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"ANGEL KANCHEV"



FACULTATEA de  
FILOSOFIE și ȘTIINȚE  
SOCIAL-POLITICE



FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND  
ADMINISTRATIVE SCIENCES  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
DEPARTMENT



**International Security Congress-2024**

# **CHANGING STRATEGIC SECURITY LANDSCAPE IN THE BLACK SEA AND THE BALKANS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

 **30-31 MAY 2024**  
Face to Face

 Istanbul Arel University Kemal Gözükara Campus



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**PROCEEDINGS**  
**CHANGING STRATEGIC SECURITY LANDSCAPE IN THE BLACK SEA**  
**AND THE BALKANS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**  
**(30-31 MAY 2024)**

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## CONTENTS

Programme.....	1
Organization Committee.....	6
Scientific Advisory Committee.....	8
Session-I: Emerging Strategic Security Landscape in the Black Sea Region and the Balkans.....	9
Navigating Strategic Security Landscape in the Black Sea: A Multi-Theoretical Analysis and Prospective Scenarios - Assad Mehmood Khan.....	10
Redefining Global Security: Towards a New World Order-For Peaceful and Sustainable Security in the Balkans and Black Sea – Shahindah Hesam & Ahmad Tanveer.....	22
Russian War of Aggression and Perspectives of the Wider Black Sea Region: Future Studies and Alternative Scenarios – Iulian Chifu.....	35
Session-II: Military Threat Perceptions of the States in the Black Sea Region and the Balkans.....	44
Bulgaria’s Threat Perceptions in the Black Sea After Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine - Ildir Lika.....	45
North Macedonia Security Threats in the Third Decade of XXI. Century: Institutional and Political Framework as a Key Determinant of Instability - Mitko Arnaudov.....	53
From Three Pillars to Three Variables: Quo Vadis, Black Sea Region’s Military Security? - Leonid Polyakov.....	62
Session-III: Non-Military Threats Perceptions.....	72
God and Money: Radicalization and Financial Motivation in Terrorist Attacks: The Case of Crocus City Hall Moscow - Iulian Chifu & Iulia Mihaela Drăgan.....	73
A Geo-digital Approach to Immune Trade Routes amid the Black Sea Tension - Ana Yousefian.....	83
Assessing the Impact of the Russo-Ukraine War on the Global Energy Supply Chain (With Special Reference to Western Europe’s Energy Security)- Rifat Ullah Rifat .....	92
The Russo-Ukraine War: Navigating the Future of Europe’s Energy Security Using Scenario Building Technique - Rifat Ullah Rifat .....	109

The Consequences of the Trans-Caspian Pipeline on the Energy Security of Iran and Türkiye -  
Rahmat Hajimineh & Ebrahim Rezaei Rad.....125

Session-V: Foreign Policies of Regional Countries and Their Role in Providing Security.....137

The Russo-Ukrainian War: Solidarity and Unity of the States in the Black Sea Region -  
Prof., Ph.D.Victor Korendovych .....138

Changing Geopolitics of Central Asia: Challenges and Prospects - Guli I. Yuldasheva.....148

## AIM AND SCOPE

In the last few years, radical changes have occurred in the strategic security environment of the Black Sea region and the Balkans. Russia's interventions in the region and invasion of Ukraine not only reshaped the security situation in the Black Sea region but also increased concerns in the Balkans. These developments have changed these regions' importance and key regional players' roles for European and global security. While the Black Sea was rarely considered among the world's most important strategic spaces, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has shifted the Black Sea region from the periphery to the center of the Euro-Atlantic security processes. The war also indicated that the Black Sea region should be considered not separately but as closely connected to the Balkans and as a part of the whole European security system.

As the current situation shows, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has negatively affected the already fragile stability in the Western Balkans. The region faces new troubles. Bosnia and Herzegovina is confronted with calls for secession in the autonomous Serb-dominated entity, Republika Srpska. There exist grievances of the Croat population living in the Federation as well. Meanwhile, efforts to resolve Serbia-Kosovo dispute have come to a standstill, tensions brew anew between the two sides which make minority communities on both sides of the border vulnerable to a possible renewed conflict. Moreover, regional instability is also deteriorating as a result of the increasing disagreements between Türkiye and Greece in the Aegean and in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Against this backdrop, İstanbul Arel University has held a face-to-face international congress on 30-31 May 2024. The Congress's main theme is "Changing Strategic Security Landscape in the Black Sea and the Balkans: Challenges and Opportunities". The Congress aims to analyze the current challenges, risks, threats, and opportunities in the Black Sea region and the Balkans, explore future dynamics, and evaluate possible scenarios. The two-day congress is planned to examine the emerging strategic security landscape in the Black Sea region and the Balkans, explore the military and non-military threat perceptions of the states and peoples, discuss policies of global and regional actors and their roles in providing security, and assess the role of international/regional institutions to meet new challenges and threats.

