, Europa e Mediterraneo: l'evoluzione dal secondo dopoguerra a oggi*, in Eugenia Ferragina (ed.), *Rapporto*…; Stefano Gallo, *Le migrazioni interne nel Maghreb mediterraneo, dalla decolonizzazione al nuovo millennio*, in Eugenia Ferragina (ed.), *Rapporto*…; Antonio M. Morone, *Migranti e politiche di contenimento: il caso della Libia*, in Eugenia Ferragina (ed.), *Rapporto*…

CHINA'S PRESENCE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND ITS IMPACTS: CENTRIPETAL IMPERIALISM

The Chinese entry into the Mediterranean fits into this context, representing the final piece of the New Silk Roads. Announced in 2013 in Kazakhstan by President Xi Jinping, they developed a northern land corridor (*the Silk Road Economic Belt*) and a series of sea routes in the south between China and Europe (*the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road* or MSR). Presented as *One Belt, One Road* (OBOR) in 2014 in front of the EU heads of government, this name was later replaced by the alternative *Belt and Road Initiative*. It involves many countries, which collectively account for more than half of the global GDP and 75% of the world's energy resources. The BRI's stated goal is to increase the transport networks between China and the European markets, although its ramifications are represented by Latin America and Africa. The sectors involved were not limited to logistics and trade: infrastructures only received 24% of the total funds, whereas 32% of them have so far been allocated to the energy sector (China is known to be an energy-intensive country).[27]

The main form of participation in the BRI is the signing of a specific Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Among the G7 countries, Italy was the first one to sign, joining in March 2019. The peninsula offers a convenient way for Chinese goods to enter Europe; the Dragon mainly focuses on the northern Adriatic, as it does not have the difficulties in creating logistical lines with the hinterland that the Tyrrhenian Sea has, and, above all, it allows Mediterranean trade to connect with Europe's industrial and commercial engines (Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Poland).[28] The projects in the northern Adriatic follow the acquisition of Piraeus, with Beijing obtaining the management of the main European transhipment port, which will be connected to Budapest through a new railway line via Skopje and Belgrade.[29] The real Mediterranean bottleneck is still Suez; as a matter of fact, it has received China's main investments for the development and modernization

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[27] See Alessia Amighini, Giulia Sciorati, *Fact Checking: BRI, la nuova via della seta*, ISPI, 2019.

[28] See Paolo Sellari, *Scenari euroasiatici. Le Vie della Seta e la proiezione imperiale cinese*, Edizioni Nuova Cultura, Rome 2020; Diego D'Amelio, *Il risveglio del porto di Trieste fra Mitteleuropa e Cina*, in "Limes", XXVII, 10, 2019, pp. 263-272.

[29] See Huang Shan, *China-Europe Maritime and Terrestrial Express Lines in Smooth Progress*, CRI, May 13, 2017.

of its port area through the launch of the Suez Canal Corridor Area Project (SCZone) and the introduction of the China-Egypt Suez Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone.[30]

Scholars' views about the Dragon's objectives and impacts on Mediterranean geopolitics are varied, to say the least. Some of them, while referring to an "Asian century", specified that China does not aspire to global hegemony, but rather to a leading and driving position in international economic development.[31] Others, on the other hand, condemned the New Silk Roads as a "global invasion project"[32], with imperialist ambitions carried forward thanks to an *ad hoc* use of financial resources.[33] In fact, it is important to underline that the Chinese companies and funds involved in the BRI investments are mostly led (directly or indirectly) by the Beijing government. This could result in the risk of undue influence on the recipient countries; one example would be the forced return of the Uyghurs from Egypt to China in 2016-2017, which was carried out with the assistance of local security forces and justified by a cooperation agreement between the two countries for the suppression of Islamic terrorism.[34] It is no coincidence that Greece and Egypt itself, among the main recipients of Chinese investments in the region, have openly supported Beijing against several international actions in defence of human rights.[35]

It is more difficult to determine what the economic impacts of the Chinese investments are and whether they favour unity or divisions in the area. According to some scholars, foreign direct investments (FDI) help the economic development of the host countries by increasing their capital and

[30] See AA.VV., *The Suez Canal after the expansion. Analysis of traffic, competitiveness indicators, the challenges of the BRI and the role of the Free Zone*, SRM and AlexBank, 2018.

[31] See Parag Khanna, *The Future is Asian: Commerce, Conflict and Culture in the 21st Century*, Simon & Schuster, New York 2019.

[32] See Antonio Selvatici, *La Cina e la Nuova Via della Seta. Progetto per un'invasione globale*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2018.

[33] See John Pomfret, *China's debt traps around the world are a trademark of its imperialist ambitions*, in "The Washington Post", August 27, 2019.

[34] See Human Rights Watch, *Egypt: Don't Deport Uyghurs to China*, July 2017.

[35] See Plamen Tonchev, *Le relazioni sino-greche: contesto e prospettive*, in "OrizzonteCina", IX, 3, pp. 16-20; Giulia Sciorati, *Cina: la questione uigura nello Xinjiang*, ISPI, 2019.

bringing in best practises and new technologies; positive results in the Mediterranean and African countries were apparent at the turn of the crisis of 2008.[36] Other scholars have analysed the possible negative effects of FDI, underlining their weight within the BRI.[37] There is a risk that countries will give their raw materials away without gaining enough benefits, and that only investors will benefit. They can take advantage of local corruption and often unstable governments; usually, they do not hire local workers but only (or mostly) theirs. Moreover, they can limit access to new technologies' know-how. Another big risk is represented by the "debt trap" in case the indebted governments do not have enough revenue generation, which "can generate a downward spiral that inevitably ends in the need for debt restructuring or reduction".[38] However, real risks depend on the total amount of debt and the debt individual states owe to China: this mostly concerns countries in Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa and, in the Euro-Mediterranean area, the exceptional case of Montenegro.[39]

It can be seen how the Dragon does not exclude *hard power*, deploying the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and its Navy (PLA Navy), especially in those BRI areas with a higher strategic interest. For example, the naval base of Doraleh (Djibouti), whose construction began in 2016, allows China to have a stable presence in the Red Sea.[40] However, Beijing relies more on its *soft power*. In order to overcome the accusations of being a threat to other countries and to propose itself as a reliable partner, China has funded many programmes to spread the Chinese language and culture, as well as a vast

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[36] See Isaac Doku, John Akuma, John Owusu-Afriyie, *Effect of Chinese foreign direct investment on economic growth in Africa*, in "Journal of Chinese Economic and Foreign Trade Studies", X, 2, 2017, pp. 162-17; John Whalley, Aaron Weisbrod, *The Contribution of Chinese FDI to Africa's Pre Crisis Growth Surge*, in "Global Economy Journal", XII, 4, 2012, pp. 1-26.

[37] See Alessia Amighini, *Finanza e potere lungo le Nuove Vie della Seta*, Università Bocconi Editore, Milan 2021.

[38] See John Hurley, Scott Morris, Gailyn Portelance, *Examining the Debt Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative from a Policy Perspective*, CGD Policy Paper, Center for Global Development, Washington 2018.

[39] See Jeremy Garlik, *The Impact of China's Belt and Road Initiative. From Asia to Europe*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2020.

[40] See Alessia Amighini, Giulia Sciorati, *Fact Checking*…

network of Confucius Institutes.[41] Nevertheless, there are serious inconsistencies: the Dragon's companies abroad (including the ones in the Mediterranean) almost exclusively employ Chinese workers, who are not encouraged to settle in or fit in the local societies, in contrast with the intentions at the basis of cultural exchange initiatives. Moreover, as mentioned above, Beijing's indifference to the human rights issue risks affecting the countries that receive the investments as well.

All these elements support the hypothesis that the Chinese presence results in more divisions in the Mediterranean; this hypothesis seems to prevail in the heated debate among scholars.

To be fair, while not underestimating concerns regarding democracy and security, some scholars such as Alice Ekman highlight some elements showing the Dragon could seemingly favour more unity.[42] Chinese investments concern both the southern and the northern shore, as evidenced by the acquisition of Piraeus, which managed to enter into competition with the ports of the Northern Range, with Rotterdam obtaining a contract with the American company Hewlett-Packard (HP) as its new distribution centre for central and southern Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and Russia. Beijing's *all-out* policy, which is based on flexible, multilateral, and sector-specific mechanisms, fosters cohesion thanks to "group co-operation diplomacy": a model put forth again in various areas, such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), the Forum on China–Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF), and the so-called "17+1" with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.[43]

The main flaw in such an analysis is that it focuses almost exclusively on the region's potential opportunities for economic development through

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[41] See Audrey Dugué-Nevers, *China and Soft Power: Building Relations and Cooperation*, in "Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations: An International Journal", III, 1, 2017, pp. 71-101; Mustafa Yağcı, *Rethinking Soft Power in Light of China's Belt and Road Initiative*, in "Uluslararası İlişkiler", LVII, 5, 2018, pp. 67-78.

[42] See Alice Ekman, *China in the Mediterranean: An Emergin Presence*, in "Notes de l'Ifri", Ifri, February 2018.

[43] See Katarzyna W. Sidło, *The Chinese Belt and Road Project in the Middle East and North Africa*, in "IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2020", IEMed, Barcelona 2020, pp. 272-275; Hu Dawei, *Analysis of the Group Cooperation Diplomacy of China, with Discussion of China-CEEC Cooperation*, in "China Interntional Studies", XI, 6, 2015, pp. 40-57.

Chinese investments, without giving due weight to the possible negative geopolitical impacts, which are underlined by another type of interpretation. According to scholars such as Christina Müller-Markus, Beijing has seemingly put aside its non-interference principle to protect its interests in the Mediterranean in a more active way, taking advantage of the EU, which it considers "a military uninfluental, politically divided, and ideologically weakened actor".[44] Agreements with Athens would play a central role: "Greece's geographical and diplomatic proximity – with Europe and NATO on one side and the Middle East on the other – makes it an attractive ally in the strategic vision pursued by China".[45] The ability of China to increase divisions through the use of *hard power*, as in the case of the naval base in Djibouti[46] or its army's support to the Arab states promised in the Arab Policy Paper of 2016, has been pointed out.[47] As remarked by Nadia Schadlow, Beijing has taken advantage of the internal tensions within NATO and the EU to change the *status quo*: "China's presence and active investments in the region have divided friends and provided them with alternatives to the EU and the United States".[48]

This second interpretation has the merit of highlighting the prevalence of division elements among the effects of the Chinese foray into the Mediterranean. However, it has the limit of overstressing the importance of *hard power*, almost overshadowing China's preference for *soft power* and for win-win agreements. These aspects regain their centrality, for example, in the analysis of Adel A. Ghafar and Anna L. Jacobs.[49] Focusing on Beijing's bilateral agreements with Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt, they underline their primarily economic and trade nature, breaking the "debt book diplomacy" stereotype. China has influence on the states of the southern shore as they consider it a valid alternative to the US and European countries. It is by taking advantage

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[44] Christina Müller-Markus, *China Moors in the Mediterranean: A Sea of Opportunities for Europe?*, in "Notes Internacionals", VIII, 156, pp. 1-4.

[45] *Ibid.*

[46] Alessia Amighini, Giulia Sciorati, *Fact Checking…*

[47] People's Republic of China, *Arab Policy Paper*, Beijing, 2016.

[48] Nadia Schadlow, *China in the Mediterranean and Implications for the United States and Europe*, in "Strategika", VIII, 62, 2020, pp. 31-33.

[49] Adel Abdel Ghafar, Anna L. Jacobs,, *China in the Mediterranean: Implications of expanding Sino-North Africa relations*, Brooking Institution, Washington 2020.

of their mistakes and indecisiveness that Beijing has succeeded in presenting a new model of practical and flexible development that has the advantage of not requiring democratic reforms and sticking to the non-interference principle. North African and Middle Eastern countries' getting closer to China with regard to diplomacy and security represents only the next step in integration, and Beijing would not intend to confront the US from a political and military point of view. As a matter of fact, its entry into the Mediterranean is based on a "balance of power" whose aim would be, neither more nor less, to protect its own interests in the region.

This position is in line with the one expressed in 2019 by Jon B. Alterman in front of a US House Subcommittee.[50] China would not aim to replace the United States in the Middle East. On the contrary, it would be interested in having Washington incur the costs of keeping order in the region. Beijing would "content itself" with the benefits of promoting its relationships with the countries in the area, especially with the ones on the southern shore, which consider it an alternative partner, the advantage being that it was not their colonizer. Beijing only offers them agreements with their full consent, without further conditions. The Dragon not only does not affect these countries' traditions, but it has also received the support of local populations as it brought in new infrastructures and technologies. Alterman defines this as "Imperialism 3.0 (or perhaps Mercantilism 2.0)"[51] as China manages to make its partners dependent in an indirect way. This strategy gives a central role to digital technology, as evidenced by the 5G case. Beijing, concludes Alterman, questions the US certainties by "seeking ways to compete without becoming a rival".[52]

In conclusion, we think we can integrate this set of interpretations by defining Chinese space as a centripetal imperial one: the Dragon is pushed by the global geopolitical reality to project itself beyond its borders by adopting neo-colonial policies to protect its own national interests – primarily economic ones – without imposing a predetermined political and cultural formula and only intervening if strategically necessary.

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[50] See Jon B. Alterman, *Chinese and Russian Influence in the Middle East*, in "Middle East Policy", XXVI, 2, 2019, pp. 129-136. It is the *House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism*.

[51] *Ibid.*

[52] *Ibid.*

BEIJING'S PENETRATION IN THE BALKANS

In the described framework, a particularly interesting case study is represented by Beijing's penetration of the Balkans. If it was negligible until around 2010[53], things have remarkably changed in the following years. As a result, given their numerous and uneven ramifications, Chinese activities in the area require proper contextualization in order to be understood. The Balkans already have highly discussed geographical borders and, within them, they have a great variety of economic, political, and cultural situations. Moreover, as it has been remarked, the Dragon has not elaborated on a specific strategy for the countries in this area.[54] On the other hand, they have been included in the wider scope of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, with which China created the "16+1" format in 2016, which then became "17+1" in 2019, after Greece had joined. Greece, which does not geographically fall within the so-called CEE area, has been involved because it borders three countries (Albania, Bulgaria, and North Macedonia), which belong to it with full rights.

The accession of Athens to the 17+1 forum allows for a reflection on the nature of such an initiative and on the interests pushing China to carry it forward. Plamen Tonchev tried to go beyond "the idea that the expansion of Beijing's influence has to be ascribed to the growth of its investments in the region", arguing that the profound motivations for the expansion have "less to do with the financial resources mobilised by China in the Mediterranean and more with the emotions and perceptions that China arouses in public opinion and in local political life".[55] In support of its own theory, the scholar mentions a series of surveys which show how citizens of the Balkan countries are disappointed by the EU with regard to globalisation and, even if they do not have a positive opinion about social and working life in China, they have a very favourable opinion about it as an economic partner.[56] Tonchev's interpretation

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[53] See Anastas Vangeli, *China's Belt and Road in the Balkans in the Post-COVID-19 Era*, IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook, 2020.

[54] See Wouter Zweers, Vladimir Shopov, Frans-Paul van der Putten, Mirela Pektova, Maarten Lemstra, *China and the EU in the Western Balkans. A zero-sum game?*, Clingendael, 2020.

[55] See Plamen Tonchev, *Le relazioni sino-greche: contesto e prospettive*, in "OrizzonteCina", IX, 3, 2018 pp. 16-20.

[56] See Plamen Tonchev, *China's Image in Greece. 2008-2018*, Institute of International Economic Relations, 2018.

is supported by a theoretical framework offered by Andrea Ghiselli. When referring to Chinese-Balkan relations, he mentions a series of contributions on the use of narratives for the purpose of geopolitical influence.[57]

However, these interpretations are weakened by the fact that they excessively underestimate the role played by infrastructure in the Dragon's economic and expansion policies. Infrastructural projects in the Balkan countries (especially the Western ones) have often been met with scepticism by European and American investors who tend to label them as too expensive and risky, as well as not profitable enough, also because they almost exclusively pertain to the public sector. A report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has clearly stated that such projects should not be considered as "a substitute for a wide range of structural reforms and prudent macro-financial policies" needed for the region's development.[58] These countries have thus found an attractive and ready alternative in the Chinese investment proposals, which are by no means concerned about road construction in mountainous areas and are interested in maximising connectivity in territories where it is possible to exploit economic-commercial potential. The Chinese approach is well represented by the motto "if one wants to develop, one should build the roads first".[59]

Besides, the cooperation forum between China and the Central and Eastern countries, as recognised by Chinese institutions themselves, has to be considered an integral part of the BRI plan.[60] This becomes apparent if one considers that 22 countries within the geographical area under discussion adhere to the *Belt and Road Initiative* more or less officially. They are more than the ones taking part in the "17+1" format where, for obvious reasons of expediency, Beijing has not involved those post-Soviet states which are still

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[57] See Andrea Ghiselli, *L'importanza di sapersi raccontare: le sfide della Belt and Road Initiative dall'Asia ai Balcani*, in "OrizzonteCina", IX, 3, 2018, pp. 3-10.

[58] See Ruben Atoyan, Dóra Benedek, *Public infrastructure in the Western Balkans: a highway to higher income*, International Monetary Fund, 2018.

[59] See Xin Chen, *Connectivity in China and Europe: what lessons can be learned*, in Māris Andžāns (ed.), *Afterthoughts: Riga 2016 International Forum of China and Central and Eastern European Countries*, Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2016, pp. 40-43.

[60] See State Information Center, *"Belt and Road" Country Cooperation Evaluation Report*, 2016.

in the Russian orbit (such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine). Some scholars, such as Jeremy Garlik, tend to downsize the importance of Central-Eastern Europe and the Balkans within the BRI.[61] According to such interpretations, China's interests would be centred in countries that are closer[62] to it and, at most, in the countries of Western Europe.[63] This hypothesis is apparently supported by the fact that Chinese investments currently account for less than 1% of the total FDI in the region[64], whereas around 90% of Chinese funding is always directed to Western Europe (especially Germany, France, and the United Kingdom).[65]

However, this view does not take into account the strategic importance of the Balkans as a potential link between the arrival point of the Maritime Silk Road in the Mediterranean and the promising and ever-growing industrial and commercial region of Central-Eastern Europe. The area would represent an ideal entry point for the wider and more developed market of Western Europe, and it is also a manufacturing space that, in the context of fairly strong institutions, offers a skilled workforce and acceptable wages.[66] Related to "17+1" and integrated within the BRI, the China-Europe Land-Sea Express Route (LSER) finds its own central role, that is, a railway corridor designed for the transport of containerized goods from the port of Piraeus to Hungary and the Czech Republic through North Macedonia and Serbia.[67] This main project, managed by the Chinese COSCO, is accompanied by many others which are controlled, more or less directly, by the Dragon: the Pelješac Bridge and the Bar-Boljare highway in Montenegro, both entrusted to the China Road and

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[61] See Jeremy Garlik, *The Impact of China's Belt and Road Initiative. From Asia to Europe*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2020, pp. 178-184.

[62] See Kerry Brown, *China's World: What Does China Want?*, I. B. Tauris, London and New York 2017.

[63] See Richard Turcsányi, *China is raising its flag in Central and Eastern Europe*, East Asia Forum, 2018.

[64] *Ibid.*

[65] See Derek Scissors, *China Global Investment Tracker (CGIT)*, The American Enterprise Institute and the Heritage Foundation, 2019; People's Republic of China, *Statistical Bulletin of China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment*, Beijing 2017.

[66] See Weiqing Song (ed.), *China's Relations with Central and Eastern Europe. From "Old Comrades" to New Partners*, Routledge, Abingdon 2018.

[67] See Wouter Zweers *et. al.*, *China and the EU...*

Bridge Corporation (CRBC); the A-2 and A-4 Highway sections in North Macedonia; the Počitelj – Zvirovići subsection in Bosnia and Herzegovina managed by the Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC), etc.[68]

Chinese penetration in the Balkans, however, is not merely linked to logistics and transport. Think of Geo-Jade, a Chinese private company that entered the oil market in 2013 and acquired Bankers Petroleum for €385 million in 2016. Despite being a former Canadian company, it currently produces around 95% of Albania's crude oil, accounting for 11% of the country's exports.[69] Another big operation was the acquisition of Zelezara Smederevo by the state-owned Chinese Hesteel Group company for €46 million. After the acquisition, the steel manufacturing company became the first Serbian exporter, thus remarkably fostering local employment. Chinese FDI in Serbia went from 7.32% of the total amount in 2016 to 14.82% in 2018.

The privileged relationship between Belgrade and Beijing is confirmed by the choice of the latter not to support the recognition of Kosovo at an international level (as it is, on principle, against independent movements, considering that it is dealing with them in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Taiwan, which it considers as its rebel provinces).[70] Such a circumstance has reinforced European concerns regarding potential political *liaisons* between the Dragon and the countries of the Western Balkans, in particular the fact that the non-conditionality of investments and the combination of capitalism and political dictatorship of the Chinese model could dangerously attract some states that are or could become candidates for EU membership. This led the European Commissioner, Johannes Hahn, to warn that the People's Republic could turn the countries into "Trojan horses".[71] However, it must also be mentioned that although Beijing does not have any official relations with Kosovo and does not promote its recognition, unlike Russia, it did not oppose it either.[72] Moreover, considering that China's position is primarily intended to seek support against the recognition of Taiwan, this case well represents what we defined as

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[68] *Ibid.* See also Weiqing Song (ed.), *China's Relations…*

[69] See Wouter Zweers *et. al.*, *China and the EU…*

[70] *Ibid.*

[71] See Dragan Pavlićević, *Unione Europea e Cina nei Balcani occidentali: quali agende politiche e quali vettori di influenza?*, in "OrizzonteCina", IX, 3, 2018, pp. 16-24.

[72] See Wouter Zweers et. al., *China and the EU…*

centripetal imperialism, namely, the Dragon's tendency to only use interventionism for the protection of its direct interests. Finally, as pointed out, the communist past of the Balkans made these countries quite wary of Chinese official propaganda and therefore unwilling to passively follow its models.[73]

Others seem to be the main critical issues regarding China's presence in the Balkans, and they are well represented by two cases. The first one is related to the Bar-Boljare highway: Montenegro owes to China's Export-Import (Exim) Bank (which financed the project) €671 million, that is, 22% of the country's total foreign debt, and which accounts for 63% of its GDP. Podgorica is not able to repay and the EU has refused to help, with the risk that this could trigger the "debt trap", an exceptional case in the region.[74] The second case is the Kichevo-Ohrid highway in North Macedonia, financed by the Exim Bank itself and entrusted to Sinohydro. The accusations of corruption against some officials of the Macedonian government raised concerns about the fairness of the project's tender, which was later temporarily interrupted.[75] In general, also in the Balkan area, the problems arising from Chinese financing do not seem to be sufficiently explained by the interpretations of Beijing's potential ambitions of subjugation, but they have a more convincing interpretation (as already proposed by Deborah Brautigam in 2009[76]) in "much less malevolent intentions and still unresolved planning mistakes by China".[77] Within this context, an EU comeback should be considered: by changing some conditions for new members to join and by launching initiatives like the "Berlin process" for an enlargement involving the Balkans, it makes future developments in the area more complicated.[78]

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[73] See Weiqing Song (ed.), *China's Relations*...

[74] See Dragan Pavlićević, *Unione Europea e Cina*...; Wouter Zweers et. al., *China and the EU*...; Hans von der Burchard, *EU rebuffs Montenegro plea to help repay $1B Chinese highway loan*, in "Politico", December 21, 2021.

[75] See Anastas Vangeli, *La cooperazione per lo sviluppo delle infrastrutture nei Balcani: sotto l'egida della Cina, per volontà locale*, in "OrizzonteCina", IX, 3, 2018, pp. 11-15; Wouter Zweers et. al., *China and the EU*...

[76] See Deborah Brautigam, *The Dragon's Gift: the real story of China in Africa*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York 2009.

[77] See Andrea Ghiselli, *L'importanza di sapersi raccontare*...

[78] See Dragan Pavlićević, *Unione Europea e Cina*...

To conclude, as we have seen, it is not possible to understand China's presence in the Mediterranean without bearing in mind the peculiarity of the region, as given by its several divisions. Considering the Western failures, in such a context, Beijing is an attractive alternative partner, especially for the countries (on both sides of the sea) that are most in need of resources. Indeed, China's investments benefit from the BRI's brand and from not asking recipient countries for any demanding reforms. Apart from the opposing analyses of the scholars, the case study of the Balkans confirms our geopolitical interpretation of a Chinese centripetal imperialism: the Dragon is ready to offer its capitals in exchange for a penetration which, despite its neo-colonial aspect, does not want to impose a predetermined political and cultural formula.

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ISRAEL: THE MIDDLE EAST OBJECTIVES OF THE REGIONAL POWER AFTER THE LEBANON WAR (2006)

Slobodan Janković[1]

Abstract: The study of the Middle Eastern objectives of Israel as a regional power is divided into five chapters. The introductory chapter presents hypotheses that Israel is a regional power and asks what its regional objectives are. The second chapter is divided into two parts, the first of which explains how current international relations impact theoretical approaches and makes them the product of time, or echo of what is actually happening. As a result, the author contends that the majority of Anglo-American theoretical production is essentially post-factum and designed to explain only what has already occurred, rather than offering patterns that can explain future interactions among units of the international system. The second part of the chapter presents an overview of the literature on regional powers and offers the minimal definition of a regional power. The third chapter corroborates hypotheses that Israel is a regional power, while the fourth part of the text analyses the Middle Eastern objectives of Israel's policies. The concluding part briefly presents the overview of the current state of objectives that Israel has reached and how Iran remains its strongest contestant.

Keywords: Israel, Middle East, regional power, Israel's Middle Eastern policy.

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[1] Senior Research Fellow, Head of the Centre for Neighbourly and Mediterranean countries; Institute of International Politics and Economics (Serbia). slobodan@diplomacy.bg.ac.rs

Israel is a geographically and demographically small, yet very active and influential country in the Middle East and even outside the region. In recent years, it has expanded its diplomatic network globally and established regional partnerships on a scale never seen before. On July 22nd, it was granted Observer Status at the African Union by Moussa Faki, Chairperson of the African Union Commission.[2] It was one of the African continent's successes because countries on the Black continent typically support Palestinians due to the influence of North African Arab countries and Sahara's Muslim majority countries.[3] This, as other initiatives of the Jewish state in international fora, is part of a strategic endeavour to garner support, marginalise opponents and affirm its interests and policies in the Middle East. These regional policies, supported by engagement in international organisations and through bilateral diplomacy in other regions, are not new. Yet, the scope of activity tells those analysing the behaviour of official Jerusalem that Israel is a peculiar regional power. The aim of the article is to analyse the regional policy of Israel and try to evaluate its long-term aims. To do so, two preliminary questions must first be addressed: what is a regional power, and how does Israel fit into this category?

The Middle East is maybe the most famous world region, even though it has no universally accepted borders. For the purpose of this paper, the Middle East is defined as a space stretching from Iran (including it) to Libya, and from Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula in the south to Turkey in the north, including it. It is predominantly Muslim, with the notable exception of Israel and, to a lesser extent, Lebanon, i.e., states that occupy important Levantine coasts and correspond to the majority of territories that once comprised Outremer, a mediaeval crusader state. It includes heirs of the Persian and Ottoman empires and is, at the same time, largely the heritage of European powers' colonial policies. This mixture is at the origin of the contemporary region within which Israel acts as a strong country, if not as a regional power.

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[2] "Communiqué du Président de la Commission de l'UA sur l'accréditation de l'État d'Israël", *Union Africaine*, août 06, 2021, https://au.int/fr/pressreleases/20210806/communique-du-president-de-la-commission-sur-accreditation-etat-israel (accessed: 13 August 2021).

[3] Nineteen years since the previous Organisation of African Unity was dissolved, Israel had to ask for observer status in the new organisation, i.e., in the African Union.

In order to achieve stated objectives, it is necessary to revisit definitions of regional power and briefly overview literature on the Middle East and North African regional powers. Although Israel has no public strategy for foreign policy nor a national security strategy, this does not mean that strategic planning and thinking are not shaping Israel's policies; they are just not publicly disclosed.

As regards the time frame researched in the text, it starts after the Lebanon summer war in 2006, but it will concentrate particularly on the period after the Arab Spring. The latest Israeli major military action against objectives in Lebanon is a starting point as it did not achieve the goal of at least significantly reducing the military power of Hezbollah, if not defeating it. Much of Israel's activity is dominated by its relations with Iran and its regional influence. Popular support for Iran and Hezbollah grew after the war, and the star of Tehran had a positive image in the broader Islamic world. This outcome was surely negative for decision makers in Jerusalem.

REGIONAL POWER

A contextual framework for the research concept

As regards different theorisations over the concept of regional power, it is interesting to note how theoretical frameworks, including so-called grand theories, are just echoes of current behaviour in the international arena. The impossibility of explaining and predicting theoretically founded patterns of behaviour is a general characteristic of most of the theoretical production in the Anglo-American IR field.[4] That is why in the past seventy years, after significant changes, new theories have arisen to describe and officially explain the *post factum* changed reality. In that sense, Waltzian explanation and prediction, like the pullulation of post-colonial theories, are among the most hazy, generalized, and ultimately disconnected from real-world political writings. Of course, generalisation is necessary for a theory, but a theory, in order to be such, needs to explain some pattern occurring in the part of reality

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[4] See detailed critique of the Anglo-American theories of IR in: Slobodan Janković, Слободан Јанковић, *Англо-америчка обмана: Да ли је изучавање међународних односа у сукобу са стварношћу?*, (Београд: Catena mundi, 2017), 131. (Anglo-American Deceit: are studies of international relations conflicted with reality?)

to which it refers. In 1979, the Western world was shaken after the oil shocks and class clashes, and the communist block seemed stable. For a couple of decades, the Soviets and Americans had the dominant position in international relations after the decadence of France and the United Kingdom as former colonial empires. In this context, bipolar power distribution was proposed as the most stable and thus most durable feature of the international system, and the balance of power as the situation toward which any system will be inclined. But this theory sometimes seems right and sometimes, as in the period 1989-2007, not. Still, a scientific theory explains some phenomena or aspects of the real world and should be confirmed through two basic methods: observation and experiment. Sometimes it is not valid, and sometimes it is. Only ten years after Waltz's book, bipolarity and the balance of power were defunct. Layne indeed envisaged early that unipolarity was an illusion or temporary, and Waltz claimed in 1993 that "bipolarity endures, but in an altered state". Yet, they could not predict that such momentum would last almost two decades.[5] Waltz even predicted a rapprochement between a declining Russia and a rising great power, Germany.[6] We can see today how that was erroneous. The explanation that units define the structure is taken from theories outside the field of international relations and not only from microeconomic theory.[7] It is different with Huntington, who was a long-time practitioner besides his academic tenure, and was directly involved in foreign policy making. He understood international relations more clearly than his purely theoretical colleagues and, already in 1999, could argue that:

> "Global politics has thus moved from the bipolar system of the Cold War through a unipolar moment — highlighted by the Gulf War — and is now

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[5] For that see Layne explanation of why they missed qualities of American hegemony in: Layne, Christopher, "The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming End of the United States' Unipolar Moment." *Quarterly Journal: International Security*, vol. 31. no. 2. (Fall 2006), 7-41. Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics", *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 2. (Autumn, 1993), 52.

[6] Waltz envisaged the emergence of Japan, Germany, and China as rising great powers and Russia as a declining power, relying solely on nuclear power, "large population, vast resources, and geographic presence in Europe and Asia". In: Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics", 52.

[7] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of international politics*, (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co. 1979), 89-97.

passing through one or two uni-multipolar decades before it enters a truly multipolar 21st century".[8]

Alexandr Zinoviev (+2006), a Russian philosopher and sociologist, more accurately described the global political process as westernisation leading to the creation of a globally managed structure that would subdue human freedom.[9] Living in the West as ostracized from the Soviet Union, he criticised the Western society also through his futurologist work. He claimed that ideologues in the West (social scientists) explain to the citizens of the "Western Union" how, why, and what they should think about any of the issues.[10] In concordance with Zinoviev's view, when it was evident that previous explanations were not enough and, in particular, when the unipolar moment[11] was waning, ideologues (social scientists) launched the regional power concept.

Definitions and concepts

Iver Neumann published in 1992 a collection of papers titled "*Regional Great Powers in International Politics*". The context in which it was published was a changing world with a dissolving USSR.[12] In order to explain certain behaviours in some regions, the concept of regional power has become more and more welcome. Since then, the understanding of regional power has been conceptualised, mostly without appellative greatness. As Detlef Nolte points out, Buzzan, at the end of the 20th century, dealt with the characteristics of the region, and other authors followed swiftly.[13] But area

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[8] Samuel P. Huntington, "The Lonely Superpower", *Foreign Affairs*, 78(2), (1999), 37.

[9] Александар Зиновјев, *Велика раскрсница*, (Београд: Наш дом–L'age d' Homme 1999).

[10] Александр Зиновьев, *Глобальный Человейник*, 197 (Alexandr Zinoviev, The Global Humant Hill), https://politconservatism.ru/upload/iblock/2ba/2ba0523d98a2a1a579673a53a1ec519f.pdf (accessed: 20/06/2021).

[11] Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 1, (Council on Foreign Relations 1990/1991), 23-33

[12] Iver B. Neumann, ed, *Regional great powers in International Politics*, (Palgrave Macmillan; 1st ed. 1992 edition), 210.

[13] It refers to the article: Barry Buzan, The Asia-Pacific: what sort of region in what sort of world?', in Christopher Brook and Anthony McGrew (eds), *Asia-Pacific in the New World*

studies were formed in the US much earlier, mostly in joint programmes of the US Army and academia.[14] Regional studies in Europe did not immediately produce the concept of regional power, although it is quite sensible that some distinction in the power of regional countries has been studied many times before. Different regions, from East Asia to the Middle East, South Africa, Latin America, etc., are studied. But there are different definitions of regional power too. When studying regional orders, Lake discerns different models, among them a regional order dominated by one regional power.[15] Beck, similarly, or essentially equally, like that particular model of Lake, defined regional power as an actor whose

> "power capabilities in a region significantly outweigh those of other actors within the same region and whose power is, to a high degree, based on its leadership role... regional powers heavily rely on soft-power skills since... their power capabilities are not sufficient to dominate regional affairs by unilateral measures. Thus, regional powers exert their influence on the basis of cooperation... rather than measures of hard-power politics".[16]

Martin Beck, like some other authors, occasionally considers continents as regions.[17] Osterud in 1992 wrote on "geopolitical regions", naming Europe, Africa south of the Sahara, the Middle East, North Africa, South America, and

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Order, (London: Routledge 1998), 68-87. See footnotes 15 and 16 in: Detlef Nolte, "How to compare regional powers: analytical concepts and research topics", 883.

[14] See more in: Слободан Јанковић, *Англо-америчка обмана: Да ли је изучавање међународних односа у сукобу са стварношћу?*, (*Anglo-American Deceit: are studies of international relations conflicted with reality?*), 66-67.

[15] Lake is mostly concentrated on its concept of international hierarchy and writes mostly about dyadic hierarchy in the region where the dominant state may also be an outside actor (the US in the Middle East). Still, this framework also allows for regional countries to be dominant. In: David A. Lake, "Regional Hierarchy: Authority and Local International Order", *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 35, Globalising the Regional, Regionalising the Global (Feb., 2009), 35–58. doi:10.2307/20542777

[16] Martin Beck, "The Concept of Regional Power as Applied to the Middle East", in *Regional Powers in the Middle East: New Constellations after the Arab Revolts*, ed. Henner Fuertig (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 4.

[17] Martin Beck, "Regional Politics in a Highly Fragmented Region: Israel's Middle East Policies", (2010), 130.

so on.[18] Yet, the Middle East, as well as other macro-regions, does not correspond to the continent.

Cooperation rather than confrontation and dominance over other actors in the region is the approach taken later (in 2014, although in 2010 it was slightly more inclusive) by Beck, recalling Nolte's 11 criteria for regional power. By accepting Nolte's criteria, he adheres to the understanding that regional and world hegemony creates stability (concept of cooperative hegemony and power transition theory). But the problem with Nolte is that he also defines some continents as regions (Asia, in particular, as the largest continent), and that he did not try to empirically test his criteria or to mention at least one regional power.[19]

There is also a congruity between the mentioned approaches and Flemes. Flemes argued that there are four pivotal criteria in order to distinguish regional powers: "claim to leadership, power resources, employment of foreign policy instruments, and acceptance of leadership", notably in the same region. This acceptance of leadership and the claim to it are the links between the mentioned authors. After applying such criteria, Beck concluded that there are no regional powers in the Middle East but only "potential regional powers".[20] The reasoning of Beck, Flemes, and Nolte is highly ideological, based on a postulate of a benevolent hegemon, or at least, a dominating country mostly acting through international institutions and using cooperation rather than coercion. On top of this, the leadership of such a country should be "recognised" by other regional countries and act for the common good (a benevolent hegemon that distributes public goods exists only in an ideologized view of the world). When taking into account the mentioned and other criteria, there is no country in the world that could fulfil them. Thus, Flemes, when analysing the role of South Africa as a regional power, claimed that Nigeria was a secondary regional power, although accepted as a leader by more governments than South Africa. His various arguments in favour of South Africa and against "secondary rogue power" Zimbabwe were actually

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[18] Østerud, Øyvind, "Regional Great Powers", in: *Regional great powers in International Politics*, Iver B. Neumann, ed, 1-15.

[19] Detlef Nolte, "How to compare regional powers: analytical concepts and research topics", *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (October 2010), 893, 894-95, 897-98.

[20] Martin Beck, "The Concept of Regional Power as Applied to the Middle East", 4, 5, 15, 18.

based on its elite's promotion of economic liberalisation, African free trade and promotion of globalisation through activities based on the affirmation of African organisations aimed at continental integration (following the EU model).[21] Then again, the US's constant use of coercive power both in the military and economic spheres in the ideological world of some authors would deny the US the status of great power and of regional power too! How ludicrous are these claims!?

Given all the previously enumerated criteria, it could be concluded that the concept would be essentially hypothetical and not applicable to the realities of regional politics. This output is not far from the long tradition of ivory tower academic production in international relations. Here I would like to cite the words of the US marine and professor of security studies, Joyner[22]:

> "(a)cademic study of IR has divorced itself from the real world study of the actual conduct of international relations. Those who serve in government and work in the IR-focused think tanks tend to go to the public policy schools rather than mainline PhD programs. And the work being done by academics in IR is largely irrelevant and inaccessible to the policy community. Indeed, I can't remember the last time I picked up a copy of *International Studies Quarterly*, much less the *American Political Science Review*. Frankly, I'm not sure I *could* read those journals at this point if I wanted to".[23]

Of course, there is another mostly shared understanding that "regional powers are actors—notably states—with significant power capabilities which

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[21] Flemes argues that Pretoria played a pivotal role in securing the end of Zaire's involvement in Angola's civil war and in the end of the war (DRC), in the war that did not stop until today. See: Daniel Flemes, "Conceptualising Regional Power in International Relations: Lessons from the South African Case" (June 1, 2007). GIGA Research Programme: Violence, Power and Security- *GIGA Working Paper No*. 53. 37, 38, 42, 4.8

[22] Joyner is Professor of Security Studies and Security Studies Department Head at the Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University; a nonresident senior fellow at the Brent Scowcroft Center on Strategy and Security at the Atlantic Council; and the publisher of the blog Outside The Beltway. He published around 200 articles and comments in the New York Times, Foreign Policy, War on the Rocks, The National Interest, Defense One, Christian Science Monitor, The Hill, World Politics Review… See: https: //www.usmcu.edu/About-MCU/Faculty/Faculty-Directory/Joyner/

[23] James Joyner, "Professionalization and Marginalization of International Relations Field", *Outside the Beltway* March 27, 2012. http://www.outsidethebeltway.com/professionali zation-and-marginalization-of-international-relations-field/ (accessed: 12/03/2014).

are, to a comparatively great degree, exerted in their regional context". This is a common assumption in a myriad of productions on the concept and role of regional powers.[24] Differently put, "regional power is a state that projects influence in a specific region... The regional powers display comparatively high military, economic, political, and ideological capabilities, enabling them to shape their regional security agenda. Overall, the terms "middle powers" and "regional powers" convey capacity, hierarchy, influence, and aspiration".[25] Thus, regional power is a kind of great power but limited to the region of its origin. However, David Mitchell departs from the understanding that only states are units for analysis and brings in non-state actors that connect elites present in states (decision-makers, S.J.) but also transcend them.[26] It is what other authors call "transnational capital" or "transnational class/corporate interests". Obviously, transnational capital plays a growing role as states, including the US, try to accommodate its demands. In regional politics, transnational interests at global and regional level certainly do have some role, bigger or smaller. Still, for the purpose of the research on Israel, it is enough to analyse what it as a state unit promotes and what its interests are in the region, whether they rely on elites and other non-state actors in the region and outside of it. Martin Beck and Detlef Nolte listed literature on the concept of regional power.[27] What seems to be the general characteristic is that there may be more than one regional power, just as there are more great powers at the world level. For example, it is hard to claim that South Africa is a sub-Saharan regional power and Nigeria

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[24] Martin Beck, "Regional Politics in a Highly Fragmented Region: Israel's Middle East Policies", *GIGA Research Programme: Violence, Power and Security*, GIGA WP 89/2008, (Hamburg: September 2008), 8.

[25] Şuhnaz Yilmaz, "Middle Powers and Regional Powers", *Oxford Bibliographies Online*, 27 September 2017, https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199 743292/obo-9780199743292-0222.xml#obo-9780199743292-0222-bibItem-0010 (accessed August 24, 2021).

[26] David Mitchell, "Regional Power? Yes, but What Kind?", Paper Presented at International Studies Association Asia-Pacific, (Hong Kong: June 25-27, 2016).

[27] But extensively also on regions and regionalism. See: Detlef Nolte, "How to compare regional powers: analytical concepts and research topics", 881-901. Martin Beck, "Regional Politics in a Highly Fragmented Region: Israel's Middle East Policies", in: *Regional Leadership in the Global System. Ideas, Interests and Strategies of Regional Powers*, ed. Daniel Flemes and Detlef Nolte, (London: Ashgate 2010), 127-148.

is not. To claim that China is a regional power is quite limited. On the one hand, a great power, such as the United States in North America, can also be a regional power. But China, which is undoubtedly a great power, is unable to fulfil the criteria for regional power set forth by Nolte, Flemes, and Beck, especially regarding the acceptance of leadership. Ponižilova, in order to define it, tries to establish the actors' "position within the regional power hierarchy reflecting the distribution of power among countries in the given subsystem". She defines regional power as

> "a state that is an integral part of a distinctive, geographically defined region; that in a regional context, reaches a relative preponderance of material resources; that exerts real influence on other actors and thereby influences the regional policy; that realizes its power potential and aims to become a regional leader and that won the recognition of its power status by at least some states in the region and, if necessary, also by world powers".[28]

In addition to the ideational resources favoured by the mentioned authors and partially accepted by Ponižilova, Estradi admits that regional power may pursue different strategies, from highly aggressive to extremely cooperative, which she defines as imperial, hegemonic, and leading.[29] This is in line with the behaviour of great powers in the global order. This division does not necessarily mean that powers do not employ sets of strategies to achieve their goals in international relations, but the prevalence should be the crucial distinction. **Yet, the very distinction should probably be applied only** in certain periods. In that sense, China would be a leading great power, and Germany could be a leading regional power in Central Europe. In order to avoid further ambiguities, it is helpful to propose a minimalistic definition of a regional power that partially fits into the previous mentioned definitions but leaves enough space in order to determine the position of the studied actor in regional power relations. Thus, a regional power is a state (or other actor) able to exert influence in the region with comparatively higher military, economic, and political capabilities and a higher ability to employ them than most other actors

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[28] Martina Ponižilova, "Delimitation of Regional Powers in The Middle East in The 21th and 21st Century", *Medzinárodné Vzťahy / Journal of International Relations*, (Faculty of International Relations, University of Economics in Bratislava), 2016, Volume XIV, Issue 2, 163.

[29] Sandra Destradi, "Regional powers and their strategies: empire, hegemony, and leadership", *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (October 2010), 904.

in the same region. In that vein, it could be said that the Middle East has several regional powers. Regions can be dominated by one hegemonic power, but not necessarily, as already proposed by Lake (as mentioned previously).

Finally, about power. There are mostly two ways to understand it. Either by comparison of stable categories, such as size of territory, economy, population, military and research size and expenditure, or relationally, which is substantively more suited for the meaning of power, which derives from the Latin verb possum (*possum, potes, posse, potui*), meaning essentially ability and only later arriving at the more contemporary meaning referring to influence others to act according to your own intentions. To qualify power relatively means judging relations between two or more actors. Yet, even the first category, assumed as stable, is also relational as it relates to the same characteristics of other units with which it is compared. The nature of power as relational means that it is essentially a qualitative category and can be understood also by employing *phronesis*.

ISRAEL AS A MIDDLE EAST REGIONAL POWER

Israel is territorially and demographically small. Still, one could not but agree with the assertion of Butenschøn, expressed in 1992:

> "...no scholar would deny that Israel today, directly or indirectly, has a political-military strength that at least balances its regional Arab contenders and that it plays a role in global politics which is more important than the size and wealth of this country should suggest. Israel is not only the most privileged 'client state' of the United States (in terms of economic and military assistance, strategic cooperation, and trade), but is also involved on its own on the African continent, from Ethiopia to South Africa, as well as in Latin American countries".[30]

Gabellini enumerates a vast gama of examples of Israeli involvement in many crises and wars across the region (but also outside of it).[31] But Jankovic

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[30] Nils A. Butenschøn, "Israel as a Regional Great Power: Paradoxes of Regional Alienation", in *Regional Great Powers in International Politics*, ed. Iver B. Neumann (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), 96.

[31] Giacomo Gabellini, *Israele. Geopolitica di una piccola, grande potenza*, (Cesena: Arianna Editrice 2017), 352.

goes further to point out that not only AIPAC, or the Israel lobby in general, managed to impose or garner support for many US decisions in the Middle East, as Gabellini also showed, but he claims, based on many examples, like testimonies of high-ranking US government officials and after examining the practise of bilateral relations between two countries, that US regional policy has followed Israeli guidance. This leadership of Israel over US regional politics started early, at least since the death of Kennedy. He argues that the strength of the Israeli lobby was already significant in the first decades of the 20th century, but after the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, it became for the first time dominant in shaping US Middle East foreign policy, and continued so with pause until the presidency of Johnson.[32]

That Israel is a Middle Eastern regional power capable of challenging or contrasting with its neighbours militarily has been proven in several Arab-Israeli wars. It is the only nuclear power in the region with at least 400 nuclear-armed missiles.[33] Israel is the world leader in research and development with 4,95% of GDP yearly expenditure, it is western country in the Middle Eastern world. In the region UAE is second with 1.3% of GDP expenditure on R&D, Turkey is third with 0.96% and Egypt with 0.72% of GDP is at the fourth place.[34] It has around 170,000 personnel in active service in its armed forces, plus some 8,000 in paramilitaries. Its army is well trained and constantly engaged in military actions and covert operations involving special units, the navy, and air forces.[35] Site *Global Fire Power* puts Israel in third place as a military force in the Middle East and North Africa, but Egypt could hardly be ahead of it. Only Turkey and Iran could compete to be militarily above Israel's capabilities in that field, being highly trained and probed in wars (in Syria and Iraq).

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[32] Слободан Јанковић, *Блискоисточна криза: рат без мира*, (Middle East Crisis: war without peace) (Београд: Catena Mundi 2019), 291-93, 319-327, 329.

[33] Gabellini, *Israele. Geopolitica di una piccola, grande potenza*, 81-84.

[34] According to data for the year 2018 from: "Research and development expenditure - Country rankings", *The global economy*, https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/research_and_development/ and for Iran data: "Research and development expenditure (% of GDP) – Middle East", *Index Mundi*, https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/indicators/GB.XPD.RSDV.GD.ZS/map/middle-east (accessed 29/8/2021).

[35] Data on manpower are from the site *Global Fire Power*, https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=israel (accessed 29/8/2021).

The Jewish state operates in the multipolar region (if regarded as a structure *per se*).[36] The Arab Spring did not alter the regional structure in the sense that it remained multipolar. Prior to the waves of regime changes and the mini-world war in Syria, with western intervention in Libya and regional wars in Yemen and Iraq, Turkey, Egypt, Iran, and Saudi Arabia were considered regional powers and still are.[37]

For the argument of acceptance of leadership and cooperation, which are simplified in our definition as the ability to influence other actors, a good example is the Abraham Accords between Israel, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates. However, prior to that, during the Netanyahu administration, Israel sought to reopen embassies or establish entirely new diplomatic missions on the African continent. It renewed ties not only with Arab Muslim countries but also with the Republic of Guinea and started relations with Chad.[38] Not only that Israel did not fulfil any of the requests of Arab countries presented in the United Nations, requests and proposals of the Arab League or the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation regarding Palestine, but in the end, it was recognised first by Egypt (after the Camp David Accords in 1978), then by Jordan (in 1994) and finally by the UAE and Bahrain (in 2020). Israel used the so-called peace process as a tool of cooperation with the United States to alienate its regional adversaries Iran, Iraq (until 2003), Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas, while continuing to build new houses and settlements in the occupied territories. Israel managed to obstruct the peace process and sideline the Palestine issue in order to develop ties with actors who previously had anti-Israeli standing (from Saudi Arabia to the UAE). Furthermore, the Israeli president was participating, through satellite connection, at the security conference in Abu Dhabi in November 2013, addressing the "Iranian threat".[39] At least since 2016, Israel has cooperated with the Emirates by conducting

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[36] Martina Poníživlová, "Delimitation of Regional Powers in The Middle East in The 21th and 21st Century", 158.

[37] Ibid, 167.

[38] Raphael Ahren, "Boosting diplomatic drive to Africa, Israel opens embassy in Rwanda", *Times of Israel*, 1 April 2019, https://www.timesofisrael.com/boosting-diplomatic-drive-to-africa-israel-opens-embassy-in-rwanda/ (accessed: 15/4/2020).

[39] Thomas L. Friedman, "Let's Make a Deal", *New York Times*, November 19, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/20/opinion/friedman-lets-make-a-deal.html, (accessed: 01/12/2013).

secret joint air force exercises.[40] Secret cooperation with Iraqi Kurds is not official but has been referenced among those researching or operating in the Middle East for years.[41] Israel is finally, along with Turkey, the only regional country able to conduct military operations and actions on other states' territory without any consequences (attacks on objectives in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq). Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and eventually Egypt are also interventionist states in the region, but they are doing so with an official invitation by the government of the country, or at least by some authority (the government in Aden invited Saudi Arabia and the UAE to intervene in the Yemen civil war, and Iraq and Syria called upon Iran for military help). Given all the mentioned facts, Israel is undoubtedly the Middle Eastern regional power.

ISRAELI REGIONAL OBJECTIVES AFTER 2006

The "Unfinished War"[42] in the summer of 2006 between Israel and Hezbollah was fought in the atmosphere of the regional and global campaign against the perceived threat of the "Shia crescent" announced by the Jordanian king Abdullah in 2004.[43] Some of the reserves for the religious basis of political actions (in this case, the Shia background of Iranian political expansion) are founded on ideological bias ruling in much of Western academia, which refuses to study this for fear of being called Orientalists (or recently, for fear of being called racists).[44] Early announcement of the said

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[40] Theodore Karasik and Jacopo Spezia Depretto, "Enemies with Benefits: How Israel and Gulf Monarchies Work Together", *Fair Observer*, May 03, 2019, https://www.fairobserver.com/region/middle_east_north_africa/israel-gulf-cooperation-council-gulf-news-headlines-arab-world-news-80384/ (accessed: 2/9/2021).

[41] As I testified in many talks I had with officials from different Islamic countries in the region.

[42] Jonathan Spyer, "Lebanon 2006: Unfinished War", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (March 2008), 69-82. Spyer misrepresented the war, trying to minimize the deployment of the Israeli ground army in order to justify the inability of the Israeli army to achieve victory. The result of the war was the strengthening of Hezbollah, both in national and regional popularity and militarily. See in: Janković, "Middle East Crisis: war without peace", 123.

[43] Robin Wright and Peter Baker, "Iraq, Jordan See Threat to Election From Iran", *The Washington Post*, Dec. 8, 2004.

[44] The French political geographer, Fabrice Balanche, is himself a victim of this ideologically driven politics in academia. Part of the problem can be understood by reading the open

Shia "menace" fitted into the plan of part of the American elite to subvert regional order in the greater Middle East and overthrow governments or wage war on seven countries.[45] But the overall campaign against Iran and its regional partners and allies is also part of the Israeli regional policy that has become more and more clear since the Second Lebanon War in 2006.

Meanwhile, an old regional partner entered into a rift with the Jewish state after an incident in which Israeli commandos killed Turkish citizens on board of the Mavi Marmara, a Turkish ship on an official humanitarian mission to break the naval blockade of the Gaza open-air prison in 2010.[46] Despite the fact that several initiatives to resolve the dispute have been launched in the interim, the two countries remain verbally antagonistic. Recently, Turkish president Erdogan asked for a firm reaction from the UN and Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, saying, "If we do not immediately stop Israel's aggression in Palestine, and especially in Jerusalem, tomorrow everyone will find themselves the target of this brutal mentality"[47]. Still, this remains a verbal altercation.

Previously, Israel has concentrated efforts on appeasing neighbouring Arab countries or trying to divide them (as is the case with Syria and Lebanon) in parallel with obstructing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The fall of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq and the US-led occupation since 2003 destabilised another Muslim secular regime in the region that was also a sponsor of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and a political ally of the Palestinian cause. The Palestinians lost other partners with the subsequent fall of Tunisian and Libyan leadership in the so-called Arab Spring.

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letter signed by 100 French scholars and previous hysterical announcements. See: "Open letter: a response from the '100' French scholars", *Open Democracy*, 25 November 2020. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/open-letter-response-100-french-scholars/ (accessed: 10/09/2021).

[45] "Wes Clark- America's Foreign Policy «Coup»", 05.11.2007, *Youtube*, http://www.youtube.com/watch ?v=TY2DKzastu8 (accessed: 16/05/2011). Taken from: Janković, "Middle East Crisis: war without peace", 150.

[46] Dan Arbell, "The U.S.-Turkey-Israel Triangle", *The Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings*, Analysis paper, Number 34, October (2014): 1, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/USTurkeyIsrael-TriangleFINAL.pdf (accessed: 12/9/2021).

[47] https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/turkey-will-not-accept-israeli-persecution-even-if-entire-world-ignores-it/2241343

As the Palestinian issue was waning, Israel could concentrate more on other regional issues, regarding the implementation of the old strategy. In other words, as a Middle Eastern power, Israel uses coercion and cooperation in order to influence regional order. Outlines of never published but discernible strategic policy objectives of the Jewish state could be understood from the fragments of Moshe Sharett's diary, from Yinon's plan, and generally from Israeli actions in the region. The overall strategy would be twofold: 1) appease regional countries and form alliances with them, and 2) weaken regional actors who may pose a threat to the political ambition of securing the Promised Land—Eretz Israel (biblical concept of the Land of Israel). Securing the Promised Land essentially means annexing most of the Western Bank (Judea and Samaria).

Previously, as published by former Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs employee Oded Yinon, the Jewish state was trying to become a regional power.[48] In the meantime, as already demonstrated, it achieved that objective. The second part of the strategy is essentially a division of Syria and Iraq. Finally, as Iran became the main sponsor of anti-Israeli or non-Israeli affiliated actors in the region, it became a similar objective of Israeli strategy as Iraq and Syria were before.

By signing US-sponsored accords with Arab states like the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, Israel achieves two objectives: 1) it isolates those in the Islamic world who are actively opposing the Jewish state, in particular Iran. Indeed, as already noticed, "security alignment between Israel and Arab states aims to create a firewall against expanding Iranian influence" and 2) it creates an additional regional alliance centred upon Jerusalem-Tel Aviv.

The birth of Israel was marked by war, as is the case of many countries. But defeated enemies in the 1948/49 Arab-Israeli War did not perish. Secured peace with Egypt relaxed Israel in the West, as it is the largest neighbour, which is also the major Arab country in terms of population and army size. Besides Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq were the most serious military threats. But Jordan was founded as a British creation, and it kept strong bonds with the West until today, and was thus inclined to have, if not good, then at least less worse relations with the Jewish state than Damascus or Baghdad did.

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[48] Israel Shahak, "The Zionist Plan for the Middle East", *Association of Arab-American University Graduates, Inc*. Belmont, Massachusetts, 1982 Special Document No. 1.

Gabellini refers to different authors in sustaining that Jordan, almost since the 1940s, did not intend to annihilate the Jewish state but had limited territorial ambitions.[49] In any case, after Jordan allowed the formation of a Palestinian delegation in peace talks, it was clear that the Hashemite kingdom was heading toward an agreement with the Jewish state.

The Western occupation of Iraq in 2003 was followed by an internal sectarian war among Shia, Sunni, Kurds, and Turkmens. Even the episode of the ascendance and later of havoc and breakdown of the so-called Islamic State (best known as ISIS) additionally endangered Iraq, which thus does not represent, for the time being, the threat to Israel. The multinational war in Syria[50], which is partially civil and partially military, fits perfectly into Israeli strategies, together with the mentioned internal conflicts and confrontations in Iraq. Yinon publicly propagated the division of regional Islamic countries into smaller states, which would then become satellites of Israel.[51] Israeli government members planned in 1954 the division of Lebanon and the creation of the Christian satellite country.[52] Rolling back Syria from Lebanon and changing the regime in Baghdad were explicit in the text of the document prepared as a sort of foreign policy strategy for Israel made by US neocons (partially of Jewish origin in the US) for the first government led by Benyamin Netanyahu in 1996. Besides that, the redefinition of the Middle East was timidly announced.[53]

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[49] Gabellini, *Israele. Geopolitica di una piccola, grande potenza*, 45. However, this is just one of the interpretations of the engagement of the Jordan Army founded by British military officer Glubb Pasha (John Bagot Glubb). Glubb commanded the Jordan Arab Legion in the period 1939-1956.

[50] Slobodan Janković, "South and East Mediterranean power struggle: cases of Libya and Syria", *Review of International Affairs*, Apr-Jun 2020, Vol. 71 Issue 1178, 80.

[51] Israel Shahak, "The Zionist Plan for the Middle East", 6-9, 11.

[52] Ibid, 3.

[53] "… removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq — an important Israeli strategic objective in its own right — as a means of foiling Syria's regional ambitions". "And Damascus fears that the 'natural axis' with Israel on one side, central Iraq and Turkey on the other, and Jordan in the center, would squeeze and detach Syria from the Saudi Peninsula. For Syria, this could be the prelude to a redrawing of the map of the Middle East, which would threaten Syria's territorial integrity. Since Iraq's future could affect the strategic balance in the Middle East profoundly, it would be understandable that Israel has an interest in

Iran in Israel`s focus

If Israel transformed conflict with Egypt into peace and cooperation, it did so through US mediation and in exchange for land (liberation of the previously occupied Sinai Peninsula) and economic gains (US yearly support and later through Qualified industrial zones-QIZ and their guaranteed export to the US). It achieved peace with Jordan, in exchange for guarantees that were, since 1996, transformed into concrete economic advantages too (QIZ again).[54] Still, both Arab countries did not officially renounce their backing of the establishment of the Arab state in Palestine, but ceased to actively oppose Israel's policies and occupation.[55]

The conflict between Israel and Iran evolved from an ideological standoff that erupted after the Islamic Revolution in Persia, to a military one with the Iranian support of first Amal and then Hezbollah in Lebanon. The American-led occupation of Iraq, followed by the civil war in that country, has emphasized internal divisions in the Mesopotamian country. Iran trained and supported many brigades inside the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) — paramilitary organisations in Iraq, among them Kata'ib Hezbollah and several political forces in its western neighbour. Together with political organisations, various smaller and bigger armed organisations are securing Iranian influence in Iraq, though with differing levels of autonomy.[56]

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supporting the Hashemites…"are probably the most illustrative of the intentions of the authors of this document: *"A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm"*, Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies 1996, http://www.iasps.org/strat1.htm, In the year 2011 this address was still valid, but in the meantime this Israeli think-tank ceased to exist in 2017. One of new e-addresses is http://www.ism-italia.org/wp-content/uploads/Institute-for-Advanced-Strategic-and-Political-Studies-1996-A-Clean-Break-A-New-Strategy-for-Securing-the-Realm.pdf (accessed: 5/09/2021).

[54] Daniel Rosenblatt, "Peace and Prosperity: Israel's Qualifying Industrial Zone Agreements with Jordan and Egypt", *Global Trade and Customs Journal*, N. 15, Issue 3, (2020): 150-158, https://kluwerlawonline.com/journalarticle/Global+Trade+and+Customs+Journal/15.3/GTCJ2020019

[55] Of course, in Israel's view, it is a liberation of Judea and Samaria.

[56] On Iraqi Hezbollah and other PMF see: Tamer Badawi, "How Can Iran's Raisi Engage with Iraq's Defiant Paramilitaries?", ISPI, 15 June 2021. https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/how-can-irans-raisi-engage-iraqs-defiant-paramilitaries-30864 (accessed:

Since 2010, the United States has been introducing sanctions against Iran and has been pressing other countries to do the same. But ever since Iran managed to sign the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with UN Security Council member states plus Germany in 2015, Netanyahu has been trying to subvert it.[57] The Trump administration showed discontinuity with previous efforts to reach a compromise with the Iranians through the US unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA. Recent changes in governments in the United States and Israel in 2021 raise the prospect of an American return to the JCPOA. But new conditions demanded by Washington make it difficult for Iran to accept them. It is still a question if there is good will to return to the agreement or if it is only a pretext for more diplomatically aggressive US policy on Tehran. Elaborating on an eventual Iranian refusal to accept additional conditionality, new Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennet is proposing a joint strategy with the US against Iran.[58]

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Definitions of regional power vary, and some of them are not applicable in the real world. Israel is a peculiar regional power due to its small size in terms of territory and population. Still, the signing of the Abraham Accords affirmed the role of Israel as a regional power. Jerusalem managed to achieve substantial diplomatic goals by signing peace agreements with four Arab countries in one year: Bahrein, the UAE, Sudan, and Morocco. Additionally, Israel succeeded in isolating its adversaries in the Islamic world. Besides cooperation, in this period, Israel continues to use coercion by conducting hundreds, if not more, of air-attacks and other air military missions in Syria

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18/08/2021); and in particular Michael Knights, "Back into the Shadows? The Future of Kata'ib Hezbollah and Iran's Other Proxies in Iraq", *CTC Sentinel*, Volume 13, Issue 10, (October 2020): 1-22.

[57] Udi Evental, "Israel's counter-Iran strategy: Significant accomplishments, but a negative trend", *MEI@75* June 23, 2021, https://www.mei.edu/publications/israels-counter-iran-strategy-significant-accomplishments-negative-trend (accessed: 14/9/2021).

[58] "Bennett seeking joint US-Israel strategy on Iran if nuclear talks fail — report", *Times of Israel*, 13 August 2021, https://www.timesofisrael.com/bennett-seeking-joint-us-israel-strategy-on-iran-if-nuclear-talks-fail-report/ (accessed: 6/10/2021).

and Lebanon in the observed period.[59] It pushes Western sanctions against Iran, Hezbollah, and Syria, by relying on its main partner, the United States. Secret ground operations cannot be documented at the moment, but we can assume that they are carried on, having in mind the history of engagement of the Israeli military special forces outside the country. **Thus, Israel fulfils the criteria we set in the proposed definition of a regional power.**

The Israeli Middle Eastern strategy of securing the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea is substantially unchanged, though Iran remains the main challenger to its regional interests. The role of Iran in contesting Israel's interests is growing as other actors, such as Iraq, Syria, and partially Libya, are weakened. At the same time, Israel managed to further cooperation with Arab monarchies, from Jordan to Saudi Arabia's court and Gulf states by forming an informal coalition against the perceived Shia crescent. This helped Israel gain acceptance not only as a partner, but also as a regional power, in the sense that it shapes regional policy and has other regional entities agree with or follow its lead.

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[59] Suleiman Al-Khalidi, "Israel intensifying air war in Syria against Iranian encroachment", *Reuters* April 22, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-intensifying-air-war-syria-against-iranian-encroachment-2021-04-22/ (accessed: 13/9/2021).

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IRANIAN ARCHITECTURE OF THE MIDDLE EAST[1]

Vuk Lazić[2]
Danilo Babić[3]

Abstract: The Middle East region has always been a politically significant and unstable area, with the permanent scramble of various regional and global actors. Due to circumstances at the international, regional, and domestic level, we can perceive consolidation and a growing tendency of the Iranian regional presence. The cultural and historical foundations of Iran's regional position date back to the distant past. Simultaneously, the geopolitical, economic, and military prerequisites for its modern rise have been present for several decades, especially after the Arab Spring.

After the Islamic revolution, the Iran-Iraq war, and international interventions against Iraq, the Arab Spring stood out as one of the most complex challenges for Iran, which in certain phases threatened to lead to its complete geopolitical and economic isolation. Nevertheless, an important role in the hard-won strategic victories in Iraq and Syria has enabled Iran to extend its multidimensional presence along the historically important geopolitical corridor that stretches from Iran-Iraq-Syria to Lebanon.

After examining the strategic determinants and the regional conjuncture as preconditions and the basis of Iran's regional presence, the article clarifies

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[2] Research Associate, Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade. vuk.lazic@diplomacy.bg.ac.rs.

[3] Research Associate, Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade. danilo.babic@diplomacy.bg.ac.rs.

Iran's vision of the Middle East and its dynamic engagement in the region. Iran's activities are first and foremost aimed at political and military consolidation, and then towards economic and infrastructural connectivity among the countries of the region. In this context, special emphasis was placed on Iran's relations with the key Middle Eastern countries and global actors without neglecting the internal and regional restrictions imposed on Iran in the realisation of its foreign policy goals.

Keywords: the Middle East, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Israel, China.

INTERNATIONAL, REGIONAL AND DOMESTIC PREREQUISITES OF IRAN'S GROWING POWER IN THE MIDDLE EAST

In a series of significant international events and problems that have occupied the interest of the scientific community over the past decade, a group of issues related to the prerequisites and consequences of the growing power of regional actors is particularly important. Some of these actors are characterised as challengers to the US hegemony. In this context, the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran are attracting special attention, especially in the Middle East. In the research dedicated to Iran, tense American-Iranian relations, the issue of Iran's nuclear programme and agreements (JCPOE), and UN and US sanctions occupy a prominent place. Due to the complex environment in the international arena, several regional circumstances, and a decisive strategic direction over the past decade, Iran has come into a position to more actively and confidently project its extensive state and national interests in the region of the Middle East. In addition to ancient civilization-historical themes and extremely important geopolitical settings, the sources and causes of the rise of Iran's regional powers in the Middle East can be found at the domestic, regional, and international level.[4]

Historical, civilizational, and cultural heritage, geopolitical position, demographic potential, and natural resources have greatly contributed to the

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[4] In recent years, there have been a great number of academic articles and studies that analyse the impact of the nature of the international system and the characteristics of the strategic environment on Iran's regional power and foreign policy. See: Javid Karimi Nerbin and Hamid Sarmadi, "New systemic order and foreign policy strategies of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Middle East", International Journal of Political Science and Governance, Vol. 3, no. 1, 2021, pp. 04–11.

stability and capacity of Iran's regional power. Internally, the most significant change was the Islamic Revolution (1979), which, through the content and form of a special Islamic heritage and teachings, promoted the imperatives of economic sovereignty, political stability, military power, indigenous technological development, and a stronger and more independent regional position. On the other hand, the revolution structured social divisions and produced the conditions for internal political competition, most often between religious and political leadership and liberal and conservative political forces.

Although the unipolar structure of the post-Cold War order has produced a variety of serious constraints on the strengthening of Iran's power in the Middle East, regional circumstances (beginning in the 1980s) have paradoxically weakened several of Iran's regional rivals and opened a wide and uncertain space for defining and pursuing more active Iranian policies towards the Middle East. The dissolution of the USSR significantly decreased the Soviet-Iranian antagonism and created new preconditions for the development of strategic Iranian-Russian relations. In the same period, a new political elite grew up in Turkey, inclined to strengthen all types of cooperation with Iran. The culmination of favourable regional circumstances was (probably unexpected) the intervention in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), which ended the rule of anti-Iranian regimes in these countries. Following these regional changes, the idea of Iran as a regional power is increasingly emerging, accompanied by geopolitical concepts of "rebuilding the Persian Empire" and establishing a "Shiite crescent", usually planned in the area covering Iran through Iraq and Syria to Lebanon and Palestine.

However, far-reaching and broad UN sanctions, strained US-Iranian relations during the presidential terms of George W. Bush and Barack Obama, and a strengthened US regional military presence, have significantly limited the penetration of Iranian influence into the newly created regional vacuum. Moreover, the war in Lebanon (2006), economic sanctions, and the numerous announcements of military intervention against Iran were important aspects of a broader strategy to curb its regional power. According to the Syrian and Iranian ruling elites, and even several Lebanese and Iraqi political actors, the most intense and significant episode of this strategy was the Arab Spring. The processes that started in 2011 were characterized, among other things, as a carefully designed and consistently implemented plan that would primarily

limit Iran's regional power and then lead to its political and economic isolation. The realisation of this endeavuor included extensive, diverse, and asymmetric activities in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq, aimed at weakening the military and political strength of the Hezbollah movement, removing Bashar al-Assad, and establishing an anti-Iranian government in Iraq.

After a decade of intense confrontation on many different levels, followed by bloody civil wars in Iraq and Syria, it can be concluded that Iran, in cooperation with the Russian Federation, Syrian authorities, and local political and military actors, has thwarted the key intentions of the Arab Spring. On the other hand, Iran has paid dearly for this success internally, primarily economically and politically, as well as in the aspect of what can be classified as "regional overstrain".

Iran's strategic environment has changed significantly in recent years, primarily in the area of emerging opportunities and threats. One can assume that the US presence in the region most directly contributes to the sensitivity of Iran's strategic environment. Yet, based on a number of indicators, we may notice that the US hegemonic regional position is weakening, but the US still maintains a range of tools and instruments to influence the regional conjuncture. Having in mind the dilemma of the future architecture of this region in the conditions of the intensive presence of regional and non-regional actors, this article aims to analyse the basic features of the Iranian vision of the Middle East and, consequently, the current dynamics and perspectives of its political, military, economic, infrastructural, and cultural influence and connectivity in the region.

IRAN'S VISION OF A (NEW) MIDDLE EAST

After the stabilisation of security and political conditions on the Syrian and Iraqi battlefields, scientific discussions were intensified on the topics of the future constitutional, legal, and social organisation of these countries and the new regional architecture of the Middle East. In this context, it is necessary to consider the complex vision of Iran as one of the most powerful countries in the Middle East, which has a significant increase in influence on the overall regional situation. Iran's vision of the Middle East is a legacy of long historical development and a series of civilizational, religious, political, and economic determinants. Although the Iranian vision throughout its

turbulent history has largely adapted to international, regional, and domestic circumstances, it has largely retained a set of stable and enduring factors. The fact that modern Iran, despite a series of social and personal changes, still rests heavily on ancient and rich Persian culture in terms of values and ideas, allows a certain historical continuity and civilizational depth of its geopolitical position at the regional and global level. On the other hand, there are indications that Iran seeks to formulate and implement a neo-Persian or pan-Persian doctrine, based on the restoration of political, economic, and cultural presence in the former empire, from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf.[5]

In the academic literature, the Iranian geopolitical vision is most often associated with the notions of pan-Islamism, Panshism, anti-Westernism, anti-imperialism, and anti-Zionism.[6] Unlike Western authors, who frequently refer to the expansionist and exclusive concept of the "Shiite crescent," most Iranian scholars believe that the reason for the reduction of a complex and tolerant Iranian vision is solely based on this concept of the "Shiite crescent," and that it is political, not scientific.[7] Based on the analysis of a large number of foreign policy decisions, a recently published study identified the most important factors in contemporary Iranian foreign policy. These are: geopolitical structure, natural resources, ethnic and religious differences, government, ideology (Shi'ism), and the international and regional environment.[8]

From the aspect of strategic mentality, the "psychological effect of occupation" left the deepest psychological consequences on Iran's foreign

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[5] The growth of the Iranian military presence in the region, trade, and investment activity and the developed cultural engagement in the protection and promotion of the Persian heritage have encouraged many Western analysts to launch the thesis about the formation of a new Persian Empire. See more in: Charles Krauthammer, Iran's emerging empire, The Washington Post, 22.01.2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/charles-krauthammer-irans-emerging-empire/2015/01/22/c3098336-a269-11e4-903f-9f2faf7cd9fe_story.html, accessed: 20.08.2021; Kayhan Barzegar, Persia is back, but in a different form, 28.01.2019, Atlantic Council, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/persia-is-back-but-in-a-different-form/, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[6] Vali Golmohammadi, „The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Prospects for change and continuity", All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2019, p. 93.

[7] Anar Aliyev and Dr.K.M. Ashifa, „Internal and External Factors Determining Foreign Policy of Iran: Prospects and Perspectives", Journal of Contemporary Issues in Business and Government, Vol. 27, No. 3, 2021, pp. 1158–1167.

[8] Ibidem.

policy-makers, especially after the Islamic Revolution and the Iraq-Iran war. The main characteristic of this phenomenon is the immanent and deeply structured distrust of the intentions and policies of Western actors.[9] The consequences of the "occupation effect" are reflected in Iran's turn towards its own potential and its firm insistence on the principle of sovereignty. In conceptual and historical terms, the Iranian "effect of occupation" corresponds to the "Sèvres Syndrome" of modern Turkey, manifested through a special sense of geopolitical isolation.[10]

Masoud Kazemzadeh rightly notes that the heterogeneous structure of the population, made up of numerous ethnolinguistic communities, and Shi'ism, as the second-largest branch of Islam, occupy a very important place in Iran's foreign policy.[11] In this light, it is worth pointing out a certain paradox in the Iranian vision, which draws its specific values and ideological worldview from Shi'ism while at the same time uncompromisingly and continuously insisting on the idea of Islamic solidarity and unity. Isolation from most of the Sunni world increases Iran's sensitivity to the problems of Muslim communities throughout the Middle East and worldwide. This increased sensitivity leads to the paradox of levitating between pan-Shi'ism and pan-Islamism in Iran's foreign policy, which is often neglected by many authors who tend to reduce the Iranian vision to either concept, ignoring the complex paradox. This paradox sometimes leads to unbalanced decisions in Iran's foreign policy.

In the political dimension, Iran's vision of the Middle East is based on the general principles of sovereignty, political, economic, and technological independence, the preservation of territorial integrity, and non-interference of non-regional actors in regional affairs. Due to its extreme internal heterogeneity and complex regional circumstances, Iran shows a high degree of sensibility and understanding towards the question of ethnic and religious diversity. Although the statements of the highest state officials insist on

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[9] Mahan Abedin, "The Domestic Determinants of Iranian Foreign Policy: Challenges to Consensus.", Strategic Analysis, Vol. 35, No.4, 2011, p. 623.

[10] For this reason, it can be assumed that these similarities in strategic mentality represent one of the bridges of understanding and pillars of stability of the Turkish-Iranian relationship.

[11] Masoud Kazemzadeh, "Foreign policy decision making in Iran and the nuclear program.", Comparative Strategy, Vol. 36, No.3, 2017, pp. 198–214.

tolerance, inter-religious tolerance, and the fight against sectarianism, it can be seen that Shiite actors are the cornerstone of Iranian policy in the Middle East. The political and military dimensions of the Syrian war unequivocally demonstrate Iran's overriding reliance on Shiite actors.

Rivalry with Israel, the United States, and other Western actors is one of the most stable and dominant features of Iran's Middle East policy after the Islamic Revolution. However, it is necessary to point out that Iran's success in Middle Eastern affairs depends to a large extent on the quality of relations with these actors. Therefore, behind Iran's declaratively irreconcilable and firm stance towards these actors, there is often an increasingly pragmatic approach that deliberately and soberly considers the problems and possible solutions to the most important regional issues.[12] The complexity of the Iranian vision is most evident in the example of the policy towards the Kurdish factor in the Middle East. On the one hand, Iran seeks to establish strong political, economic, and cultural ties with Kurdish actors, especially Iraqi Kurds. On the other hand, Iran strongly opposes any move that would lead to the establishment of an independent Kurdish state.[13]

The new reality was formed in the Middle East based on strategic victory, the dire consequences of the Syrian and Iraqi wars, the announced US withdrawal from Iraq, the dynamics of Israeli-Palestinian relations, and Iran's

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[12] As an example of pragmatism and a certain contradiction in Iranian policy, some experts cite Iran's recent tacit consent to the appointment of Mustafa al-Kadhimi, one of the suspects in the assassination of senior Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps officer Qasem Soleimaniz as minister in Iraq's new government. Iran from anti-imperialist to imperialist again, Thierry Meyssan, Voltaire, 11.08.2020, https://www.voltairenet.org/article2106 95.html, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[13] Since the beginning of the Arab Spring, Iran has sought to maintain communication and develop relations with the Kurds in Iraq and Syria. However, after the announcement of the referendum on the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan (2017), Iran threatened to suspend political and economic relations with the Kurds and turn to creating a coalition with Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. Turkey would, if necessary, militarily defeat the proponents of this idea. After stabilizing the situation with the Kurdish factor in the Middle East, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif paid a significant visit to Erbil, during which, in addition to providing guarantees that Iraqi Kurdistan will not be the ground for an attack on Iran, both sides expressed a desire to continue developing relations. Iraqi Kurdistan's Soil Won't Be Used for Threatening Iran: Barzani, IFP, 28.04.2021, https://ifpnews.com/iraqi-kurdistans-soil-wont-be-used-for-threatening-iran-barzani, accessed: 20.08.2021.

broader geopolitical vision. Considering this new reality, we can identify six key dimensions of the Iranian vision of the (new) architecture of the Middle East:

1. Minimization of the (military) presence and influence of non-regional actors, especially the US and the UK in the Middle East;

2. Finding a modus vivendi with the Gulf States;

3. Continuous political, military, and economic support for pro-Iranian actors in the Middle East;

4. The military strengthening and political stabilisation of Syria and Iraq with the strengthening of the role of Hezbollah in the political life of Lebanon;

5. The development of cultural cooperation with Middle Eastern countries;

6. Facilitating the political, military, economic, and infrastructural integration of Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon alongside strategic cooperation with the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation, and to some extent with Turkey.

POLITICAL AND MILITARY INTEGRATION OF THE MIDDLE EAST

The post-Cold War order and the American effort to change the architecture of the Middle East did not directly affect Iran's interests in the initial stages because the US was primarily focused on Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. However, immediately after the intervention in Iraq (2003) and the war in Lebanon (2006), it became clear that soon enough, the issue of Iran's regional influence would occupy the very top of the US and its allies' agenda. In the following years, many variables that influence the conjuncture of the Middle East have changed. There was an increase in the US military presence in the region, limiting the role of Hezbollah in Lebanon, the gradual isolation of Syria, and the economic strengthening of the Gulf states. Furthermore, devastating trade sanctions and the threat of military intervention against Iran, as well as the continuous and unsuccessful attempts by the United States to "produce" or find an adequate interlocutor in the political sphere of Iran.

The Arab Spring (2011), as the most dramatic event in recent Middle East history, is a key process that has had the greatest impact on contemporary regional conjuncture and trends. The political, economic, and military engagement of the world's most important powers and regional actors has

drastically raised the stakes of the war in Syria and Iraq. After years of bloody conflicts, demographic and economic collapse, and engagement of maximum military efforts, Syria, Russia, and Iran, with significant financial support from China, won a strategic, but not a final victory. The echo of the decisive victories in Aleppo, Deir ez-Zor, and Abu Kamal, the restraint of the Kurds in the region, and the announcement of the withdrawal of the US from Iraq, had an echo in the new and forced approach of the US and its regional allies. The main goal of the new US strategy is aimed at prolonging and hindering military, economic, and infrastructural integration and political and financial consolidation in the Middle East, in which Iran has a notable, and often initial, role. This chapter provides an overview of Iran's results and planned activities in this area, considering some serious constraints it faces in this complex and delicate endeavor.

Syria has been and continues to be Iran's key, and often sole, ally in the Middle East over the last few decades. The alliance between the two countries is based on strong trust between political elites, agreement on strategic goals, and certain cultural and religious similarities.[14] The enormous military and economic assistance provided during the Arab Spring and continued diplomatic and political support for stabilising the situation in Syria, especially on the issue of preserving territorial integrity, the legitimacy of the presidential election, and debates about the new constitution, further strengthened strategic relations between the two countries.[15] Over the past

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[14] In the political dimension, both countries take almost identical positions on the Palestinian issue, the Lebanese problem, and key Islamist militant organizations. (Muslim Brotherhood, Al-Nusra Front/Jabhat Fatah al-Sham) and the role of Israel, the United States, and their allies in the Middle East. At the same time, Iran provides continuous and full support to the territorial integrity of Syria, which is confirmed by the statement of the President of Iran, Hassan Rouhani that Golan is part and parcel of the Syrian territories, Rasha Milhem, SANA, 06.04.2019, https://sana.sy/en/?p=162638, accessed: 20.08.2021. In addition, the fact that Syria's political, economic, and military elite are mainly members of the Shi'ite Alawite sect is an important bridge of mutual understanding and co-operation.

[15] Iran's support on the ground is primarily characterised by extensive and well-organized humanitarian aid, especially after the liberation of Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor. Iran sends 200 tonnes of aid to Eastern Aleppo, M.al-Frieh and H. Said, SANA, 03.10.2017, https://sana.sy/en/?p=115060, accessed: 20.08.2021; Iranian humanitarian aid convoy to the people in Deir Ezzor, 21.09.2017, SANA, https://sana.sy/en/?p=114302, accessed: 20. 08. 2021. Equally important as the entire war assistance is Iran's proposal to establish the International Fund for the Reconstruction of Syria. In the process of painstaking renewal

years, Iran has, at a very delicate moment, provided decisive support to the Syrian government in the arduous negotiations and then the tensions that followed with the Syrian Kurds, primarily in northeastern Syria.[16]

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard, Hezbollah, and other pro-Iranian militias had significant military engagement in the battles along the Lebanese border (Al-Zabadani) and the liberation of Aleppo and eastern Syria.[17] The consolidation of Iran's military presence paved the way for the Syrian Arab

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of Syria's infrastructure, which in a sense has already begun, significant assistance is expected from Iran. Khaji: Iran suggests establishing International Fund for reconstructing Syria, Baraa Ali and Mazen Eyon, SANA, 11.11.2020, https://sana.sy/en/?p=209615, accessed: 20.08.2021. In that context, Syria and Iran have signed agreements and memoranda on infrastructure reconstruction in recent years. One of the most important programmes signed in 2019, emphasised the provision of benefits for the establishment of Iranian-Syrian companies in charge of the reconstruction of housing units and public infrastructure. The following year (2020), a memorandum was signed which envisages the rapid construction of residential suburbs, the renovation of water treatment plants, and the construction and renovation of facilities for the production of electricity. Syria, Iran to enhance cooperation in infrastructure and housing domains, MHD Ibrahim and Mazen Eyon, SANA, 27.08.2020, https://sana.sy/en/?p=201335, accessed: 20.08.2021; Syria, Iran ink executive program on joint cooperation in public services and housing, Gh.A.Hassoun, SANA, 26.11.2019, https://sana.sy/en/?p=179306, accessed: 20.08.2021. Iran was among the first countries to congratulate Bashar al-Assad on his victory in the presidential election, while in a recent meeting with the President of the Islamic Shura Council, Assad reiterated that Iran is a key partner and sided with and supported the Syrian people in the terrorist war. President al-Assad: Iran is key partner to Syria, coordination in war against terrorism gave positive results, Bushra Dabin and Mazen Eyon, SANA, 28.07.2021, https://sana.sy/en/?p=243464, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[16] On the one hand, Iran is in favour of negotiations between the Syrian government and the Kurds, while on the other hand, it strongly condemns any agreement between the Syrian Kurds and the United States, interpreting it as "a new step in plundering Syria's natural resources.", Iran: Deal between" QSD" militia and a U.S. company, a new step for looting Syrian natural resources, Bushra Dabin and Mazen Eyon, SANA, 04.08.2020, https://sana.sy/en/?p=199126, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[17] Iranian forces are currently stationed in about 700 Syrian settlements and control an area of about 17,000 km2. Their wartime engagement extended to the provinces of Latakia, Raqqa, Aleppo, Damascus, and Tadmur. Including numerous pro-Iranian militias, current estimates say that about 20,000 of (pro)Iranian fighters are on Syrian soil, while estimates of realized Iranian financial aid range from a few tens to hundreds of billions of dollars. Since its official involvement in the war (2013), the Iranian Revolutionary Guard has lost about 2,300 soldiers and several high-ranking officers.

Armed Forces' strategic victory over the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations. In order to strengthen the Syrian armed forces and mutual military cooperation, a number of military-technical agreements have been signed between the two countries.[18] Although Iran emphasises that the role of its military presence in Syria is solely advisory, the formation of numerous and various pro-Iranian armed formations suggests otherwise. The increase in the total number of its armed forces and the delivery of significant quantities of military equipment have produced strong reactions from neighbouring countries. In recent years, Israel's military activity against the Iranian armed forces in Syria has been accompanied by a series of airstrikes. In response to the ongoing Israeli attacks, Iran has resorted to a change in tactics that includes not only changing the deployment of the armed forces, but also the operational segment of its operations.[19] In that context, the position and behaviour of the Russian Federation are indicative. Russia has shown considerable restraint and even understanding during a series of Israeli airstrikes. The fact that there is no complete agreement between Russia and

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[18] The following agreements have been signed in this area: memoranda defining coordination in the field of internal security cooperation and the fight against terrorism (2015), agreements dedicated to the development of cooperation and coordination between the armed forces (2017) and the recent comprehensive agreement on strengthening military and security cooperation (2020). Syria and Iran sign MoU on internal security cooperation and fighting terrorism, SANA, 22.06.2015, https://sana.sy/en/?p=45929, accessed: 20.08.2021; Syria, Iran sign MoU on developing cooperation and coordination between their armies, SANA, 22.10.2017, https://sana.sy/en/?p=116282, accessed: 20.08.2021; Syria and Iran ink agreement to enhance military and security cooperation, SANA, 08.07.2020, https://sana.sy/en/?p=196751, accessed: 20.08.2021. Visits of top military officials have been intensified in recent years. Syria, Iran to enhance military cooperation, Manar and Mazen, SANA, 01.05.2017, https://sana.sy/en/?p=105311, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[19] Iran has shifted the focus of its military presence from its own armed forces to pro-Iranian local militias and other units composed mostly of Palestinian volunteers and several mercenary units. In order to legitimise and reduce the visibility of its presence, Iran seeks to incorporate these units into the official Syrian armed forces. In general, based on a number of indicators, it can be observed that after the initial phase of the spread of Iranian influence in Syria, the period of its entrenchment, deepening, and stabilisation began. The Atlantic Council report notes that Iran, especially since 2017, is applying a new approach that shifts the focus from classic military instruments to infiltrating Syrian society and strengthening relations with its businessmen. See more in: Nader Uskowi, „The Evolving Iranian Strategy in Syria: A Looming Conflict with Israel", Atlantic Council, 2018.

Iran on the number, manner, and deployment of the armed forces in Syria can be a serious limitation for Iranian policy, especially in the period after the liberation of the remaining Syrian territories (Idlib).

Although the military and political aspects are the backbone of Syrian-Iranian relations, the achieved results and the planned cooperation in the fields of culture, education, science, and the media should not be neglected.[20] The foundations for expanding and further strengthening strategic cooperation were laid in 2019 when the two countries signed 11 agreements, memoranda, and executive programmes on strengthening relations in the economic, cultural, and scientific fields.[21] In this period, the emphasis in relations was placed on the strategic area of energy, which envisages the construction of several capital infrastructure projects. Likewise, special attention has been devoted to helping and cooperation in the field of healthcare, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.[22] It is becoming more

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[20] The memorandum of cooperation in the fields of higher education and scientific research, signed in 2018, was one of the first significant interstate agreements of this kind. Syria, Iran ink MoU on cooperation in higher education and scientific research, SANA, 03.07.2018, https://sana.sy/en/?p=141439, accessed: 20.08.2021. After a series of meetings dedicated to strengthening educational and scientific relations, an agreement was recently signed on strengthening cooperation in the cultural, economic, and tourism domains, with an emphasis on cooperation in scientific and research activities, student exchange, and scholarships. Syrian-Iranian talks on enhancing educational cooperation, Hala Zain, SANA, 27.07.2021, https://sana.sy/en/?p=243315, accessed: 20.08.2021. In order to strengthen scientific cooperation in the field of biotechnology, nanotechnology, communication and industrial technology, the Iranian Center for Innovation and Technology was opened in Damascus, while at the same time a credit line of 10 million arrivals to support the import of high-tech and hospital equipment from Iran. Iranian Innovation and Technology Center opened in Damascus, Manar Salameh and Hala Zain, SANA, 03.03.2021, https://sana.sy/en/?p=224722, accessed: 20.08.2021. Following modern trends, the two countries signed agreements on strengthening media relations with the media, with an emphasis on coordinating activities in dealing with the media war and similar types of threats. Syria, Iran to enhance media cooperation, Manar, Bushra and Mazen, SANA, 24.02.2021, https://sana.sy/en/?p=223829, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[21] Syrian-Iranian relations… strategic cooperation, coordination in various fields, Shaza al-Ashkar and Ruaa al-Jazaeri, SANA, 11.02.2021, https://sana.sy/en/?p=221826, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[22] Following Iran's provision of health care during the first wave of pandemic, a series of high-level meetings dedicated to developing relations in this area have been held since the end

and more obvious that Iran wants to build relations with Syria in a multidimensional and extensive way while simultaneously aiming to impose its own vision of these relations.