**DAY 1: 1<sup>st</sup> Session**  
**30 May 2024**  
**10:00 am – 12:30 pm (İstanbul Time)**

**Opening Session – Introduction (10:00 am-10:30 am - İstanbul Time)**

**Opening Speech by Professor Dr. A. Ercan Gegez, Rector of İstanbul Arel University**

**Welcome Speech by Professor Dr Harun Demirkaya, Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences**

**Moderator: Assoc. Prof. Dr Ali Bilgin Varlık**

**Session-I: Emerging Strategic Security Landscape in the Black Sea Region and the Balkans**

- Impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on regional stability
- Energy crisis in Europe and Refugees
- Future scenarios

<b>Session</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Speaker</b>	<b>The topic of the Paper</b>
I	1.	Assad Mehmood Khan	Navigating Strategic Security Landscape in the Black Sea: A Multi-Theoretical Analysis and Prospective Scenarios
I	2.	Yaşar Sarı	Impact of the War in Ukraine on the Security of the Black Sea: A Comparative Analysis of International Relations Theories
I	3.	Gökhan Ak	Applicability of the Concept of the “Responsibility to Protect” ‘From What’: The Case of Russian War on Ukraine
I	4.	Shahindah Hesam & Ahmad Tanveer	Redefining Global Security: Towards a New World Order - For Peaceful and Sustainable Security in the Balkans and Black Sea
I	5.	Iulian Chifu	Russian War of Aggression and Perspectives of the Wider Black Sea Region: Future Studies and Alternative Scenarios
I	6.	Zoltán György Bács	Some Aspects of the On-Going Conflicts in the Balkan and Black Sea Region

Lunch Break (12:30 pm -13:45 pm İstanbul Time)

**DAY 1: 2<sup>nd</sup> Session**  
**30 May 2024**  
**13:45 pm – 16:00 pm (İstanbul Time)**

**Moderator: Prof. Dr Aşkın İnci Sökmen Alaca**

**Session-II: Military Threat Perceptions of the States in the Black Sea Region and the Balkans**

- Spread of war
- Possible regional points of conflict: (The future of B-H, Kosovo dispute, Albanian-Macedonian relations in Northern Macedonia.)
- Terrorism
- Nuclear threats, chemicals, bioweapons

II	7.	Idlir Lika	Bulgaria's Threat Perceptions in the Black Sea After Russia's Invasion of Ukraine
II	8.	Mitko Arnaudov	North Macedonia Security Threats in the Third Decade of XXI. Century: Institutional and Political Framework as a Key Determinant of Instability
II	9.	Valeria Gornychka & Slav Anastasov	International Aspects of the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution
II	10.	Krasimir Koev	The Security Problems in the Black Sea Countries According to the Fragile States Index 2023
II	11.	Leonid Polyakov	From Three Pillars to Three Variables: Quo Vadis, Black Sea Region's Military Security?
II	12.	Todor Kodzheykov	Use of Drones in the Protection of State Leaders

**DAY 2: 3<sup>rd</sup> Session**  
**31 May 2024**  
**9:30 am – 11:30 am (İstanbul Time)**

**Moderator: Asst. Prof. Dr Selma Şekercioğlu Bozacıoğlu**

**Session-III: Non-Military Threats Perceptions**

- Hybrid threats including cyber threats
- Criminal threats
- Mass migration, energy insecurity, food shortages, and environmental pollution.