Iran's regional policy cannot be fully understood without shedding light on the nature and perspectives of contemporary Iranian-Iraqi relations. In geopolitical and geoeconomic terms, Iraq is a key and, at the same time, extremely sensitive and even potentially the weakest link in Iran's policy towards the Middle East. After decades of regional rivalry and conflict in the Iraq-Iran war, the Arab Spring followed, resulting in a complete turnaround in Iranian-Iraqi relations. The overlap of strategic goals and the existence of a common adversary in the form of Islamic terrorism and then "Kurdish separatism" was the basis for providing strong political support to the Iraqi government and the framework for future relations. During the fight against the Islamic State, Iran provided great military and economic aid to Iraq. The concrete results of the new dynamics in their relations were embodied in the trilateral meeting of Syria, Iraq, and Iran (2015).[23] Soon after, political harmonisation was developed, followed by economic and military unification of the three countries, while the trilateral format became a regular form of tripartite relations.[24]

In addition to the undoubted and strong military presence of pro-Iranian forces in Iraq, Iranian policy pays great attention to the economy, and above

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of 2020, with a focus on strengthening cooperation between medical, therapeutic, and scientific centers. Syrian-Iranian talks to enhance cooperation in Medical, technological Sciences, Manar Salameh and Mazen Eyon, SANA, 24.11.2020, https://sana.sy/en /?p=211227, accessed: 20.08.2021; Syrian-Iranian talks to enhance cooperation in medical sciences and engineering, Manar Salameh and Mazen Eyon, SANA, 08.12.2020, https:// sana.sy/en/?p=213060, accessed: 20.08.2021; Syria, Iran discuss cooperation in health sector, Hala Zain, SANA, 26.01.2021, https://sana.sy/en/?p=219414, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[23] Trilateral meeting of Syria, Iraq and Iran a turning point in cooperation, Tehran says, SANA, 24.06.2015, https://sana.sy/en/?p=46204, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[24] Iran's diplomatic approach to Iraq has been carefully prepared and skillfully led. It is based on "the need for a sovereign, strong and developed Iraq." Iran Wants to See Strong, Developed Iraq: President Raisi, IFP, 05.08.2021, https://ifpnews.com/iran-wants-to-see-strong-developed-iraq-president-raisi, accessed: 20.08.2021. At the end of last year, the Roadmap for five-year cooperation between the two countries was defined. Iran, Iraq Delineate Roadmap for Five-Year Cooperation: Minister, IFP, 27.12.2020, https://ifpnews. com/iran-iraq-delineate-roadmap-for-five-year-cooperation-minister, accessed: 20. 08. 2021.

all to the process of rebuilding Iraq and strengthening trade and energy relations.[25] Finally, Iran seeks to establish a cultural and religious factor as a fundamental basis of relations between the two states.[26]

The sensitive domestic circumstances in Iraq, embodied in ethnic and religious complexity and the existence of numerous opposing political groups, are forcing Iran to adopt a more sensitive and pragmatic attitude, which often includes making certain concessions.[27] On the other hand, despite the repeatedly expressed agreement between Iraq and Iran on the necessity of withdrawing US military forces, the fact remains that Iraq will have to carefully balance between the Iranian and Western blocs for internal and foreign policy reasons.

ECONOMIC AND INFRASTRUCTURAL INTEGRATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST REGION

Iranian MP Jalil Rahimi has proposed an idea: since Iraq is unable to pay reparations to Iran for the deadly eight-year war it imposed on Iran in the 1980s, it can instead give Iran certain exclusive rights in various fields, such as oil exploration, energy exportations, and the establishment of oil rigs. Then

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[25] Over the past year, Iranian militias in Iraq have increased the pressure on the United States through a series of attacks on its communications lines and military bases. At the same time, Iran's top military officials have repeatedly expressed readiness to meet all of Iraq's military and defence needs. Special attention was paid to the procurement of air defence systems, artillery and missile weapons, electronic warfare equipment, and unmanned aerial vehicles. Top General Says Iran Ready to Meet Iraq's Defence Needs, IFP, 15.11.2020, https://ifpnews.com/top-general-says-iran-ready-to-meet-iraqs-defence-needs, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[26] A visit by the Iranian Minister of Culture has recently taken place in Baghdad. During the visit, the necessity of strengthening these ties was emphasized, especially in the fields of civilizational, cultural, and artistic aspects. Iranian Diplomat, Iraqi Culture Minister Meet in Baghdad, IFP, 09.06.2021, https://ifpnews.com/iranian-diplomat-iraqi-culture-minister-meet-in-baghdad, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[27] Iran is making a significant diplomatic effort in the process of uniting Iraqi religious factions and political groups, which is confirmed by the recent meeting of the former Iranian MFA Mohammad Zarif. Iran Respects Diversity of Religious, Ethnic Groups in Iraq: FM Zarif, IFP, 27.04.2021, https://ifpnews.com/iran-respects-diversity-of-religious-ethnic-groups-in-iraq-fm-zarif, accessed: 20.08.2021.

he referred to Iraq's hard economic conditions and considered the export of Iranian goods with special discounts to Iraq as another alternative to the $97bn reparations.[28]

However, cooperation is developing in a more mutually beneficial way. Iran and Iraq have signed an overall memorandum of understanding on the expansion of mutual economic cooperation. The deal was clinched at the close of the fourth meeting on Iran-Iraq economic cooperation at the Iranian Energy Ministry. Technical committees were formed in various trade areas, and they exchanged views on technical and engineering services as well as other issues of mutual interest. A commercial committee will soon meet as part of these meetings. Industrial and financial affairs committees will also be formed to follow up on issues of mutual concern.[29]

Hamid Zadboom, Chairman of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran, says the value of Iranian exports to neighbouring Iraq amounts to one-fourth of Iraq's total imports. The value of Iranian goods makes up $10 billion of the total of $40 billion in imports into Iraq.[30] According to Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian, the goal is to raise the value of the annual trade exchange to $20 billion. The energy minister explained that achievement of the trade target requires plans to allow the private sector to get involved in economic activities freely, remove the trade barriers, set up a joint investment fund, and settle the problems arising in the transportation industry, customs issues, and preferential trade arrangements.[31]

Energetics plays a very important role in Iran-Iraq cooperation. Two key projects, which include the Iranian companies' endeavours to reduce losses in Iraq's electricity distribution network as well as retrofit and repair damaged

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[28] Iraq Can Give Iran Exclusive Rights instead of War Reparations, IFP, 21.02.2017, https://ifpnews.com/iraq-can-give-iran-exclusive-rights-instead-of-war-reparations, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[29] Iran, Iraq Sign MoU on Boosting Bilateral Economic Cooperation, IFP, 14.01.2021, https://ifpnews.com/iran-iraq-sign-mou-on-boosting-bilateral-economic-cooperation, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[30] Iran's Share of Iraqi Imports Reaches 25 Percent, IFP, 06.12.2019, https://ifpnews.com/irans-share-of-iraqi-imports-reaches-25-percent, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[31] Iran, Iraq Resolved to Meet $20 Billion Trade Target: Energy Minister, IFP, 12.01.2021, https://ifpnews.com/iran-iraq-resolved-to-meet-20-billion-trade-target-energy-minister, accessed: 20.08.2021.

electrical equipment in Iraq. As a case in point, Iranian companies can restore more than 5,000 damaged transformers in Iraq and export 1,200 megawatts of electricity to Iraq.[32] Iran and Iraq have connected their national electricity grids in a ceremony with the participation of the Islamic Republic's energy minister and the Iraqi deputy minister of electricity. The power grids of the two neighbouring countries were synchronised to help Iraq reduce its power outages. Gas imports from Iran generate as much as 45 percent of Iraq's 14,000 megawatts of electricity consumed daily. Iran transmits another 1,000 megawatts directly, making itself an indispensable energy source for Iraq.[33] Energy cooperation with Iran is crucial for Iraq. Besides electricity, every month, $200 million worth of Iranian gas is exported to Iraq. But Iran-Iraq relations are increasingly coming under pressure from the US, which imposed unilateral sanctions on Tehran in May after abandoning an international nuclear agreement.[34] This has caused Iraq to owe Iran $2 billion for gas and electricity, which cannot be paid due to sanctions. Moreover, an oil swap was taking place from Kirkuk. After the sanctions, the Iraqis were forced to stop that too.[35]

Surprisingly, Iraq is trying to resist US pressure. In an attempt to mitigate the problems caused by US sanctions, Iran and Iraq have reached an agreement under which Baghdad will pay for Iran's energy sales to Iraq in euros. The debts that Iraq owes Iran will gradually be converted into euros and saved in these accounts. Iranian traders can open accounts with Iraqi banks to carry out their transactions under a new payment system between the two countries, said Iran's central bank governor, Abdolnaser Hemmati.[36]

Of course, economic cooperation could not be possible without friendly political discourse. Hence, we can find numerous statements which

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[32] 'Iraq to Pay for Energy Imports from Iran in Euros to Mitigate US Bans', IFP, https://ifpnews. com/iraq-to-pay-for-energy-imports-from-iran-in-euros-to-mitigate-impact-of-us-bans, 30.12.2020, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[33] Iran's Power Export to Iraq Hits Record High: Energy Minister, IFP, 20.10.2019, https://ifp news. com/irans-power-export-to-iraq-hits-record-high-energy-minister, accessed: 20. 08. 2021.

[34] Iraq Allows Iranian Traders to Open Accounts in Its Banks, IFP, 06.02.2019, https:// ifpnews.com/iraq-allows-iranian-traders-to-open-accounts-in-banks, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[35] US Says Iraq Can Buy Energy from Iran, IFP, 23.05.2019, https://ifpnews.com/us-says-iraq-can-buy-energy-from-iran, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[36] Iranian official says Iraq agrees to release Iran's frozen assets, Xinhuanet, 13.10.2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-10/13/c_139437718.htm, accessed: 20.08.2021.

emphasise that the Islamic Republic of Iran will stand by the Iraqi government and nation and call for the protection of Iraq's sovereignty[37] Furthermore, after the assassination of Iranian General Soleimani and the attacks carried out against Iranian diplomatic locations, Iran and Iraq signed an agreement guaranteeing the security of Iranian diplomats in Iraq.[38]

Iran and Syria have been taking major steps towards the expansion of their mutual trade ties. Syria and Iran signed five contracts for cooperation in agriculture, animal resources, industry, oil, and communications on January 17th, 2017, including cooperation among mobile network operators.[39] The two sides have exchanged numerous trade delegations, and Iranian private companies are investing in various fields of the Syrian economy, like providing construction materials, especially cement. They are also working on several reconstruction projects, some in conjunction with Chinese contractors. The Head of the Iran-Syria Joint Chamber of Commerce, Keyvan Kashefi, has stated that the value of Iran's trade with Syria will reach US$1.[40] The Chamber officially started working on August 28, 2019, just six months after the signing. Participants pointed out the need to reactivate the agreement on Free Trade signed between the two countries in 2011 through exempting goods from taxes. This agreement came into force in 2015, but the scope of the products covered by it needs to be expanded. The Head of the Iranian-Syrian Joint Chamber of Commerce, Kiwan Kashifi, pointed out the need for improving relations between businessmen in the two countries, particularly in the fields of agriculture and industry.[41] This goal is in coordination with the agreement signed in January of the same year. It is the banking cooperation agreement

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[37] Iran Reaffirms Support for Iraq, Urges Boost to Bilateral Trade, IFP, 18.05.2020, https://ifp news.com/iran-reaffirms-support-for-iraq-urges-boost-to-bilateral-trade, accessed: 20.08. 2021.

[38] Iranian, Iraqi FMs Discuss Regional Issues in Tehran, IFP, 26.09.2020, https://ifpnews.com /iranian-iraqi-fms-discuss-regional-issues-in-tehran, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[39] Syria and Iran sign five contracts on economic cooperation, R. Melhem, H. Zain and H. Said, SANA, 17.01.2017, https://sana.sy/en/?p=98377, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[40] Iraq Ties Itself to China Via Belt & Road Rail Links Between Basra and Iran's Shalamcheh, 19.05.2021, https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2021/05/19/iraq-ties-itself-to-china-via-belt-road-rail-links-between-basra-and-irans-shalamcheh/, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[41] First conference of Syrian-Iranian Joint Chamber of Commerce calls for raising the level of economic relations, Mazen Eyon, SANA, 28.08.2019, https://sana.sy/en/?p=172175, accessed: 20.08.2021.

between Syria's Central Bank and Iran's Central Bank. The agreement aims to enhance the stabilisation of the banking sector. The secondary goal is to facilitate trade exchange and encourage investment as well as boost economic relations, which would benefit the private sector as well.[42]

Syrian Minister of Oil and Mineral Resources Ali Ghanem talked with Iranian Oil Minister Bian Zangeneh about aspects of strategic cooperation in the oil sector. They emphasized the need to work together to rebuild facilities and production lines, as well as exchange expertise and train Syrian personnel. Iranian Oil Minister stressed his willingness to cooperate in this area.[43] Iran is also developing cooperation with Syria, connecting it with Iraq along the way. The railway we mentioned above is a stellar example of this cooperation. Furthermore, Iran's Energy Minister, Reza Ardakanian, earlier talked about Iran's plan to export electricity to Syria through Iraq, saying it would require setting up a 400KV line so that Iran could play a significant role in the reconstruction of Syria.[44] A lot of noise has been made by the Memorandum of Cooperation in the field of electricity (2017), which envisages the opening of a new power plant in Lattakia with a capacity of 450 MW, the establishment of 5 Banias gas plants, the rehabilitation of the thermal power plant in Aleppo, the rehabilitation of al-Taim plant in Deir Ezzor, and the modernization of the Jandar Generating Plant in Homs. A few years later, a Memorandum of Cooperation in the field of hydropower was signed (2019), which envisages joint projects on the construction and rehabilitation of the water system. Syria and Iran signed a memorandum on cooperation in the domain of hydropower.[45]

"DRAGON" IN THE SHADOW– CHINA'S ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

China's role in the region should not be neglected. China did not disengage from Syria when the country was plunged into turmoil in 2011,

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[42] Banking cooperation agreement signed between Syria and Iran, Rasha Milhem, SANA, 29.01.2019, https://sana.sy/en/?p=156962, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[43] Syria, Iran to boost cooperation in oil, gas and industry sectors, Mazen Eyon, SANA, 24.09.2019, https://sana.sy/en/?p=174147, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[44] Iran, Iraq Connect National Electricity Grids, IFP, 02.11.2019, https://ifpnews.com/iran-iraq-connect-national-electricity-grids, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[45] Syria, Iran sign a memo on cooperation in domain of hydropower, Ruaa al-Jazaeri, SANA, 05.12.2019, https://sana.sy/en/?p=179852, accessed: 20.08.2021.

and contacts and communication between the Chinese government and the Syrian government remained in place at the political level. In addition, China has also refused to condemn Syria in the Security Council and has used its veto power (alongside Russia) to protect it. China has chosen a middle path in the Syrian issue and does not want to play a direct role like that of Russia and Iran.[46]

Two main objectives have driven China's Syria policies. Firstly, in terms of security, China wants to build a strong partnership with Syria to maintain friendly ties and cooperate on counter-terrorism issues. Beijing's main concerns are militant jihadists and violent extremists outside of Chinese territory, which have historically focused on Afghanistan. For years, militant Uighurs from groups such as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP) have crossed into Afghanistan, where they have purportedly plotted actions against the Chinese state.[47]

Secondly, in terms of economics, the Chinese leadership seeks a Sino-Syrian relationship that helps Beijing advance its vision for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI will serve as an integration catalyst. Damascus welcomes the BRI. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad spoke about it in an interview on December 16, 2019, saying that Syria could be a part of the initiative by developing its infrastructure with China's help.[48] Another economic interest is the rebuilding of Syria. By keeping Assad in power, Beijing will maintain its primary access to the abundant investment opportunities central to the impending reconstruction. Through this approach and the fact that Chinese aid will not come with the political strings inevitably accompanying Western aid, China will be Damascus' firm favorite as the leader of the reconstruction, especially because it has much greater financial strength than Russia and Iran. China is active in Syria both long-term and in the short-term.

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[46] Ministry of the People's Republic of China, "Wang Yi Proposes Five Principles to Facilitate a Political Settlement of Syrian Issue," 20.01.2014, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xybfs_663590/xwlb_663592/t1124573.shtml, accessed: 20. 08. 2021.

[47] China plays the long game on Syria, Giorgio Cafiero, Middle East Institute, 10.02.2020, https://www.mei.edu/publications/china-plays-long-game-syria, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[48] Abdullah Al-Ghadhawi, "China's Policy in Syria", March 2020, Chatham House, https://syria.chathamhouse.org/research/chinas-policy-in-syria, accessed: 20.08.2021.

China's short-term role in Syria remains to offer humanitarian aid, with aid agreements signed in 2017 totaling $40 million, in parallel with its aspiration for a long-term economic role in reconstruction as part of its economic investment project while including Syria in the Belt and Road Initiative.[49]

China also approached Iran. Beijing has signed a 25-year investment deal with Iran that could see China's economic, political, and military influence expand in the Middle East. On March 26, Iran and China signed an agreement expressing a desire to increase cooperation and trade relations over the next 25 years. This Strategic Cooperation Agreement, as it is officially known, represents a massive overhaul of Sino-Iranian relations that will see China invest anywhere from $400 to $600 billion in Iran, with some estimates running as high as $800 billion.[50] In defiance of American sanctions, China will buy Iranian oil. The deal with the Chinese should give Iran more leverage with the US.[51] Moving beyond oil, the arrangement aims to enhance China-Iran strategic ties, especially military cooperation, joint training, and high-end technological cooperation between the defense industries of the two nations.[52]

China's investment in Syria, Iran, and Iraq is not random and without a plan, but is part of a carefully planned strategy. Proof of this coordination is the construction of a railway connecting these three countries. A railroad connecting Khorramshahr and Shalamcheh was inaugurated in 2011. It was supposed to stretch for another 32 kilometers to the city of Basra on Iraqi soil. However, the project was left unfinished for various reasons, such as the attack by ISIS on Iraq in 2014.[53] That short, 30km railway is vital because it showcases a new era of Iran-Iraqi detente, links the region to China's Belt and Road Initiative, and establishes a channel between Iran and Syria. Although

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[49] Ibidem.

[50] William Figueroa, "China-Iran Relations: The Myth of Massive Investment", The Diplomat, 06.04.2021, https://thediplomat.com/2021/04/china-iran-relations-the-myth-of-massive-investment/, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[51] China sets sights on Middle East with Iran co-operation deal, Jeremy Bowen, BBC, 31.03. 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-56574336, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[52] US wants out and so, the attraction for a Chinese presence in the region has been growing, Harsh V. Pant, Observer Research Foundation, 20.04.2021, https://www.orfonline.org/research/shifting-sands-in-the-middle-east/, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[53] Iraq, Syria Working on Joint Railway Project with Iran, IFP, 16.04.2019, https://ifpnews.com/iraq-syria-working-on-joint-railway-project-with-iran, accessed: 20.08.2021.

the line would run for only 30km and cost around $150 million, none of the three countries has the financial capabilities nor the expertise to finish the rail construction. For that reason, they rely on China. The railway will be the only rail connection between Iran and Syria, which would vastly improve communications in the wider region. Iraq could become one of the largest transit countries in the region. Moreover, Iraq can be connected to China through the railways of Iran, increasing its strategic importance in the region. This will be a very big change, and Iran's railway will be connected to Iraq, Syria, and the Mediterranean. Indirectly, this connects China with the Mediterranean, and that is exactly where China's interests lie. Iran's First Vice-President, Es'haq Jahangiri (whose mandate expired on August 8, 2021), says the construction of the railway between Iran's Shalamcheh and Basra will facilitate cargo transit from China to the Mediterranean and become one of the world's transit hubs. The former vice-president, however, noted that part of the railway that connects Iraq to Syria needs to be reconstructed. Iran had earlier linked its railway network to western Afghanistan through a joint project that was inaugurated in December 2020. The 225-km railroad project that connects Iran's Khaf to Afghanistan's Herat includes four phases that are currently under construction. About 78 km of the project, which includes two phases, is on Iran's soil and the rest in Afghanistan. The link will also enable Iran to send various commodities such as consumer goods, construction materials, and minerals through the railway from Tehran to Shalamcheh, further to Basra, and finally to Qaem (Abu Kamal) on the border with Syria.[54]

IRAN'S INTERNAL LIMITATIONS – HIDDEN WEAKNESSES OF IRAN'S ECONOMY.

With a population of 85 million, half under the age of 30 and highly educated, as well as a strategic location on the Persian Gulf and vast reserves of energy and other natural resources, including wind and solar energy, Iran's economy has incredible potential waiting to be unlocked.

In the past two decades, Iran's labor force has become increasingly well educated. The adult literacy rate is near 90%, compared to a regional average

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[54] Iran-Iraq Railway to Connect China to Mediterranean: VP, IFP, 31.01.2021, https://ifp news.com/iran-iraq-railway-to-connect-china-to-mediterranean-vp, accessed: 20.08.2021.

of about 80%. More importantly, nearly 70% of Iran's labor force has a university-level education, and young Iranian women are on par with men in terms of educational attainment. However, for mainly cultural reasons, it is expected that only half of the Iranian women with advanced education will participate in the labor force, while this figure stands at more than 80% for men. In the past decades, labor market conditions in Iran have improved significantly in women's favor, and policies aimed at encouraging greater female participation could benefit the Iranian economy by tapping into the large number of university-educated females who remain outside the labor force. Nevertheless, over the past two decades, the Iranian labor market has not been able to fully absorb a large number of university graduates, and the official unemployment rate among this group has been around 20%, with underemployment figures approaching 40–50%. Faced with harsh labor market conditions, especially since the imposition of sanctions, many of Iran's top graduates have migrated to countries with more favorable job prospects, costing the economy billions of dollars yearly.[55]

Energy is the single most important factor in any economic activity. While Iran is home to about 1% of the world's population, it holds 9% of the world's proven crude oil and 16% of the world's natural gas reserves, respectively. Iran also has considerable reserves of other natural resources and minerals. According to estimates from the U.S. Geological Survey, Iran has major reserves of feldspar[56] (2nd largest in the world), barite[57] (5th largest), gypsum (5th largest), fluorite (8th largest), and iron ore (10th largest), as well as substantial reserves of other strategic minerals, like copper, manganese, zinc, chromium, and gold. Overall, Iran is home to an estimated 5% of the world's metal constituent reserves, but much of its vast reserves are untapped. Historically, mining has contributed less than 1% of the country's GDP. Moreover, despite huge natural gas reserves, Iran's production barely meets domestic needs and it accounts for less than 1% of total global gas exports.

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[55] Iran's unrealized economic potential, Amin Mohseni-Cheraghlou, 09.02.2021, Middle East Institute, https://www.mei.edu/publications/irans-unrealized-economic-potential, accessed: 20.08.2021.

[56] Colorless or pale-colored crystals and consisting of aluminosilicates of potassium, sodium, and calcium.

[57] A mineral consisting of barium sulfate, typically occurring as colorless prismatic crystals or thin white flakes.

Iran can easily meet all of its electricity demand through wind and solar sources. About 75% of Iran's territory is suitable for solar energy generation. Also, Iran is located in a wind belt, where wind speed at a height of 40 meters averages more than 5 meters per second — the speed required for the development of utility-scale wind farms — in at least a quarter of the country. Therefore, Iran's mining, oil and natural gas, and renewable energy industries can benefit substantially from domestic and foreign investments and technology transfers and are widely considered some of the most attractive sectors to invest in.

Clearly, sanctions are the biggest problem in Iran's economy, but unfortunately, not the only one. Iran has failed not only to utilize the potential of its natural resources sufficiently, but also to diversify its economy. The labor market is imbalanced because of the lack of development in ICT technologies and renewable energy technologies. Additionally, Iran's economy has been debilitated by the combination of COVID-19. It is estimated that Iran's GDP contracted at least 4.5 percent over 2020–21. The ramifications of Iran's economic fallout are projected to last well into the future.[58] These economic weaknesses will definitely hinder Iran's power projection in the Middle East.

CONCLUSION

The processes and trends started by the Arab Spring have greatly changed the dynamics of regional relations and the architecture of the Middle East. Although the crisis has not been resolved with an adequate political solution, the strategic winners of this confrontation can be clearly seen. From the aspect of a complex regional conjuncture, the biggest winner is Iran, which, based on the achieved results and in accordance with the special vision of the Middle East, strives to formulate a comprehensive and multidimensional regional policy. Although the basis of its Middle East policy lies in the military and security components, Iran is trying to expand and increase the quality of existing relations with regional actors through economic, energy, and infrastructure cooperation. At the same time, the civilizational depth of Iran's

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[58] Why China will not rebuild Syria, Samy Akil, ANU and OPC, East Asia Forum, 08.05.2021, https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/05/08/why-china-will-not-rebuild-syria/, accessed: 20.08.2021.

international position is accompanied by a continuous insistence on deepening cultural, educational, and scientific relations with these countries.

The pillar of the emerging regional dynamics is the increasingly firm Iran-Iraq-Syria axis, with an extension to Lebanon, while the complex processes of the political, military, economic, and infrastructural connection of this geospace remain the biggest challenge. On this path, permeated with many unknowns, Iran is facing a series of internal (political and, above all, economic and financial) difficulties. On the other hand, the external restrictions on this project come mostly from the rival bloc (the US, Israel, and regional allies), but also, to a certain extent, from the Russian Federation and Turkey. Finally, in the dynamic and uncertain process of regional integration, the People's Republic of China sees its political and even greater economic interests, which further complicates this already complex Middle East equation.

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THE PERSPECTIVE OF INTERNATIONAL INTERACTIONS IN THE POST-CORONA MULTIPOLAR WORLD
(with an emphasis on Iranian-Islamic civilization)

Garineh Keshishyan Siraki[1]

Abstract: Deep and pervasive crises are among the events that may occur once a century and cause many changes in all areas and dimensions of human life. The outbreak of the coronavirus is one of the crises that affected all aspects of human life, so that the world underwent economic, political, cultural, social, structural and international order. In previous decades, changes in technology, the free flow of ideas, capital and services, and the existence of heterogeneous governments and actors with different demographics and power levels have resulted in diverse, complex, and asymmetric relationships beyond global geographical boundaries and global phenomena. This characterized the world led by the United States in the unipolar system after the collapse of the Soviet Union. But after the Corona crisis, a change in the status quo and an increase in the power of countries like China and Russia by creating cooperative dipoles was able to affect international interactions and upset the old equations. In such circumstances, the possibility of playing the role of "Iranian-Islamic civilization" as an emerging power, given its discourse power and emphasizing the "Theory of Resistance of the Iranian Supreme leader" in the field of military, economic, political and cultural deterrent power of the Islamic Republic of Iran, is very high. It was important under these circumstances, the possibility of changing the world order from uni-multipolar to multipolar conditions, the prospect of international interactions in the post-corona multipolar world, which was examined in this article.

Keywords: International Interactions, Multipolar World, Post-Corona, Theory of Resistance, Iranian-Islamic Civilization.

[1] Associate Professor of Political Science and International Relations, South Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran. g.keshishyan71@gmail.com, G_keshishyan@azad.ac.ir

INTRODUCTION

Many international relations experts believe that the new world order is being formed by emerging powers, and some believe that emerging orders are being formed by emerging powers. The current situation promises a multidimensional order and a multipolar world, and the world is evolving towards a new geometry in such a way that the gradual transfer of power can be the basis for a transition to a just and humane order.

On the other hand, in the fluidity of the changing international system and in the current mono-polar situation, there is still no definite or established order that indicates the dominance of one trend over other trends or the domination of one actor over other actors. Such a fluid and transitional situation can be affected by the atmosphere of globalization, the emergence of emerging powers, the emphasis on the role of the media, the formation of network power, and the emergence of pervasive crises, including the COVID-19 crisis, which is one of the most important issues that has overshadowed international interactions. The "New Security Riddle" feature can also create new complex, transnational, regional, and global-local connections.

"Changes in technology, the free flow of ideas, goods, capital, and services in an interdependent world, and the existence of heterogeneous governments and actors with different geographical sizes, demographic compositions, and power levels result in diverse, complex, and asymmetric relationships across geographical boundaries has become global. In the interconnected world in general, countries need to cooperate in global affairs. In the meantime, interactions and connections between different units in the world system are not limited to heads of state, but also citizens have interacted with each other with similar social and economic interests, creating subsystems separate from the spider web system of their governments. The interaction between these subsystems has placed the world community as a spider web in an intertwined system and complex network[2]."

In such circumstances, the possibility of playing the role of "Iranian-Islamic Civilization" as an emerging power, given its discourse power and emphasising

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[2] John W. Burton, *World Society*, (Cambridge University Press, 1972).

the "Theory of Resistance of Imam Khamenei" in the field of military, economic, political, and cultural deterrent power of the Islamic Republic of Iran, is very important and has a lot to think about. Also, in the post-Corona context, increasing the power of countries such as China and Russia by creating cooperative bipolarities can affect international interactions and upset old equations. These conditions can move the world order from a uni-multipolar to a multipolar and be a source of hope for governments that emerge as emerging powers in their regions.

In this article, we will try to use the "Theory of Resistance of the Supreme Leader" to examine the opportunities and challenges facing "Iranian-Islamic Civilization" as an "Emerging Power" in the "Emerging Global Multipolar Order" and the perspective of international interactions in the post-corona multipolar world.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, horizontal processes in the international system were expanding due to the ubiquity of governments, international civil society organizations, international NGOs, multinational corporations, and the international media. Multiplication (local, national, and trans boundary) and multidimensionality (political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, and military) of national sovereignty due to interdependence, increasing trade, the emergence and expansion of cyberspace, the compaction of time and space in geographical space, and the supremacy of international norms and regimes over international equations, led to the erosion of local sovereignty and the diminishing role of nation-states in enacting world laws and regulating international politics and economics in the post-Apostolic era[3].

The impact of civil wars and crises on regional and international developments has increased due to the growth of violence and terrorism, as well as increased ethnic, religious, and racial conflicts, especially in deprived

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[3] Saskia Sassen, *Deciphering the Global: Its Scales, Spaces and Subjects*, (London and New York, Routledge, 2007) & Mohammad Reza Dehshiri, (2014). "Globalization and the International System", *Quarterly Journal of Strategic Studies in Public Policy*, Volume 5, Number 14, Spring 2014, 7-44

countries, failed states, and semi–sovereignties. It happened due to the instability of semi-nationalist authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes, transnational and religious ethnic separatism, cross-border wars, as well as invisible wars such as poverty, unemployment, homelessness, hunger, malnutrition, infectious diseases, poor health conditions, repression and exploitation, racial discrimination, physical assassinations, inequality, and racial inequality. Violations of civil rights, degradation of the environment and human ecosystem, the activities of terrorist groups, especially postmodern terrorists who use bioterrorism and cyber-terrorism (using cyberspace and computer technology to attack targets), also affect regional and international order and stability, and the challenges become more complex and chronic in the age of globalisation[4].

But the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis upset the status quo. Even in these circumstances, the most fundamental issue in international relations is still the issue of "change" in the international order, which is of great importance. There are different ways to express the concept of change in international relations. Explaining the transfer of power is one way to study and analyse change in international relations. Each established order represents a particular order of power in the international system, which has a definite period of rise and fall. As a result, the analysis and identification of the power pyramid and the factors influencing its stability and crisis have become the focus of understanding change in the international system. Hence, in some cases, the transfer of power has led to the disappearance of the existing order and the birth of a new order.

Historically, the primary critical factors in the system have been the decline of hegemonic power or the rise of a challenging actor's power. Accuracy in the history of this field is a good indication of the transformation of order during the rise and fall of the great powers, so now, with the decline of American power and the rise of China and other regional powers, the focus of analysis of international relations is shifting. Conditions that can promise a multidimensional order change the world towards a new geometry, in such

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[4] T. Szentes, *World Economics, 1- Comparative Theories and Methods of International and Development Economics*, (Akademiai Kiado, Budapest, 2002) & T. Szentes, *World Economics, 2- The Political Economy of Development, Globalization and System Transformation*, (Akademiai Kiado, Budapest, 2003)

a way that the gradual transfer of power can be the basis for a transition to a just and humane order.

In this regard, the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, by proposing the "Theory of Resistance", sought to create conditions for being in the new world order. The "Theory of Resistance", which was put forward in Ayatollah Khamenei's statements on November 4, 2018, showed his belief in the essence and nature of civilizations. Perhaps it can be said that the main idea of the Islamic Revolution and the general direction of religious civilization is the Islamic resistance. Resistance is the opposite of passivity. Resistance is even more than mere defense. Resistance is at the heart of aggression and action and increases social and historical opportunities. Resistance is not only for its own survival, but in addition to its own preservation, it seeks to be effective.

The idea of resistance goes beyond nationalities, ethnicities, and religious affiliations and can bring all freedom-loving people with it. Resistance is a new idea that was born from the history of the struggle of Shiite scholars, reached maturity in the Islamic Revolution, and has spread today in the region and the Islamic world. Hence, in the slogans of the Islamic Revolution, the struggle of the barefoot and the oppressed against the arrogant and oppressors was raised. Of course, the idea of resistance is always associated with certain conditions because, on the one hand, it pursues lofty ideals and, on the other hand, it sees many dangers and obstacles ahead. The idea of resistance, while idealistic, is realistic and tries to humbly look at the scene of objectivity and reality in accordance with its historical conditions and possibilities[5]. Therefore, in this article, using the idea of resistance, we will examine international interactions in a multipolar world.

"THEORY OF RESISTANCE"

The reasons for the theory of resistance and why and how to explain it can be seen in the table below.

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[5] Mohammad Hossein Motevalli Emami, "Capturing the pattern of the original confrontation of the Islamic Republic of Iran with Western civilization", *Journal of Islam and Social Studies*; Spring 2019, Vol. 24, pp. 57-78.

Table 1: By Author

The Experience of American Retreat Against Resistance	Low Cost of Resistance	The Futility of the Compromise and Surrender Strategy	Successful Experience of Resistance Thinking
Another reason for expressing the theory of resistance is the need to recall the political behaviour of the United States and Western hegemons against the resistance of nations. The history of the foreign policies of great countries, especially the United States, shows that wherever a nation or government or even a group has stood against these countries, they have retreated. But in the face of backwardness, countries have not only failed to do what they wanted, they have gone a step further.	Another reason for the Enlightenment about resistance is that among the solutions to confront the system of domination, including one-way interaction, compromise and commitment, retreat and surrender, passivity and indifference, etc., "resistance" is one of the least expensive solutions, but it will also be useful.	The strategy of compromise and surrender to the domination system has shown its ineffectiveness in the occupied territories and has resulted in nothing but backwardness and identity crisis. The situation in Saudi Arabia and the repeated pressures from the US government are a good example of the situation of surrendering to the demands of the oppressors of the domination system.	A look at the situation in the Middle East shows that the nations that have taken the path of resistance have not only regained their dignity and been freed from the humiliation of submission and decision-making by foreigners, but they have paved the way for their progress. For example, the path that led to the victory of the Resistance Front in Syria.

Strategies for the Practical Promotion of "Resistance" include:

Fig 1: By Author
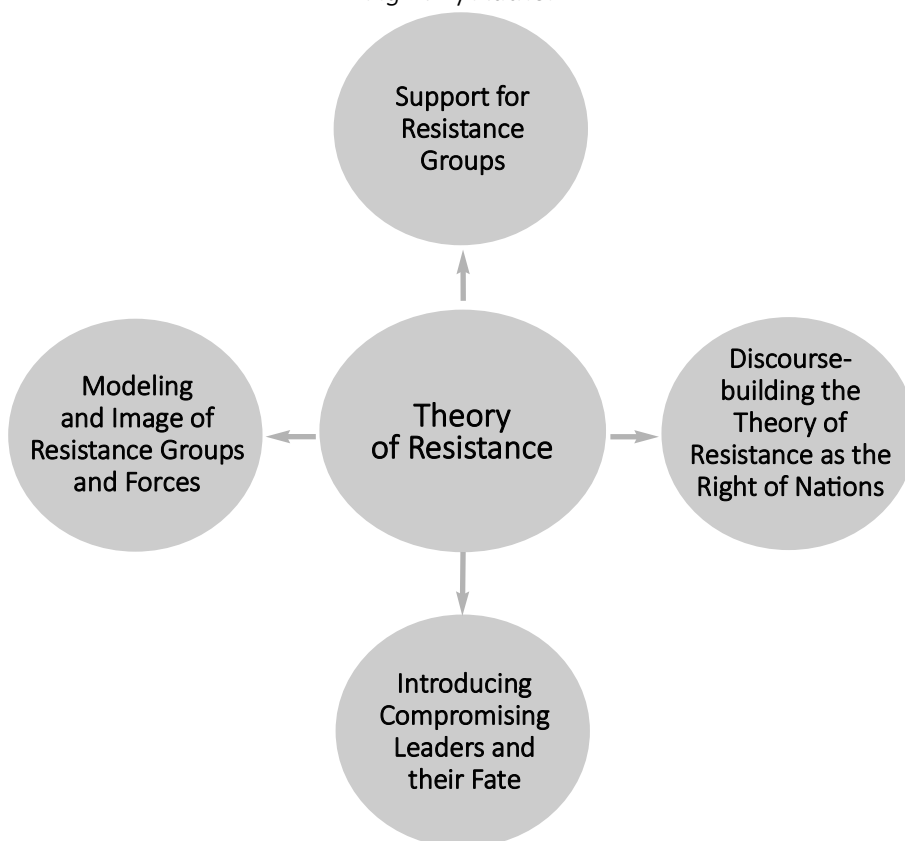
THE HISTORY OF THE NEW WORLD ORDER

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the United States, seeking world leadership, seized the opportunity and, following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, introduced a new policy under which the international community would be transformed into a new order. Since then, the "Theory of the New World Order" has been proposed and welcomed by some leaders, especially in Western countries. Of course, the United States

had long sought to impose its leadership on the world before the Persian Gulf crisis and the end of the Cold War.

Based on the theory of neoliberal institutionalism, with the end of World War II, the sovereignty of states was reduced and regional and international organisations gained more sovereignty in international relations. This trend first led to the discussion of globalisation in the field of economics and then was extended to other areas. With the outbreak of 9/11, doubts arose about the realisation of a new world order, and the existence of such an order was obscured.

Some authors have described this new world order as desirable: "If the new order is based on justice, peace, democracy, the development of human rights and international law and strives between the legal order, the political and economic order, and the morality of the world to create a lasting balance, one can hope for its prospects." Any alternative system in the future must create a moral order in which the needs of all human beings are met and encourage a kind of interdependence and solidarity between different races and nations.

It is natural that such a desirable order should establish positive international relations based on genuine and sincere partnerships between all countries, strong and weak, north and south, rich and poor. The UN Charter can be used as a framework for the new world order, but its shortcomings and gaps in many cases, such as the environment, poverty, terrorism, and nuclear threats, need to be addressed. "In such a system, peace and security are a necessity through the development and cohesion of the collective security system guaranteed by the United Nations.[6]"

However, some of these ideals were voiced by George W. Bush after the repression of Iraq: "We have an opportunity to create a new world order for ourselves and future generations. A world in which the rule of law, not the law of the jungle, governs the conduct of nations." Referring to the future role of the United Nations, he stressed that this new world order is one in which a credible United Nations can use its role to safeguard peace to fulfil the Charter and the aspirations of its founders.[7] But in practice, we witnessed actions completely contrary to these slogans.

Of course, Noam Chomsky described the nature of the new world order led by the United States as full of racism and hypocrisy, saying that Saddam's

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[6] Ali AsgharKazemi, *The End of Politics and the Last Myth*, (Tehran, Qomes Publishing, 2002)

[7] Ali Asghar Kazemi, *International Relations in Theory and Practice*, (Tehran, Qomes Publishing, 1993)

attack on the Kurds was widely reported, prompting a public outcry that forced Washington to take reluctant steps to protect victims of Aryan descent. But Saddam's more devastating attacks on Shi'ite Arabs in the south did not receive widespread news coverage or cause much concern, while Turkey's atrocities against the Kurds were largely ignored by the US media. "It continues today"[8].

In this regard, the division of the world between the great powers was another feature of the new world order. Almost all Western analysts believed that Western Europe would be one pole, and the United States another. Accordingly, the United States will have to relinquish power in the new order, and economic giants such as Japan, Germany, China, and military countries such as Russia will not remain silent in the face of the United States. Of course, under these circumstances, the world situation changed somewhat, and in the new structure, in which economic considerations were more important, he introduced Japan and Germany as two serious rivals for the United States. "America's internal problems and the creation of new poles around the world by China and Islamic countries have strengthened this analysis and change in the world order."[9]

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States, as a superpower, sought to maintain its hegemony in the world through peace negotiations, disarmament, and human rights issues, which lasted for nearly two decades. But because of other economies and other discourses, it could not continue.

So the United States used another method, and that was to present a hypothetical enemy. "Creating a hypothetical enemy as an international threat is a traditional way of trying to implement new geopolitical plans on a global scale and allocating human resources to it." With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the elimination of that international threat, the United States sought to portray the resurgence of Islam in Iran and other Islamic countries as a "fundamentalist" threat. "For this reason, Islamic and revolutionary movements have been wrongly identified by potential political and media circles in the West as potential threats to international security."[10]

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[8] Noam Chomsky, *Old and New World Orders*, translated by Mahbod Iranitalab, (Tehran, Etelaát Publications, 1996)

[9] Afzali, Rasoul, "The Third World in the New World Order", *Neshat Newspaper*, June 1999, Vol. 24, 27/4/78

[10] Roozitalab, Zahra and Pirooz Mojtahedzadeh, "The weak foundations of the theory of the new world order", *Abrar Newspaper*, Feb 1997, 12/23/76

Of course, after the COVID-19 crisis and the emergence of China's special economic position as an unrivalled economic power, the situation was different. However, it seems that the United States has no more purpose than to design a new world order, and that is to maintain its hegemony and dominance over the world based on its short-term and long-term interests, and the world order is in fact an excuse to maintain and perpetuate this domination at the international level.

International relations theorists have offered different analyses of the situation in the early 21st century, naming these years under different headings. Farid Zakaria, a contemporary thinker in international relations, has described this process as "the emergence of others." Kishour Mahbubani emphasises the fact that the rise of Japan, China, India, South Korea, and other Asian countries has created new centres of world power in Asia in terms of demographics, economy, trade, technology, etc. Therefore, an appropriate description of the "emerging international structure" has been made[11].

Also, many terms have been used in the last two decades to describe the distribution of global power among the units of the international system. Many writers have suggested that we are witnessing the expansion of a "polar world". The basic examples of this approach are Nile Ferguson's concept of "unipolarity", Simon Sarfati's concept of "polarity", the concept of "G-zero" by Ian Bremer and Norril Rubini, or the "absence of polarity" proposed by Richard Haas. These implications suggest that the end of the "unipolar moment" did not lead to a multipolar structure but to a power vacuum because no unit is willing or able to lead. According to some writers, the lack of overpowering power in the international system has led to the emergence of "no one world" or "anarchy" in the international system. In a world of "zero sum", no power can dominate the system. In this world, foreign powers such as China, the United States, Europe, and Russia compete for influence in different regions. However, it is not possible to fully shape its political, social, and economic realities.[12]

Other researchers point out that the structure of the system is moving toward a multipolar one, but in a different form than in the past. The concept

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[11] Fereshteh Mir Hosseini & Mohammad Rahim Eivazi, "Future scenarios of the geopolitical position of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the West Asian regional power system on the horizon of 2031", *Journal of Basij Strategic Studies*, Volume 22, Number 83 / Summer 2019, pp. 143–169, 152

[12] E. S. I Lecha, & et al. "Re-conceptualizing orders in the Mena Region, the Analytical Framework of the Menara Project", *Methodology and Concept papers*, (2016, 70-71)

of asymmetric multipolarity was introduced by Thomas Reynard. Huntington commented in the article that "America is the only superpower." He believes that global politics has moved beyond the Cold War bipolar system and the post-Cold War unipolar phase, culminating in the Persian Gulf War, and now before entering the 21st century multipolar era. It is the transition from one or two decades of the mono-polar era.[13]

According to various research reports conducted by various international organizations, the United States is no longer just a superpower, but also a number of other great powers with whom the United States is forced to cooperate and participate in resolving global issues. The 2018 Strategic Trends report notes that while the United States will be a major player in global affairs, the long-term role of the United States' international leadership is under threat. This is partly due to structural changes in the international system. As the challenges of future scenarios increase, the geopolitical position of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the power system of the West Asian regions on the horizon of 2031 is also strengthening.[14]

The report, "Strategic Future Trends Started Today," notes that over the next thirty years, a multipolar world will develop in which the current liberal international order and its institutions will be under greater pressure. It is also claimed that by 2025, economic power will shift from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and by 2050, the Chinese and Indian economies are likely to overtake the United States. Furthermore, if current trends continue, China will be the world's largest economy, a major military power, and the largest importer of natural resources by 2025. India is also likely to continue its rapid growth and continue to strive for a multipolar world as an economic power. Russia also has the potential to become richer, more powerful, and more self-sufficient by 2025[15]. The political and economic power of other countries, such as

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[13] According to: Mohammad Reza Dehshiri, & Muslim Golestan, "Behavioral Model of Major Powers in Managing International Crises in a Unipolar System", *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 2016, Volume 11 (3,) pp. 79-124, 84

[14] Mohammad Rahim Eivazi, and Mahsa Fallah Hosseini, "Islamophobia and the scenarios before it", *Journal of Political Studies of the Islamic World*, 2020, Volume 6 (3,) pp. 75-92.

[15] Global Strategic Trend the Futures Starts Today, *Ministry of Defense*, Strategic Trends, Key Developments in Global Affairs, Center for Security Studies, 2018, ETH Zurich, available at: www.css.ethz.ch/publications/strategic-trends

Indonesia, Iran, and Turkey, is also expected to increase. Thus, the theory of a multipolar system seems to be more appropriate for describing the long-term future of the structure of the international power system.

THE MODEL OF IRANIAN ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

In line with the new world order and emphasising the Theory of Resistance proposed by the Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the model of Iranian Islamic civilization, with emphasis on religion and God-centeredness, the centrality of divine laws and the Qur'an, effort and struggle, science and knowledge, rationality, justice-oriented and orbital ethics, is trying to gain a place first in the region of West Asia and then in the new world order.

Fig 2: By Author

The pattern of this civilization can be plotted in the chart below, and, of course, there are opportunities and challenges in this discourse that we will address in order to achieve global status.

THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF IRANIAN ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

Geographically and territorially, Islamic civilization began to grow in a region of the world that the Holy Qur'an describes as ignorance. Therefore, it can be argued that in terms of social and geographical talent, the land of Hejaz lacked significant features for the formation of a great world civilization. But history shows that the Prophet (PBUH), by using small capacities and careful planning to build a great civilization, first made all the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula aware of a divine and humanizing message, and then, with planned efforts and the spread of revelatory ideas, laid the core of the great Islamic civilization.

In this regard, the Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, relying on the method of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) as a good model of the Islamic Ummah, introduces the new Islamic civilization as a superior idea and plan that has the ability to attract Muslim nations to itself. Finally, it has a soft effect on uniting and moving Islamic societies to build a great world power. The creation of a new Islamic civilization is an intellectual movement and thought that will pave the way for the construction of a new Islamic civilization by influencing the Islamic Ummah. This original civilization and this emerging power could have something to say in the present age and are places to pay attention to. By relying on attributes such as religion-oriented, implementing divine laws, rationalism, avoiding extremism, social justice, and economic prosperity, as well as emphasising basic knowledge and science-based civilization, the original Islamic civilization can have many opportunities in the world and have a high position among emerging disciplines.[16]

It is clear that the new Islamic civilization is based on a deep knowledge and correct implementation of the teachings of Islam, because in principle,

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[16] Majid Khari Arani & Zahra Ali Akbarzadeh Arani, "Principles and Components of Modern Islamic Civilization with Emphasis on the Thoughts of the Supreme Leader", *National Conference on Modern Islamic Civilization*, (Tehran, Shahed University, 2015).

this civilization will base its growth on the axis of religion. Naturally, in order for the new Islamic civilization to be able to have its material and spiritual power together, it must have a comprehensive and, of course, refined view of religion free from lethargic deviations. This civilization is based on pure Islam and is far from destructive superstitious readings. Such a conception of religion, as in the early days of Islam, was able to lead an ignorant society towards the creation of a great world civilization. It will undoubtedly be effective in the age of human progress and could be like an emerging power in the age of order. The new ones have a place to show off their power. What is certain is that, as the title of the new Islamic civilization suggests, the most important and main indicators of the new Islamic civilization are showing the face of religion in the course of social life.

The signs of religion in a society and civilization are focused on its laws. Until the divine laws are implemented in society, it cannot really be called a pivotal word. So, without the application of divine laws in individual and social life, not only will this vital thing not happen, but it will also be impossible to call it Islamic civilization in principle. Therefore, one of the main ways to create a new Islamic civilization is to try to implement divine laws in Islamic society. This process increases the power of the spiritual and soft influence of the new Islamic civilization among the nations and prepares the Islamic world to become a power in line with the interests of the Islamic Ummah.[17]

It is also important to note that nations have never crossed the path of extremism in order to progress and excel, but it must be said that the main requirements for the development of a civilization and the modernization of its structure in accordance with the needs of the new time and place are rationalism and legal mechanisms. The root of division among the Islamic Ummah is the failure to stay away from rational methods and to fall into the trap of extremism and heresy. The enemies of the Islamic world are trying to lead the Islamic Ummah towards extremism in various ways. Rationalism and the avoidance of extremism cause the Islamic Ummah to recognise its true interests quickly and accurately in the first place, and by maintaining moderation and rationality, to provide the means of unity and lay the foundations for the movement of the new Islamic civilization.

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[17] Hamid Zamani Mahjoob, "Components and Indicators of Islamic Civilization", *Conference of the Research Institute of Islamic Sciences*, (Imam Sadegh (AS) University, 2017).

The Islamic world in general and Iran in particular, due to the rich underground resources, especially energy, and the motivated manpower, have very strong economic support. The reasons why the huge capital of Islamic lands has not been able to give a successful economic face to the whole Muslim community are mismanagement and a lack of regulation of co-operative economic relations among Muslim countries. The formation of a new Islamic civilization as a planning and guiding power can play a very effective role in the production of productive and endogenous employment in the Islamic world and lead them to their true economic position and the balance of raw sales and dependence. This has the potential to transform the economy outside of the Islamic world into an equal and capitalizable economic interaction.

In the face of these opportunities, the Islamic world also faces challenges. One of the major problems for Muslims today is their economic weakness, or the waste of their capital and consumerist culture, given that they have the underlying power for an economic leap. Therefore, it should be emphasised as an attractive axis among the Muslim community that the new Islamic civilization will provide a better future for the children of the Islamic world, although the enemies of Islamic Iran may try to come up with this idea through misinterpretations and self-made interpretations. The revival of Islamic civilization is tantamount to trying to establish hegemony and leadership in the Islamic world and creating divisions within and outside Islamic states, but the reality is that the new Islamic civilization is based on justice and efforts to preserve material and spiritual capital. It is possible for Islamic countries to be established for the Islamic Ummah, especially Muslim nations.

The gap between developed and underdeveloped countries can be boldly explored in their approach to science and technology. The migration of knowledge from the Islamic civilization to the West in the third and fourth centuries of Islam caused the Western world to move towards progress in the fields of economy, military, etc., in contrast to the Islamic world in a period of little attention and no connection between the public body. Society and scientific centres have lost the path of growth and development and finally look for ways to progress by looking at the West and imperfectly imitating them.

Today, one of the main ways to revive the new Islamic civilization is to rely on the knowledge of the scientists of the Islamic world and move towards discovering shortcuts to promote science within Islamic societies. Thus, civilised Islamic society must inevitably pave the way for the advancement of

its goals through the path of indigenous knowledge and transform its face with endogenous knowledge, which can be both an opportunity and a challenge. Undoubtedly, the revival of the new Islamic civilization depends on the scientific efforts of the Muslim elite, and this is the path that Muslims have taken before, inspired by Islamic teachings, and in recent years, with the emphasis of the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran on intelligent and educated Iranian-Islamic youth. With full confidence and in light of the support of the Islamic system, they have taken steps towards the development of knowledge and amazing scientific advances, and this promises the formation and strength of a new Islamic civilization in the very near future.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned, emerging orders are taking shape and global geometry is changing. This refers to those who did not succumb to US hegemony and the unipolar order. New orders create novel situations and a variety of opportunities and challenges. In this regard, the Supreme Leader of Iran believes that the current situation can bring opportunities for Iranian Islamic civilization. One of the key concepts proposed by him, which is derived from the main discourse of the Islamic Revolution, is the keyword "Theory of Resistance", which finds meaning in the face of domination, compromise, and submission.

His strategic advice is to promote this theory both theoretically and practically, so that it can be used as a framework for "discourse-building, networking, and stream-making" resistance to the system of domination not only in the geography of Islamic Iran, but in the realm of all nations in a free world. The "Theory of Resistance" is a framework for thinking, planning, and finding solutions for the progress of Islamic Iran.

According to him, today it is necessary to define resistance both in the field of foreign policy and foreign interactions and in the domestic dimension, and according to this macro theory, the strategy of "deepening and internalizing resistance" should be put on the agenda and redefined and explained based on it. "Political resistance", "socio-cultural resistance" and "economic resistance" to further deepen the components of the soft power of the Islamic Revolution in the country and beyond its borders, and from that path of progress and resistance against the all-out combined war of the enemy.

By emphasising the theory of resistance and establishing the deterrent aspect of this theory in all political, economic, military, social, and cultural fields, Iran can achieve self-sufficiency in all areas and therefore will not need foreigners to solve internal problems. Also, according to this, the Iranian-Islamic model of progress can be a way forward and the Iranian-Islamic civilization in the new world order can have a place for emergence and expression.

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THE MIDDLE EAST WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION FREE ZONE: RATIONALE, ATTITUDES AND WAY AHEAD

Marina T. Kostić[1]
Andrej Stefanović[2]

Abstract: The 2021 events, such as the Tenth Review Conference (RevCon) of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the renewed Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the confirmed use of chemical weapons in the conflicts in the region, and the frequent proposals for the new Biden administration to return to the JCPOA, raised the issue of the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (MEWMDFZ) establishment high on the contemporary international agenda once again. The aim of this paper is to assess the prospects of the MEWMDFZ through the historical analysis of similar models, exploration of the rationale behind the MENWFZ/WMDFZ proposal since 1974 and its development through the subsequent decades, attitudes of key stakeholders, and the possible way ahead. The authors employ historical analysis to present the evolution of the proposal on the MEWMDFZ, content analysis of the documents adopted on this issue, and a comparative method to present the key stakeholders' points of contention and draw conclusions from similar models such as NWFZs. The authors conclude that the establishment of the MEWMDs will remain a "moving target," but one that is necessary in order to maintain the momentum of the peace process, the credibility of

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the main stakeholders' non-proliferation policy for the Middle East, and to avoid nuclear risks for the sake of the instrumental tactical interests of regional states.

Keywords: the Middle East WMDFZ, weapons of mass destruction, non-proliferation, disarmament, the NPT, stability.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to assess the prospects of the establishment of a Middle East Zone free of Weapons of Mass Destruction (MEWMDFZ) as the only region for which such a proposal exists as a distinct and holistic concept.[3] The 2021 events, such as the Tenth Review Conference (RevCon) of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the renewed Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the confirmed use of chemical weapons in the region, and the frequent proposals for the new Biden administration to return to the JCPOA, raised the issue of the MEWMDFZ establishment high on the contemporary international agenda once again.

However, having in mind the lack of empirical models and data regarding the WMDFZ, it is impossible to assess the prospects of creating this Zone through historical or case study analysis. But, this possibility exists regarding a similar model, which was also the original proposal for the Middle East until the 1990s, in the form of the Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (NWFZ). At first sight, the addition of the other WMD seems like it does not complicate the effort that much, since there are global bans and universal instruments that prohibit chemical and biological weapons on an equal footing. Still, having in mind that not all states of the Middle East region are part of this global ban and that, in some cases, chemical and biological weapons can be seen as an equaliser to nuclear weapons possession, this addition to the original proposal does complicate the effort, but seems like an inevitable one. Egypt, for example, which was also the state that proposed the establishment of the MEWMDFZ, made its participation in the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the

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[3] The proposal for the creation of a *de-facto* zone free of WMD existed in 1991 in Latin America, following the Cartagena Declaration (NWFZ would be complemented by the ban on chemical and biological weapons).

Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) conditional upon Israel's entry into the NPT. Egypt has also not ratified the Treaty of Pelindaba, which established the African NWFZ. In addition to not being a party to the NPT, Israel has also not joined the BTWC. Syria, as well, did not ratify the BTWC. The case of the WMDFZ is also prompted by the recent use of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict in the region.[4]

Through historical and content analysis of the existing NWFZs and taking into account the specific additional international measures and treaties regarding the other WMD (biological, chemical, and radiological) in the first part of the paper, we will try to draw some conclusions of merit for the establishment of the MEWMDFZ. In the second part of the paper, we will deal with the characteristics of the Middle East NWFZ/WMDFZ proposal, including through analysis of the origins of the concept, its transformation, and attitudes of the parties involved by means of content analysis of the proposals, statements, and opinions of main stakeholders and final documents of multilateral forums. The third part of the paper is concerned with the assessment of the main variables identified in the first part of the paper as pertinent to the creation of the NWFZs and the identification of the way ahead regarding the proposal for the MEWMDFZ. We concluded that many of these variables or conditions are not met in the case of the Middle East, but for the reasons of the peace process, external actors' interests in maintaining the credibility of non-proliferation policy and avoiding nuclear risks, and instrumental tactical national interests of the states in the region, the proposal for the establishment of the MEWMDFZ will remain a valid and desirable option.

THE HISTORY AND POLITICS OF THE NUCLEAR WEAPONS FREE ZONES AND THE CONCEPT OF THE WMD FREE ZONE

Nuclear Weapon Free Zones (NWFZs) are usually put in the context of the disarmament agenda, even though some authors see them only as part

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[4] "OPCW Confirms Chemical Weapons Use in Syria," July/August 2021, *Arms Control Today*, https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2021-07/news-briefs/opcw-confirms-chemical-weapons-use-syria, (accessed August 12, 2021).

of non-proliferation and arms control efforts, not necessarily leading to nuclear disarmament on a global scale.[5] According to some opinions, proposals for zones free of nuclear weapons were promoted as a reaction to the obvious failure of early Cold War ambitions for general and complete disarmament, such as the "Open Skies" plan for complete disarmament presented by President Eisenhower at the 1955 Geneva Summit, or the 1956 USSR proposal for prohibiting production and the use of nuclear weapons, as well as their deployment in foreign states.[6] Other authors see them in a more instrumental way – as a tool "for attaining tactical policy goals which often had little to do with the wider objectives of non-proliferation, world peace, and national economic development".[7] Also, they are seen as an instrument for developing states to stay out or avoid being victims of the superpowers' nuclear arms race.[8] Müller, for example, writes that "the central concern which motivated the emergence of the NWFZ concept and its implementation was the prevention of nuclear interference from outside the region".[9] In this regard, this author maintains that the treaties establishing the NWFZs go beyond the NPT and that the prohibition on the stationing and deployment of nuclear weapons by outside forces is their "most meaningful contribution".[10] This is also why it is important that Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) recognize the status of the NFWZs through acceptance of the protocol(s) attached to the treaties establishing the zone. Certainly, through their inclusion in the Treaty on the

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[5] Müller mentions that the NWFZ were thus far non-proliferation instruments. Harald Müller et al., "From Nuclear Weapons to WMD: The Development and Added Value of the WMD-Free Zone Concept", Non-Proliferation Papers, No. 31, September 2013, EU Non-Proliferation Consortium, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/EUNPC_no-31.pdf, (accessed July 30, 2021), 2.

[6] James R. Ozinga, "An Analysis of the Rapacki Plan to Denuclearize Central Europe", Master's Theses, Graduate College, Western Michigan University, 1964, 16-17.

[7] Athanassios G. Platias and R. J. Rydell, "International Security Regimes: the Case of a Balkan Nuclear-Free Zone", in: *South-Eastern Europe after Tito, a Powder-Keg for the 1980s,* ed. David Carlton and Carlo Schaerf (London: Macmillan Press, 1983), 112.

[8] Radovan Vukadinović, "Prospects for Mediterranean Security: a Yugoslav View," in: *South-Eastern Europe after Tito, a Powder-Keg for the 1980s,* ed. David Carlton and Carlo Schaerf (London: Macmillan Press, 1983), 158.

[9] Müller et al., "From Nuclear Weapons to WMD", 3.

[10] Ibid.

Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the NWFZs have become part of the universal nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime and some states, such as Egypt, see them as "instrumental in enabling the Non-Proliferation Treaty to achieve its objectives and aims".[11] Their importance also lies in the fact that over 100 countries in the world participate in the NWFZs, which cover over 50% of the world's surface, with the figures being even more outstanding for the southern hemisphere, as 99% of the surface is covered by the NWFZs.[12]

Historically speaking, the NWFZ proposals were developed in the 1950s. The already mentioned 1956 USSR proposal was further elaborated in another Soviet project submitted to the 1956 meetings of the UN Disarmament Commission, which suggested creating in Central Europe (extending to both Germanies and countries "adjacent to them") a zone free from the stationing of nuclear forces.[13] Mirroring this proposal, a Polish initiative known as the *Rapacki Plan*, named after the former Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, was proposed in 1957, which promoted the idea of a zone encompassing West and East Germany, as well as Poland and Czechoslovakia, in which the production, stockpiling, import, and deployment of any type of nuclear weapon would be prohibited, while nuclear weapon states would be required to commit not to maintain nuclear forces in the zone, nor to deploy nuclear weapons.[14] It is widely assumed that many NWFZs were proposed in response to "trigger events", but the Rapacki Plan did indeed follow a NATO decision to install American intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) in West Germany.[15] On the

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[11] "Egypt: Ratification of Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)," https://treaties.unoda.org/a/npt/egypt/RAT/london, (accessed August 19, 2021).

[12] Cecilie Hellestveit and Daniel Mekonnen, "Nuclear weapon-free zones: the political context", in: *Nuclear Weapons under International Law*, ed. Gyo Nyustuen, Stuart Casey-Maslen and Annie Golden Bersagel, (Camrbidge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 347.

[13] "Official Records, Supplement for January to December 1956," Disarmament Commission, 1956, https://s3.amazonaws.com/unoda-web/documents/library/Supplement%20for%201956.pdf, (accessed July 3, 2021), 11.

[14] "The Rapacki Plan", 14 February 1958, Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe, https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/the_rapacki_plan_warsaw_14_february_1958-en-c7c21f77-83c4-4ffc-8cca-30255b300cb2.html, (accessed July 3, 2021).

[15] Platias and Rydell, "International Security Regimes," 111-112.

other hand, it was seen as a pure Polish initiative or "manoeuvre" aimed at disengagement from any possible nuclear confrontation, avoidance of the stationing of any nuclear weapons on its soil, and gaining security assurances from the NWS that they would not use nuclear weapons against countries covered by the proposal (fear of invasion such as the one that occurred in Hungary was part of the motivation).[16] Thus, in the political climate of the late 1950s, the *Rapacki Plan* had little, if any, chance of being adopted, as the Western states saw it as a Soviet ploy to create supplementary advantage for the Eastern Bloc, which already had the upper hand in conventional forces on the continent.[17] The *Rapacki Plan* was actually a convenient way for the USSR to prevent Germany from acquiring nuclear weapons, a long-standing aim of the USSR during the Cold War, as well as Russia today. Despite being unsuccessful at first, this innovative concept proved to be useful in elaborating the principal framework of a NWFZ and served as a model for other countries, which took up many of the principles found in the *Rapacki Plan* (such as the total absence of nuclear weapons, the existence of a verification and control system, and the obligation on the part of the NWS to provide guarantees that they would not use nuclear weapons against the zone) in the construction of NWFZs in their respective regions.[18] At the same time, the differences in geography, politics, culture, strategy, and economics meant that it was impossible to attain a truly uniform model of a NWFZ, and in practice, these regimes differed in the scope of states parties' obligations, responsibilities of states outside of the zone, geographical delimitation of

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[16] Valeria Puga Alvarez, "Functional peace? The "first wave" of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone sproposals in the Cold War", *Grotius*, https://www.academia.edu/43482987/Functional _peace_The_first_wave_of_nuclear_weapon_free_zones_proposals_in_the_Cold_War?e mail_work_card=thumbnail, 4 (accessed August 20, 2021).

[17] Zoltan Marusza, "Denuclearization in Central Europe? The Rapacki Plan during the Cold War", Cold War History Research Center, Budapest, 2010, 12; Michael Hamel-Green, "Peeling the orange: regional paths to a nuclear-weapon-free world," in: *Nuclear-weapon-free zones*, ed. Kerstin Vignard and Ross McRae, (Geneva: United Nations for Disarmament Research, 2011), 4.

[18] Hellestveit and Mekonnen, *Nuclear weapon-free zones: the political context*, 348; Hamel-Green, *Peeling the orange: regional paths to a nuclear-weapon-free world,* 4; Jozef Goldblat, *Arms Control: The New Guide to Negotiations and Agreements*, (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: PRIO, SIPRI and SAGE Publications, 2002), 196.

the zone, verification arrangements, conditions for entry into force, as well as the right to terminate and leave.[19]

Apart from the *Rapacki Plan* and the proposal for the creation of the NWFZ in Central Europe, there were proposals to create Balkan and Scandinavian NWFZs. In fact, between the 1950s and 1960s, there were at least several "proposals" for establishing a NWFZ in the Balkans (or including the Balkans).[20] The Soviet Union supported the second Romanian proposal (from 1959, while the first one was made in 1957) on the Balkan Peace Zone and the creation of a Balkan NWFZ, including the Adriatic, after the installation of Jupiter IRBMs in Italy and Turkey, but the proposal was unsuccessful since the US found it incompatible with its and its allies' security interests.[21] Furthermore, in 1963, there was a Soviet proposal for the establishment of a Mediterranean NWFZ, which was triggered by NATO plans to deploy Polaris submarines in the Mediterranean.[22] One of the proposals for a NWFZ covering both the Balkans and the Mediterranean was put forward by Bulgaria and Yugoslavia in 1968, while the latest initiative was advanced in 1981 by Greece (after the victory of PASOK that year) and Romania, but none succeeded, since the West saw them as Soviet tools for rebalancing power in Europe.[23] Vukadinović, for example, thought that the Middle East NWFZ could be extended to the Balkans and encompass the unique Meditearranean region which would be covered by the NWFZ, as proposed by the Non-Alignment Movement.[24]

As was observed by one author, the emergence of the NWFZs bears a resemblance to peeling an orange – first the zone in the Antarctic was created in 1959, followed by the Latin American one in 1967, with the process continuing during the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s in Africa, the South Pacific, South-East Asia, and Central Asia.[25] Despite their opposition to the *Rapacki Plan*, Western states were later on in the forefront of promoting

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[19] Goldblat, *Arms Control*, 198.

[20] Platias and Rydell, "International Security Regimes," 120.

[21] Alvarez, "Functional peace?," 5.

[22] Platias and Rydell, "International Security Regimes," 112.

[23] Alvarez, "Functional peace?," 5.

[24] Vukadinović, "Prospects for Mediterranean Security," 159.

[25] Hamel-Green, *Peeling the orange: regional paths to a nuclear-weapon-free world*, 3.

the creation of the first NWFZ, albeit on uninhabited land – the Antarctic. The 1959 Antarctic Treaty established a zone free of nuclear weapons (and a demilitarised zone all together), prohibiting nuclear explosions and weapon testing.[26] Similar instruments were adopted in the following decades for Outer Space, the Moon, the Sea-Bed, the Ocean Floor, and the Subsoil. The efforts to establish the NWFZs in populated areas followed the Antarctic Treaty, as the Latin American countries, alarmed by the potential catastrophic consequences of the 1962 Cuban Crisis, came together and adopted the 1967 Tlatelolco Treaty, which established a NWFZ in Latin America and the Caribbean, with the most salient features inspired by the proposals of the *Rapacki Plan.*[27] Adopted at the height of the Cold War, the Tlatelolco Treaty is often cited as a "success story" of what can be achieved despite great differences and difficulties.[28]

Prior to reaching the Tlatelolco Treaty, the growing international attraction of the NWFZ concept continued unabated in the United Nations. In 1965, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a resolution which affirmed the right of groups of states to agree on a treaty-based absence of nuclear weapons from their territories.[29] This principle was subsequently reaffirmed by the UNGA in a 1975 resolution, which also provided a definition of the NWFZs through enumerating a number of constitutive elements. This can be summed up as follows: a NWFZ entails the existence of a treaty envisaging the total absence of nuclear weapons in a geographically delimitated zone, accompanied by a system of verification and control of compliance, with nuclear weapon states being called upon to respect, in legally binding terms, these regimes, and in so doing not to violate them, including through the use or threat to use nuclear weapons against them.[30] The Tlatelolco Treaty, together with UNGA

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[26] Ibid., 5.

[27] Ibid., 5.

[28] Hellestveit and Mekonnen, *Nuclear weapon-free zones: the political context*, 354.

[29] "Non-proliferation of nuclear weapons," UN General Assembly, Resolution 2028, A/RES/2028, November 19, 1965, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65 BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Disarm%20ARES2028.pdf, (accessed July 5, 2021).

[30] "Comprehensive Study of the question of nuclear-weapon-free zones in all its aspects," UN General Assembly, Resolution 3472, December 11, 1975, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/640307?ln=en, (accessed July 5, 2021).

and NPT norms, served as a guide for the South Pacific states, which, due to raised concerns because of French nuclear tests, established a NWFZ through the adoption of the 1985 Rarotonga Treaty. It not only banned nuclear weapons and all forms of nuclear activity, but also prohibited nuclear weapons testing in the entire zone, as well as the dumping of nuclear waste.[31]

Despite calls for NWFZs in other parts of the world in the 1960s and 1970s, due to the difficult and unfavourable international situation, these initiatives did not come to fruition until the Cold War's end. In South East Asia, for example, the Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality, a precursor of the future zone, was established in 1971. However, a full-fledged NWFZ was not feasible due to Thailand's and the Philippines' foreign policy alignment with the US. After the end of the Cold War, countries in Southeast Asia adopted the 1995 Bangkok Treaty, the provisions of which went a step further compared to the Tlatelolco and the Rarotonga Treaties, as it extended the obligations of nuclear weapons absence to the exclusive economic zones of state parties, a crucial reason why the nuclear weapon states were reluctant to give this zone the requested negative assurances.[32] With regard to the African continent, interest in a NWFZ also emerged in the 1960s, triggered by French nuclear testing in the Sahara and ignited by the development of the South African nuclear program. With the Cold War drawing to an end, in 1990, the UNGA adopted a resolution calling for the implementation of the 1964 Organization of African Unity Declaration, which committed African states to denuclearizing the continent. Subsequent negotiations resulted in the 1996 Pelindaba Treaty, which included provisions relating to the dismantling of existing nuclear facilities.[33] The latest NWFZ was created in Central Asia through the adoption of the 2006 Semipalatinsk Treaty, where the aspiration for a zone was triggered by regular nuclear testing, as well as other nuclear-related activities (processing of nuclear fuel, stockpiling of nuclear weapons and fission material) conducted by the USSR. Because of this, the Treaty contains

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[31] Hamel-Green, *Peeling the orange: regional paths to a nuclear-weapon-free world*, 6.

[32] Hellestveit and Mekonnen, *Nuclear weapon-free zones: the political context*, 356-357; Hamel-Green, *Peeling the orange: regional paths to a nuclear-weapon-free world,* 7.

[33] Hamel-Green, *Peeling the orange: regional paths to a nuclear-weapon-free world*, 7-8.

provisions for assistance in environmental rehabilitation of contaminated areas and bans nuclear weapons research.[34]

The latest contribution to the development of the NWFZ concept took place in 1999, when the UN Disarmament Commission, in its report, recommended a set of principles and guidelines for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone such as that they should be established on the initiative of the state(s) of the region and include regional states who, by their free will, choose to create such a zone, as well as that the NWS should be consulted during this process in order to facilitate their acceptance of the security assurances (protocol(s)) and that this zone will in no way influence the peaceful use of nuclear energy.[35]

However, not all NWS ratified the NWFZ protocol(s). Through these protocol(s), NWSs make legally binding commitments to the zone's status and to refrain from using or threatening to use nuclear weapons against treaty parties. Regarding the Latin America and the Caribbean NWFZ (Tlatelolco Treaty), all five NWS ratified the First Protocol, with China remaining the only NWS that has not ratified the Second Protocol. Concerning the South Pacific NWFZ (Rarotonga Treaty), France and the United Kingdom have ratified all three protocols; China and Russia have ratified only the II and the III, while the United States has not ratified a single Protocol, although it signed all three in 1996. No NWS has signed the Protocol to the South East Asia NWFZ (Bangkok Treaty). Four NWS have ratified Protocols I and II of the African NWFZ (Pelindaba Treaty), with the US being the only exception, as it only signed them in 1996. On the other hand, Protocol III was ratified only by France. In relation to the Central Asia NWFZ, the Protocol has been ratified by four NWS, with the US again being the only NWS to deviate, even though it signed the Protocol in 2014.[36]

When it comes to the relationship with the NPT and having in mind the obstacles to the Middle East NWFZ, it is important to stress that, according

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[34] Ibid., 8; Hellestveit and Mekonnen, *Nuclear weapon-free zones: the political context*, 359.

[35] "Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones", UNODA, https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/nwfz/, (accessed August 15, 2021).

[36] Status and details of the Protocols can be found on: "Protocols to the Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone Treaties", https://www.un.org/nwfz/content/protocols-nuclear-weapon-free-zone-treaties, (accessed August 15, 2021).

to the research conducted by the authors of this paper, only in the case of the first NWFZ (1967) – in Latin America – there were several states that ratified or acceded to the NPT only after they joined the Treaty of Tlatelolco (and when both were open for signature, i.e. after 1968), with some of them, like Brazil, being members of the Zone for as much as thirty years before ratifying the NPT, while having a nuclear weapons programme during the 1970s and 1980s, but never developing a nuclear weapon. This means that they were not part of the NPT at the moment they became part of the NWFZ. But, in any other case involving the NWFZ, all parties to the NWFZ had previously ratified or acceded to the NPT.

Overall, having in mind all the mentioned cases of successful and unsuccessful proposals for the NWFZs, several findings can be relevant for assessing the prospect of the Middle East NWFZ/WMDFZ: (1) the NWFZs were established by the member states who believed that it increased rather than decreased their security and contributed to the overall stabilization of the region covered by the NWFZ; (2) the NWFZs never included countries where some of them had capabilities to become hegemonies or were practicing hegemony; (3) the NWFZs never included countries that were experiencing existential threats; (4) the NWFZs tended to protect member countries from external hegemonies and arms races and were created in the areas close to the NWS, but were at the same time not essential for the strategic stability (deterrence) among superpowers;[37] (5) the NWFZs never included countries that possessed nuclear capabilities, and countries that did have such capacities had to relinquish them in order to enter the Zone. Nonetheless, the decision to destroy the nuclear weapons programme was prompted by other considerations, and was only thereafter followed by the decision to join the zone (as in the case of South Africa).

Apart from nuclear weapons, there were also proposals to create Chemical Weapon Free Zones (CWFZs), which would include both regional and sub-regional initiatives, and, as in the case of nuclear weapons, they were mostly focused on Central Europe (proposed by the Warsaw Treaty members and two German states), the Balkans (proposed by Bulgaria and

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[37] More on strategic stability see: Marina T. Kostić, „Controversial issues regarding the extension of the "New START" Treaty: Can the USA and Russia preserve existing strategic arms control?", *Serbian Political Thought* 70, No. 4, (2020): 124-128.

Romania), Scandinavia, the Mediterranean, and Latin America.[38] But, after the conclusion of the global ban on chemical weapons (CWC) in 1993, all regional CW-ban initiatives were abandoned and "all of these plans and proposals evaporated".[39] Since the global ban on biological weapons (BTWC) was introduced early on, the regional approach to this matter did not develop.[40] Following this line of thinking, one could conclude that with the adoption of a global ban on nuclear weapons (such as the one proposed by the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons), the concept of the NWFZs might also be abandoned or serve as an easier accession to this ban treaty.

After presenting the history of the idea of the Middle East NWFZ/WMDFZ, we will assess the prospect of establishing such a zone by examining the above-mentioned conditions, i.e., variables. Despite the fact that the conditions for establishing such a zone have not been met, negotiations on the zone are likely to continue in the larger interest of non-proliferation of surrounding regional and global powers.

THE RATIONALE FOR PURSUING A MIDDLE EAST ZONE FREE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS (AND OTHER WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION)

Origins of the Initiative and the main obstacles for the creation of the NWFZ

At approximately the same time when the *Rapacki Plan* was presented to the international community, the Soviet Union pressed hard for the Middle East to become a "zone of peace free of nuclear weapons and missiles, and also of good neighbourly relations and cooperation".[41] In this endeavor, the Soviets were motivated by the awareness that plans for

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[38] Müller et al., "From Nuclear Weapons to WMD", 7.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., 9.

[41] "Soviet Initiative calls for a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East", United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, https://unidir.org/timeline/1950s/soviet-initiative-calls-nuclear-weapon-free-zone-middle-east, (accessed July 15, 2021).

universal disarmament were not going to materialize, as well as a fear that the US might share its nuclear weapons with allies in the Middle East. The USSR pursued this agenda and engaged Iran a year later, mostly due to concerns raised by the 1959 US-Iran security agreement. In a note to its authorities, the USSR urged the establishment of a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East.[42]

The first wave of initiatives for regional nuclear weapon-free zones, including one confined to the Middle Eastern space, faded in the mid-1960s as a result of the emergence of a global non-proliferation regime (i.e., the adoption of the NPT), which aimed to limit the size of the global nuclear states club.[43] Nonetheless, it did not take long for the cracks, gaps, and weaknesses in the NPT regime to become evident, especially as many key countries (such as China, India, Pakistan, and Israel) decided to remain outside of the Treaty. With this in mind, interest in a regional non-proliferation and disarmament approach was restored during the 1970s in various parts of the world. This renewed interest was also manifested in the UNGA, as one-half of the disarmament resolutions became directly linked to the issue of the NWFZs.[44] During the UNGA's 25th session in 1970, Iran announced for the first time its willingness to declare the Middle East a nuclear-free zone, if other countries in the region agreed to such an exploit.[45] This commitment was reiterated a year later, with Iran calling upon neighbouring countries to reach an agreement on the Middle East nuclear free zone.[46] The proposal was strengthened after the 1973 Yom Kippur war, and in 1974, the initiative was endorsed by the Shah of Iran, Reza Pahlavi, in a letter addressed to the UN Secretary-General. In it, the Shah confessed

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[42] Unto Vesa, "The Revival of Proposals for Nuclear-Free Zones", *Instant Research on Peace and Violence* 5, no. 1, (1975): 43; John C. Campbell, "The Soviet Union and the United States in the Middle East," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 401, no. 1 (1972): 131.

[43] Vesa, "The Revival of Proposals for Nuclear-Free Zones," 44.

[44] Ibid.

[45] "Twenty-fifth session Official Records," UN General Assembly,1857th plenary meeting, October 1, 1970, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/740456?ln=en, (accessed July 15, 2021), 5.

[46] "Twenty-sixth session Official Records," UN General Assembly, 1941st plenary meeting, September 27, 1971, digitallibrary.un.org/record/734914?ln=en, (accessed July 15, 2021).

his understanding of the obstacles that stand in the way of realising such an initiative, but he also underlined that Iran had received support from many governments, both inside and outside the region.[47] In preparing for the commencement of the 29th UNGA session, scheduled for September 1974, the Iranian delegation requested, for the first time, to include an item on the UNGA agenda concerning the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East.[48] Eventually, Egypt joined as a co-sponsor of the request, and the two countries quickly reached an understanding to rename the initiative "the establishment of a nuclear-*weapons*-free zone in the region of the Middle East". On the basis of a draft submitted by the two delegations, the UNGA adopted a resolution on the establishment of the NWFZ in the Middle East, with a total of 125 UN member states supporting it, only two countries abstaining (Israel and Burma), and none against.[49]

In line with a request made by UN member states in this resolution, the UN Secretary General published a Report on the views of interested states regarding its implementation. This document was important as it contained, for the first time, the delineation of the proposed zone. Apart from expressing their readiness to refrain from producing, testing, and acquiring nuclear weapons, many Arab states pointed to the fact that Israel had still not joined the NPT, and they conditioned their ratification of the Treaty upon Israel's accession. Israel, for its part, in supporting the establishment of the zone as a "desirable further step towards a just and durable peace in the region", underlined that the goal can be accomplished only by a formal agreement between all states of the region, and expressed its readiness to participate at a conference convened for this purpose. In

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[47] "Request for the inclusion of an item in the provisional agenda of the twenty-ninth session," UN General Assembly, A/9693/Add. 3, September 17, 1974, https://unidir.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/1974%20Shah%20UN%20letter.pdf, (accessed July 15, 2021).

[48] "Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East," UN General Assembly, Resolution 3263, A/RES/3263, December 9, 1974, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/disarm-ares3263-xxix.php, (accessed July 15, 2021).

[49] "Iran and Egypt co-sponsor a resolution calling for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East," UNIDIR, https://unidir.org/timeline/1970s/iran-and-egypt-co-sponsor-resolution-calling-establishment-nuclear-weapon-free-zone, (accessed July 16, 2021).

relation to the NPT, Israel voiced its concerns because Arab states frequently threatened to use force against it and continuously tried to exclude it from the international community.[50] Egypt, in its reply to this statement, stressed that by insisting on negotiations as the only way to establish the zone, the Israelis not only rejected the initiative up front, but also effectively evaded joining the NPT.[51]

After 1974, the resolution on the Middle East NWFZ became a regular item on the agenda of the UNGA. The resolutions adopted throughout the second part of the 1970s resembled the original resolution significantly, with the addition of calls to regional states to place their nuclear activities under an effective system of safeguards operated by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). These resolutions were adopted by a resounding majority, with no votes against and only Israel abstaining, something which was justified by "reservations with regard to the wording of the resolution".[52] Many elements from these resolutions were incorporated into relevant paragraphs of the Final Document from the 1978 UNGA's 10th Special Session dedicated to Disarmament. It contained calls to establish a Middle East NWFZ, having in mind the support expressed by all concerned states and acknowledging the contribution it would make to international peace and security. It was also asserted that, pending the establishment of such a zone, the states in the region ought to proclaim their commitment to refraining from acquiring nuclear weapons on a reciprocal basis.[53]

The 35th UNGA session in 1980 was a turning point as the resolution on the Middle East NWFZ was adopted for the first time without a vote. The resolution was drafted along the same lines as its precursors, with

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[50] "Report of the Secretary General on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East." UN Secretary General, 1975S/11778, https://www.unidir.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/1975_SecGenReport.pdf, (accessed July 16, 2021), 11.

[51] Ibid., 13.

[52] "Thirty-fourth session Official Records," UN General Assembly, 70th Plenary meeting, October 16, 1979, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/754036?ln=en, (accessed July 18, 2021), 38-40.

[53] "Final Document of the Tenth Special Session of the General Assembly," UN General Assembly, 1978, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/218448?ln=en, (accessed July 18, 2021), 8.

paragraphs dedicated to the adherence to the NPT, placing nuclear activities under IAEA safeguards, and provisions on refraining from the production and acquisition of nuclear weapons pending the establishment of the zone.[54] Prior to its adoption, Israel's delegation submitted to the UNGA an alternative resolution on the same subject, which called on all states in the region, as well as all other adjacent states that are not parties to any NWFZ treaty, to convene a conference in order to negotiate a multilateral treaty for the establishment of a NWFZ in the Middle East. However, their proposal was immediately rejected by the Arab states, which prompted the Israelis to withdraw their resolution and eventually decide to vote in favour of the resolution sponsored by Egypt. A turn in Israel's stance was caused in part by accusations that it dismissed calls for a Middle East NWFZ, as alleged in the Secretary General's 1980 Comprehensive Study on Nuclear Weapons.[55] Reacting to this remark, Israel's Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time explained that Israel had continuously supported the establishment of a NWFZ in the region, and that they actually viewed regional arrangements as the best mechanism to solve the issue of nuclear proliferation. However, it was once again stressed that such a zone should follow the example of the "Tlatelolco model", i.e., that it should be achieved through a multilateral convention between all states of the region negotiated at an international conference.[56]

Despite their draft being rejected in 1980, Israel pushed forward again the next year, during the 36th UNGA session, by requesting all states concerned to indicate their readiness to hold a preparatory meeting to discuss the modalities of a conference for adopting a multilateral treaty that would establish a NWFZ in the Middle East. At the same time, the Arab

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[54] "Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East." UN General Assembly, Resolution 35/147, A/35/PV.94, December 12, 1980, https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/35/147 (accessed July 18, 2021).

[55] "Comprehensive study on nuclear weapons," Report of the Secretary General, UN Secretary General, A/35/392, September 12, 1980, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/15382?ln=en, (accessed July 20, 2021), 143.

[56] "Lettre datée du 23 octobre 1980, adressée au Secrétaire général par le Représentant permanent d'Israel auprès de l'Organisation des Nations Unies," Nations Unies Assemblee, A/C.1/35/8, Octobre 24, 1980, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/16331?ln=en, (accessed July 20, 2021).

states used every opportunity to point out the dangers of Israel's nuclear capabilities, which they designated as the greatest threat to the establishment of the zone. In 1979, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution expressing concern that Israel's nuclear capabilities would exacerbate already volatile regional security and endanger international peace.[57] These fears were further exacerbated in June 1981 when Israel attacked an Iraqi nuclear research centre, which prompted the Security Council to adopt a resolution in 1981 that called upon Israel to urgently place its nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards.[58] These calls were repeated within the IAEA in a resolution adopted by its General Conference in September 1987, which made a direct reference to the "recent information regarding the possession of nuclear weapons by Israel".[59]

Apart from this, the second part of the eighties was important in further elaborating the concept of a NWFZ in the Middle East. Acting upon a request made by Egypt in 1988, the UN Secretary General conducted a study on effective and verifiable measures which would "facilitate the establishment of a NWFZ in the Middle East, taking into account the circumstances and characteristics of the Middle East".[60] It also explored the geographical delimitation of the zone, as it included in the process all member states of the Arab League, plus Iran and Israel, and introduced the concepts of "core" and "peripheral countries", which implies the existence of a smaller group of states that are essential to the initiation, establishment, and operation of the zone, while the other, larger group of countries, is important for the agreement to enter into force. From the perspective of the Arab states and Iran, the problem continued to be Israel's

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[57] "Israeli nuclear armament," UN General Assembly, Resolution 34/89, A/RES/34/89, December 11, 1979, https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/34/89, (accessed July 20, 2021).

[58] "On the Israeli military attack Iraqi nuclear facilities," UN Security Council, Resolution 487 (1981), S/RES/487, June 19, 1981, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/22225?ln=en, (accessed July 20, 2021).

[59] "IAEA resolution on the 'Israeli nuclear capabilities and threat' is adopted for the first time," UNIDIR, https://unidir.org/timeline/1980s/iaea-resolution-israeli-nuclear-capabilities-and-threat-adopted-first-time, (accessed July 20, 2021).

[60] "Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East," UN General Assembly, Resolution 45/52, A/RES/45/52, December 19, 1990, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/104358?ln=en, (accessed July 20, 2021).

nuclear capabilities and its absence from the NPT and IAEA safeguards. On the other hand, Israel's difficulty was attributed to the unwillingness of other countries in the region to accept it as a legitimate state and to sit at a negotiating table in order to agree on the zone's arrangements.

A Zone Free of All Weapons of Mass Destruction

Israel's nuclear armament was, however, not the only problem facing the Middle East. Certain countries in the region were recorded as stockpiling chemical weapons, which were even used by some of them in conflict situations (such as the decade-long Iran-Iraq War). Even though never used, there was also strong suspicion of developing biological weapons programmes in the Middle East.[61] Looking to encompass all these threats, in 1990, the former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak called for the Middle East to be rid of all WMD (i.e. nuclear, chemical, and biological) without exception, and that, consequentially, all states concerned should make commitments to this end. In order to ensure compliance, he advocated for adequate verification measures to be put in place.[62] This proposal, which came to be known as the "Mubarak Initiative", effectively put the prospective Middle East zone at a qualitatively different level compared to all other NWFZs. A year later, the UNSC, in a resolution that terminated the 1991 Gulf War (UNSC Res. 687), *inter alia,* recalled "the need to work towards the establishment in the Middle East of a zone free of such weapons", and that Iraq's disarmament, required by this resolution, "represents steps towards the goal of establishing in the Middle East a zone free from weapons of mass destruction and all missiles for their delivery".[63] At about the same time, the former US President George Bush, in an address delivered before a joint session of the US Congress on March 6, 1991, on the occasion of the end of the Gulf War, committed the US to controlling the spread of WMD and the missiles for their delivery in the

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[61] "Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East", Nuclear Threat Initiative, https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/weapons-mass-destruction-middle-east/, (accessed July 27, 2021).

[62] "On restoration of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Kuwait," UN Security Council Resolution 687 (1991), S/RES/687, 3 April 1991, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/110709?ln=en, (accessed July 27, 2021).

[63] Ibid.

Middle East.[64] This commitment was subsequently elaborated in a White House Middle East Arms Control Initiative, which called upon all countries concerned to accede to the relevant international instruments (the NPT, BTWC, and CWC), also envisaging a verifiable ban by regional states on the production and acquisition of weapons grade fission material.[65] This initiative was afterwards discussed in the framework of the P5 process (five nuclear weapon states) during 1991 and 1992, resulting in support by the P5 for the establishment of the Middle East WMDFZ, in accordance with UNSC resolution 687 on the end of the Iraq-Kuwait War (April 1991).[66]

In August 1991, Egypt and other Arab states requested the IAEA Director General to include a new item on the IAEA General Conference's agenda — the Application of IAEA safeguards in the Middle East. The resolution under this item ended up being adopted without a vote. It referred to the urgent need for all states in the Middle East to accept the IAEA's safeguards over all of their nuclear activities and to take measures, including confidence-building and verification, in order for the NWFZ to be established in the Middle East.[67] Israel backed the consensus on this item as a result of the agreement that the resolution on Israeli nuclear capabilities and threats (adopted for the first time in 1987 and included annually in the IAEA General Conference's agenda) would not be put to a vote. Other members approved this maneuver, seeing it as a measure conducive to the peace process in the Middle East.[68] The UN Secretary

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[64] "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the End of the Gulf War," University of Virginia Miller Center, March 6, 1991, https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/march-6-1991-address-joint-session-congress-end-gulf-war, (accessed July 27, 2021).

[65] "The Fact Sheet: Middle East Arms Control Initiative," The White House: The Office of the Press Secretary, May 29 1991, https://www.dscu.mil/Pubs/Indexes/Vol%2013_4/Fact%20Sheet%20Middle%20East%20Arms%20Control%20Initiative.pdf, (accessed August 7, 2021), 2.

[66] "P5 express their support for a ME WMDFZ," UNIDIR, 1991, https://unidir.org/timeline/1990s/p5-express-their-support-me-wmdfz, (accessed August 7, 2021).

[67] "Application of IAEA Safeguards in the Middle East," International Atomic Energy Agency, 20 September 1991, https://unidir.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/1991_Resolution%20adopted.pdf, (accessed August 7, 2021).

[68] "IAEA General Conference agrees not to put the resolution on 'Israeli Nuclear Capabilities and Threat' to a vote," UNIDIR, 1992, https://unidir.org/timeline/1990s/iaea-general-conference-agrees-not-put-resolution-israeli-nuclear-capabilities-and, (accessed August 7, 2021).

General also decided to suspend further actions in relation to the issue of the Middle East NWFZ, as the Madrid Peace Process seemed to offer a "window of opportunity" for resolving the overall situation.[69]

The Madrid Peace Conference, held from October to November 1991, brought together for the first time all the parties to the conflict in the Middle East. Even though it did not produce tangible results, the participants agreed to stay in dialogue, both on a bilateral and a multilateral track. The multilateral dialogue was aimed, among other things, at finding solutions to key regional problems, arms control, and regional security.[70] Between 1992 and 1994, the Arms Control and Regional Security Working Group (ACRS) held several meetings where the discussions focused on the feasibility of applying the US-Soviet risk reduction model in the Middle East, such as establishing a hotline, preventing misunderstandings, and avoiding incidents.[71] However, the deterioration of the peace process, drawing attention to the 1995 NPT Review Conference, and the disagreement between Israel and Egypt regarding the timing of discussions on the nuclear agenda, led to the collapse of the talks.[72]

From the UNGA to the NPT RevCon and back

With the work of the ACRS Working Group ending in disagreement, Egypt started to put the issue of the Middle East WMDFZ at the forefront

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[69] "Report of the Secretary General: Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East," UN Secretary General, 1992, A/47/387, September 1992, https://www.unidir.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/1992_0.pdf, (accessed August 7, 2021), 2.

[70] "The Madrid Conference 1991," Department of State United States of America, Office of the Historian, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1989-1992/madrid-conference, (accessed August 10, 2021); Mission of Israel to the UN in Geneva, "History: The Peace Process", https://embassies.gov.il/UnGeneva/AboutIsrael/history/Pages/History-Peace-Process.aspx, (accessed August 10, 2021).

[71] More on US-USSR/RF arms control measures see: Andrej Stefanović, "Deterioration of the global arms control regime and the role of the Vienna Document in reviving stability and confidence in Europe", *Journal of Regional Security* 16, No. 1, (2021): 56-60.

[72] "Parties of the Madrid Peace Conference create the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) working group," UNIDIR, 1991, https://unidir.org/timeline/1990s/1992-1995-arms-control-and-regional-security-working-group-acrs (accessed August 10, 2021).

of the NPT. Furthermore, after two decades of inconsequential UNGA resolutions on the Middle East NWFZ, the sentiment among the Arab states was that a formal linkage with the NPT would make a difference, particularly to the way the US, Israel's most important ally, approached the issue.[73] In 1995, the NPT was about to expire, as the Treaty was originally signed for a duration of 25 years, and at that year's Review Conference (which became known as the Review and Extension Conference) most parties were ready to support an indefinite extension. On the other hand, Egypt and other Arab states signalled their readiness to do so if the three Treaty depositaries (the US, the United Kingdom, and the Russian Federation) sponsor a resolution on the Middle East. The resolution, adopted as part of a package of decisions, called on the Middle Eastern states "to take practical steps… aimed at making progress towards… the establishment of a verifiable Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction… and their delivery systems".[74] Since it was evident that the extension of the Treaty could not have happened without the Arab states' support, the resolution would become part of the NPT review cycle. Despite this, little progress was made on the resolutions' implementation in the subsequent period.

At the 2000 NPT Review Conference, the depositaries did not pay specific attention to the issue. When in 2005, this attitude continued, Egypt, which in 2000 agreed not to prevent the adoption of a consensus document, denied support for the Conference's agenda, which prevented the parties from reaching consensus on the final document.[75] The failures of the previous two conferences gave rise to reinvigorated efforts to implement the 1995 Resolution. In the 2010 Final Document, the parties emphasised the importance of the full implementation of the resolution and envisaged the three co-sponsors of the resolution and the UN Secretary General, in consultations with the states of the region, convening a conference in 2012 on the establishment of the WMDFZ in the Middle East.

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[73] Tytti Erästö, *The Lack of Disarmament in the Middle East: A Thorn in the Side of the NPT* (Stokholm: SIPRI, 2019), 3.

[74] "Resolution on the Middle East", 1995 NPT Review Conference, https://unoda-web.s3-accelerate.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/assets/WMD/Nuclear/1995-NPT/pdf/Resolution_MiddleEast.pdf, (accessed August 15, 2021).

[75] Patricia E. Lewis, "A Middle East free of nuclear weapons: possible, probable or pipe-dream?" *International Affairs* 89, no. 2 (2013): 438-439.

This Conference was to be attended by all Middle Eastern states and conducted on the basis of the 1995 Resolution. Additionally, the preparations for it would be done by a facilitator, to be appointed by the Secretary General, who would also be mandated to support the implementation of the resolution, assist in conjuring up follow-up steps, and report to the 2015 Review Conference.[76]

Despite the success of the 2010 Review Conference, the US started distancing itself from the outcome due to the fact that Israel's nuclear facilities and the need to place them under IAEA safeguards were mentioned in the Final Document, while there was no word on Iran's non-compliance issues.[77] In reiterating its support for the establishment of the Zone, which is dependent on the achievement of comprehensive and durable peace, the US announced that it could not allow the holding of a conference that would jeopardise Israel's national security, or that would single out Israel and create unrealistic expectations.[78] This was precisely the point where the Arab states opted not to submit the resolution on Israeli nuclear capabilities to the IAEA General Conference, as they refrained from aggravating the process further.[79]

In October 2011, it was announced that the implementation of the 2010 decision had commenced being implemented through the appointment of a Finnish diplomat, Ambassador Jaakko Laajava, as the facilitator of the process, while Finland was designated as the host country for the 2012 Conference.[80] However, as the end of 2012 was drawing to a

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[76] "2010 NPT Review Conference Final Document," https://www.nonproliferation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2010_fd_part_i.pdf, (accessed August 16, 2021): 29-30.

[77] Lewis, "A Middle East free of nuclear weapons: possible, probable or pipe-dream?," 439.

[78] "Statement by the National Security Advisor, General James L. Jones, on the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference," The White House Office of the Press Secretary, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/realitycheck/the-press-office/statement-national-security-advisor-general-james-l-jones-non-proliferation-treaty- (accessed August 16, 2021).

[79] "Arab Group refrains from putting the draft resolution on 'Israeli nuclear capabilities' to a vote at the IAEA General Conference," UNIDIR, 2011, https://unidir.org/timeline/2010s/arab-group-refrains-putting-draft-resolution-israeli-nuclear-capabilities-vote-iaea (accessed August 16, 2021).

[80] "Finland appointed as Host Government, Facilitator for 2012 Conference on Middle East as Zone Free of Nuclear, All Mass-Destruction Weapons," United Nations, 2011, https://www.un.org/press/en/2011/sg2180.doc.htm, (accessed August 16, 2021).

close, the US announced unilaterally that the conference could not be held due to ongoing unfavourable conditions in the Middle East and that the states concerned had not reached an agreement on the terms of reference of the Conference.[81] Russia affirmed that such a decision could only be taken following the explicit consent of the countries concerned. Also, in the case of postponement, they argued that new dates ought to be set right away.[82] In addition, the League of Arab States characterised the postponement as a violation of obligations that stemmed from the NPT and requested the facilitator to work out new dates. However, no alternative was agreed.[83] The failure to convene the Conference signalled the limitations of furthering the WMDFZ initiative within the NPT as well as the extent to which great powers could exert their influence on the process. Disagreement over the convening of the Conference was the reason for the failure to adopt the 2015 NPR RevCon Final Document.

During the 2000s, the renewed point of concern was also the supposed Iranian nuclear weapons programme, and, after several failures, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was finally signed in 2015. However, whatever aspiration existed for using the JCPOA as a trigger mechanism for advancing the WMDFZ in the Middle East soon went away, as in May 2018, President Trump announced the US's departure from the Agreement, which put into question its future existence. To this day, the new Biden administration did not return to this agreement regardless of numerous pressures and mediation from the EU in the first half of 2021 and prominent US-based arms control associations.[84]

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[81] "2012 ME WMDFZ conference is postponed", UNIDIR, 2012, https://unidir.org/timeline/2010/2012-me-wmdfz-conference-postponed?timeline=12, (accessed August 16, 2021).

[82] "Press Statement on the 2012 Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, https://unidir.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/2012-11-24_Russian%20Statement%20on%20postponement%20of%20the%202012%20conference.pdf, (accessed August 16, 2021).

[83] "League of Arab States criticizes decision to postpone the 2012 ME WMDFZ conference," UNIDIR, 2013, https://unidir.org/timeline/2010/league-arab-states-criticizes-decision-postpone-2012-me-wmdfz-conference?timeline=13, (accessed August 16, 2021).

[84] On the position of the EU toward the WMD see: Marina T. Kostić, "European Union and the Weapons of Mass Destruction: Policy, Threat, Response", *Romanian Review of Political Sciences and International Relations* XVIII, No. 2 (2021):135-155.

Finally, at the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the Tenth NPT Review Conference in 2018, the US effectively divorced the issue of the Middle East WMDFZ from the NPT, stating that the Treaty's review cycle could not be the primary mechanism for advancing the zone's establishment. It was also reiterated that the establishment of the zone could not be isolated from the overall regional political and security situation in the region. Ultimately, the US concluded that the regional states should take the necessary practical steps in order to ensure the political, diplomatic, and security conditions required for the WMDFZ to be instituted.[85] However, taken away by the failures in 2015 and not expecting that the process within the NPT could get back on track, the League of Arab States, in March 2018, was prepared for such a scenario. In an Action Plan adopted during this period, it envisaged the implementation of the 1995 ME Resolution through mobilising efforts at the 73rd session of the UNGA, as a way of deferring the issue of the Middle East WMDFZ back to the UNGA.[86] These efforts paid dividends as the Arab states succeeded in passing the decision on convening a conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMD through the UNGA in December 2018. The decision was adopted with the votes of 103 countries, while 6 voted against it, among which were the US and Israel.[87] The decision mandated the Secretary General to convene a conference no later than 2019 and to invite all regional states, the three co-sponsors of the 1995 Resolutions, and the other NWS. The conference's mandate was a step further compared to the 2010 agreement, as it provided for the Conference to elaborate on a legally-binding treaty on the establishment

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[85] "Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Working Paper submitted by the USA on Establishing Regional Conditions Conducive to a Middle East Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction and Delivery Systems," https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2018-04-19-US-Working-Paper-33-MEWMDFZ.pdf, (accessed August 16, 2021).

[86] "Resolution 8251," League of Arab States, March 7, 2018, https://unidir.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/2018-03-07_EN_LAS%20Ministerial%20Council%20adopts%20SOC%20action%20plan%20for%20the%20implementation%20of%201995%20Resolution%20on%20the%20Middle%20East.pdf, (accessed August 16, 2021).

[87] "Report of the First Committee," UN General Assembly, Seventy-third session, November 19, 2018, https://undocs.org/A/73/513, (accessed August 15, 2021).

of a WMD free zone in the Middle East. In performing this task, it was envisaged for the conference to be convened at annual sessions until this task was completed.[88] Nonetheless, the adoption of this decision was not without consequences on other fronts. Specifically, the consensual adoption of the UNGA resolution on the Middle East NWFZ was put to an end at this very session, as the Israeli delegation referred to the "imposition of the new unilateral and destructive" decision and warned that the Arab states had shifted the *status quo*, which made it impossible for Israel to continue supporting the resolution as well as cooperating with other regional arms control initiatives.[89] This remark was seconded by the US delegation, which blamed the Arab states for advancing a short-sighted approach of coercive measures designed to isolate cooperative principles at the cost of consensus-based solutions.[90] The UK delegation decided to abstain from voting, as for them it became clear that the resolution no longer had support among the countries in the region.[91] On the other hand, the Russian Federation accused the US and the UK of sabotaging the adoption of the consensus document at the 2015 NPT Review Conference, despite bearing a major part of the responsibility for implementing the 1995 Resolution. The Russian delegation pointed to the fact that without any dialogue, there could be no progress and no agreement on this issue.[92] Despite these cracks and the abandoning of consensus, the resolution succeeded in being adopted by the votes of 171 member states and only two votes against (the US and Israel).[93]

Consistent with the 2018 decision, the first session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and

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[88] "Convening a conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction," UN General Assembly, Decision 73/546, A/73/513, December 22, 2018, https://undocs.org/A/73/513, (accessed August 15, 2021).

[89] "Official Records," UN General Assembly, Seventy-third session, First Committee, 27th meeting, November 2, 2018, https://undocs.org/A/C.1/73/PV.27, (accessed August 17, 2021).

[90] "Official Records," UN General Assembly, Seventy-third session, First Committee, 26th meeting, November 1, 2018, https://undocs.org/A/C.1/73/PV.26, (accessed August 15, 2021).

[91] Ibid.

[92] "Official Records," First Committee, 27th meeting.

[93] Ibid.

other WMD was held in New York on November 18–22, 2019, with the representatives of all participating states in attendance, apart from Israel and the US. The Conference adopted a Political Declaration, in which the aim of elaborating a legally binding treaty to establish a Middle East WMDFZ was ascertained. This was to be done on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at by the regional states following the rule of consensus. The realisation of such a goal would be facilitated by the participation of all states in the region in an open and inclusive manner. Even though an agreement was made that annual sessions of the Conference ought to be held in November of each year, the 2020 session was postponed to a later date, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.[94]

CONCLUSION: ASSESSING THE CONDITIONS FOR THE MIDDLE EAST NWFZ/WMDFZ AND THE WAY AHEAD

Insistence and new orientation towards creating a zone free of all WMD in the Middle East surely complicated the equation, since no such zone still exists, and it looks like it serves as some kind of experiment for both practitioners and scholars to try to develop and implement such a concept. This poses an additional layer of uncertainty in the process since it requires the regional states to comply with an additional set of international disarmament norms, not just the NPT and the IAEA safeguards. But, as we could see from the analysis of already established NWFZs, ratification or accession to the NPT did not always precede the forming or entering the Zone, which was the case of the Latin American NWFZ. Thus, Israel's primary participation in the NPT, before joining the proposed Zone, would be highly expected, but it would not be without exception if it becomes part of the Zone without prior accession to the NPT. In any case, it is self-evident that Israel would have to abandon its nuclear weapons or prove through some other agreed mechanism that it does not possess such weapons in order to become part of the Zone. Also, other states would be expected to enter into other agreements that regulate other types of WMD.

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[94] "Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction", United Nations, 2020, Accessed 27 August 2021, https://www.un.org/disarmament/topics/conference-on-a-mezf-of-nwandowomd/.

In this context, attempts to create a WMDFZ additionally complicate the possibilities of verification of the regime since, for example, the BTWC does not have verification mechanisms and the possibility of some kind of negative security assurance from NWSs.

As we mentioned in the theoretical part of the paper, some elements critical for the establishment of NWFZs might be of importance for the MEWMDFZ. First, for now, it seems that all countries from the region use the idea of the NWFZ/WMDFZ as an instrument for attaining tactical policy goals, and not all of them seem to see this Zone as a tool for enhancing their security. Setting differences and ending war is precisely a point of divergence, as there are diametrically opposed positions relating to the relationship between achieving peace in the region and establishing the Zone; while Israel claims that peace should be achieved first in order to pave the way for other goals, Arab states argue that these two processes should be dealt with concurrently, as they are mutually reinforcing. Secondly, the NWFZs comprise states in the same category of power. They are usually developing states, with most of them having equal power without the possibility of establishing regional hegemony. However, in the Middle East, there is a clear asymmetry in power and threat perception (strong US, extension of threat perception of other states to the US, as well as alleged Israel's nuclear capabilities). It is clear that this runs contrary to the efforts to establish the MEWMDFZ. Third, none of the countries participating in any of the existing NWFZs had their existence and recognition denied as much as in the case with Israel. This also clashes with the establishment of the Zone. Fourth, the Middle East countries do not border any of the NWS and are not essential for the preservation of strategic stability among superpowers. Instead, they are areas of contested superpowers' interests, and their influence in the region is greater than expected. These are reasons that are also detrimental to the establishment of the Zone. Fifth, it will hardly be possible for Israel to relinquish its nuclear weapons just in order to enter the Zone. State parties had various reasons for abandoning their nuclear weapons programs, such as in the case of South Africa, but none of them was for the reason of entering the NWFZ.

Having in mind these variables, it seems like the regional states' individual commitments not to develop nuclear weapons, or other weapons of mass destruction, would be a more feasible option. Thus, the

creation of the Zone is highly improbable, but it still remains high on the agendas of all involved states, including great powers. One of the explanations for this can be found in the context of the pursuance of the non-proliferation agenda of great powers, as well as some organizations, such as the EU. They need to maintain the credibility of these agendas and, through the involvement of all states in the region, continue to work on the elimination of the possibility that some of the "unfriendly" states could come into the possession of nuclear weapons. However, the credibility of this approach does not stop at the regional level and non-proliferation efforts, since for the Arab states, this project also has a wider dimension in the context of pressuring great powers to do more on disarmament. Actually, the framing of the WMD Free Zone as part of non-proliferation instead of a larger disarmament agenda weakens the support of Arab states for the creation of the Zone. On the other hand, without a credible non-proliferation agenda and arms control in the region, Israel might continue to view the MEWMDFZ as a means of other states' attempts to disarm it.

In the end, the goal of establishing the Middle East WMDFZ appears to be a "moving target", with the interests and preferences of the key players continuously susceptible to alteration, which makes the process that much difficult, and at times even impossible to achieve. Nonetheless, it is clear that efforts to establish the zone will continue, as the process has become too important to the security interests of regional states and great powers, which have already invested too much in the process over the last nearly five decades.

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ICT AND THE CONVERGENCE OF THE MIDDLE EAST TO THE DEVELOPED ECONOMIES

Nataša Stanojević[1]

Abstract: The focus of this research is the problem of the constant lag in the economic development of the Middle East region. Due to numerous specifics and limitations, these countries are not subject to conventional development models. One of the newer development opportunities is offered by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), which bypass many earlier obstacles to the development of this region. The review of previous research, as a starting point for this paper, includes both theoretical assumptions about the mechanisms of positive effects of ICTs on economic development and empirical research results that do not indicate such clear positive effects, especially in less developed economies. The general hypothesis is that ICTs have both converging and diverging effects on the development of the Middle Eastern economies. ICTs *implementation* in these undiversified economies has very limited scope, while *investing* in ICTs has a strong positive effect on economic growth. The methods used are the classification of ICTs determinants in the region as well as the Pearson coefficient of correlation between investment in ICTs and economic growth. The summary results show that ICTs have significant development potential for the region only if they are implemented in specially selected segments of the economy for each individual country.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), the Middle East, Network readiness index (NRI), economic development, spending, investments.

[1] Ph.D. Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade.
natasa.stanojevic@diplomacy.bg.ac.rs

INTRODUCTION

The key differences between developed and developing economies that are commonly cited in the literature are: high income, usually measured by per capita income; dominance of the service sector in GDP; technological advancements; high level of infrastructure development; high human development rank in terms of education quality and health; and others. The criterion included in all classifications is high income, as the main difference between the developed and underdeveloped worlds. However, such a clear distinction cannot be made between the economies of the countries of the Middle East and developed economies. Some of the countries in the region, such as Qatar, the UAE, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, have higher per capita incomes than the US and most of the most developed economies in Western Europe. Wealthy Arab economies also have the highest level of infrastructure. Nevertheless, this region does not belong to the group of developed economies, just as it cannot be called underdeveloped. A crucial step that separates the Middle East from the developed world is advanced technology, education, and skills.

In this article, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are seen as a characteristic of competitiveness but at the same time as a means of stimulating economic growth and development in general, including many aspects of human development.

ICTs have the potential to accelerate economic development by stimulating productivity and employment growth in services, industry, and agriculture. Of particular importance for the Middle East region, including North Africa (hereinafter the Middle East), is the fact that ICTs do not depend on natural conditions and resources, which are very unfavourable in this region, not even on the achieved stage of industrialization, which is lagging behind in most of these countries.

Having in mind the monolithic structure of the Middle Eastern economies, two special hypotheses can be set. The first is that investing in ICTs has a strong positive effect on their economic growth by raising the level of invested capital and engaging additional labour in a new sector. On the other hand, it is precisely this monolithic structure of the economy and the lack of productive activities that significantly narrow the possibility of realising the full potential of ICTs, which is usually related to increasing productivity and

efficiency. Therefore, the general hypothesis is that *ICTs have both converging and diverging effects on the development of the Middle Eastern economies*.

The main problem with generalising the effects of ICT investment is that developing countries may lack the capacity to absorb these technologies. This can happen if, for example, they do not have the appropriate level of human capital or simply do not have enough capital to complete the started phases but remain with the commenced projects, unfinished ICT infrastructure, and the like. Thus, the effects of investment can be significantly smaller than in developed countries. Developing countries, on the other hand, in the modern period feel fewer positive effects of new investment in ICTs because the most advanced technologies have already been implemented in all segments of the economy and society and have strongly contributed to the development of these economies.

Despite these barriers, directing additional resources to encourage the implementation of ICTs generally contributes to the growth and development of all economies. However, for the Middle Eastern countries, this may be more important, because this is one of the few development options that fits into their non-productive position in the world market and bypasses existing internal natural and social barriers to development. ICTs could enable these countries to "skip" the industrialization phase and the usual methods of increasing productivity, as shown by the modern rise of the Indian economy.

This research analyses the state and potential of ICTs development in the Middle East. All segments of technological readiness, according to the classification of the World Economic Forum (WEF), are compared with developed economies in order to determine how much the countries of the Middle East converge with those that belong to the "developed world". The specific goal is to determine whether investing in ICTs, as a sector, has a positive and significant relationship with economic growth in these countries.

The first chapter refers to the literature review of the impact of ICTs on the economy and consists of two parts. The first sub-chapter explores the theoretical assumptions of this impact, and the second one presents empirical research on this impact on specific economies.

The second chapter describes in detail the state of ICTs in the Middle East, following the criteria of the 2016 Networked Readiness Index (NRI) of the WEF. According to these criteria, the following were investigated: the ICTs environment in these countries, the readiness for ICTs implementation, the

scope of ICTs use by individuals, companies, and governments, as well as the impact of ICTs on the economies and societies of these countries. All these criteria are analysed in separate sub-chapters. Each of them is further divided into several indicators, so that this chapter presents the state of ICTs not by simple description, but in depth and quantitatively.

The third chapter is a quantitative study of the effects of investing in the ICTs sector in all Middle Eastern countries. The Pearson coefficient was applied, which determines the correlation between ICTs investments and their economic growth, measured by GDP growth and GDP per capita.

LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE IMPACT OF ICTS ON THE ECONOMY

Theoretical assumptions about the impact of ICTs on development

Information and communication technologies have a direct or indirect impact on the entire economy. In developing countries, "information and communication technologies can reduce poverty[2], increase productivity, and stimulate economic growth".[3] The most common ways of influencing are: changes in product type, production (productivity), trade, banking, and governance (e-government), increasing efficiency, increasing the quality of human resources, etc.

Production in the field of ICTs is characterised by rapid technological development and strong demand, which makes a great contribution to the development of the economy, business, and exports. The developed ICTs sector enables companies to achieve advantages through the development of technologies for certain purposes. These technologies have found wide application in services, industry, and even agriculture, and they greatly encourage the growth of productivity in these sectors.

One of the most important aspects of the impact of ICTs sector production and services on the economy is the impact on employment. It is not only

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[2] These are not direct effects, but the development of ICTs enhances people's economic opportunities and access to financial resources, as well as information on government policies, social services, health care, and education.

[3] World Bank, *ICT for Greater Development Impact.* Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group, 2012.

about increasing employment, but also about big changes in the quality of the workforce (education and skills), as well as its distribution by sectors and geographical locations. In telecommunications companies, employment is not increasing faster than the increase in assets and income. Digitalization in these groups has not so far affected the increase in the number of jobs. In contrast, after 2015, the number of employees in multinational corporations with a technical profile increased by about 5% per year. In addition to contributing to overall employment, it is of some importance to create new employment opportunities within the ICTs sector.

To some extent, ICTs contribute to economic growth and productivity directly through the opening of new companies in this sector. By founding these companies, GDP automatically increases for the year in which they are founded. ICT companies, such as telecommunications services, have the largest share among start-ups. The success of their businesses in the coming years (and these companies are growing faster than in other sectors of the economy) will make an additional contribution to economic growth. At the same time, successful business does not depend so much on the ability of management, but on the growth of the number of consumers and new needs, thus new services, in the field of communications at the global level. These new services are, for example, electronic commerce, electronic financing, electronic management, and the like. These new services contribute to increasing economic activity. More intensive application of ICTs contributes to the reduction of transaction costs and accelerates innovation processes. This further encourages multifactorial productivity and thus the overall efficiency of the economy. ICTs enable cost reduction and faster and better communication between business entities; contribute to process and inventory optimization in factories; play an important role in retail ICTs through automated payments, scheduling optimization, inventory control, and more.[4]

The relationship between technology and employment is a bit controversial. Although high technologies create new markets, new jobs, and business ventures, they simultaneously lead to disruptions in existing manufacturing sectors and the labour market. The rapid development of

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[4] UNCTAD, *World Investment Report 2018 – Investment and New Industrial Policies, Geneva: United Nations,* 2018: 9.

information and communication technologies has led to a change in the way individuals work and the nature of jobs available in the labour market. Changes and the development of information and communication technologies are related to the transformation of job characteristics at the level of individual occupations as well as at the level of coordination and organization. These changes are related to the change in the requirements of the labour market in terms of qualifications and levels of expertise. In the Middle East, a potential problem would be that high technologies require far less labour in quantitative terms, but have increased demands on the quality of human resources in terms of education and skills. Teleworking is one of the most significant advantages of ICT. Some of the most important social benefits of teleworking are the expansion of the workforce by providing opportunities for wider sections of the population to engage in economic flows. This applies to people with disabilities, to women, enabling them to reconcile work with family obligations, and to the population in isolated areas, among others.

In addition to the economy, the application of high technologies has a strong, visible impact on the overall development of society. ICTs can facilitate access to basic services such as health (e-health services, disease monitoring), traffic monitoring and control, pollution monitoring, logistics in transport, and education (online courses). Information and communication technologies can help governments better understand and respond more quickly and adequately to social trends and events, such as changes in migration patterns and the needs of migrants. ICTs can facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid. Governments in developing countries can facilitate anti-corruption efforts, increase traditionally very low efficiency (e-government), and information management can contribute to a better response to natural disasters, environmental disasters, and displacement.[5]

Empirical research on the impact of ICTs on development

Since the end of the 20th century, information and communication technologies have been considered a key driver of productivity growth.

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[5] UNCTAD, *World Investment Report 2017 – The digital economy – the application of internet-based digital technologies to the production and trade of goods and services,* Geneva: United Nations, 2017.

However, in the mass of articles, strategies, books, and brochures, there is not much concrete quantitative research on the impact of ICTs on the economy. Most of the significant research is conducted by the OECD and refers to OECD countries, i.e., developed countries. Most of these studies have proven a positive and economically significant link between the state and dynamics of ICTs and economic growth.

Although the effects of the application of ICTs on development are experientially evident, very rare are scientific studies that measure the effects of the use of ICTs on economic growth. Even rarer are studies that analyse these effects in less developed and developing countries. Most notable is Wu, which investigates the impact of the use rates of computers in private use, mobile phones, and Internet users in 107 developed, underdeveloped, and developing countries on economic growth.[6] No distinction was made between these groups of countries, but they entered the sample together, and the research showed generally positive effects of ICTs application on growth.

Research by Niebel and Yousefi analysed the impact of ICTs investment on economic growth and their results indicate a strong positive relationship.[7] Nibel's research is one of the few that analyses developed, underdeveloped, and developing countries separately. The results are approximately the same, with little advantage in developed countries. Stiroh finds a negative correlation. But in a repeated study, with the same methodology and with extended results, he obtained a positive link between ICTs investment and economic growth.[8] More significant studies of this relationship are by Strauss and Samkharadze, O'Mahony and Vecchi, Papaioannou and Dimelis with positive results, and Pilat with negative results or no effects of ICTs investments.[9]

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[6] Khuong Vu, "ICT as a Source of Economic Growth in the Information Age: Empirical Evidence from the 1996-2005 Period". *Telecommunications Policy*, 35(4), 2011.

[7] Thomas Niebel, "ICT and Economic Growth – Comparing Developing, Emerging and Developed Countries," *World Development,* 104(C), 2018; Ayoub Yousefi, "The impact of information and communication technology on economic growth: evidence from developed and developing countries", *Economics of Innovation and New Technology*, 20(6), 2011.

[8] Kevin Stiroh, "Are ICT Spillovers Driving the New Economy?" *Review of Income and Wealth*, 48(1), 2002

[9] Hubert Strauss and Besik Samkharadze, "ICT Capital and Productivity Growth." EIB Papers, 16(2), 2011; Mary O'Mahony and Michela Vecchi, "Quantifying the Impact of ICT Capital

An extensive OECD survey from 2003, entitled "OECD, ICT and Economic Growth: Evidence from OECD Countries, Industries and Firms", showed that investing in ICTs has contributed to growth and productivity in all OECD countries. However, the impact is not evenly balanced. In the United States, this impact is far greater than in any other OECD country. In some countries, namely the US and Australia, the research showed that the sectors that invested a lot in ICTs had faster productivity growth. This is especially true for the wholesale and retail trade.

There is little research on the impact of ICTs investment on the economic growth and development of underdeveloped and developing countries, and the existing empirical evidence is relatively weak and contradictory, mainly as a result of the lack of reliable data.

A few in-depth studies relate to determining the correlation between several parameters of the state and dynamics of ICT in the analysed countries and economic growth. The mentioned Niebel research is based on a sample of 59 countries in a period of 5 years (1995– 2010) and confirms the hypothesis of a positive relationship between capital invested in ICTs and GDP growth.[10] In this study, underdeveloped countries, emerging economies, and developed countries were analysed separately. What is interesting in this study is that there is no statistically significant difference between them in terms of the degree of impact of ICTs on the growth of their economies.

Karlsson and Liljevern investigated the impact of ICTs investments on production growth, with countries divided into four groups according to the criterion of total revenues.[11] The panel analysis is based on a sample of 101 countries from 1995 to 2015. The extended Cobb-Douglas production function was applied. The results showed that in the lowest income countries

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on Output Growth: A Heterogeneous Dynamic Panel Approach", *Economica* 72(288), 2005; Papaioannou, Sotiris and Dimelis Sophia. "Information Technology as a Factor of Economic Development: Evidence from Developed and Developing Countries," *Economics of Innovation and New Technology* 16(3), 2007; Dirk Pilat, "The ICT Productivity Paradox: Insights from Micro Data", *OECD Economic Studies*, 1, 2004.

[10] *Niebel, "ICT and Economic Growth – Comparing Developing, Emerging and Developed Countries."*

[11] Emil Karlsson and Jennie Liljevern. *ICT Investment and the Effect on Economic Growth – a Comparative Study across Four Income Group*. Jönköping: Jönköping University, 2017.

(only seven countries), the positive effect of investing in ICTs on economic growth is completely absent. Similar results are given by the analysis of Hanclova et al., which also points to the weak effects of ICTs on economic growth in Eastern European countries.[12]

This article strongly relies on Stanojević's research, in which the effect of investing in ICTs on the economic growth of the Middle Eastern countries is analysed and a strong positive correlation is obtained.[13]

COMPETITIVENESS AND TECHNOLOGICAL READINESS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution have created many new development opportunities, but also disruptions within and between economies and societies.[14] In that context, in 2018, the WEF created a new Competitiveness Index 4.0. In addition to the previous competitiveness factors (called competitiveness pillars), index 4.0 includes ICTs, innovation capacity, information infrastructure, and other factors (Table 1).

Table 1. Factors (pillars) of competitiveness in the Middle East

Pillars of competitiveness	Index (1-100)	Growth compared to the previous period
Institutions	55.5	1.2
Infrastructure	70.5	1.4
ICT adoption	57.6	4.8
Macroeconomic stability	75.3	-4.3
Health	80.8	1.0

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[12] Jana Hanclova et al. "Does ICT capital affect economic growth in the EU-15 and EU-12 countries"? *Journal of Business Economics and Management*, 16(2).

[13] Nataša Stanojević, *Karakteristike privreda Bliskog istoka i Severne Afrike i perspektive ekonomske* saradnje sa Srbijom, (Beograd, Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu, 2021).

[14] Klaus, Schwab, (ed.), *The Global Competitiveness Report 2019*, Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2019.

Pillars of competitiveness	Index (1-100)	Growth compared to the previous period
Skills	62.9	1.1
Commodity market	56.7	2.7
Job market	54.8	3.4
Financial system	63.7	2.2
Market size	59.9	1.0
Business dynamics	58.2	2.1
Innovative ability	41.3	4.3

Source: Schwab, 2019.[15]

The Middle East, compared to other regions, has a relatively high infrastructure index and ICTs adoption as factors of competitiveness. The nation's health index is itself the largest (80), but compared to other regions, it is higher only than South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.[16] The weakest index has the factor of innovation ability, although this factor is relatively low-rated in other regions as well.

Among the mentioned factors of competitiveness, ICTs adoption stands out as a potential driver of future growth in the competitiveness of the Middle Eastern economies. The reason is the relatively good position compared to other regions, but above all, the higher growth of the index compared to the previous period. As the data in Table 1 shows, other factors are stagnant or declining. An important feature of information technologies is that they support not only business and efficiency, but also the economic sector itself, which, like other economic activities, includes domestic and foreign investments, significant revenues, and jobs. Unlike manufacturing, there are no requirements in terms of geographical conditions and resources, which the region does not have. These countries cannot develop industry, but they

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

are part of global value chains as transportation hubs, with the potential to become financial hubs like the UAE and Bahrain. Both positions require a wide implementation of the latest information technologies. ICTs can overcome many weaknesses in Arab economies, contribute to diversification by creating a number of new economic opportunities, raise the level of education, which is constantly low in this region, and contribute to inclusion in trends and trends in the world economy and global value chains.

In order to gain a more detailed insight into the state and perspectives of ICTs as a driver of competitiveness growth, it is necessary to determine the technological level of these countries. Quantitatively, the technological level is most often expressed by the Networked Readiness Index (NRI), which is also called technological readiness. This is a tool for assessing the readiness of countries to take advantage of new ICTs and digital transformation. The original index was developed in 2001 by the WEF. The goal was to better understand the impact of ICTs on the competitiveness of economies, and for this reason, this composite indicator had the following three components: 1. the ICTs environment offered by a particular country; 2. society's willingness to use ICTs (individuals, companies, and governments); and 3. the scope of ICTs use.

The NRI is then systematically developed so that the categories it includes are partially different in each new model, which is created every four years. Although a new, slightly modified index was constructed in 2020, this research includes the classification of countries and the NRI categories from the previous report for 2016 because it referred more directly to the ICTs sector. The new index refers to a broader topic, the digital transformations of the entire society, and includes precisely the categories in which the countries of the Middle East lag behind: the inclusion of women, rural areas, and the like.

In the 2016 report, the NRI included 4 main categories, 10 subcategories (pillars), and 53 specific indicators that are integral parts of the subcategories. Indicators are rated 1-7. Each category will be considered in the context of the Arab countries and their global position in the areas covered by the pillars of competitiveness.

- ICTs environment; 1. Political and regulatory environment (9 indicators) 2. Business and innovation environment (9 indicators).
- ICTs readiness; 3. Infrastructure (4 indicators) 4. Availability (3 indicators) 5. Skills (4 indicators).

- Use of ICTs; 6. Individual usage (7 indicators) 7. Business usage (6 indicators) 8. Government usage (3 indicators).
- Impact of ICTs; 9. Economic impact (4 indicators) 10. Social impact (4 indicators).

139 countries were included in the analysis. Figure 1 shows the trend of the NRI, i.e., the trend of technological readiness in seven regions of the world. Trends for all four main categories of the information and communication technology sector in the period 2012-2016 are presented.

When comparing these trends, it is noted that the Arab countries (the Middle East group, North Africa, and Pakistan) do not lag behind other regions to which developing countries belong. Compared to Latin America and especially sub-Saharan Africa, Arab countries are better rated in all four categories (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Index of technology readiness
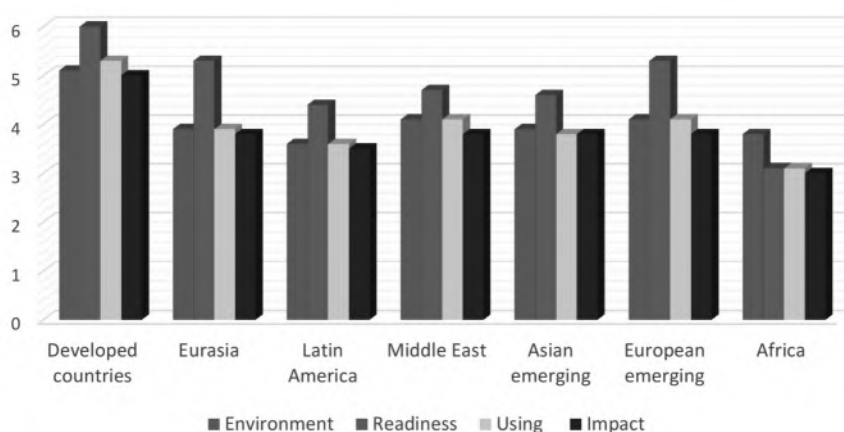
Source: author according Baller, Dutta and Lanvin, 2016. pp. 22-23.[17]

The countries of the Middle East lag far behind the developed countries in terms of all categories of NRIs. On the other hand, they are relatively

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[17] Silja Baller, Soumitra Dutta, and Bruno Lanvin (eds), *Technology Report 2016 - Innovating in the Digital Economy, Geneva,* Geneva, World Economic Forum, 2016. pp. 22-23.

uniform in all four categories with emerging Asian countries, which include China, Malaysia, Thailand, and other successful Asian economies. Compared to European emerging countries and Eurasian countries, the lag is significant only in terms of readiness to implement ICTs. In terms of the extent of ICTs use, only the most developed countries stand out, while all others are relatively uniform (Figure 1).

According to the total NRI, among the countries of the region, the richest countries are in the lead, namely the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. This order in the region is constant, but their position in the world is changing somewhat. In 2016, the UAE and Qatar took the 26th, 27th, and 33rd places in the world, and in 2020 they dropped to 30th, 38th, and 41st places.

Most Middle Eastern countries occupy 50 to 90 places in the world, which can be considered an average technological level of about 4 index points. Oman is in the 52nd place, Jordan in the 60th, Kuwait in the 61st, Morocco in the 78th, Tunisia in the 81st, and Lebanon in the 88th. Other Arab countries lag far behind in terms of technological level. Pakistan is 110, Algeria is 117, while Libya, Yemen, and Syria are not included in the report due to a lack of data, which in itself gives a picture of the technological level of these conflict-affected areas. Kuwait and Lebanon made the biggest progress compared to the previous period. Algeria has far greater financial opportunities for improving the technological level than all the countries in the second group, which speaks in favour of the fact that the technological level does not depend exclusively on investments. Many indicators do not actually require much investment.[18]

The cumulative index, however, in some cases, does not reveal the true picture of the ICTs sector in all countries. In the example of the UAE, an extremely large difference can be noticed in terms of certain pillars. The high position of the UAE is largely due to the government, which is second in the world in 2016 according to the criteria of government use of ICTs. Individual use of ICTs is in a high 19th place, especially in terms of the number of households with Internet access and mobile subscriptions. The adoption of ICTs in the business environment and the economic impact of ICTs have improved compared to the previous report. However, in terms of the most advanced economic activities, there is still a significant gap. Activities related

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[18] Stanojević, *Karakteristike privreda Bliskog istoka*.

to patents in general and patents in the field of ICTs are very low and reduce the overall NR index.

Due to such large differences between different aspects of ICTs within countries, it is necessary to analyze the state of the sector from the angle of four main categories of ICTs: environment, readiness for implementation, use, and impact.

Information and communication environment in the Middle East

The first category, the ICTs environment, relies on two pillars: the *Political and Regulatory Environment* and the *Business and Innovation Environment*. The political and regulatory environment includes indicators such as the efficiency of the legislature and the judiciary, ICTs-related laws, the independence of judges, the protection of intellectual property, software piracy, the number of days to execute contracts, and so on. The business environment includes the availability of the latest technologies, tax rates, the number of days required to start a business, the number of procedures for starting a business, some indicators related to the education system (not specifically for workforce qualifications) and the like.[19]

The assessment and ranking of countries with respect to these two aspects of the first category are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. ICTs environment in the Middle East countries

	Political and Regulatory Environment		Business and Innovation Environment	
Country	Rank	Value	Rank	Value
Qatar	18	5.3	15	5.3
UAE	25	5.1	13	5.4
S. Arabia	29	4.6	25	5.1
Bahrain	36	4.3	29	5.0

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[19] Slobodan Kotlica and Nataša Stanoejvić. *Tehnologija, inovacije i konkurentnost u globalizovanoj privredi.* Beograd: Dositej, 2017.

	Political and Regulatory Environment		Business and Innovation Environment	
Jordan	39	4.2	38	4.8
Oman	53	4.0	58	4.4
Kuwait	63	3.8	72	4.2
Morocco	70	3.8	87	4.1
Lebanon	126	3.0	49	4.6
Tunisia	90	3.5	112	3.7
Egypt	102	3.3	113	3.7
Algeria	123	3.0	133	3.2

Source: author according to Baller, Dutta and Lanvin, 2016.[20]

Among the countries of the region, only Qatar and the UAE rank high, the 15th and 19th in the world, while several of the lowest ranked countries are below the 100th position (Egypt is 113, Pakistan 115, and Tunisia 109). In general, all Middle Eastern countries have a much better business than political-regulatory environment for the development of the ICTs sector.

Readiness for implementation of ICTs in the Middle East

The second category is the readiness to implement ICTs. It consists of three pillars: ICTs infrastructure, ICTs availability, and ICTs skills. Infrastructure in this context includes: electricity production per capita, mobile network coverage, and internet servers (number and security). Infrastructure is the most developed aspect of the second category in the countries of the Middle East. As many as five countries have an infrastructure rating higher than 5, which is close to the rank of the most developed countries (Table 3). It is interesting that Egypt has by far the weakest ICTs infrastructure, where tourism is one of the most important sources of income, and it is precisely the weak infrastructure that is the factor that most refers to visitors.

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[20] Baller, Dutta, and Lanvin (eds), *Technology Report 2016.*

The availability of ICTs implies the prices of mobile telephony services, the prices of the Internet, and the competitiveness of the Internet and telephony sectors. In terms of affordability, Egypt is highly ranked, with as many as 5.8 points. Above it, it is only Bahrain, with similar prices, and Morocco, with prices for the internet and mobile telephony that are among the lowest in the world. That is why this country has 6.3 out of a possible 7 points (Table 3). This is the result of a very low standard of living and prices in general, and not especially the development of the ICT sector. In contrast to these countries, Qatar, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, which rank highest in the region in terms of overall index, rank very low in terms of availability, and rank between 101st and 120th. These rich countries have a very high standard of living, so the prices of the Internet and mobile telephony are in line with the general price level. Unlike the most developed countries, they have not provided the widest access to ICTs.

Table 3. Readiness for implementation of ICTs in THE Middle east countries

Country	Infrastructure		Availability		Skills	
	Rank	Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value
Bahrain	31	5.8	40	5.9	31	5.7
Kuwait	30	5.8	89	4.8	77	4.9
Qatar	29	5.8	120	3.1	5	6.4
UAE	28	5.9	116	3.4	22	5.8
S. Arabia	36	5.2	101	4.3	49	5.4
Tunisia	82	3.7	24	6.3	85	4.7
Oman	46	4.9	96	4.6	76	5.0
Lebanon	77	4.0	109	4.0	55	5.3
Jordan	92	3.2	94	4.6	59	5.3
Morocco	102	3.0	20	6.3	110	3.7
Algeria	80	3.9	99	4.4	89	4.6
Egypt	94	3.1	47	5.8	111	3.7

Source: author according to Baller, Dutta and Lanvin, 2016.[21]

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[21] Baller, Dutta, and Lanvin (eds), *Technology Report 2016.*

The fifth pillar, i.e., the third in the category of readiness for the implementation of ICTs, is skills. This includes the quality of the education system, especially the quality of education in mathematics and science, the enrollment rate in secondary education, and the adult literacy rate. In this aspect, some countries in the region, such as Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain, achieve very good results, with an average score of 5.7 to as much as 6.4 in Qatar, which positions this country as the fifth in the world.

Usage subindex

The third category of technological readiness is the use of ICTs. It refers to the usage of information and communication technologies by individuals, economic entities, and the government. The performance of the Middle Eastern countries in these three pillars is shown in Table 4.

The highest rank in this category is held by the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Bahrain, where the use of ICTs by governments and individuals in these countries is far higher than the degree of use of ICTs by economic entities. In terms of individual use, it is not just the number of mobile phones, but in addition to mobile phone subscriptions, a number of indicators are included, such as the percentage of the population using the Internet, the percentage of households with computers, the number of households with Internet access, the use of virtual social networks and more. The UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia have more than 6 points each, while the countries of North Africa have the least individual usage of ICTs, with Algeria at the bottom of the world list with 2.8 points (Table 4).

Business usage of ICTs is a separate pillar of the NRI. It includes indicators of technology absorption, the capacity of companies to innovate, the rate of patent applications, the use of information and communication technologies for business transactions, the use of the Internet between companies and consumers, and the level of training of staff to use ICTs. Business usage of ICTs in any country in the region did not reach five points, and the ranking is below one hundredth place in all countries of North Africa.

Table 4. Level of ICTs usage in THE Middle east countries

Country	Individual usage		Business usage		Government usage	
	Rank	Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value
UAE	19	6.2	27	4.6	2	6.2
Qatar	23	6.0	25	4.8	5	5.5
Bahrain	14	6.3	37	4.0	3	5.7
S. Arabia	21	6.0	42	3.9	11	5.4
Oman	39	5.3	94	3.4	34	4.7
Kuwait	32	5.6	72	3.6	81	3.7
Jordan	70	4.1	41	3.9	47	4.4
Morocco	67	4.2	105	3.3	41	4.6
Lebanon	46	5.1	97	3.4	124	2.9
Tunisia	78	3.9	107	3.3	55	4.1
Egypt	80	3.8	129	3.0	67	3.8
Algeria	103	2.8	133	2.9	130	2.7

Source: author according to Baller, Dutta and Lanvin, 2016.[22]

The use of ICTs by governments in the region is far more intense. It has already been mentioned that, according to this criterion, the UAE government is in the second place in the world. Qatar, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia are also ranked highly. Algeria is far behind in this, as well as the previous two pillars of this category, and it is in 130th place. The Lebanese government has far less use of ICTs (only 2.9 points) than individuals (5.1) and the economy of this country (3.4) (Table 4).

ICTs impact

The fourth and last category that defines the technological readiness of countries is the impact of ICTs on society and the economy. Economic impact

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[22] Baller, Dutta, and Lanvin (eds), *Technology Report 2016.*

is measured by the impact of ICTs on business and organisational models, on the rates of applied patents in the field of ICTs, and on the rates of jobs where there is a high share of knowledge. Social impact is measured by the impact of ICTs on access to basic services, internet access in schools, government efficiency, etc. In all Middle Eastern countries, the impact of ICTs on society is far greater than the economic impact. It is not about a high impact on society, but about a small impact on the economy. Given the dominance of the most technologically underdeveloped economic activity (energy exploitation), this outcome is quite expected.

ICTs have the greatest impact on society in the UAE, which is also ranked second in the world in this aspect, followed by Qatar and Bahrain, which also have a relatively high position in the world (Table 5).

Table 5. The impact of ICTs on the economy and society in the Middle east

	Economic impact			Social impact		
Rank	Country	Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value
18	UAE	5.2	26	4.3	2	6.1
27	Qatar	4.9	28	4.2	10	5.6
32	Bahrain	4.5	48	3.5	13	5.5
38	S. Arabia	4.3	40	3.7	36	4.9
51	Jordan	3.9	61	3.4	53	4.4
66	Oman	3.7	95	2.9	46	4.6
80	Morocco	3.5	110	2.8	59	4.3
84	Tunisia	3.4	93	2.9	78	3.9
85	Egypt	3.4	58	3.4	103	3.5
90	Kuwait	3.4	102	2.9	84	3.9
103	Lebanon	3.2	83	3.1	114	3.3
129	Algeria	2.6	124	2.6	132	2.7

Source: author according to Baller, Dutta and Lanvin, 2016.[23]

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[23] Baller, Dutta, and Lanvin (eds), *Technology Report 2016.*

EFFECTS OF INVESTING IN THE ICTS SECTOR
IN THE MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES

Investing in itself, in any economic activity, increases the invested capital and thus helps increase labour productivity. Investing in a fast-growing sector, such as the ICTs sector, should provide additional impetus to growth and development.[24] Computer hardware (computers, storage devices, printers, and other peripherals), computer software (operating systems, programming tools, applications, and internal software development), computer services (information technology consulting, computer and network system integration, Web hosting, data processing services, and other services), and communications services (voice and data communications services) are all included in the World Bank's definition of ICT expenditures.[25] All this can be considered as areas of investment in ICTs.

Investment and spending in the ICTs sector are not covered by the World Economic Forum reports, and in general, data are very scarce and out of date. The latest and most accurate data was provided by the WITSA in the Digital Planet 2010 report (updated in 2013), based on reports from local member agencies.[26] The expansion of ICTs use and investment in recent years has been so large that data is no longer collected even by the most important global statistical services such as the World Bank. Given that the aim of this research is to determine the correlation between investment in ICTs and economic parameters, i.e., to determine the relationship between the two time series, the lack of recent data is not of great statistical significance. In relation to the mentioned research by Stanojević, this correlation includes data on ICTs spending for 2019 and 2020, which were collected from various, mostly national sources in the form of statements by officials of the competent ministries and governments in the region. Such data are published (at least in English) for Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, and the UAE.[27] In the meantime,

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[24] Kotlica, Stanojević, *Tehnologija, inovacije i konkurentnost u globalizovanoj privredi.*

[25] World Bank, *Information and Communication Technology Expenditure*, Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group, 2020.

[26] WITSA, *Digital planet 2010*, Vienna, The World Information Technology and Services Alliance, 2014.

[27] Stanojević, *Karakteristike privreda Bliskog istoka*

more detailed data were published by the competent ministries of Bahrain and Qatar, which are not covered by the aforementioned previous research, as well as Oman. A significant set of data for the Gulf countries was provided by the Saudi Communication and Information Technology Commission.[28] Older data were used in the research for the other five countries of North Africa and Iran, so the results for them completely coincide with the results obtained in Stanojević's research.[29]

Investment in information and communication technologies in the Middle East is listed in Table 6. Expenditure does not only refer to government investment, but total government, corporate, household, and individual consumption. For the statistical analysis that follows, the time series for the periods 2005-2013 and 2019-2020 were used, and in Table 6, for the sake of clarity in the text, only a part of the data is shown.

Table 6. Investment in ICTs sector

(Billion USD)

	2006	2008	2010	2012	2013	2019	2020
MENA	52.8	77.7	91.7	110.6	117.8	-	-
Tunisia	1.8	2.3	2.5	2.9	3.1	-	-
Egypt	5.8	9.4	12.5	15.6	16.9	-	-
Bahrain	0.8	0.8	1.0	1.2	1.5	1.4	-
Iran	7.2	13.4	16.1	18.8	19.5	-	-
Jordan	1.4	1.7	2.0	2.3	2.5	2.2	2.3
Kuwait	3.6	4.9	5.2	6.3	6.7	8.8	9.1
S. Arabia	17.6	25.4	32.9	39.5	42.1	35.2	36.8
Qatar	2.6	3.2	3.5	3.6	3.8	4.1	4.2

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[28] CITC. *ICT Report – ICT Investment in Saudi Arabia,* Riyadh, Communication and Information Technology Commission, 2015.

[29] Stanojević, *Karakteristike privreda Bliskog istoka.*

	2006	2008	2010	2012	2013	2019	2020
Oman	2.4	3.0	3.1	2.9	3.0	3.2	-
UAE	7.8	11.5	12.3	15.3	16.5	15.9	16.3
Algeria	2.9	3.8	4.3	4.8	5.3	-	-
Morocco	4.9	9.8	11.9	14.2	15.0	-	-

Source: WITSA, 2014; CITC, 2015.[30]

The data show that the total spending on ICTs in the Middle East region amounts to slightly more than 140 billion dollars in 2013, and it is by far the largest in Saudi Arabia, as much as 42 billion. It is followed by Iran with 19 and Egypt and the United Arab Emirates with 18 billion dollars. Despite many years of extensive investment by the state and the growth of individual consumption, Saudi Arabia lags behind in terms of technological indicators compared to the UAE because the application and use of ICTs is at a very low level.

However, globally, these countries have extremely low spending in the ICTs field. Many developed countries individually have a similar volume of consumption to all Arab countries combined, although some of the richest countries, such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, are also here.[31] For example, Canada, France, Italy, and India have about the same spending as all Arab countries combined. While Germany and the UK spend over $200 billion a year on ICTs, Brazil, which is not a developed country, spends $110 billion. Japan $400 billion, China about $550 billion, and the US $1260 billion a year.[32]

The correlation between investment in ICTs and GDP, as well as ICTs and GDP per capita, was calculated using the Pearson correlation coefficient. It is a measure of the intensity of a linear relationship between two variables and can have values between +1 and -1. A value of 0 indicates that there is no relationship between these two variables. A value greater than 0 indicates a positive relationship; that is, as the value of one variable increases, so does

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[30] WITSA, *Digital planet 2010*; CITC, *ICT Report.*

[31] Stanojević, *Karakteristike privreda Bliskog istoka.*

[32] WITSA, *Digital Planet 2010*, 23.

the value of the other variable. A value less than 0 indicates a negative relationship; that is, as the value of one variable increases, the value of the other decreases.

The equation for the Pearson correlation coefficient is:

$$r = \frac{\Sigma(xi - \bar{x})\,(yi - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\Sigma(xi - \bar{x})^2\ \Sigma(yi - \bar{y})^2}}$$

(1)

Where:

r	correlation coefficient
xi	values of the x-variable in a sample
x	mean of the values of the x-variable
yi	values of the y-variable in a sample
y	mean of the values of the y-variable

By applying the Pearson coefficient to all countries in the region and all years for which data are available, with investment in ICTs as an independent variable and the dependent variables GDP and GDP per capita, the following results were obtained.

Investments in ICTs in the Middle Eastern economies have a large positive impact on the growth of these economies, while the impact on GDP growth per capita shows some differences. In Tunisia, Iran, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, the Pearson ratio is over 0.95 and 96-99%, respectively, which is similar to the analysis of the impact on GDP. Deviations are observed in the case of Jordan, where the impact is around 72%, and, paradoxically, a large negative impact was measured in the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait.

This, of course, does not mean that economic growth per capita is declining due to investment in ICTs, especially since total GDP grew in this period and showed a high correlation with investment in ICTs.

Table 7. Effects of investment in ICTs on economic growth

Country	Pearson coefficient for GDP	Pearson coefficient for GDP per capita
Tunisia	0.931	0.975
Egypt	0.997	0.970
Iran	0.951	0.911
Jordan	0.994	0.727
Qatar	0.933	0.912
Kuwait	0.952	-0.136
S. Arabia	0.914	0.947
UAE	0.968	-0.731
Oman	0.922	0.941
Algeria	0.965	0.995
Morocco	0.977	0.988
Pakistan	0.969	0.993

Source: author`s calculation

As GDP per capita declined while total GDP grew, it can only be concluded that these two countries recorded a large increase in population over a period of several years, which was reflected in the data on GDP per capita. As the birth rate cannot increase so sharply, it is most likely that in this period, the UAE and Kuwait, as rich oil economies, had a large immigration inflow as a result of the post-2008 World Economic Crisis.

CONCLUSIONS

The focus of this research is the possibility of including the Middle East region in the group of developed countries, as it already meets some of the key criteria, such as a high standard of living, high incomes, and modern infrastructure.

Among the many factors of competitiveness, such as macroeconomic stability, institutions, market size, skills, and others, ICTs adoption stands out

as a potential driver of future growth in the competitiveness of the Middle Eastern economies. The development of information, and especially communication technologies, has been analysed both as a goal and as a means of convergence for the developed world. For a region in the Middle East that does not have the natural potential to develop industry, this is one of the few opportunities to achieve development.

Research has shown that many countries in the Middle East do not lag behind other regions of the world in terms of key categories by which the degree of technological readiness is assessed. The lag was recorded only in relation to the most developed economies, which confirms the hypothesis that ICT can be a successful driver of development in these countries.

In three of the four categories that assess technological readiness, the Middle East is ahead of Eurasia and the emerging economies of Europe and Asia, and in all four it is ahead of Latin America and Africa. Indicators in which the region lags slightly behind emerging economies and lags the most behind developed countries are ICTs skills in the poorer countries of the region and ICTs availability in the richest countries in the Middle East. The first lower indicator of ICTs skills confirmed the second part of the general hypothesis about the mixed effects of ICTs, due to the low capacity of labour and the population in general to absorb new technologies. Because the criterion for judging the price indicators of Internet services and mobile telephony services, which are high in these countries due to the high standard, and are in fact widely available, the latter indicator of ICTs availability is not a real obstacle.

In other categories (ICTs environment, ICTs usage, and ICTs impact), although collectively not lagging behind other regions, many countries are ranked very low in terms of the usage of ICTs by governments and businesses.

The most important results of this research are that the countries of the Middle East have the opportunity to join the so-called developed world and get closer to developed economies by engaging in the field of ICTs development. Although the investment relates to hardware and software development, the Middle Eastern countries do not have an industry that would support the former, nor enough human resources to contribute significantly to the latter. On the other hand, a significant incentive to include the Middle East in the group of developed economies would be investments in services, such as communications services (voice and data communications

services), as well as data processing services, computer and network systems integration, Web hosting, etc.

In addition to capital investment, which many countries in the region do not lack, many segments of ICTs development require only the greater involvement of governments in the region (without investment) in terms of more intensive use of ICTs by governments and businesses.

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IRAN'S ECONOMIC COOPERATION
WITH EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES:
EXTRAORDINARY SPACE FOR FOREIGN TRADE

Ali Beman Eghbali Zarchi[1]

Abstract: After the Soviet collapse in the late twentieth century, the Eastern European countries had to undergo profound political and economic reforms to qualify for entry into the European Union. While the political reforms have gone ahead slowly, in the economic area, these reforms have been on course to obtain international standards for producing industrial products. Considering the changes in the US and the possibility of a revival of the JCPOA nuclear agreement and the lifting of economic sanctions, there will be an opportunity for Iranian investors and the economic sector, which will provide more options for expanding economic relations. The Eastern European countries have a good market for our economic sector because these countries are culturally inclined to the east and are receptive to Asian and Eastern products, an advantage that Iran can invest in. The economic similarities (in production, market, and consumption) between Iran and the Eastern European countries and the Iranian economy's advantages and specifics in the region and world have led Iran to hold an important economic-trade status for these countries. The Eastern European region has enjoyed fairly good industrial and technological capacity in the 20th century, and its industries complement and overlap in many areas with Iran's heavy industries.

Keywords: Foreign Trade, Economic Growth, East Europe, Competitiveness, Non-Oil and Engineering Services Exports.

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[1] Senior Expert of European Studies. abeghbali@gmail.com

In the present situation of the global economy, no single country is able to solely rely on its domestic resources and the resulting gains from its national economy to attain considerable growth in economic development. The growing trend of diversification of extraterritorial exchanges of goods and services, along with the fast flow of capital and the comprehensibility of fast technical and industrial growth, has led to the strengthening of the role of foreign trade in economic growth and the importance of boosting exports of goods and services to upgrade international economic cooperation.[2] Nowadays, the export and import of goods and services have an influential supporting role in each country's domestic economy, and the more countries participate in international trade, the easier it will be for their respective development. Because foreign trade is the first step in increasing GDP, even when the import and export structures are different, it has a worthy role, and in the second step, considering the national value and international value of the exported goods, it can raise the income per capita. The amount of success in foreign trade has a direct relation to economic growth.[3] Also, the resulting revenue from foreign trade and export of goods can be invested in the country's economic infrastructure and lead to an increase in public welfare. Also, the economic science intellectuals, while presenting various definitions of foreign trade, share common views on the following aspects:[4]

1. Foreign trade is a separate branch of the national economy, including trade operations as well as technical and scientific cooperation with the outside world. This includes the exchange of goods, warehousing, banking transactions, insurance, transportation, and even tourism.

2. Foreign trade shoulders two basic responsibilities in international trade operations and in international economic cooperation organizations.

   Yet, international trade operations are a form of interdependence between producing units and the national economy in the area of the purchase and sale of goods and exports and imports, which are as follows:[5]

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[2] Events and Analysis Bulletin No. 334 May 2020 P. 51- IPIS

[3] Events and Analysis Bulletin No. 334 May 2020 Page 57- IPIS

[4] Economic Diplomacy and Leading Opportunities (Vol. 1), Coordinator: Massoud Manshouri: University Scholars, 2020, p. 48

[5] Economic Diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Trends and Developments, Opportunities and Challenges after the Nuclear Deal, Author: Morteza Damanpakojami pp. 33-57.

A. International trade of goods, which includes the sale of produced goods by a country to other countries, and exports of all types of semi-manufactured goods with limited value-added and total imports from a country done to secure producer needs and producing cycles,

B. International trade in commercial services, which are called intangible trade, includes operational services relying on imports and exports (transportation, insurance, trade licenses) and even international tourism,

C. Hybrid international trade based on re-exporting goods and, in some situations, importing semi-finished items and finishing them with specialised technical knowledge in order to achieve net value-added in exports,

D. International trade in the form of cooperation with regional, international, bilateral or multilateral economic organizations, in which process, each country's foreign trade is closely connected to the number of the strategic, organized and hybrid partners they have for exporting and importing of goods.

E. International trade is closely connected to how insightful the importers and exporters of goods are, and for successful international trade, governments are responsible for upgrading their exporters' understanding and knowledge of the governing global trade system,

F. Foreign commerce is a complicated and multi-faceted operation that is in compliance with the terms and conditions of the exporting and importing countries, international regulations, and even the 1980 Vienna convention regarding the international sale of commodities.

The reality is that Iran, with 1% of the world population and ranking first among the countries having oil and gas and being situated in the strategic regions of the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea with direct access to a 500 million consumer market, has a tiny share in international trade, a share that is even more limited in electronic international trade, because the basic preconditions and prerequisites for developing electronic trade that will be mentioned below have not been met:

1. Building the necessary equipment and technical infrastructure
2. Legal framework and legal regulations
3. Effective, safe and proper mechanisms for electronic payments
4. Required tools for precise identification of the clients.

Therefore, to increase our country's share and role in international trade, we must pay profound attention to this area. In his book, International Trade Operations, Dan Vesian, while pointing to the importance of electronic international trade, summarises its benefits as follows:

A: Effective and efficient information management

B: Optimal integration of suppliers of goods

C: Lowering the cost of exchanges

D: Lowering the cost of advertising

E: Optimal management of production, especially quantitatively

The reality is that the foreign trade sector of our country's economy in general, and non-oil exports in particular, is fundamentally underdeveloped and its symbols are tangible in exports of low-earning goods, a single-product economy, instability in the grand environment of the economy, and geographical concentration in our country's exports and imports partners. In the era of globalisation, the five areas of trade, financial markets, multi-national companies, world investment, and labour markets have had the most influence, the main reasons being the changes in production methods, the expansion of rationalism, the dynamism of investment, and technological innovation in communication and data-processing. In such a situation, competition will be more influenced by deep development in the organisation of production and economic exchanges in the third millennium, and although in the encyclopaedia of economics, the definition of competitiveness at the national and international levels is as hard and vague as the concepts of democracy, pluralism, and open economy, the competitiveness of each country lies in three main components:[6]

1. The economy's performance in the adaptation process with other countries

2. The country's status in the world trade

3. Each country's capability for optimal utilisation of its resources and capabilities. Also, the World Economic Forum defines each country's competitiveness as "hard and multi-dimensional" and deems this level

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[6] Economic Diplomacy and Leading Opportunities (Vol. 1), Massoud Manshourip. 28

of productivity in each country as the ability of the national economy to achieve sustained high rates of growth in GDP per capita, which is comprised of a set of institutions, policies, and factors that determine the rates of returns obtained by investments in an economy, comprising of 110 indexes, 12 pillars, and three sub-indexes. Of the 12 pillars, the four factors of institutions, infrastructures, grand stability of the economy, hygiene, and basic education are basic requirements, and the six factors of training and education, efficiency, labour market, labour market efficiency, efficiency of goods market, advanced financial markets, technological readiness, and the size of the market are boosters of efficiency, and the two factors of progress in business and innovation are other pillars of technological complexities. There is no doubt that if we see the WTO as the result of interaction and connection between the relative supply and demand of various countries aimed at gaining profits and value-adding through upgrading capacity and diversification of production, we will more than ever understand the important role that development of exports plays under the oppressive western sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran, and we will come to understand the goals of implementing the mechanisms of the Resistance Economy. This is why, under the existing situation and according to the latest assessments made by the World Economic Forum, our country, which ranks 18th in the size of the market, and 25th in access to foreign markets among 139 countries, has no acceptable stand and its indicators are evident in the statistics below.[7]

• 45th in economic stability

• 82nd in institutions

• 74th in infrastructure

• 96th in readiness to attract technology

• 135th in efficiency of the labour market

• 98th in efficiency of the financial market

• 35th in communications

• 91st in the process of Business Progress

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[7] Fundamentals of Economics: Microeconomics, Macroeconomics, Tahmasb Mohtasham Dolatshahi p. 129.

- 15th in controlling international distribution
- 87th in vocational and higher education
- 66th in innovation
- 120th in developed financial market
- 54th in hygiene and basic education

With regard to the statistics and figures presented and the general policies of the Resistance Economy, in paragraph two, the primacy of the knowledge-based economy, the organisation of the national system of innovation for upgrading the global status of the country and increasing the share of production and export of products and knowledge-based services and accessing the first rank in the region, and in paragraph 10, the importance of fully target-purposed support of exports of goods and services, in proportion with the value added and with a positive net currency balance, expanding foreign trade services and transit, encouraging foreign investment in exports, planning national production fitting to the exports needs, and shaping new markets and diversifying the economic bonds with various countries, especially the regional countries, and sustained raising of our country's share in the target markets has been stressed. Taking basic steps to fill the deep gap with the developed and industrialised countries is necessary, and in doing so, we have to shed off certain traits and gain some others, which are summarised in the following two pivots:

A: Preventive Traits:

Preferring personal interests over collective and national interests, consumerism and overspending, insensitivity to production costs, low productivity and efficiency, lack of camaraderie and cooperation among groups and organizations, conservatism, not valuing time, inattention to quality and standards, lack of a grand long-term look at the markets, lack of efforts to precisely comprehend the markets and the consumer's tastes, lack of the necessary technological and communication infrastructures.

B: Required Traits:

Motivation, successes, seeing work as a value, teamwork, regularity, competitiveness, productivity, innovation, and attention to technology, research and development, transfer of technology, quality and standards, the environment, national production, law-abidingness, and futurism, full

comprehension of the importance of exports, and promotion of the country's share in international trade.[8]

This group of traits has been many times stressed in the 20 Year Vision of Development and the Resistance Economy policies. Also, in studying the ways trade expands alongside the type of foreign policy towards other countries in the bilateral, multilateral, regional, and international areas, the three following pivots are of paramount importance:

1. The international economic and trade organisations (UNCTAD, the World Economic Forum, and the World Bank)
2. Multinational Companies
3. Globalisation, especially in the international economy ;

Among these three pivots, as Dolatshahi writes, globalization, meaning the realisation of labour division, has had a more prominent role on the international level and economically includes the following dimensions:[9]

• International Integration of the Labour Market and the Capital Market

• Removing Trade Barriers

• Production of Goods by Multinational Companies

• Integration of Fiscal and Monetary Markets on an International Level

• Expansion of Information across Borders

The Iranian economy's advantages are generally as follows: geo-economic status, higher economic ranking in the world, young and educated population, existence of rich mineral and natural resources, robust economic infrastructures, variety in the economic sectors, and richness in oil and hydrocarbon resources[10], being the world's fourth oil producing country, having the world's second major gas reservoirs, tourism and eco-tourism industry, production of aluminium and cobalt, global high rank in aluminium,

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[8] Economic Diplomacy and Leading Opportunities (Vol. 1), Massoud Manshouri, p. 118

[9] Fundamentals of Economics: Microeconomics, Macroeconomics, Tahmasb Mohtasham Dolatshahi p. 79.

[10] Director of Exploration of the National Iranian Oil Company: With the new discoveries, Iran's position as the largest holder of oil and gas resources in the world has been established, and our authority in this rank will be maintained. (https://www.iribnews.ir/fa/news/2547505

manganese, and copper reservoirs, and having a worthy rank in the world for diversity in agricultural products. These characteristics have led Eastern European countries to be interested in investing in exporting their products to Iran. For example, the countries of Slovenia, Latvia, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Croatia, and other countries can invest in the electronic and engineering industries, furniture, food, chemical industries, railways, drugs, water, car parts production, hydro-electricity, technologies for the environment, building and civic plans, tourism, land and sea transportation, electric machinery, and other areas in Iran.

On the other hand, East European industrial production complies with European standards, and these countries are hubs for producing drugs, agricultural mechanisation industries, medical and dental equipment, and railway industries. In particular, in Romania, the pharmaceutical industry has considerably advanced and follows the highest European and American standards. Also, the fixed prices of food and industrial products in these countries are lower than in Central Europe. By this token, Iran can invest in the areas of building roads, hotels, manufacturing agricultural machinery, gemstones, coal, agricultural products (dried foods and fruits, nuts, spices, and fresh fruit), building, building materials, electricity projects, water supply, petro-chemistry, car manufacturing, food industries, dam building projects, subway projects, tunnels, building silos, creating irrigation and piping networks, energy (building power plants), carpets, furniture, textiles, car oil, petrochemical products, and other areas in these countries and export engineering and technical services to them. In the view of Eastern European countries, including Romania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Moldavia, and some other Schengen non-members, Iran should be looking for the target markets in these countries in its relations with Europe because these countries, with regard to the conditions and positions that hold, can be receptive to Iranian products.[11] Of course, one of the requirements for consolidating presence in Eastern European markets is the production of agricultural and industrial products in accordance with European standards, which fortunately, Iranian products comply with, resulting in Iranian products' having acceptable European standards and Iran having the requirements to

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[11] Political Geography of Europe Authors: Mohammad Mehdi Mazaheri, Azam Mollai, Majid Kafinasher: Islamic Azad University (Khorasgan), 2018, P. 79

export its industrial products to Europe. But unfortunately, in the past years, the Iranian economy has not paid attention to the Eastern markets of the green continent, and Iran's trade has been focused solely on some Central European countries such as Germany, France, and Spain.[12] Furthermore, nowadays, this region's countries have turned into hubs for producing drugs, agricultural mechanisation industries, medical and dental equipment, railways industries, primary chemical materials and licenced additives, fertilizers, seeds, chemical agricultural pesticides, steel and precious metals industries, cosmetics and hygiene primary materials, and in particular, in Romania and Austria, the pharmaceutical industries have considerably advanced and comply with the highest European and American standards. For this, their products are exported to Europe, North, and Central America. All industrial, as well as agricultural and livestock products, meet European standards in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Moldavia. Therefore, with a high degree of certainty, the consumer markets can be receptive to these products.

Iran and Romania's interactions are old and traditional, so the first and last Romanian presidents who visited Iran did so during the waning decades of communism.[13] An excerpt of the talks exchanged between the Shah of Iran and Ceausescu has been quoted by one of the Shah's associates: "Pahlavi believed that small countries could not stand on their feet without their bigger friends, but Ceausescu said it was the big countries that could not survive without plundering small countries." Also, Ceausescu, at his meeting with the Shah of Iran, told him: "Iran and the oil-rich Middle East countries must form a strong alliance and extract their oil freely and sell it by themselves." Ceausescu added: "Romania, until before the Second World War, was an oil exporting country to Europe, but the looting companies sacked its oil to the last barrel and left behind a desolate environment.[14] The westerners buy your oil, but in return give you so little money that you can only import necessary oil-rigging equipment and pay for the technical equipment and other requirements needed for oil wells, and a tiny amount is left for you to buy food in order for you not to starve and to be able to extract oil and give it to

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[12] Events and Analysis Bulletin No. 326 Aug. 2019 P. 44- IPIS

[13] Romanian Foreign Policy and Diplomacy Volume 2 Academy of Sciences P. 157

[14] http://www.tarikhirani.ir.fa A review of Iran and Romanian Relation in Ceausescu era- Hoseine sokhanvar

the westerners." The Romanian leader depicted the western companies as ruthless looters that plundered the third world countries' oil and minerals and, in return, would pay little money as charity, money that was enough only to pay for the extraction operations, but the Shah believed: "This man is crazy. He spends more of his time on propaganda against the west than on bilateral negotiations." The important fact was that Ceausescu's visit to auto factories was a staple of his plans in Tehran. On his second trip, during Rafsanjani's presidency, he again visited the Iran Khodro auto factory.[15]

It is no secret that Romania has a large complementary capacity for foreign trade with our country, and this country's foreign minister, in his 2016 trip to Tehran and after negotiations with Tayebnia, the Iranian Minister for Financial and Economic Affairs, talked about a $3 billion ceiling for economic exchanges between Iran and Romania and added, "we should make the most out of the new economic and political conditions that have unfolded in Iran's international relations with the world." Also, to the economic activists, Poland is a great market which is receptive to Iranian goods because this country's economic policies are based on barter of goods, and also, in the post-sanctions era, it is a unique market for Iran. It seems that Poland has a $40 billion market open to the Iranian economy in the post-sanctions era, and our country can, by proper targeting, on the one hand, and producing agricultural and industrial products according to EU standards, on the other hand, expand its area of economic exchanges and give a new lifeline to its national economy through these exchanges.

The Eastern Europe region includes the Balkans, consisting of over 10 countries, all either having become EU members (like Slovenia, in 2004) or waiting in line for membership in this political and economic establishment (like the Republic of Serbia). In any case, Iran has long had a special place in the Balkans as, historically, some nations of this region see themselves as of the Iranian race (like the Croats), and the Persian language has had much attraction to the intellectuals and literary figures of the Balkans in the past, and some poets and mystics have composed their poetry in Persian. Over the last 6 decades, Iran has had considerable industrial cooperation with Eastern European countries, which had been considerable until the collapse of communism, especially Iran's post-revolutionary era relations, in order of

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[15] The Last dine of Ceausescu, Alibeman Eghbali Zarch, P. 39

importance, with Bucharest, Belgrade, Prague, Budapest, and Warsaw. During the Pahlavi era, the volume of exchanges between Iran and these countries was between $50 million and $300 million (Romania $300 million, Czechoslovakia $100 million, former Yugoslavia $70 million, Poland $50 million, and Hungary $40 million). During that time, Iran traded with Romania in the electric and agricultural machinery industries, with the former Czechoslovakia in power plant construction, aluminium production, and Tabriz Machine Manufacturing with Poland in ship building and copper, with Hungary in agriculture and the environment, and with the former Yugoslavia in heavy industries. After the Islamic revolution, the volume of exchanges with these countries has considerably increased, so that only the volume of exchanges with Romania was over $1 billion in 1988. Energy is one of the important factors for cooperation in this region. According to many experts, in recent years, Iran has not paid attention to Eastern European markets and Iran's trade has been focused on some Central European countries like Germany, France, and Spain. But in the new conditions and in a situation where Eastern Europe is distancing itself from Central European economic policies, it is the best time for Iran to think about these countries' markets and step up the exchanges.[16]

Among the issues that impede presence in Eastern European markets are improper concessions, facilities, rampant bureaucracy, and legal and institutional issues. The question is whether Iran's diplomacy apparatus is able to get over these thorny economic and trade problems with East Europe.

Below we will enumerate the most important economic indexes and the volume of foreign trade exchanges, imports, and exports with these countries:[17]

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[16] Events and Analysis Bulletin No. 326 Aug. 2019 P. 61- IPIS

[17] https://economic.mfa.gov.ir/portal/newsagencyshow

Row	Country	Population (million)	GDP US dollar	GDP Per Capita	GDP Growth Percent
1	Slovakia	5	160	29,000	4
2	Slovenia	2.2	48	34,000	5
3	Albania	3	16	5,500	4
4	Bulgaria	7	55	7,800	3
5	Bosnia	3	20	5,700	2
6	Czech	11	368	30,000	5
7	Romania	21	239	12,000	4
8	Serbia	8	106	14,000	3
9	Croatia	4	61	15,000	3
10	Poland	38	610	31,000	3
11	Hungary	10	290	29,000	4
12	Northern Macedonia	3	10	5,000	4
13	Montenegro	0.6	11	18,000	5
13*	Kosovo	2	8	4,000	4
Total	117.8		1192		

The Islamic Republic of Iran does not recognize Kosovo

Row	Country	Exports	Imports	Mutual exchanges	Iranian exports	Iranian Imports
1	Slovakia	73	71	60	28	32
2	Slovenia	28	27	51	3	48
3	Albania	3	6	5	5	
4	Bulgaria	29	33	76	32	42
5	Bosnia	6	10	77.5	76	1.5
6	Czech	180	160	92	16	76
7	Romania	67	83	115	45	70

Row	Country	Exports	Imports	Mutual exchanges	Iranian exports	Iranian Imports
8	Serbia	15	20	20	12	8
9	Croatia	34	33	8	4	4
10	Poland	200	202	225	90	135
11	Hungary	124	117	35	10	25
12	Northern Macedonia	6	5	6	5	1
13	Montenegro	3	3	150 thousand		
13*	Kosovo					
Total		763	770	763.6	327	436

Exports and Imports in Billion Dollars

Mutual Exchanges is in million dollars

In addition to Romania and Poland, other countries in the region also have the capacity to cooperate with our country. For example, Slovakia is another member of the EU that, after the JCPOA nuclear deal, declared readiness to broaden ties with Tehran, and a number of its officials visited Iran in February 2017 to upgrade their relations with Tehran to the desired level.[18] There is a lot of potential for the two countries' ties to be revived, especially in the auto industry, energy, banking, petro-chemistry, and mining, which can be turned into joint investment, increased production, and a better economy for the two countries if economic activists and officials work hard enough. Also, the Iranian economic activists believe that Croatia is an important country for them, and this importance is not merely due to its geo-political status, but because Croatia, as a friendly country that has never left Iran alone, has many advantages over other countries. On her trip to Iran four years ago, after the Iranian president's trip to Croatia 12 years ago, which was a turning point in bilateral relations, Kitarovic and the Iranian side stressed the importance of broadening ties and cooperation in all areas, especially in energy. The important thing is that there are huge capacities in various areas, including the knowledge-based economy, transfer of technology, petrochemical

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[18] https://economic.mfa.gov.ir/portal/newsagencyshow

industries, reviving banking and financial relations, mines, steel industries, and energy for Zagreb and Tehran in the post-sanctions era. Although, due to western sanctions, the trade exchanges between the two countries have decreased, according to the experts, considering the Croatian capacities and capabilities, the two sides can jointly invest in the areas of tourism, oil and gas excavation and production, petrochemical industries, production of drugs, manufacturing locomotives, and building ships. In Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Moldavia, too, all industrial, agricultural, and livestock products are of European standards. Therefore, the consumer markets can be, with certainty of quality, receptive to these products. Also, the fixed prices of food and industrial products in this country are lower than those in Central Europe. Therefore, Iran can invest in the areas of building roads, hotels, manufacturing agricultural machinery, gemstones, coal, agricultural products (dried foods and fruits, nuts, spices, and fresh fruit), building, building materials, electricity projects, water supply, petro-chemistry, car manufacturing, food industries, dam building projects, subway projects, tunnels, building silos, creating irrigation and piping networks, energy (building power plants), carpets, furniture, textiles, car oil, petrochemical products, and other areas in these countries and export engineering and technical services to them.

CONCLUSION

The Eastern European region is strategically important and has always been a flashpoint for the start of conflicts and a hotspot for hard and soft rivalry among great powers. Many believe that dominating this region is a king-making factor in the rise of big global powers. From the perspective of sea geopolitical importance, this region has access to the Mediterranean and the Black Sea for global transportation of energy. Also, from a geopolitical standpoint, the region has been the root of many crucial developments. No doubt, this region's countries, which today include about 14 countries, of which 8 are EU member states, due to historical events and Iran's multidimensional presence, have more cultural commonalities with Iran than western countries of the continent, in an adaptation process.[19] Iran's relations with this region's countries have considerable and important cultural and economic impacts, in

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[19] Events and Analysis Bulletin No. 326 Aug. 2019 Page 44- IPIS

a way that, on one hand, in the cultural area, many of the great and unique figures of the shining Iranian culture and civilization, and noble Persian literary works like the poems of Saadi, Hafiz, Firdausi, Khayyam, and others are well known, and on the other hand, in many of these countries, Iran is known for its commodities such as carpets, pistachios, caviar, and oil.

Considering widespread global efforts made to achieve a maximum share in the global markets, the Islamic Republic of Iran's special status in the international arena and its process of growth and development, despite enjoying huge human capital and God-given natural resources, will not reach a stable stage without profound development in the 12 pillars of competitiveness of the economy and trade and a change in the general view of governmental and private institutions and organisations. In addition, our country's commercial diplomacy must, in proportion to the increase in capabilities and capacities for exports, add to its vigour and dynamism, and pay special attention to training and employing commercial advisors who can, according to scientific standards (at least 6% increase in trade per each advisor), play a worthy role. However, in a situation where each day competition in trade and the economy becomes tense and the big powers try by the utilisation of economic tools, especially oppressive sanctions, to exert more international pressure, there is no doubt that the solution to achieving welfare and economic dynamism is a change of view and approach toward the institutions, structures, and the main pillars of production and international trade, along with inspiration from the basics of the Resistance Economy and an influential translation of the God-given capacities and our country's huge human capital.

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https://economic.mfa.gov.ir/portal/newsagencyshow

http://www.tarikhirani.ir.fa A review of Iran and Romanian Relation in Ceausescu era- Hoseine sokhanvar

THE SECOND ARMED CONFLICT IN NAGORNO-KARABAKH – CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS

Ana Jović-Lazić[1]

Abstract: The article aims to contribute to the discourse on the latest armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh by analysing its causes and implications. Starting with the failure of the diplomatic process, it examines various factors, ranging from imbalances in local armed forces to broader changes in the region's geopolitical order that contributed to a shift in dynamics in this unresolved dispute and the outbreak of a new armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan defeated Armenia decisively thanks to military superiority gained through increased military spending and political, military, and logistical assistance from Turkey. With this in mind, Turkey's role in the dynamics of this conflict is regarded as crucial. Furthermore, given Russia's traditional role as a mediator in unresolved conflicts in the post-Soviet space, changes in Russian-Azerbaijani and Russian-Armenian relations are analysed as factors that influenced the creation of conditions in which Azerbaijan would feel strong enough to launch a new war. Russia's response is being considered in particular because, despite initial restraint, it has preserved its role as a key mediator in achieving peace in the region, seizing the opportunity to further strengthen it by deploying peacekeeping troops. Although the armistice agreement ended the war, the question of the disputed area's final status remained unresolved. Because this is a critical

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[1] Ph.D., Senior Research Fellow, Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade. anajovic@diplomacy.bg.ac.rs

issue for both parties, a future flare-up of hostilities can only be avoided if Azerbaijan and Armenia achieve an agreement on the final political status of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Keywords: Nagorno-Karabakh, unresolved conflict, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey, Russia, OSCE MINSK group

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Historically, the South Caucasus region has been home to a diverse range of ethnic groups, cultures, and religions. The geopolitical dynamics of the contemporary South Caucasus have been driven by the breakup of the Soviet Union and the desire of newly constituted nations to express their national identity and define their foreign policy.[2] The ethnic-territorial dispute between the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh, which has been dormant for decades, is considered one of the most complicated and unresolved conflicts in the post-Soviet area.[3] During the Soviet period, this area, primarily inhabited by Armenians, was an autonomous region inside the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. Inter-ethnic tensions erupted during the disintegration of the Soviet Union, resulting in military confrontations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, which lasted until the mid-1990s. The Armenians triumphed in the armed conflict, occupying not only Nagorno-Karabakh but also the surrounding areas. Soon after, the OSCE established the MINSK Group as an international negotiation mechanism, but it was unable to persuade the governments of Azerbaijan and Armenia to reach an agreement. A compromise between Azerbaijan's claims to maintaining its sovereignty and territorial integrity and ethnic Armenians' aspirations to establish their own state in Nagorno-Karabakh based on the right to self-determination was not possible. Such distant positions, together with the policies of regional powers, generated complicated circumstances that did not give enough incentives to Azerbaijan and Armenia to adopt a peace strategy.

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[2] Sadi Sadiyev Saleh et al., "South Caucasus and a 'New Great Game': The Communication of Competition in Securitised International Relations," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 29, no. 2 (September 29, 2020): 282.

[3] Kavus Abushov, "Russian Foreign Policy towards the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Prudent Geopolitics, Incapacity or Identity?," *East European Politics* 35, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 72.

Despite the ostensible peace, there were regular casualties as a result of periodic skirmishes between the conflicting sides along the line of contact. Nearly 300 people lost their lives during the so-called four-day conflict in April 2016, indicating that the situation was on the verge of "snatching control." That is what happened in September 2020, when Azerbaijan launched a military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh after years of developing military capabilities to reestablish sovereignty and reintegrate the disputed territory. Azerbaijan had significant diplomatic, logistical, and military support from Turkey, which, like Israel, supplied it with unmanned aerial vehicles that were crucial in determining the final outcome of the armed conflict. The Azerbaijani army had advanced deep into Nagorno-Karabakh, forcing Armenia to accept a ceasefire agreement reached through Russian mediation. Under the deal, Azerbaijan gained control of the majority of Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as the surrounding Azerbaijani territory, which was taken by Armenia during the first conflict in the early 1990s. At the same time, Russian peacekeepers were deployed to assist in maintaining the truce and carrying out the agreed-upon deal. The outcome of the war altered the situation on the ground, affecting the rest of the region. The fact that approximately 6,700 people, both soldiers and civilians, lost their lives during the conflict demonstrates the gravity of the situation.[4]

The renewal of the armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh has had far-reaching regional and global security implications, dramatically affecting the decades-long status on the ground created by the end of the first conflict in the mid-1990s. As a result, several questions have arisen. What created the conditions for its escalation? What causes led to Azerbaijan's decisive victory, and what are the implications of such an outcome? How much did changed internal circumstances in Azerbaijan and Armenia contribute to such a result, and how much did the foreign policy of major regional countries, notably Turkey and Russia, influence it? What are the prospects for peace given that the eventual political status of Nagorno-Karabakh and the exact boundary dividing the two sides along the line of conflict remain undetermined under the truce agreement?

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[4] Ian Davis. "Armed conflict and peace processes in Europe.", Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI YEARBOOK 2021: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security.* (S.L.: Oxford Univ Press, 2021). https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2021/05.

To answer these issues, the fundamental facts of Nagorno-Karabakh's first armed conflict and the blocked peace process will be presented. The article will next discuss Armenia's and Azerbaijan's new military confrontation. Following a brief overview of the conflict's dynamics and course, the focus will shift to the fundamental elements that contributed to the emergence of favourable conditions for its occurrence. In addition to the growing military capability disparity between Azerbaijan and Armenia, it will focus on other factors that influenced the renewal of the armed conflict. Special attention will be paid to the improvement of relations between Moscow and Baku, which is the result, above all, of the increased export of Russian weapons to Azerbaijan, as well as the loss of Moscow's trust in Yerevan after the so-called Velvet revolutions in Armenia in 2018. As Azerbaijan's traditional ally, Turkey was willing to openly back it not only politically and diplomatically, but also militarily, organizationally, and logistically, so Turkey's position will be considered as a significant factor that influenced the conflict's beginning and its outcome. Finally, the influence of the Second Armed Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh on Moscow's objectives and the role as a traditional mediator in post-Soviet conflict resolution will be examined.

ARMED CONFLICTS IN NAGORNO-KARABAKH

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the first armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh

Due to diverse historical, religious, and geopolitical influences, tensions between the Azerbaijanis and the Armenians over Nagorno-Karabakh have persisted for centuries. Cornell notes that the region's initial clashes date back to 1905, although there are differing perspectives on when they began and whether the Azeris or the Armenians are to blame.[5] The opposing sides offer a range of historical reasons and evidence to support their claims. Thus, the region's early history has been overshadowed by contrasting historical interpretations, which are framed by the nationalist rhetoric of opposing sides.[6]

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[5] Cornell, "Turkey and the Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh: A Delicate Balance," *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 1 (January 1998): 51–72.

[6] Tomáš Hoch, "The Roots of Ethno-Political Mobilization in Nagorno-Karabakh," *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 47, no. 3 (July 3, 2020): 1–27, Adil Baguirov, "Nagorno-Karabakh:

In any case, this conflict is inextricably linked to the political cartography of the early Soviet Union. During the Soviet era, beginning in 1921, Nagorno-Karabakh, predominantly inhabited by the Armenians, was an autonomous region within Soviet Azerbaijan. For years, the Armenians complained about cultural discrimination and economic neglect, attempting to bring Nagorno-Karabakh under Armenian direct authority. Due to the policy of Openness (Glasnost) under Gorbachev, these objections came to the fore. To take advantage of this policy, Armenian demands for secession from Azerbaijan and unification with the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic became more prominent. Thus, in 1988, mass protests erupted in Yerevan, followed by counter-protests in Baku.[7] To effectively manage such a complex situation, Moscow's strategy from 1988 to 1991 was primarily focused on protecting the Soviet Union's legitimacy.[8] However, the accelerated degeneration of the state's ability to impose its will, particularly the Soviet state's lack of authority, created space for ethnic mobilization, the emergence of various national movements, and, finally, the outbreak of conflict.[9] Despite the fact that the outbreak of the conflict was enabled by unstable circumstances caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the gradual ethno-political mobilisation of the Armenians and the Azeris.[10]

When Soviet Interior Ministry forces left Nagorno-Karabakh in December 1991, the dispute entered a military phase, escalating into an armed conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. By mid-1992, Armenian troops had established a land corridor connecting Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia and

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Competing Legal, Historic and Economic Claims in Political, Academic and Media Discourses," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 32, no. 2 (June 2012): 139–75, James J Coyle, *Russia's Border Wars and Frozen Conflicts* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 208.

[7] Charles King, "The Benefits of Ethnic War: Understanding Eurasia's Unrecognized States," *World Politics* 53, no. 04 (July 2001): 529.

[8] Andrei A. Kazantsev et al., "Russia's Policy in the 'Frozen Conflicts' of the Post-Soviet Space: From Ethno-Politics to Geopolitics," *Caucasus Survey* 8, no. 2 (April 16, 2020):145.

[9] Vicken Cheterian, *War and Peace in the Caucasus: Ethnic Conflict and the New Geopolitics* (New York: Columbia University, 2008), p. 20; Christoph Zürcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2009): 153.

[10] Tomáš Hoch, "The Roots of Ethno-Political Mobilization in Nagorno-Karabakh".

had pushed the Azerbaijani army from Shushi, a key mountain from which it could attack Stepanakert. The conflict's acute phase concluded on April 16, 1993, with an Armenian victory. Armenian troops occupied not only Nagorno-Karabakh, but also 20% of the surrounding territory, or seven additional Azerbaijani districts, which served as a "seat belt" for this disputed region. The Russian Federation finally managed to secure peace in 1994 after multiple failed mediation attempts in the early 1990s.[11] Specifically, the representatives of the Republic of Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as Nagorno-Karabakh and the Russian representation in the OSCE Minsk Group, signed the "Bishkek Protocol" in early May 1994, which created a cease-fire. This protocol states categorically that the armed conflict not only caused irreparable losses for the Armenians and the Azeris but also had a significant influence on the whole area, the interests of other powers in the region, and, in general, considerably complicated the international situation. This protocol also supports all UN Security Council Resolutions 822, 853, 874, and 884, as well as the OSCE's objectives and specific decisions. The conflicting parties are also called upon to come to their senses and work intensively to confirm this by signing a reliable, legally binding agreement that provides a mechanism to ensure that military and hostile activities do not continue, withdraw troops from occupied territories, restore communication and return refugees.[12] But although the "Bishkek Protocol" ended the conflict, it did not result in the withdrawal of forces or the repatriation of a substantial number of refugees and internally displaced persons. Meanwhile, the so-called Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh was created, with no country in the world, including Armenia, recognising its independence.

Also, following the cease-fire agreement, efforts to resolve this conflict were undertaken inside the OSCE Minsk Group, which was co-chaired by Russia, the United States, and France. However, the international community failed to persuade the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan to reach a compromise. The official positions of Baku and Yerevan remained very distant, while their completely incompatible demands became increasingly

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[11] Charles King, "The Benefits of Ethnic War: Understanding Eurasia's Unrecognized States," 529, 532.

[12] United Nations Peacemaker. "Bishkek Protocol | UN Peacemaker." peacemaker.un.org, May 5, 1994. https://peacemaker.un.org/armeniaazerbaijan-bishkekprotocol94.

maximalist. The failure of the negotiations to progress resulted in numerous criticisms of the Minsk Group from both the international community and the conflicting parties, particularly Azerbaijan.

As a result, there was no lasting peace, and both countries continued to stockpile weapons. Under these conditions, the ethnic-territorial conflict between the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis over this territory has raged for decades, with regular skirmishes resulting in a number of casualties. Aggressive rhetoric and hate narratives have followed, resulting in a significant increase in tension on the contact line in recent years.[13] Between 2014 and the outbreak of the second armed conflict in 2020, the number of incidents involving periodic exchanges of fire and casualties on both sides increased significantly. This demonstrates unequivocally that the region is far from peaceful and stable. Conflicts have become more frequent and intense, with several dozen people killed each year. An unexpected wave of violence, the so-called four-day war, in which several hundred people lost their lives in 2016, was a kind of test of the Armenian defence, as well as a warning to the international community that there was a real danger that the war in the region would escalate again. Regardless of the scale of the conflict escalation and its consequences, the international community, particularly the OSCE MINSK group, did not pay enough attention to this conflict, which contributed to the creation of favourable conditions for further aggression in the region. Furthermore, the fact that Azerbaijan managed to gain, albeit minor, territorial gains during the conflict demolished the so-called myth of Armenian soldiers' invincibility.[14] Numerous artillery clashes broke out on the line of contact in mid-July 2020, resulting in the deaths of 17 soldiers on both sides and one civilian. This provoked demonstrations in Baku, with tens of thousands of people demanding a harsher response and the start of a new conflict to regain control of Nagorno-Karabakh. Tensions remained high following the clashes, with both sides blaming each other for the incidents.

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[13] Philip Gamaghelyan and Sergey Rumyantsev, "The Road to the Second Karabakh War: The Role of Ethno-Centric Narratives in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Caucasus Survey* 9, no. 3 (July 14, 2021): 1–17.

[14] Jarosław Kardaś, "The Unfreezing of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict through Changes to Azerbaijan's Security Policy," *Refleksje*, no. 1 (2017): 76.

The Second armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh

Azerbaijan launched military action against Nagorno-Karabakh on September 27, 2020, dissatisfied with decades of stagnation in the negotiation process and pressed by local economic problems and the rise of nationalism. This large-scale conflict erupted following a difficult year marked by numerous armed incidents. Although the conflict lasted only a few weeks, it was intense and called into question the region's territorial authority status quo. It was clear very quickly that the balance of military forces had shifted dramatically in Azerbaijan's favour. With Turkey's support, Azerbaijan recaptured much of the territory it had lost in the previous conflict, while its forces advanced deep into the breakaway region and conquered Sushi, the region's second-largest and most strategically important city. Following the loss of Shushi in early November 2020, it appeared that Azerbaijani troops would capture the capital Stepanakert in a matter of hours rather than days.

Direct military intervention on Azerbaijan's side by Turkey and Syrian mercenaries threatened to jeopardise Russia's key role in resolving post-Soviet territorial disputes. Despite Turkey's increased influence, a truce was reached on November 9, 2020, thanks to Moscow's mediation, and all hostilities ceased, with both sides' forces remaining in their positions. This fact, in a sense, enabled Russia to maintain a key role in the ongoing process of resolving the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict.[15] There are also claims that a tacit unspoken agreement was reached based on Moscow's implicit consent to give Ankara a greater role in changing the circumstances of the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, after which Turkey agreed to let Russia play a mediating role to end the conflict.[16]

With Russia mediating, Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a cease-fire agreement on November 10, 2020. Russian peacekeepers would be stationed in Nagorno-Karabakh to oversee the ceasefire along the line of contact and the Lachin corridor, which connects Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia.[17] The

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[15] G. Avetikyan, "The 2020 War in Nagorno-Karabakh: The Regional Dimension," *Pathways to Peace and Security* 59, no. 2 (2020), 185.

[16] A. Valiyev and N. Gafarova, "New Big War in the South Caucasus and Prospects for Peace in Karabakh," *Pathways to Peace and Security*, no. 2 (2020): 167–80.

[17] The Russian Federation committed to deploying peacekeeping troops, including 1,960 personnel with arms, 90 armoured personnel carriers, 380 motor vehicles, and special equipment. It also ensured the return of internally displaced persons and refugees.

parties also agreed to build new transportation links connecting the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic to Azerbaijan's western regions, which is vital for that country. The ceasefire agreement will last for five years and will be automatically renewed unless one side notifies the other of its desire to withdraw at least six months before the scheduled date.[18] A day after a tripartite ceasefire agreement was reached, Russia and Turkey signed a memorandum laying the groundwork for establishing a joint ceasefire monitoring centre. The centre was opened in the Agdam district of Azerbaijan in January 2021. It is expected to deal with the collection and processing of information on compliance with the ceasefire regime in Nagorno-Karabakh, with control carried out via unmanned aerial vehicles and other sources.[19] Under the agreement, the major question about the future political status of Nagorno-Karabakh remains unanswered. Because this agreement did not resolve the disputed issue of Nagorno-Karabakh's political status, it is far from a guarantee that new hostilities will not erupt, because that risk exists until one of the parties is satisfied with its outcome. Nonetheless, it imposes significant, even temporary, constraints on new hostilities and will almost certainly have an impact on the reorganisation of the long-standing international framework for its resolution.

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE OUTBREAK OF THE SECOND NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

The failure of the diplomatic process

The OSCE Minsk Group-led negotiation process failed to persuade the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia to make mutual concessions. Despite the fact that considerable negotiations took place during this process and various solutions were offered to the opposing parties, a mutually acceptable

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[18] "Official Text of Nagorno Karabakh Armistice," armenpress.am, November 10, 2020, https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1034480.html.

[19] Sputnik Србија, "Отворен руско-турски центар за мониторинг примирја: Пут до стабилног мира у Карабаху," Sputnik Србија, 2021, https://rs.sputniknews.com/ 2021 0130/otvoren-rusko-turski-centar-za-monitoring-primirja-put-do-stabilnog-mira-u-karabahu-1124506798.html.

agreement could not be reached.[20] Russia is frequently blamed for the failure of peace talks. It is accused of supporting Nagorno-Karabakh separatism and monopolistic mediation in order to influence Armenian and Azerbaijani domestic and foreign policies.[21] Partly this is because the region of Nagorno-Karabakh is so vital to both parties that it is regarded indivisible, and so settling its status would need a considerable sacrifice of both Armenian and Azerbaijani interests.[22] The issue of the political status of Nagorno-Karabakh has always been the main point of contention between the two sides. Azerbaijan's position is that Armenian troops must immediately withdraw from the Nagorno-Karabakh region, that all displaced persons must be allowed to return, and that Azerbaijan's territorial integrity cannot be the subject of negotiations. Armenia, on the other hand, refuses to recognise Nagorno-Karabakh as an integral part of Azerbaijan, referring to the fact that it declared independence at the same time as Azerbaijan, and thus both are Soviet Union successors. In this context, Armenia demanded that the Nagorno-Karabakh government take part in discussions about the region's future, and it refused to hand over occupied territory to Azerbaijan or allow refugees to return to Nagorno-Karabakh so that their representatives could take part in status talks.[23] Negotiations failed because, as Fowkes once observed, in an atmosphere of heightened nationalism, any attempt by political leaders on both sides to reach a compromise would almost certainly result in their political and, in some cases, physical death.[24] According to some, any leader who is willing to compromise could be considered a traitor.[25]

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[20] Ana Jović-Lazić, Sanja Jelisavac-Trošić, and Aleksandar Jazić, "Problem Nagorno Karabaha u svetlu bilateralnih odnosa članica Minsk grupe OEBS-a," *Međunarodni problemi* 63, no. 4 (2011): 583–612.

[21] Јовић-Лазић Ана, *Односи између Европске уније и Руске Федерације: крај XX и почетак XXI века* (Београд: Институт за међународну политику и привреду, 2015), 276–77.

[22] Kavus Abushov, "Russian Foreign Policy towards the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Prudent Geopolitics, Incapacity or Identity?".

[23] Ana Jović-Lazić and Ivona Lađevac, "Zamrznuti sukobi i pregovarački procesi u regionu Južnog Kavkaza," *Međunarodna politika* LXIV, no. 1152 (2013): 55–73.

[24] Ben Fowkes, *Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict in the Post-Communist World* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 137.

[25] Philip Remler et al., "OSCE Minsk Group: Lessons from the Past and Tasks for the Future," *OSCE Insights 2020*, 2020, 85–100, https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748922339-06.

Because no agreement has been reached in years, there have been increasing calls to change the format of negotiations. Peace was coming under increasing pressure. Simultaneously, tensions and frustrations were rising, particularly on the Azerbaijani side.[26] In addition to losing faith in the possibility of resolving the conflict through the international peace mechanism after years of inaction, Azerbaijan's decision to launch a military offensive was influenced by the fact that many of the factors that contributed to Armenia's victory changed. Thanks to energy revenues, Azerbaijan was able to significantly enhance and upgrade its military forces, strengthen relations with Turkey, and, most crucially, develop economic and military-technical cooperation with Russia. At the same time, in the aftermath of Armenia's political changes in 2018, there was growing scepticism about Yerevan's loyalty to Moscow.

Weapons accumulation and the widening military gap between Azerbaijan and Armenia

Following the end of the First War in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan and Armenia engaged in some kind of arms race, resulting in the stockpiling of armaments in the region. Bearing in mind that, as a result of that armed conflict, the Armenian forces achieved significant territorial gains, they had no reason to start new hostilities. However, due to a considerable rise in Caspian Sea oil and gas revenues, Azerbaijan opted to increase budget allocations for weapons and military equipment modernization. In those conditions, Armenia's strategy was largely focused on deterring Azerbaijan from initiating a new conflict. Armenia continued to buy weapons, primarily from Russia, believing that participation in an arms race would reduce the risk of a new conflict erupting. Due to its poor economic situation, Armenia could only maintain parity in the arms race by obtaining armaments on extremely favourable terms from Russia as a result of its membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).[27] However, given that

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[26] Sabine Freizer, "Twenty Years after the Nagorny Karabakh Ceasefire: An Opportunity to Move towards More Inclusive Conflict Resolution," *Caucasus Survey* 1, no. 2 (April 2014): 109–22.

[27] Sergey Minasyan, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict in the Context of South Caucasus Regional Security Issues: An Armenian Perspective†," *Nationalities Papers* 45, no. 1 (January 2017): 136.

Azerbaijan's military budget had been steadily increasing since the start of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline in 2006, Armenia gradually but steadily fell behind in this race.

Azerbaijan began to purchase weapons from different countries, including, inter alia, from Russia, Turkey, and Israel. As a result, over time, the military capabilities of the two sides began to diverge dramatically. The ability of Azerbaijani forces to conduct reconnaissance and precise attacks has greatly improved as a result of their possession of sophisticated weapon systems. The four-day armed confrontation in 2016 reflected this growth in military confidence in Azerbaijan, but only the Second War in Nagorno-Karabakh revealed Azerbaijan's true military supremacy over Armenia. A large number of drones in the military arsenal had a decisive influence on the victory of Azerbaijan. Various models of drones, including military modern equipment procured from Turkey and Israel, which were actively used during the conflict to detect, shoot, and attack Armenian defensive positions and armoured forces, allowed Azerbaijan to quickly gain, maintain primacy, and finally defeat Armenian forces. Also, Turkish military assistance was essential for the successful deployment of unmanned aerial vehicles in Azerbaijan, as well as precise artillery attacks. Azerbaijan also employed Israeli-made Harop kamikaze drones in addition to Turkish-made Barjaktar TB2-type attacking drones.[28] Armenian troops, on the other hand, had little chance against them because they relied on an often outdated Russian weapon system.

Tactically, Azerbaijan also had Turkey's logistical support. At the beginning of the conflict, Azerbaijani forces disabled Armenian air defences before attacking Armenian armoured and infantry units with drones along the front lines. Such an offensive, with the widespread use of drones and technology, had an impact not only on the real military losses of Armenian forces but also on the general morale of Armenian soldiers.

Improving relations between Azerbaijan and Russia

After experiencing defeat in the First War in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan realised the significance of Russia's role in the post-Soviet space in general, as

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[28] Cory Welt and Andrew S. Bowen, "Azerbaijan and Armenia: The Nagorno- Karabakh Conflict" (Library of Congress Washington DC: Technical Report, Congressional Repor, January 7, 2021), https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1147494.pdf.

well as in resolving this conflict in particular. Because the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh issue directly threatens Azerbaijan's national interests, Baku has sought to pursue a pragmatic foreign policy that will develop relations with the West while also taking Russian interests in the region into account. Thus, in order to develop its oil and gas projects, Azerbaijan hired Western companies while attempting to maintain good relations with Russia. Energy export revenues have allowed Azerbaijan to significantly strengthen its economic position while also pursuing an independent foreign policy, avoiding existing security and political integration initiatives.[29]

As a result, Azerbaijan refused to join the Collective Security Treaty Organization and, later, the Eurasian Economic Union, which are both dominated by Russia.[30] At the same time, because Azerbaijan has not expressed a desire to join the Euro-Atlantic integration process, Russia does not consider it a threat. Azerbaijan has also sought to strengthen economic ties with Russia, purchasing billions of euros in weapons from it. Relations between Azerbaijan and Russia have improved, notably since Vladimir Putin took power. In particular, Russia and Azerbaijan signed the Baku Declaration in 2001, which declares that enhancing Russian-Azerbaijani friendship and strategic partnership is an important factor in ensuring regional security. The willingness to expand bilateral cooperation in all areas was also confirmed, including economic, foreign policy, and military-technical cooperation.[31] Two years later, in September 2003, Russia and Azerbaijan signed the Agreement on Military-Technical Cooperation, which entered into force in March 2005. It is expected to be achieved through the delivery of military products, materials, and technical means for the signatory states' defence and security needs, military-technical services, and military development and production cooperation. In addition, Russia and Azerbaijan agreed not to transfer

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[29] Anar Valiyev and Narmina Mamishova, "Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy towards Russia since Independence: Compromise Achieved," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 19, no. 2 (February 21, 2019): 269-271.

[30] Although it signed the Collective Security Treaty (CST) in Tashkent on May 15, 1992, Azerbaijan withdrew from it in 1999, while the signatory states agreed in 2002 to expand the CST into an international organization, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

[31] "Бакинская декларация Российской Федерации и Азербайджанской Республики от 09 января 2001 – Docs.cntd.ru," docs.cntd.ru, accessed October 1, 2021, https://docs.cntd.ru/document/901783889.

weapons and military equipment, as well as technical documentation for their production, to third parties, including international organizations, and to keep the information communicated in accordance with this agreement and its implementation confidential.[32]

Therefore, by signing and applying the provisions of this agreement, conditions have been created for Russia to become the leading supplier of weapons and other military equipment to Azerbaijan. As a result, the Azerbaijani army has a large stockpile of Russian-made military hardware, such as air defence systems, artillery, armoured vehicles, transport and combat helicopters, multiple rocket launchers, and tanks.[33] In recent years, signed contracts for the purchase of weapons from Russia have amounted to 5 billion dollars. Over the last ten years, Russian supplies to Azerbaijan have included T-72 and T-90S tanks, BTR-80 armoured personnel carriers, "Smerch" and "Grad" multi-role missile systems, multi-role helicopters, anti-aircraft missile systems (SAM) S-300, and Radio-Electronic Warfare (EW).[34] Aside from economic and military cooperation, there is diaspora interaction between Russian and Azerbaijani peoples, as well as active cooperation in the field of education. Thus, despite the centrifugal tendencies of the post-Soviet space and the specificities of Azerbaijan's foreign policy, including its confrontation with Armenia, Baku manages to maintain strategic relations with Moscow.[35] All of this undoubtedly influenced Moscow's mild reaction and its relatively neutral position during the outbreak of the last conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.[36]

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[32] "Соглашение между Правительством Российской Федерации и Правительством Азербайджанской Республики о военно-техническом сотрудничестве- Docs.cntd.ru," docs.cntd.ru, accessed October 1, 2021, https://docs.cntd.ru/document/901927006.

[33] Pieter D. Wezeman, Alexandra Kuimov, Jordan Smith, Arms transfers to conflict zones: The case of Nagorno-Karabakh, SIPRI, 30 April 2021, https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-backgrounder/2021/arms-transfers-conflict-zones-case-nagorno-karabakh.

[34] Александр Хроленко, "Военно-техническое сотрудничество Азербайджана и России: что на очереди?," Sputnik Азербайджан, 2019, https://az.sputniknews.ru/20191004/Voenno-tekhnicheskoe-sotrudnichestvo-Azerbaydzhana-i-Rossii-chto-na-ocheredi-421937021.html.

[35] В. А. Аватков, "Основы внешнеполитического курса Азербайджанской Республики на современном этапе," *Контуры глобальных трансформаций: политика, экономика, право* 13, no. 3 (August 20, 2020): 126.

[36] Araz Aslanlı, "Azerbaijan - Russia Relations: Is the Foreign Policy Strategy of Azerbaijan Changing?" (Turkish Policy Quarterly, 2010), https://esiweb.org/pdf/esi_turkey_tpq_vol9_no3_araz-aslanli.pdf.

The Velvet Revolution in Armenia and the questionable loyalty
of Yerevan to Moscow

Historically, bilateral relations between Armenia and Russia have been very strong and diverse, but they have also been unbalanced due to Yerevan's over-reliance on Moscow. Following the end of the First War in Nagorno-Karabakh and the establishment of the so-called independent republic in this region, Armenia began to view Russia as a security guarantor. Thus, the 102nd Russian base, with approximately 3,000 soldiers, has been stationed in Gyumri, Armenia, since 1995. Armenia joined the CST in 1993 and the CSTO in 2002, with the founding treaty stating that member states may be called to participate in armed conflict on the territory of any other CSTO member in the event of aggression.[37] Furthermore, in accordance with a 2016 bilateral agreement, a single Russian-Armenian air defence system was established, as well as a united Russian-Armenian ground military force, the immediate task of which is to detect and repel potential threats from armed attacks on Armenia and Russia.[38] There is also close cooperation, which enables Armenia to buy Russian weapons on very favourable terms. Also, the two countries have strong economic and energy relations, with Yerevan relying on Moscow for both the economy and energy supply. Given Armenia's unstable economic situation, this cooperation with Russia is critical. As a result of the unresolved conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the country's borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey have been closed, making it difficult to attract foreign direct investment.[39]

The Velvet Revolution in Armenia in 2018 triggered a series of political shifts in the country, affecting both its foreign policy and bilateral relations with Russia. Moscow was upset with the developments in Armenia because

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[37] "Договор о коллективной безопасности," odkb-csto.org, accessed October 11, 2021, https://odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/dogovor_o_kollektivnoy_bezopasnosti/.

[38] Eduard Abrahamyan, "Russia and Armenia Establish Joint Ground Forces," The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst (Analytical Articles, December 16, 2016), https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13416-russia-and-armenia-establish-joint-ground-forces.html.

[39] In 1993, Turkey blocked its border with Armenia to support Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Audrey L. Altstadt and Rajan Menon, "Unfrozen Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh," *Foreign Affairs*, April 12, 2016, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/armenia/2016-04-12/unfrozen-conflict-nagorno-karabakh.

it considered the regime changes in street protests to be something that the West was supporting and organising in the post-Soviet area. The new Prime Minister, N. Pashinyan, sought to advance the importance of cooperation with Western partners, from whom Armenia expected financial and diplomatic assistance. In doing so, Armenian MPs in the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly even voted against Russia's return to the organisation in June 2019. Despite the fact that the new leadership completely replaced the heads of the former government's security structures, which were loyal to the Kremlin, Armenia attempted to maintain the political and security benefits provided by Russia. Following the outbreak of the Second War in Nagorno-Karabakh, Pashinyan asked Russia's assistance as an ally under bilateral agreements between the two countries, emphasising that Azerbaijan's intervention posed a military threat to Russia's national and security interests.[40] Russia, on the other hand, sought to stay restrained, hesitant to take the political risks of publicly supporting one side or another during the Second War in Nagorno-Karabakh. Furthermore, Russia considered that, as the power balance in the conflict shifted in Azerbaijan's favour, Armenia should be more engaged in its efforts to achieve a peace deal. In any case, Russia's ambiguous stance during the conflict undermined Yerevan's faith in Moscow, which likely affected the conflict's outcome. However, this will have little impact on future ties between Armenia and Russia, and Yerevan's reliance on Moscow will remain unchanged. This is a result of the region's geopolitical position as well as Armenia's economic and military weakness, which limits its foreign policy options.

In addition to the abovementioned factors that influenced the creation of conditions for a new flare-up of the conflict, an examination of regional powers' policies and interests, particularly those of Turkey and Russia, is critical for understanding its causes and implications.

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[40] Agnieszka Miarka and Justyna Łapaj-Kucharska, "Armenian Foreign Policy in the Wake of the Velvet Revolution," *European Politics and Society*, May 25, 2021: 1–14.

THE INTERESTS OF REGIONAL POWERS IN THE CAUCASUS AND THEIR ROLE IN THE SECOND NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

The interests and objectives of Turkey

Turkey's relationship with the South Caucasus is not new, given the region's long history as part of the Ottoman Empire. The Caucasus drew the attention of not only the Ottoman Empire, but also modern Turkey. During the Cold War, this region served as a borderland between opposing blocs, and after its end, it became the area of the emergence of new states and local conflicts.[41] Although Turkey attempted to enhance its influence in the area following the collapse of the Soviet Union, it has only recently begun to pursue a more assertive foreign policy and operate as an independent actor in international affairs.

Azerbaijan and Turkey are highly similar in terms of culture, language, and ethnicity. Because of these ties, Turkey has always been unwavering in its commitment to Azerbaijan's national interests, as well as developing military and economic cooperation and solidarity with Baku. Because of its energy reserves and the two countries' growing interdependence in this area, Azerbaijan has recently become critical to Turkey. Turkey's relationship with Azerbaijan has shifted to one of guaranteeing safe energy supplies from the Caspian Sea. In this regard, Turkey plays an important role in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Trans-Anatomical Gas Pipeline (TANAP), both of which transport Azerbaijani energy to Turkey and Europe. Furthermore, Nagorno-Karabakh is critical to Turkey for a variety of reasons, the most important of which is its connection with Azerbaijan for access to the Caspian Sea.[42]

Turkey provided Baku with unprecedented diplomatic, political, military, and logistical support during the recent conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. This demonstrated the significance of military cooperation in Azerbaijan-Turkey relations. It began with the signing of a military cooperation agreement in 1992, but it grew into a form of defence pact with the signing of the Strategic

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[41] Слободан Јанковић, Вук Лазић, "Кавкаски вектор савремене спољне политике Турске," in *Конфликтне зоне на постсовјетском простору и регионална безбедност*, ed. Драган Петровић (Институт за међународну политику и привреду, 2021): 348.

[42] Stephen F. Larrabee, "Turkey's New Geopolitics," *Survival* 52, no. 2 (March 25, 2010): 157–80.

Partnership and Mutual Support Agreement in 2010, offering mutual support in the event of a third-party attack. This agreement provides a legal foundation for future military and military-technical cooperation. It stipulates that if one of the parties is subjected to an armed assault or military aggression by a third state or group of states, all appropriate measures will be used, including the use of military force. According to the agreement, the parties will take all the necessary steps to build military infrastructure, complete armed forces training, and transfer essential weapons and military equipment.[43] As a result of the agreement, Turkey and Azerbaijan were able to expand their military cooperation. Regular combined military exercises between the two sides have increased in recent years and have taken place in mainland Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan exclave.[44] Following the aforementioned armed incidents in mid-July 2020, in the midst of substantially heightened tensions, two-week military drills involving both Turkey's and Azerbaijan's ground and air forces were held. The official goal of the exercises was to assess their ability to react quickly, their combat readiness to conduct joint operations and to specify issues of cooperation between military headquarters.[45] The military exercises in 2020 were notable not only for being the largest, but also for Turkey's sharing of experience in the deployment of unmanned aerial vehicles, multi-launch missile systems (MLRS), and air defence systems to Azerbaijan.[46] Turkish-Armenian ties, unlike those with Azerbaijan, are hampered by a bleak historical legacy, centuries of hatred, and diverging perspectives on critical regional issues, as Janković and Lazić pointed out. They also noted that Turkey had used

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[43] "Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ile Azerbaycan Cumhuriyeti Arasında Stratejik Ortaklık ve Karşılıklı Yardım Anlaşması" *Resmi Gazete*, May 28, 2011, https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2011/05/20110528M1-30-1.pdf.

[44] Branch, Anthony R. "Armenia and the South Caucasus: A New Security Environment." *Connections* 17, no. 2 (2018): 54.

[45] Vasif Huseynov, "Azerbaijan, Turkey Hold Large-Scale Military Drills amidst Escalation of Tensions with Armenia," Jamestown (*Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol: 17 No: 121, August 14, 2020), https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijan-turkey-hold-large-scale-military-drills-amidst-escalation-of-tensions-with-armenia/.

[46] Vasif Huseynov, "Azerbaijan–Turkey Strategic Alliance Deepens amid Recent Conflicts," Geopolitical Monitor, September 22, 2020, https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/azerbaijan-turkey-strategic-alliance-deepens-amid-recent-conflicts.

its unique geopolitical position to isolate Armenia not only economically, but also from regional energy and transportation projects and initiatives.[47]

There are claims that Turkey and Azerbaijan planned the war together since their military cooperation, shown in joint military drills and the procurement of drones, intensified many months before the conflict's formal beginning. In addition to military personnel and experts from Turkey, it also engaged mercenaries from Syria.[48] It is notable that, in this way, Turkey became, for the first time, openly involved in an armed conflict in the post-Soviet space, which has traditionally been considered a Russian interest zone.[49] Thus, Turkey demonstrated a clear willingness to expand its regional influence, and given that this strengthening of regional power resulted in a shift in regional balance at the expense of Russia, the renewed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh highlighted the complexities of Turkey-Russia relations. On the one hand, Russia acknowledged that acceptance of Turkish-Azerbaijani military dominance and changes in the status quo in Nagorno-Karabakh were inevitable, which is why Turkey, despite not being a signatory to the agreement, was consulted throughout the peace talks. In addition, after the agreement was reached, Turkey and Russia formed a joint monitoring centre to oversee its implementation.[50]

Despite the fact that Turkey is not a member of the peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh, it has demonstrated its importance in a region that was previously dominated primarily by the Russians. At the same time, Turkey has shown a readiness to respect Russian interests in the region, while Russia is prepared to accept a larger role for Turkey in the region if it believes it will contribute to achieving its strategic goals on other fronts. As a result, the rise of Turkey's influence at the expense of Russia might have a regional, as well

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[47] Слободан Јанковић, Вук Лазић, "Кавкаски вектор савремене спољне политике Турске," 355.

[48] Mason Clark and Ezgi Yazici, "Erdogan Seeks to Upend Kremlin-Backed Status Quo in Nagorno-Karabakh," JSTOR, 2020, http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep26446.

[49] G. Avetikyan, "The 2020 War in Nagorno-Karabakh: The Regional Dimension," *Pathways to Peace and Security* 59, no. 2 (2020): 185.

[50] ehmed Fatih, "The Caucasus State Relations with Turkey (1991-2020)," in *The Changing Perspectives and "New" Geopolitics of the Caucasus in the 21st Century*, ed. Serdar Yilmaz and Murat Yorulmaz (Ankara: Astana Yayınları, 2021): 177.

as a global, impact.[51] However, because Turkey is not mentioned in the text of the trilateral ceasefire agreement, and its representatives are only expected to contribute to the work of the Ceasefire Monitoring Centre, a significant increase in Turkey's power has been avoided for now.

The interests and objectives of Russia

Due to its complexity and the large number of ethnic groups that inhabit it, maintaining stability and influence in the South Caucasus region has always been of great importance to Russia. Since the South Caucasus serves as a kind of "buffer zone" whose protection is crucial for the country's national security, Russia, using various instruments in the political, military, and economic sense, is trying to maintain a decisive influence in this region. Although, as Leppingwell once remarked, the collapse of the Soviet Union left Russia to search for new foundations for its security policy, its foreign policy towards the so-called near abroad remained assertive.[52] Shashenkov cites the Russian leadership's belief that the renewal of some kind of integration and active policy in the near abroad are required to solve the problems that arose with the collapse of the USSR. As a result, it was actively involved in all of the armed conflicts that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia's involvement was reflected in, as he goes on to say, sponsored peace treaties and the establishment of military bases. Regardless of the argument that it is necessary to protect its citizens abroad, this exposes Russia to accusations that it threatens the sovereignty of its neighbours and pursues a neo-imperialist policy.[53]

Russia is attempting to maintain a central position in unsolved post-Soviet disputes while limiting the impact of other parties in the region.[54] In this

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[51] Sinikukka Saari et al., "Russia and Turkey in the post-soviet neighbourhood: Uneasy Tango," JSTOR, 2021, http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep34006.7.

[52] John W. R. Lepingwell, "The Russian Military and Security Policy in the 'near Abroad,'" *Survival* 36, no. 3 (September 1994): 71–72.

[53] Maxim Shashenkov, "Russian Peacekeeping in the 'near Abroad,'" *Survival* 36, no. 3 (September 1994): 49.

[54] Ana Jović-Lazić and Jovanka Kuvekalović-Stamatović, "Permanent Neutrality of the Republic of Moldova — Strategy for Survival between Russia and NATO?," *The Review of International Affairs* 71, no. 1179 (2020): 21–53.

context, there are opinions that the specifics of the Caucasus determine its security policy in this region. It originates from the fact that the security of Russia's North and South Caucasus regions is intertwined, which is why Moscow is concerned that instability and separatism in the southern part of the region might undermine the country's stability and territorial integrity. In addition to the so-called spillovers of instability, terrorism is regarded as a significant threat to national security.

Furthermore, the threat of the West projecting influence in the region through future NATO expansion is considered a security threat. This puts Russia, as well as other regional actors, under a significant amount of security pressure, forcing them to resort to military action and the so-called "hard power first" strategy.[55] Some argue, however, that while Russia remains the region's most powerful military force, its ability to influence the region's situation is far less than previously thought. Rasizade went on to say that it was hampered not only by the physical barrier of the Greater Caucasus but also by the unstable situation in the North Caucasus. As a result, Moscow works hard to maintain strong ties with Armenians, as well as Abkhazians and others who could support Russian interests, in order to counterbalance the expanding political and economic influence of other regional powers, such as Turkey.[56]

When the first war in Nagorno-Karabakh ended, Russia, together with the United States and France, became the co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group for resolving the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Some think that Russia's peace support was primarily symbolic. As part of the previously outlined strategy to enhance its position in the Caucasus, Russia exploited this conflict to further its foreign policy aims by influencing both Armenia and Azerbaijan. There are opinions that Russia's support for peace was, above all, declarative.[57] Thus, although it left part of its armed forces in Armenia after the end of the First War in Nagorno-Karabakh, which Yerevan saw as a kind of guarantee against

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[55] Andrey Sushentsov and Nikita Neklyudov, "The Caucasus in Russian Foreign Policy Strategy," *Caucasus Survey* 8, no. 2 (May 3, 2020): 127–128.

[56] Rasizade, A. "Azerbaijan's Prospects in Nagorno-Karabakh." *Mediterranean Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (July 1, 2011): 230.

[57] Kavus Abushov, "Russian Foreign Policy towards the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Prudent Geopolitics, Incapacity or Identity?".

Turkish intervention in Nagorno-Karabakh, offering it the chance to set up its bases without compensation in June 1994, the situation is far from simple.[58] Despite the development of strategic partnerships, close ties, and Armenia's membership in the CSTO, Russia has improved relations with Azerbaijan over time, as previously stated. Also, Russian officials have repeatedly stated at the official level that they support the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and that they see their role only as a mediator.

Although it openly supported Armenia during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, Russia attempted to remain neutral during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. In this context, Russia's reactions during the initial phase of the conflict were relatively mild, consisting of consultations, calls for a cessation of hostilities, and joint statements with the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs, France, and the United States.[59] Russia countered the argument that, given Armenia's membership in the CSTO, it should be more openly involved in the conflict by claiming that the security guarantees arising from this agreement apply to Armenia, not Nagorno-Karabakh.

However, as the war progressed, the prospect of Azerbaijan's complete military victory forced Russia to change its strategy. Moscow could not allow Armenia to be completely defeated because losing an ally would mean losing credibility. Also, allowing Azerbaijan to reclaim all of its disputed territories would deprive Russia of one of its most important sources of influence in the region, which enabled Moscow to keep control over both countries. Given that Moscow is attempting to maintain its role as a major mediator between Baku and Yerevan in order to maintain its position that any resolution to the crisis requires its approval, Russia has increased its efforts to reach an agreement between the two countries. Simultaneously, it wanted a rapid de-escalation of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh with as little Russian investment as possible. It was a chance for Azerbaijan and Turkey to capitalise on territorial gains and enhance their regional influence without fear of Russian interference. The fact that the six-week conflict concluded with

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[58] John W. R. Lepingwell, "The Russian Military and Security Policy in the 'near Abroad'", 71–72.

[59] Laurence Broers, "Perspectives | Did Russia Win the Karabakh War? | Eurasianet," eurasianet.org, November 17, 2020, https://eurasianet.org/perspectives-did-russia-win-the-karabakh-war.

Russia's mediation and the deployment of its peacekeeping forces allowed it to maintain and secure its vital regional interests. In addition to keeping Azerbaijan from fully controlling Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia maintained its influence in Armenia, kept excellent ties with Azerbaijan (to which it supplies weaponry), and stopped Turkey from considerably increasing its influence in the South Caucasus.[60] In any case, Russia is aware of Turkey's new position and the fact that settling the conflict in this region without taking into consideration Turkey's interests will be impossible.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Nagorno-Karabakh dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia is one of the most long-running, violent, and complicated unsolved conflicts in the former Soviet Union. Because of internal Azerbaijani instability and Russian support, Armenia gained the first military conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Since the first cease-fire agreement was reached in the mid-1990s, numerous attempts have been made to find a diplomatic solution to this conflict. They could not provide any results, though, because both parties anticipated that their positions would improve with time. Azerbaijan believed that increasing its army would give it more influence over the Armenians, while Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh believed that their self-proclaimed *de facto* independent country would eventually achieve international recognition. The triumph in the first armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh instilled in Armenia a false sense of military supremacy that lasted until the beginning of the new conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. A new conflict demonstrated that deadlock in peace negotiations or a frozen crisis can swiftly evolve into a new cycle of aggression. Its outcome significantly changed the situation on the ground, imposing the need to consider the circumstances that altered the current balance of power, resulting in a decisive victory for Azerbaijan and Turkey's growing influence in the region, where Russia had a decisive influence.

Apart from the stalemate in the peace process, the accumulation of weapons in Armenia and Azerbaijan did not create conditions for lasting

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[60] Wojciech Górecki, "A New Stage of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh," OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, September 28, 2020, https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2020-09-28/a-new-stage-conflict-over-nagorno-karabakh.

peace. Despite both sides amassing weapons, it was a significant improvement in Azerbaijan's military capabilities that contributed to the outbreak of a new conflict and determined its outcome. Thanks to high revenues from energy exports, Azerbaijan multiplied its military budget, which enabled it to invest significant economic resources in the military budget, especially in the procurement of sophisticated weapons, which, over time, when it comes to military capabilities, led to its superiority over Armenia. Contrary to Armenia, which, due to its economic situation, had little choice but to continue purchasing weapons from Moscow, where it could do so at very favourable terms thanks to its membership in the CSTO, Azerbaijan purchased modern weapons from different countries, mostly from Russia, Turkey, Belarus, and Israel. Furthermore, Russia has supplied roughly two-thirds of Azerbaijan's major arms in the last ten years. A significant increase in the import of Russian weapons to Azerbaijan enabled Moscow to generate a large income, which at the same time led to the improvement of its relations with Baku. Azerbaijan's reason for adopting such a policy was to guarantee that Moscow kept a relatively neutral position in the case of a new breakout in the conflict with Armenia, thus protecting one of the most significant national interests and restoring the occupied territory. Furthermore, Armenia's political position in this conflict was influenced by the so-called Velvet Revolution, which brought pro-Western leadership in 2018, disrupting previous relations between Moscow and Yerevan.

In the second war in Nagorno-Karabakh, Turkey and Russia played a significant and complex role. It was affected by both historical and current ties and relationships between these regional powers and Azerbaijan and Armenia, as well as Russian-Turkish relations. Changes in regional players' foreign policy strategies, particularly Turkey's and, to a lesser extent, Russia's, influenced the outbreak of the armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh because they did not provide enough incentives for Azerbaijan and Armenia's leaders to pursue a policy of peacemaking. When the last conflict erupted, Turkey, Azerbaijan's most important ally, publicly supported the country on political and military levels. As a result, Russia struggled to keep its relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan intact, as well as its regional position, which appeared to be jeopardised by the Azerbaijani offensive and Turkey's hostile attitude. In such a complicated setting, it was evident that further escalation of the conflict would have substantial security implications. Despite these obstacles, Russia was able to maintain a significant influence on regional developments

by reaching an agreement on a ceasefire and the deployment of its peacekeepers on the ground. At the same time, the outcome of the armed conflict shifted the power balance between Armenia and Azerbaijan on a local level, as well as Turkey and Russia on a regional level. Given that the political status of Nagorno-Karabakh remains an open international issue with significant potential for new conflicts, it can only be resolved through compromise, taking into account the interests of Russia and Turkey, which could have a decisive influence on Armenia-Azerbaijan reconciliation. Until a lasting solution is found, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will continue to constitute a substantial security concern, a considerable burden on Armenian and Azerbaijani political and economic progress, and a significant impediment to regional economic development and collaboration.

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NON-PAPERS OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA AND DIFFERENT VIEWS ON THE FUTURE OF THE WESTERN BALKANS REGION

Nenad A. Vasić[1]

Abstract: The subject of this scientific paper is the analysis of non-papers of the Republic of Slovenia related to the situation and possible solutions regarding disputes in the Western Balkans region. Given that this proposal in the non-papers refers to high officials in the region and was originally from one of the European Union's member states, the fact is that it has been considered and commented on by states in the Western Balkans region, as well as Kosovo* officials. Yet, apart from stirring an unusually great deal of attention, it has offered some possible solutions. As a result, it is useful to shed some light on non-papers as a form of diplomatic communication, as well as the document in question and its aftermath. Hense, the paper provides a conceptual explanation of the term "*non-paper*". Further, the paper analyses the content and the form and makes a comparison of seven non-papers identified so far, assessing the effects that these informal documents have had on the Western Balkans, taking into consideration the statements of decision-makers about the ongoing regional and bilateral disputes. Also, the interests of various actors in the region on this issue were assessed, and this assessment could contribute to a better understanding of what would be an acceptable or unacceptable solution to the disputes. The conclusion is that the possibility of using non-paper as an informal means of communication and an instrument

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[1] Research Fellow, Centre for Neighbouring and Mediterranean Countries. nenad.v@diplomacy.bg.ac.rs.

for finding solutions for the Western Balkans region could encourage critical thinking, creativity, and communication among all relevant actors about possible solutions in the future.

Keywords: non-paper of the Republic of Slovenia, Western Balkans, European integration, Euro-Atlantic integration, peaceful settlement of disputes, regional security.

INTRODUCTION

Various options are being considered concerning the regional future of the Western Balkans countries and Kosovo[2] in the form of strategists' proposals, politicians' initiatives, or officials-instructed diplomatic activities. The non-paper is one of the forms used in modern diplomatic practice. Indicatively, most of these came out in the first half of the 21st century. The emergence of most non-papers can be traced back to the months of April or May. Non-papers are neither a novelty nor a legal exception in the science of international relations and the history of diplomacy; however, they are among the less common activities of the experts who write, comment on, or interpret them, and may be completely ignored.

Nevertheless, as far as the Republic of Serbia and other Western Balkan countries are concerned, the latter did not happen. In Serbia, they have all been duly commented on, whether by government officials, journalists, or by various experts.

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[2] The Agreement on international representation and cooperation of Kosovo was reached on February 24, 2012, between the government representatives of the time: Borislav Stefanovic for Belgrade and Edita Tahiri for Priština, in Brussels, with the mediation of the current High Representative for the EU, Baroness Catherine Ashton.

In that sense, Kosovo* is the only title that should be used in international cooperation.

The footnote to be implied with the asterisk in the former point 2. shall quote: "This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence." *Договор о регионалном представљању и сарадњи*, https://www.srbija.gov.rs/kosovo-metohija/ 168200, visited 30 March 2021.

NOTION AND ELEMENTS OF THE *NON-PAPER*
IN INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE

Non-paper[3], as far as international law is concerned, is an unofficial document, according to experts. In the words of the ex-ambassador, David Dašić, non-paper is the least formal[4] type of diplomatic communication between the officials of two or more countries. "It treats, analytically and circumspectly, some particularly sensitive bilateral issues, seeking to initiate diplomatic dialogue based on them.[5] According to professor Dašić, the non-paper is thus a non-binding or at least "a document loosely binding"[6] for its author. It is mandatory for diplomatic non-papers to be put on memorandum. For that matter, the non-papers are handed out before or after diplomatic meetings with the purpose of further consideration and seeking possible solutions to disputed issues. The other party cannot refer to such a document, nor is it required to answer officially. In his widely renowned book, "Satow's Diplomatic Practice", Sir Ivor Roberts of Trinity College, Northern Ireland, UK, treats a non-paper as a demarche (Fr. démarche), a diplomatic step or move. "Non-paper is less formal than a "*bout de paper*". This is a way for a government to present its politics "off-the-record", avoiding public authorization of the positions stated. This allows for further discussion on certain proposals while waiting for feedback. This approach is functional in multilateral diplomacy. A third party can take it on itself to draft a concept of a non-paper to examine the degree of compatibility of the participants' views, devoid of any obligation or responsibility for the views stated therein.[7]

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[3] In this scientific work, the term "non-paper" is defined as an unofficial and non-administrative electronic text of a document by a government, without stating of its author, showing the position, attitude, and the requirements of other governments in resolving issues in international relations.

[4] Давид Ђ. Дашић, *Савремена дипломатија*, Мултидисциплинарни центар за подстицање интеграционих процеса и хармонизацију права/Привредни саветник д.о.о. Београд, 2008, стр. 149. Види и: Давид Ђ. Дашић, *Историја дипломатије: еволуција дипломатског метода у политичкој историји*, Институт за међународну политику и привреду, Београд, 2015, стр. 17-699. Такође о дипломатији у теорији и пракси види: Џоф Р. Бериц, *Дипломатија: теорија и пракса*, ИП „Филип Вишњић"/Академија за дипломатију и безбедност, Београд, 2008, pp. 11-306.

[5] Дашић, *Савремена дипломатија*, ibidem, p. 149.

[6] Дашић, *Савремена дипломатија*, ibidem, p. 149.

[7] *Satou: Diplomatska praksa*, Urednik izdanja Ser Ajvor Roberts, HOLLIWELL-NEOPREN, Beograd, 2009, p. 53.

It should be mentioned here that there are various sorts of non-papers. Our scientific interest is in political non-papers. These are designed by government officials in cooperation with experts in the fields and matters of national interest. Such a document is entirely non-binding, and it does not reveal its authors, despite the fact that the address from which it is issued is unofficially known.

It is important to note that a non-paper is not the same as an *aide-mémoire*[8], which is used in state official meetings and diplomatic missions. An *aide*-mémoire is a resume of an address, prepared before the dialogue takes place and handed down to the other party after the meeting. This is done to eliminate any doubts or ambiguity concerning the participants' standpoints. This is the purpose of the *aide-mémoire.* It authenticates a government's positions, which the Foreign Minister states to the diplomatic mission of the state accredited.[9]. According to Dašić, the *aide-mémoire* is a short, concise, and informal document, which actually has elements of commitment. It only comprises the date, address and the hallmark "of a diplomatic mission".[10]

Another form of communication used by officials in modern diplomacy is non-papers. So, the officials of the State Department[11] used non-papers in correspondence during the Israeli-Arab political conflict in 1980. One of the current non-papers is the non-paper on the implementation of the Agreement[12] in the field of foreign and security policy between the EU and the UK, in the field of foreign and security policy.

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[8] In this scientific work, the notion of "*aide-mémoire*" is defined as an official government document, which gives a résumé of the most significant points, or a suggestion for consensus in international relations and diplomatic correspondence.

[9] Дашић, *Савремена дипломатија*, ibidem, p. 149.

[10] Дашић, *Савремена дипломатија*, ibidem, p. 149.

[11] See: Телеграм State Department-а послат из Вашингтона, амбасади Сједињених Америчких Држава у Тел Авиву 19. септебра 1979. године: *Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel*, in: Editor Alexander R. Wieland, United States Government Publishing Office, Washington DC, 2018, pp. 952-955.

[12] *Non-paper on the implementation of the EU-UK TCA in the field of foreign and security policy*, Council of the European Union/General Secretariat, WK 8452/2021 INIT LIMITE Brussels, 24 June 2021, pp. 1-2.

Unlike the *aide-mémoire,* which is a diplomatic document*,* the non-paper, more political in nature, can be freely discussed or officially commented upon. Therefore, the political non-papers do not represent official documents on a memorandum with a reference number and a reference in the Book of Protocol. Its authors are mostly anonymous, apart from the sender. Essentially, until they are accepted by the state institution or international organization's officials, or forums, they remain merely informal files, and therefore, *non-papers*.

CURRENT NON-PAPER FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS BY THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA

The modern history of international relations and diplomacy records as many as eight non-papers regarding the Western Balkans region. The public exposure and comments made by officials from the Western Balkans countries and Kosovo*, both at home and abroad, are shared by all.

The first unofficial document, a non-paper, to come out was on the subject of Bosnia and Herzegovina[13], designed by experts monitored by the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the government of the Republic of Croatia, Gordan Grlić Radman. The Croatian expert team was to be joined by their counterparts from another five countries: the Republic of Slovenia, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of Greece, and the Republic of Cyprus. The document expressed positions close to those of the leader of the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dragan Čović. Incidentally, Minister Grlić Radman has presented the Paper on a session of the Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union, Mart 22, 2021 in Brussels.

The second paper, the most controversial and most commented on, and the one actually in focus, is related to the Republic of Slovenia and its Prime Minister, Janez Jansa. After the failure of a prospective political agreement with only two separate Agreements on Economic Normalization[14] of relations

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[13] *Ministar Grlić Radman predstavio non-paper o Bosni I Hercegovinina Vijeću za vanjske poslove EU*, http://www.mvep.hr/hr/mediji/priopcenja/,36443.html, visited 9 September 2021.

[14] See: *Economic Normalization*, у: *Анализа докумената потписаних у Белој кући*, Центар за друштвени дијалог и регионалне иницијативе, Београд, 2020, pp. 17-18 and 22-23.

between the Republic of Serbia (represented by President Alexandar Vučić) and the Kosovo Albanians (represented by the Prime Minister of Kosovo* at the time, Avdulah Hoti) mediated by the then US President Donald John Trump (4 September 2020), eagerness rose to make this plausible. The initiative was made by the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Borut Pahor, in an address in the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia on September 25, 2020, "I should, thereby, like to express my assessment which, be it exact, can prove significant: in the case that the enlargement of the EU does not occur, or it gets delayed, the thesis is that the disintegration of the ex-Yugoslavia has not been completed, and that it is necessary to introduce ethnical borders in place of the existing ones".

Experience has taught us that such a process is unlikely to take place peacefully, avoiding the impending conflicts that could destabilise and shake Southeast Europe's security. Therefore, we have stated repeatedly that an enlargement of the EU into the Western Balkans is an exclusively political question, requiring from the EU an even more circumspect strategy[15]. Even as early as March 10, 2021, at the extraordinary assembly on the topic of the High Representative in the Republic of Srpska Parliament in Banja Luka, Milorad Dodik mentioned a visit of a certain European official to Sarajevo, enquiring at a Presidency assembly about the prospect of a peaceful disintegration of Bosnia and Herzegovina. "I come before a prominent group, mind you, a prominent group in the EU, who have envoyed me to ask you: Are you capable of splitting peacefully here in Bosnia and Herzegovina?"[16]

It was the Slovenian President Pahor who posed this question on March 5, 2021, during the informal part of the visit to the Presidency members in Sarajevo, Milorad Dodik, Šefik Džaferović, and Zvonko Komšič. Only Milorad Dodik replied affirmatively. The other two remained silent. And for two reasons: it is not customary in statesman communication to comment on any

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[15] *Govorpredsednika Pahorjanaslavnostniseji Sobranja Republike Severne Makedonije*, https://www.predsednik.si/up-rs/uprs.nsf/objave/04908438A80F7354C12585EE0044 9283?OpenDocument, visited 19 April 2021.

[16] *Posebna sjednica NSRS o visokom predstavniku*; *Obraćanje Milorada Dodika*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7mgcMDMrMI&t=4087s, 1:07:47-1:08:00, visited 13 August 2021.

specific topic unless it has been pre-arranged in a common announcement. There was no disruption to Pahor's visit by his hosts.

Even before Pahor's visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the non-paper was written in Ljubljana, the Republic of Slovenia, under the supervision of Slovenian president Janez Jansa. One of the Slovenian web-portals, necenzurisano.si[17], has made public the entire contents of the non-paper dated March 15, 2021, titled: Western Balkans- a way forward.[18] According to the makers of the Slovenian non-paper, after the Council of Thessaloniki conclusions on June 20, 2003, although the enlargement of the EU has been provided, "there remain unresolved the national issues of the Serbs, Albanians, and Croats".[19] We notice the oddity of filing the Republic of Croatia under the Western Balkans region, which is significant in terms of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Croats. Yet another attempt has been made to solve the nationality issues by shifting the state borders and unifying the three dominant nations within themselves. The spur for such a move was the stability of the governments of the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Albania. The part of the Slovenian non-paper concerning the vision offered for solving the unresolved national issues is by all means the most interesting.

2.1 The Albanian national issue and its solution

According to the Slovenian non-paper, the Albanian national issue is to be solved basically by unifying into a single state.

"a) The unification of Kosovo and Albania. In Kosovo, 95% of the population wishes to unify with the Albanians, from whom they trace their origins. The situation is similar in Albania. The border between Albania and

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[17] See: Primož Cirman, Vesna Vuković, *Objavljamo dokument o razdelitvi BiH, ki ga išče ves Balkan*, https://necenzurirano.si/clanek/aktualno/objavljamo-slovenski-dokument-o-razdelitvi-bih-ki-ga-isce-ves-balkan-865692, visited 15 April 2021.

[18] *Western Balkans – a way forward*, https://necenzurirano.si/clanek/aktualno/objavljamo-slovenski-dokument-o-razdelitvi-bih-ki-ga-isce-ves-balkan-865692#gallery-2, visited 15 April 2021.

[19] *Western Balkans – a way forward*, ibidem.

Kosovo does not exist, and the Serbian parts of Kosovo would be guaranteed a special status, after the model of South Tyrol."[20]

2.2. The Serbian national issue and its solution

The Serbian national issue would also be solved by unification.

"b) By the joining of most of the territory of the Republic of Srpska to Serbia.

The Serbian national issue can mostly be solved by joining the largest part of the Republic of Srpska to Serbia. In that case, Serbia would agree to the unification of Kosovo with Albania."[21]

2.3. The Croatian national issue and its solution

"c) The Croatian national issue can be solved:
- by joining the majority Croat cantons of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Croatia.
- by granting a special status to the Croatian parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, after the model of Southern Tyrol."[22]

The Slovenian non-paper considers whether or not Bosnians in Bosnia and Herzegovina will benefit from the country's potential integration into the European Union.

"d) In this way, the Bosnians would gain an independent, functional state and take full responsibility for it. The citizens would state their will in a referendum, whether they are inclined to an EU future or to one outside of the EU (Turkey). For the time being, an overwhelming majority of the Bosnians support the European perspective, but should the chaos of the increasing influence of Turkey and radical Islam prevail, the situation may deteriorate drastically in the next decade."[23]

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[20] *Western Balkans – a way forward*, ibidem.

[21] *Western Balkans – a way forward*, ibidem.

[22] *Western Balkans – a way forward*, ibidem.

[23] *Western Balkans – a way forward*, ibidem.

An essential element of the Slovenian non-paper deals with the European Union's "Three Must Initiative" in the function of economic stabilization, development, better infrastructure, energy, and ecology. The experts of the European Commission would prepare the plan.

"e) In cooperation with other factors in the region, like the "Three Must initiative", the EU starts the implication of an all-encompassing economic programme for stabilization, better infrastructural and energetic connection of the Region, and ecological rehabilitation (the EC has already prepared some segments of this plan)."[24]

Finally, in accordance with the European Commission's plan, the decisions would be endorsed and confirmed by the assemblies of the Western Balkans states and Kosovo*, all with the goal of accelerating euro integration.

"f) After the procurement and ratification of all the necessary bilateral decisions in the region, the admission negotiations for the EU and NATO membership would be accelerated."[25]

With this aim, the Slovenian non-paper envisages six actions:

"a) An implicit assessment of the conditions for implementation of the plan with the decision-makers in the region (in progress);

"b) An implicit assessment of the supportiveness toward the plan of the decision-makers in the international community (in progress);

"c) An encompassing program of presenting the plan to the public, (regarding the varying atmosphere in different parts of the region);

"d) If the EU, the US, and the majority of decision-makers in the region agree with the plan and the steps to its implementation, the EU will formally start the initiative;

"e) The process of communicating with various aim groups will be started;

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[24] *Western Balkans – a way forward*, https://necenzurirano.si/clanek/aktualno/objavljamo-slovenski-dokument-o-razdelitvi-bih-ki-ga-isce-ves-balkan-865692#gallery-2-https://necenzurirano.si/clanek/aktualno/objavljamo-slovenski-dokument-o-razdelitvi-bih-ki-ga-isce-ves-balkan-865692#gallery-3, visited 15 April 2021.

[25] *Western Balkans – a way forward*, https://necenzurirano.si/clanek/aktualno/objavljamo-slovenski-dokument-o-razdelitvi-bih-ki-ga-isce-ves-balkan-865692#gallery-3, visited 15 April 2021.

"f) All the required bilateral procedures for the plan's implementation will be set off, synchronized, and completed legally, in a logical sequence."[26]

In the original text of the Slovenian non-paper, there is also the thesis under f) with a footnote. It is important to give a commentary here on the original text of the formerly mentioned non-paper.

Finally, if the implicit assessment and correction of the plan reveal the need for consent from regional and international decision-makers, which cannot be guaranteed, the non-paper will remain just that: a non-paper.

DIFFERENT REACTIONS OF RELEVANT ACTORS TO SLOVENIAN NON-PAPER AND ISSUE-SOLVING PROSPECTS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

It can be stated that there are a number of non-paper options for solving issues, bilateral problems, and open questions in the Western Balkans. The Slovenian non-paper is of particular interest. Its release sparked a flurry of reactions not only in the Republic of Serbia, but also in the West Balkans and Kosovo*, as well as around the world. Here, we shall refer to the most significant ones.

The journalist Sead Naumović first brought to the public's attention the existence of the Slovenian non-paper. This was on his web portal, politicki.ba, on April 12, 2021. Slovenian Prime Minister Janša handed over the draft of the non-paper to the president of the European Council, Charles Michel, and to the current Canceller of the Federal Republic of Germany, Angela Merkel. According to Janša, it starts from the plan Vučić–Taci on the redrawing of the borders of Serbia and Kosovo. Yet, here it is taken several steps further, with the prospective secession of the entity of the Republic of Srpska, the annexation of parts of Montenegro and North Macedonia with the Albanian majority to Albania, and, finally, the annexation of Western Herzegovina to Croatia.

A sub-variant of Janša's plan includes the formation of three national republics in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Serbian and Croatian republics would

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[26] *Western Balkans – a way forward*, https://necenzurirano.si/clanek/aktualno/objavljamo-slovenski-dokument-o-razdelitvi-bih-ki-ga-isce-ves-balkan-865692#gallery-3, visited 15 April 2021.

be closely bound to their respective motherlands, whereas the Bosnian republic would be granted a corridor through to the international sea waters, guaranteed by NATO.[27] Thus, whether according to the Slovenian non-paper or by the afore-mentioned sub variant, the proceedings should be peaceful and under the patronage of the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance.

On the morning of February 12, 2021, the viral Priština web-portal in Albanian, Telegrafi, published an interview with the Slovenian president, Borut Pahor, just before his visit to Kosovo*, in which he claims to have no knowledge of anything to do with a non-paper. "Let me repeat what I have said many times: I find the idea of border redrawing utterly unacceptable. Let me get this clear: I do not support the idea of border redrafting in the region because it has never yet ended well."[28]

That same day, a tweet came out by the president of the European Parliament's Committee for Stabilization and Association for the Republic of Serbia, Tanja Fajon, and a re-tweet ensued by the journalist of the daily "Delo", Peter Zerjavić. First, Mrs. Fajon tweeted, "With his initiative for a peaceful dissolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Janša is trying to finalise the old Milošević- Tudjman plan for the formation of a Greater Serbia and Greater Croatia."[29] Further on, she expresses her doubt that this can be done peacefully. "Such irresponsible behaviour could lead to another war in the Balkans!"[30] Soon came a re-tweet by the journalist Zerjavić: "Such details rarely go public. According to the Croatian member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Željko Komšić, President Borut Pahor has mentioned certain circles in the EU eager for the completion of the breaking of Yugoslavia, enquiring about a peaceful dissolution of Bosnia and

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[27] Sead Numanović, *Janša predvodi države EU koje žele „veliku Srbiju" i komadanje BiH*, *Crne Gore, Sjeverne Makedonije*, https://politicki.ba/news/read/15926, visited 25 August 2021.

[28] Muhamet Hajrullahu, *Ekskluzive, flet për Telegrafin Presidenti slloven Pahor një ditë para vizitës në Kosovë*: *Nuk e kam të njohur non-paper-in, idetë mbi ndryshimin e kufijve janë plotësisht të papranueshme*, https://telegrafi.com/ekskluzive-flet-per-telegrafin-presidenti-slloven-pahor-nje-dite-para-vizites-ne-kosove-nuk-e-kam-te-njohur-non-paper-idete-mbi-ndryshimin-e-kufijve-jane-plotesisht-te-papranueshme/, visited 27 August 2021.

[29] *Tanja Fajon*, https://twitter.com/tfajon/status/1381612387896336385, visited 25 August 2021.

[30] *Tanja Fajon*, ibidem.

Herzegovina."[31] On that occasion, Zerjavić also attached a link to the website of the daily journal "Oslobodjenje". On the same day, a member of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidency, Željko Komšić, commented on President Pahor's visit to the Sarajevo-based "Oslobodjenje". Allegedly, Pahor had asked: "Can you peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina split up peacefully?" Komšić claimed that he and Šefik Džaferović said a peaceful separation was not possible, while the Chairman, Milorad Dodik was of an opposite opinion."[32]

To the entire tweet by the journalist Zerjavić reacted Mrs. Fajon with yet another re-tweet: "If the BH media reports, and the regional diplomatic statements are true, the isolation of Slovenia could prove very detrimental. Thank you for clearing it out."[33] To this all, reacted the Slovenian Prime Minister, Janša, "a solution for the development of the region and the EU perspective of the countries of the Western Balkans is being worked on; Yet with writings of this kind, this aim is being sabotaged".[34]

The next day, Prime Minister Janez Janša negated the authenticity of the geographic map, posted by the Macedonian web-portal news1.mk[35], on the redrawing of borders in the Western Balkans. He tweeted, among other matters, "False map..."[36]

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[31] *Peter Žerjavič*, https://twitter.com/tfajon/status/1381612387896336385, visited 25 August 2021.

[32] *Komšić potvrdio da je Pahor pitao da li je moguć miran razlaz u BiH, pa otkrio šta je Dodik odgovorio na to*,https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/komsic-potvrdio-da-je-pahor-pitao-da-li-je-moguc-miran-razlaz-u-bih-pa-otkrio-sta-je-dodik-odgovorio-na-to-647019, visited 25 August 2021.

[33] *Tanja Fajon*, https://twitter.com/tfajon/status/1381613982340034564, visited 25 August 2021.

[34] *Janez Janša*, https://twitter.com/JJansaSDS/status/1381546181956878340, visited 26 August 2021.

[35] *Janша предложил поделба на границите на Балканот*?, https://news1.mk/archives/25643, visited 26 August 2021.

[36] *Janez Janša*, https://twitter.com/JJansaSDS/status/1381953503506087942, visited 26 August 2021.

Map 1

Source : https://news1.mk/archives/25643

For spreading the news of this "false map", Janša accused Mr. Drago Kos, and Mrs. Tanja Fajon. So began the polemics between Prime Minister Janša and Mrs. Fajon on the Tweeter. Regarding the false map, Fajon re-tweeted, among other quotes, "You are lying..."[37]

For the first time, a public statement concerning the Slovenian non-paper came from the Serbian President, Alekandar Vučić, and the member of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidency from the Republic of Srpska, Milorad Dodik, on April 15, 2021. On the occasion of receiving 10,000 doses of vaccine in the "Torlak" Virusology Institute in Belgrade (the vaccines donated by the officials of the Republic of Serbia to the Republic of Srpska), Dodik commented on the Slovenian non-paper. So has the Serbian President, Vučić. President Vučić was the first to speak: "I have not seen any initiative, and so I am not ready to condemn, or to praise anything I have not seen"[38] On that occasion,

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[37] *Tanja Fajon*, https://twitter.com/tfajon/status/1381964257072271370, visited 26. August 2021.

[38] *Aleksandar Vučić o non-paperu*: *Ako ja ne znam šta je to, ne možete znati ni vi*, https://radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/regija/aleksandar-vucic-o-non-paperu-ako-ja-ne-znam-sta-je-to-ne-mozete-znati-ni-vi/413845, visited 26 August 2021.

President Vučić repeated his view against redrawing Serbia's state borders. This was followed by a statement from the then Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dodik: "I believe that peaceful separation should be held as relevant in the future. My conception is of a peaceful separation, and not a war. Serbia, on the other hand, has its international bonds, as a guarantee of the Dayton Treaty, and we understand that".[39] On that same day, reactions ensued from the president of the Democratic Action Party, Bakir Izetbegović. Commenting on the Slovenian non-paper, he said that it holds dangerous[40] theses, not only for Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also for the Western Balkans region and even for the EU. That same day, as a reply to the question of Voice of America journalist, Jasmina Djurdjić, came the answer of the speaker of the State Department: "The US highly regards its long-lasting partnership with Bosnia and Herzegovina, and remains devoted to the common aim of a democratic, inclusive, and prosperous BiH, moving towards full Euro-Atlantic integration."[41] The following was also stated: "The United States is strongly supportive of all the aspirant countries from the Western Balkans on their way to the EU."[42] (It is important to stress here that US officials are active in matters of the enlargement of the EU, promoting not only a lasting peace, but also the prosperity of the West Balkans region). The next day, another two reactions came, namely, from the Russian Federation and the Republic of Albania.

On April 16, 2021, Serbian foreign minister Nikola Selaković paid an official visit to the Russian Federation and its foreign minister, Sergey Viktorovich Lavrov. After the meeting, Lavrov declared the official position of the Russian Federation regarding the Slovenian non-paper. "Those are unacceptable, provocative, and highly damaging statements".[43] Minister Lavrov has

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[39] *Aleksandar Vučić o non-paperu*: *Ako ja ne znam šta je to, ne možete znati ni vi*, ibidem.

[40] *Izetbegović*: "*Non paper" iznosi teze opasne po Evropu, a ne samo BiH!* https://politicki.ba/news/read/15980, visited 26 August 2021.

[41] Milena Đurđić, *State Department*: *Podržavamo suverenitet i teritorijalni integritet BiH*, https://ba.voanews.com/a/sad-state-department-bih-suverenitet/5854115.html, visited 15 April 2021.

[42] Đurđić, *State Department*: *Podržavamo suverenitet i teritorijalni integritet BiH*, ibidem.

[43] *Выступление и ответы на вопросы СМИ Министра иностранных дел Российской Федерации С. В. Лаврова в ходе совместной пресс-конференции с Министром*

essentially reiterated the Russian Federation's and its president, Vladimir Putin's, familiar official positions. "There exists Resolution 1244 of the UN Security Council that has not been cancelled. Responsible politicians (more so, European government leaders) have no right to put up ideas that brutally erode the very concept defined by Resolution 1244 of the EU Security Council. It is further stated that the Security Council respects the sovereignty of Serbia, and a proposition is given for a specific treatment to be demanded for Kosovo in the Priština–Belgrade negotiations".[44]

The existence of a non-paper and of a redesigned Western Balkans map was confirmed by the Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama, while participating in the "ZGJEDHJE 2021 në V+" show, having had an insight into the documents. "I have also seen this document that has emerged. I have no comment on that".[45]

On the same day, the Slovenian Prime Minister, Janša, denied the existence of a Slovenian non-paper[46], thus condemning it, in a phone conversation with Bosnian member of the BH Presidency, Šefik Džeferović.

According to the Croatian Prime Minister, Andrej Plenković, none[47] of the officials have received the Slovenian non-paper.

Starting on April 19, 2021, the president of the Independent Social-democrats Union, Milorad Dodik, started a campaign for a peaceful separation

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иностранных дел Республики Сербии Н.Селаковичем, Москва, 16 апреля 2021 года, https://www.mid.ru/ru/vizity-ministra/-/asset_publisher/ICoYBGcCUgTR/content/id/4689215, visited 19 April 2021.

[44] *Выступление и ответы на вопросы СМИ Министра иностранных дел Российской Федерации С.В.Лаврова в ходе совместной пресс-конференции с Министром иностранных дел Республики Сербии Н.Селаковичем*, Москва, visited 19 April 2021, ibidem.

[45] *ZGJEDHJE2021 në V+*, https://www.facebook.com/edirama.al/videos/923087461838528, 2:15:45-2:15:50, visited 26 August 2021.

[46] Rijad Durkić, *Janša nazvao Džaferovića*: *Ne postoji „non paper" o prekrajanju granica, podržavam integritet BiH*, https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/jansa-nazvao-dzaferovica-ne-postoji-non-paper-o-prekrajanju-granica-podrzavam-integritet-bih/210416131, visited 27 August 2021.

[47] *Navodni Janšin non-paper o BiH sam vidio na portalu*, *Hrvatska ga nije dobila'*, https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/ hrvatska/navodni-jansin-non-paper-o-bih-sam-vidio-na-portalu-hrvatska-ga-nije-dobila-15065912, visited 27 August 2021.

in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He has leased time on the u-Tube channel for the broadcast of two of his videos to that end: 1. Dodik on a peaceful separation in BiH[48]; 2. A peaceful separation of BiH is the best thing for all.[49]

Not long after this, an official view of the EU was heard from the European Commission speaker, Eric Mamer: "The position of the EU on this is well known. We are categorically against any border changing".[50]

In the name of the United Kingdom, regarding the Slovenian non-paper and the views stated by the ex-diplomat and current leader of the "Study of Disintegration" project of Cambridge University's Centre for Politics, Timothy Less, the British Ambassador to Sarajevo, BiH, Mathew Field reacted. Namely, Ambassador Field gave an interview to the journalist of the Sarajevo Daily Avaz, Erdin Halimić, on May 7, 2021. On that occasion, he said, "...of the documents that are so bad, nobody would claim them".[51] He also commented on Timothy Less' propositions: "Timothy Less does not speak for the United Kingdom".[52]

In the Republic of Slovenia, journalist Novica Mihajlović[53] of the daily "Delo" magazine wrote about the Slovenian non-paper, confirming its existence and adding that it was too risky to be made public. The paper's existence was also confirmed by Milan Kučan. "Also, this is denied by our Prime Minister, while such a non-paper obviously exists. It turns out that in

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[48] *Додик о мирном разлазу БиХ*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Shyao7TZ-DQ visited 26 August 2021.

[49] *Мирни разлаз БиХ је најбољи за све*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTOW jMh9bkw, visited 26 August 2021.

[50] *Portparol EK*: *Pitanje granica na Zapadnom Balkanu, zauvek zatvoreno*', https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/31223440.html, visited 26 August 2021.

[51] Erdin Halimić, *Ambasador Velike Britanije u BiH Metju Fild za „Avaz"*: *Timoti Les ne govori uime Ujedinjenog Kraljevstva*, https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/649925/ambasador-velike-britanije-u-bih-metju-fild-za-avaz-timoti-les-ne-govori-uime-ujedinjenog-kraljevstva?fbclid=IwAR2uixGroqM5d4-P1-PCKhWi_ef7Sv2fI_xOOvlw3pGLYUNOycoZPt9v3a8, visited 13 May 2021.

[52] Halimić, *Ambasador Velike Britanije u BiH Metju Fild za „Avaz"*: *Timoti Les ne govori u ime Ujedinjenog Kraljevstva*, ibidem.

[53] Novica Mihalović, *Slovenski non-paper obstaja, a je za javnost preveč tvegan*, https://www.delo.si/novice/ slovenija/slovenski-non-paper-je-za-javnost-prevec-tvegan/, visited 27 August 2021.

Brussels they know who the author is, as well as about its contents, but they are loath to reveal it because of its harmfulness to international relations".[54]

Another reaction to the Slovenian non-paper came from the president of the Socialist International, Jorgos Papandreou. In an author's text for the Greek daily, Ekatimerini, he confirmed the existence and circulation of the Slovenian non-paper[55] but also of another, Franco-German non-paper (we will not deal with this non-paper in this study).The Slovenian non-paper is also opposed by the President of the Republic of Montenegro and the Prime Minister of Kosovo*.

THE FINAL CONCLUSION

Non-papers, particularly the Slovenian non-paper, dominated the first half of this year in the West Balkans region.Using the historical and comparative method, as well as a content analysis of the publicly available Slovenian non-paper, we can draw four conclusions: 1. From its emergence until now, the Slovenian non-paper has become no one's official document; 2. A common trait is the Slovenian view of a peaceful, consensual solving of issues and the open questions in the bilateral and multilateral relations of states, including Kosovo*; 3. Depending on the interests of the relevant actors, integration is being facilitated into the European Union, the North Atlantic Alliance, and other organizations, institutions, and forums, according to the free inclination of state officials; 4. The position of the United Nations and the Security Council

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[54] Драган Штављанин, *Први председник Словеније: крај Југославије је био неминован*, https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/prvi-predsednik-slovenije-milan-kucan-intervju/31313878.html, visited 28 June 2021.

It is important to mention that (at the then Prime Minister's bidding), Milan Kučan, in the role of the Prime Minister's informer, made a suggestion for a constitutional form of Bosnia and Herzegovina without a change in the state's territories. See on this topic: *POROČILO G. MILANA KUČANA, POROČEVALCA PREDSEDNIKU VLADE REPUBLIKE SLO.NIJE G. BORUTU PAHORU O MOŽNIH POTEH ZA USPEŠNO NADALJEVANJE PROCESA SPREMEMB USTAVNEGA REDA V REPUBLIKI BOSNI I HERCEGOVINI*, REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA/KABINET PREDSEDNIKA VLADE, Ljubljana, 11. 6. 2021, pp. 3-17.

[55] George A. Papandreou, *Europe and the Balkans – opening Pandora's box*?, https://www.ekathimerini.com/opinion/1164270/europe-and-the-balkans-opening-pandora-s-box/, visited 19 July 2021.

is being confirmed, with the implementation of Resolution 1244, endorsed on June 10, 1999. The Slovenian non-paper was notable for igniting heated debate and public debate among the relevant actors, particularly in the Western Balkans states and Kosovo*, which felt compelled to comment on it.

The fact that no decisions were made on that occasion in the Western Balkans and Kosovo* states, as well as in international organizations, institutions, and forums, is significant. The only one who publicly saluted the Slovenian non-paper in the part concerning Bosnia and Herzegovina, that is, the dissolution of the Republic of Srpska and its annexation to the Republic of Serbia, was Milorad Dodik.

Nonetheless, the non-paper, whether Slovenian, which was the focus of our scientific analyses, or others yet to be written and sent, should be considered, treated, and interpreted in public as well as in negotiations between state officials and Kosovo* in the Western Balkans region. Principally, they should be endorsed (to a greater or lesser extent) or altogether discarded, eventually, should they prove to be unacceptable or inapplicable, especially if they do not contribute to world and regional peace, socio-economic progress, political stability, and the rule of law.

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649925/ambasador-velike-britanije-u-bih-metju-fild-za-avaz-timoti-les-ne-govori-uime-ujedinjenog kraljevstva?fbclid=IwAR2uixGroqM5d4-P1-PCKhWi_ef7Sv2fI_xOOvlw3pGLYUNOycoZPt9v3a8, posećeno 13. maj 2021.

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THE DEPLOYMENT OF TURKISH POWER IN THE BALKANS

Alexis Troude[1]

Abstract: The Balkans have once again become the favourite playground of the big boys. While Russia and China are advancing their positions in the face of a wait-and-see Euro-Atlantic bloc in the region, Turkey is reviving a neo-imperial policy. The neo-Ottoman policy, conducted with a drumbeat by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan since the early 2010s in Southeast Europe, allows Turkey to strongly mark the territory. Beyond numerous bilateral military and diplomatic agreements and a very prominent military presence (Kosovo, Bosnia), a Turkish "soft power" is imposing itself in the Balkans. Indeed, we are witnessing an acceleration of official visits by the highest representatives of the Turkish state and the opening of numerous Turkish cultural centers, which are based on the prevalent philo-Turkism among the Muslim populations of the region. A final lever of Turkish power is based on the recent but rapid deployment of numerous Turkish companies, both in industry and infrastructure and in services, because the Balkans represent a well-trained production base with low wage costs.

In this context, we need to look at the motives and objectives of the Turkish advance throughout Southeast Europe.

TURKISH DIPLOMACY AND NEO-OTTOMANISM IN THE BALKANS

Did the premonitory book by Milena Nokovitch, "And the Ottoman Night Fell on Europe", published in 1985, announce the return of the Ottoman Empire to South-East Europe?

After the battles of Maritza in 1371 and Kosovo Polje in 1389, Suleiman the Magnificent seized Constantinople in 1453 and settled definitively in

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[1] Professor, The University of Versailles, Versailles, France. troudealexis@gmail.com.

Europe with the capture of Belgrade in 1521. For more than five centuries, until the national liberation struggles of the Balkan peoples and their hard-won independence (Greece in 1830, Serbia in 1878, and Bulgaria in 1908), the Sublime Porte imposed its political and administrative system, as well as its culture (language and Muslim religion), on all of Southeast Europe.

Following the fall of the USSR and the breakup of Yugoslavia, this Ottoman legacy will serve as a basis for President Erdogan to deploy intense diplomatic and cultural activity in the Balkans, still marked by the Turkish imperial imprint. In 2012, during a trip to Bosnia-Herzegovina, he said: "For me, Sarajevo counts as much as Trabzon and Diyarbakir."

The Ottoman Empire has thus left its mark on the Balkans with a very rich religious heritage (mosques, medresas, funduqs). Faced with the cultural offensive of Wahhabi Islam (Arabia) that has built 240 mosques in Kosovo alone in 15 years[2], Turkey has taken the bull by the horns. That is why Ankara has in recent years accelerated its religious aid, financing the largest mosque in Kosovo, in Mitrovica (2 million euros) and the one in Tirana (30 million euros). By choosing symbolic places of European Sunni Islam, Turkey thinks it will quickly catch up and impose itself as a leading cultural power in the Balkans.

At the beginning of the 2010s, a Turkish soft power was set up in the Balkans. The Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA), with its six offices, is the largest provider of aid in the Balkans. It finances the construction of schools and universities, but also takes an interest in heritage (such as the reconstruction of the Mostar bridge).[3] More broadly, Turkish influence grows as a result of its cultural policy, which capitalises on a multi-secular Ottoman Islam. Out of twenty-three Turkish cultural centres in the world (Yunus Emre Institutes, YEE), no less than twelve centres are present in the Balkans, spreading the Turkish language and culture.[4]

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[2] Claire Levenson, "L' Arabie saoudite a transformé le Kosovo en repaire de djihadistes", SLATE 23 May 2016. http://www.slate.fr/story/118443/arabie-saoudite-transforme-kosovo-en-repaire-de-djihadistes

[3] An essential link in Turkish soft power, the Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA-Türk İşbirliği ve Kalkınma Ajansı) takes care of the renovation of Ottoman heritage, such as bridges, mosques, and medresses. TIKA also deals with the help of the poorest people (microcredits, health).

[4] For Davutoğlu, power rests as much on strength as on the ability to influence public opinion. Language, belief, culture, and leisure draw the contours of a neo-Ottoman soft

On the school level, schools financed by the Güllenist movement[5] and developing a rigorous Sunni Islam have been built in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina in particular, but also in Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Romania. Religious education is not ostentatious, even if a certain conservatism often prevails (veiled female staff, canteens sometimes separated for boys and girls). Finally, more than 10 universities are financed and controlled by the Turkish government: in Albania (Epoka University), in Bosnia-Herzegovina (International Burch University and International University of Sarajevo), in Macedonia (International Balkan University), and in Montenegro (Mediterranean University).

A GROWING ECONOMIC AND ENERGY INFLUENCE

Erdogan's Turkey is making intense efforts on the economic front and is about to replace its competitors in the Balkans. Indeed, since Sarkozy claimed in 2015 that "to let Turkey think that it can enter the EU is a monumental mistake"[6]. In the end, Erdogan understood that he could only maintain a foothold in Europe by literally investing in his former sphere of influence. The masterstroke was to use the failure of the South Stream gas pipeline project

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power. Modelled on the Confucius Institutes, the Yunus Emre centres are spread throughout the Balkans. Their geographical distribution reveals Ankara's target countries (two in Albania, three in Bosnia, one in Serbia, three in Kosovo, and three in Macedonia). Through these linguistic institutes, Turkey provides scholarships and trains students who will later be called upon to take on responsibilities.

Tancrède Josseran, "Regards français sur les relations turco-balkaniques", Kultura n°164, Belgrade (Serbia), Fall 2019, pp. 215-230.

[5] The brotherhood of Imam Fethullah Gülen, who has been exiled in the United States since 1999, has existed for more than forty years. It is active in more than a hundred countries around the world. In France, it is the city of Pantin (93) that hosts the headquarters of multiple associations affiliated with Hizmet (the service, as its members call it). There are schools and educational support centers, an entrepreneurial federation, and a humanitarian foundation.

https://www.franceculture.fr/societe/la-repression-du-mouvement-guleniste-en-france

[6] During this broadcast on Europe 1, December 1, 2015, Nicolas Sarkozy proclaimed, "I persist and I sign! Turkey is in Asia Minor, it is not in Europe", at a time when the file on its hypothetical accession is revived since the large influx of migrants on the Old Continent. For the former head of state, "it is a mistake to lie and make the Turks believe that they can join Europe". "We must have close relations with Turkey, common interests with Turkey. But it should not be a member of the European Union."

to rebound on the Turkish Stream project with his strategic partner Putin. The South Stream project died because of the pressure exerted by the EU on Bulgaria: in November 2014, its government declared that it no longer wanted Russian gas tubes. Putin then changed his tune and proposed to Erdogan building the "Turkish stream", which would pass through Turkey, Greece, and then Macedonia and Serbia. However, the EU exerts constant pressure on the countries of Southeast Europe to prevent the realisation of the Turkish stream. For a moment, proposals for a hypothetical "Eastern Ring", blackmail on Greece for credits, and other revisions of EU-US projects from the 1990s (TAP or TANAP) seemed to dissuade Gazprom from starting large-scale work.

Is this the announced end of the Turkey/West partnership? Erdogan is now testing the Europeans, knowing that more than 40% of their gas deliveries come from Asia. In this new Eastern Question, the Balkans have become the European centre of the Great Global Energy Game. At the end of 2019, the strategic alliance between Russia and Turkey seems, despite the resistance of the EU, to definitively occupy the terrain of Southeastern Europe. On September 18, 2019, the Bulgarian energy operator "Bulgartranz" and Saudi Arabia's "Arkad" signed an investment agreement that will extend "Turkish stream" in Europe. From 2020, the new "Turkish Stream" brings Russian gas to the Greek port of Alexandropouli; from Greece, the Tesla pipeline will irrigate several Balkan countries, while the Poseidon pipe will supply Italy[7].

Relying on this strategic deployment, the state and Turkish companies have literally invested in the Balkans over the last ten years. Even if Bulgaria risks being a brake on the Turkish stream project, it must be noted that it is the leading country in the Turkish system in the Balkans – 14 billion in investments over 10 years and 5 billion in bilateral trade in 2018, with action

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https://www.europe1.fr/politique/sarkozy-la-turquie-ne-doit-pas-etre-membre-de-lunion-europeenne-2629425

[7] Launched well before South Stream, the American Nabucco pipeline project, supported by the EU, was to supply Western Europe with gas from the Caspian Sea; its route passed through Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary. But in the face of competition from South Stream and the defection of Turkey and Azerbaijan in 2011, it was abandoned for a while. Faced with the EU's blockade of the South Stream project, the American-European gas pipeline has been reborn from its ashes since 2014 under the name Nabucco-West, with almost the same route.

in the fields of energy, health, and the electricity industry. Second, the grip on Muslim countries is equally important. Even if trade with Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo remains limited, economic projects in these two predominantly Muslim countries have been accelerating in recent years. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, sections of the highway from the capital Sarajevo to Belgrade and Budapest have been entrusted to Turkish companies, and a project to modernise its airport is underway with Ankara. In Kosovo, Turkey is among the leading investors (38 million euros per year), which has allowed banks, such as TEB, İş Bankası and Ziraat, but also the wind and electrical industries to establish themselves in this small state.

Finally, in other nations where the Muslim population forms a significant community, Turkish companies are doing everything possible to establish a presence. In the last five years, their number has risen from 29 to 1,545 in Montenegro, and real estate and airport investments are all over the place (Vlorë in Albania and Skopje and Ohrid in northern Macedonia). Even the steel industry is targeted, with the purchase of the Nikšić steelworks in Montenegro by Tosyali. But it is in Serbia that the economic conquest operation has been strongest. However, in a country that was liberated from the Ottoman yoke in the 19th century, the game was not won in advance. One also remembers the provocative words of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, then Turkish Prime Minister, who declared, during an official visit to Priština in October 2013, "Turkey is Kosovo, and Kosovo is Turkey". But times have changed, and thanks to a very cordial understanding between Erdogan and Vučić, many economic agreements between Turkey and Serbia could be signed. There are now no fewer than 800 Turkish companies in Serbia, and trade has increased fivefold since 2010[8]. More broadly, after Erdogan's last official visit to Serbia in October 2019, an Ankara-Belgrade-Sarajevo axis is taking shape. Bringing together these three countries, a "Trade Committee" was formed in 2013 and a free trade zone in August 2015. The October 2019 agreement provides for trade relations between Serbia and the two Muslim nations. We can see that

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[8] With 135 million euros of FDI still in 2019, the Turks have established themselves in the textile and automotive industries. A new Free Trade Agreement was signed in January 2019; there will be no more tariffs on Serbian products exported to Turkey. The economic consequences were quickly felt, with Serbian agricultural exports increasing in exchange for Turkish textile imports and car parts.

Erdogan uses the commercial lever in order to recreate a free trade zone in the historical backyard of Turkey.

REPOSITIONING OF TURKEY AS A MAJOR REGIONAL PLAYER

With a view to curbing migration flows to Europe, on March 18, 2016, an agreement was signed between the EU and Turkey. The EU pays 6 billion euros (aid to refugee camps) and places Turkey in the EU's antechamber, revitalising the accession process and lifting visas for Turkish citizens, in order to "fix" at least temporarily 4 million refugees and other candidates for departure to the West on Turkish soil. But despite this agreement, the result of the EU's migration policy is distressing. In 2017, out of 160,000 asylum applications filed in Italy and Greece, only a few hundred could be honored; only 20,000 refugees out of 856,000 from Turkey could be settled in other European countries[9].

Turkey seems to be waving the red rag again at the end of 2019 because the March 2016 agreement seems insufficient. The EU should increase the sums distributed to Turkey in the new European migration agreement, Dublin IV; already, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis urged, on the UN podium in late September 2019, that the European funds distributed to Turkey increase "in order to limit the flows in Europe." Indeed, more than 70,000 migrants were on Greek soil at the end of 2019, causing riots and deaths in transit camps[10].

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[9] The EU has reinforced Frontex assistance there in logistics and human resources, but despite this, the Greek authorities are criticised for their "serious failures in border enforcement. The aim of the EU was still, in mid-January, in Greece, to close the external borders of the EU to "allow free movement in the EU." However, by the end of January 2017, the EU had changed its tune: if Greece fails in its policy of retention of migrants and border control, a Recommendation decided by the European Commission proposes the introduction of re-establishing control, for two years at most, at some internal borders.

Cécile Ducourtrieux, from the newspaper "Le Monde", says it clearly: "The Union seems incapable of managing in a coordinated way projects that it has itself elaborated, such as the relocation of 160,000 refugees". As Turkey, involved in the war with Syria, does not seem to apply the agreements of November 28, 2016 (Erdogan even declared on January 21, 2017 that "we cannot create an open-air prison"), the EU is betting everything on Greece. The latter welcomed more than a million migrants in 2015.

[10] Alexia Kefalas, "La Grèce de nouveau débordée par les migrants", Le Figaro, I° October 2019.

In the camp of Moria on the island of Lesbos, a fire caused the death of three people following a fire on September 29, 2019. This camp hosts more than 13,000 refugees,

The geopolitics of the Middle East will once again have an impact on the migration issue in Europe. Furious about the setbacks suffered on the military front in Syria, Turkish President Recep Erdogan decided at the end of February 2020 to open the migration floodgates wide: "We have opened the doors. Why? Because the EU had to keep its promises."[11]

As early as February 27, 2020, 37,000 migrants were sent to the Greek border in one day; it was learned that the Moria refugee camp on the Greek island of Lesbos, built to accommodate 3,000 people, had been housing more than 20,000 for years. Yet the Greek president, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, reacted by claiming that "it is no longer a question of refugees: it is a clear attempt by Turkey to use poor people to promote its own political agenda"[12]. These migrants of Syrian, Afghan, or Kurdish origin want to enter the EU at all costs, to flee the war or simply to have a better life, dreaming of an idealised Europe[13]. For the moment, the Greek authorities have managed to push them back, at the cost of repressive measures, but until when?

Tired of waiting for possible EU membership, Turkey has used the Balkans to put pressure on the EU. Indeed, having started its accession process at the same time as Croatia, the latter has already been a full member of the EU for 7 years and has already held the presidency once, while Turkey has seen its accession, requested in 1963 from the defunct EEC, postponed to the Greek calendar. President Edogan has skilfully surfed on a certain nostalgia for the Ottoman Empire to impose the imprint of modern Turkey on the Balkans.

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four times its capacity. More than 1,000 migrants arrived each week in the Aegean islands in the fall of 2019, and in early 2020, more than 70,000 migrants were on Greek soil, causing riots and deaths in transit camps.

[11] Delphine Minoul, "Erdogan is a master of migratory blackmail," Le Figaro, 3 March 2020.

Report, "Les migrants lâchés par la Turquie," France info TV, March 1, 2020.

[12] A.F.P. and Reuters, "Turkey: thousands of migrants flock to the Greek border", Le Figaro, 1 March 2020. https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/turquie-des-milliers-de-migrants-affluent-a-la-frontiere-grecque-20200301

[13] Habiya, a Kurd from Iran interviewed at the Greek-Turkish border, says: "We dream of a better life, where our children will have the right to free health care and education. So why do you refuse to let us pass?".

Cyrille Louis, "A la frontière turco-grecque, un 'exode' téléguidé," Le Figaro, March 3, 2020

Bosnia-Herzegovina is at the heart of this strategic device: the Izetbegovi clan, father (Alija) and son (Izet), has been at the helm of the country since the early 1990s, and has made a point of basing its legitimacy among its Bosniak electoral clientele on the Ottoman Empire's heritage and grandeur. For his part, we remember that Erdogan said in 2012, during a trip to Bosnia-Herzegovina, "For me, Sarajevo counts as much as Trabzon and Diyarbakir. Bosnia-Herzegovina is the most faithful ally of Sunni Turkey, with a rapid Islamization of society visible in the streets of Sarajevo[14].

But Erdogan's Turkey has also been able in recent years, in a competition with Shiite Saudi Arabia, to accelerate its footprint on the other Muslim nations of the region. Erdogan is very close to Albanian President Edi Rama, who describes his Turkish alter ego as a "great friend" of Albania; in Kosovo, the Turkish contingent of KFOR is present in Metohia (the western region), and has proved to be the perfect policeman between the various Muslim minorities (Turks, Bosniak, and Goranis). More broadly, Turkish security services are increasingly active in North Macedonia and western Kosovo.

CONCLUSION

The clock seems to have turned in the Balkans. Europeans are concerned that Turkey's actions will limit the EU's influence in the region. Thus, on May 17, 2018, the EU did not invite Turkey to the EU-Western Balkans summit; it thus showed its desire to be the sole actor in the enlargement process of the 6 Balkan countries invited (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia).

At a time when Turkey is gradually moving away from the prospect of EU membership and is drawing closer to the powers that matter in the region, such as Russia and Iran, its influence in the Balkans is not well perceived by its Western partners. European leaders have procrastinated too much by never giving Turkey a real deadline, either out of fear of the Islamization of

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[14] Bosnian Muslims, of Ottoman Sunni tradition, have been undergoing a process of Islamist radicalization in society for two decades. The streets of the capital are becoming more and more crowded with young people wearing long beards and Salafist quami. The bars serve less and less beer, and the Accor hotel is "halal". See Bernard de la Villardière, "Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, the new territories of radical Islam", "Exclusive Investigation", M6, April 29, 2018.

the continent or, more broadly, because Turkey does not share the same values (Kurdish question, annexation of the TRNC). However, by leaving the Balkans as a buffer zone for foreign ambitions, the EU and the US have played with fire, and it will be difficult to make up for lost time. Faced with the conquering geopolitics of China, Russia, and Turkey in this region of Europe, Western powers must do everything possible to maintain their waning influence in the heart of the continent.