III	13.	Elif Üçerli	How Conflicts Affect Women: Human Trafficking in Balkans and Black Sea
III	14.	Iulian Chifu & Iulia-Mihaela Drăgan	God and Money: Radicalization and Financial Motivation in Terrorist Attacks: The Case of Crocus City Hall Moscow
III	15.	Ana Yousefian	A Geo-Digital Approach to Immune Trade Routes amid the Black Sea Tension
III	16.	Rifat Ullah Rifat	War and Energy: Assessing the Impact of the Russo-Ukraine War on the Global Energy Supply Chain
III	17.	Rifat Ullah Rifat	The Russo-Ukraine War: Navigating the Future of Europe's Energy Security Using Scenario Building Technique
III	18.	Rahmat Hajimineh & Ebrahim Rezaei Rad	The Consequences of the Trans-Caspian Pipeline on the Energy Security of Iran and Türkiye

Lunch Break (11:30 am -12:30 pm İstanbul Time)

**DAY 2: 4<sup>th</sup> Session**  
**31 May 2024**  
**12:30 pm – 14:00 pm (İstanbul Time)**

**Moderator: Assoc. Prof. Dr Fatma Aslı Kelkitli**

**Session-IV: Policies of Global Actors and Their Roles in Providing Security**

- USA policies and their roles
- Chinese policies and their roles
- Russian policies and their roles
- EU policies and their roles

IV	19.	Fatemeh Alamolhoda	The Great Geostrategic Game in the Black Sea: Eurasia's Challenges in the Confrontation between Moscow and the West; Approaches and Solutions
IV	20.	Oktay Bingöl	Great Power Competition and Militarization in the Balkans: Exploring Risks and Strengthening Conflict Prevention
IV	21.	Kremena Rayanova	Main Guidelines of the Policy of the European Union in the Black Sea Region
IV	22.	Rahman Nurdun	Navigating Great Power Competition: Assessing the EU's Gateway Program in the Western Balkans vis-à-vis China's Belt and Road Initiative
IV	23.	Besfort Rrecaj	Current Global Geopolitical Shifts and Ramifications in the Western Balkans: Shaping Our Euro-Atlantic Future Through Malign Foreign Influence"

Coffee Break (14:00 pm -14:15 pm İstanbul Time)

**DAY 2: 5<sup>th</sup> Session**  
**31 May 2024**  
**14:15 pm – 16:15 pm (İstanbul Time)**

**Moderator: Prof. Dr C. Uğur Özgöker**

**Session – V: Foreign Policies of Regional Countries and Their Role in Providing Security**

- Policies of regional countries
- Bilateral and multilateral attempts

V	24.	Victor Korendovych	The Russo-Ukrainian War: Solidarity and Unity of the States in the Black Sea Region
V	25.	Ivan Us	The Role of the Black Sea Grain Initiative in Ensuring the Presence of Ukraine in the Global Export of Agricultural Goods
V	26.	Lyuboslav Lyubenov & Vanya Panteleeva	Domestic Legal Measures for Increasing Security in the Black Sea Region
V	27.	Mandana Tishehyar	New Corridors from Asia to Europe: The Key Role of the Black Sea
V	28.	Önder Canveren	Interpretation of the Recent Past in State Identity and Foreign Policy: A Comparison of Albania and Serbia
VI	29.	Guli Ismatullaevna Yuldasheva	Changing Geopolitics of Central Asia: Challenges and Prospects

**Closing Remarks: Assoc. Prof. Dr Fatma Aslı Kelkitli and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ali Bilgin Varlık (16:15 pm-16:30 pm İstanbul Time)**

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**DAY 1: 1st Session**  
**30 May 2024**  
**10:30 am – 12:30 pm (İstanbul Time)**

**Moderator: Assoc. Prof. Dr Ali Bilgin Varlık**

**Session-I: Emerging Strategic Security Landscape in the Black Sea Region and the Balkans**

**Sub-themes to present papers:**

**Impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on regional stability**

**Energy crisis in Europe and Refugees**

**Future scenarios**

**Other subjects related to the main theme**

# Navigating Strategic Security Landscape in the Black Sea: A Multi-Theoretical Analysis and Prospective Scenarios

Assad Mehmood Khan<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*The Black Sea region serves as a critical arena for geopolitical competition, with far-reaching implications for regional stability and global security. Understanding the complexities of its strategic security landscape is imperative for formulating effective policies and strategies to address emerging challenges. Considering this hypothesis, this research focused on analyzing the motives and actions of major stakeholders, including Russia, the United States, and other regional players, and assessing their impact on the security landscape. Additionally, the study forecasts prospective scenarios to anticipate future developments and their implications. The study adopts a multi-theoretical method, integrating insights from Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, and Game Theory to analyze the strategic security landscape of the Black Sea. Data analysis employs various Game Theory models, including Stag Hunt and Prisoners' Dilemma, to elucidate strategic interactions among regional actors. Prospective scenarios are forecasted using Dominant Strategy analysis. Results underscore the complex interplay of interests and the potential for heightened security risks in the Black Sea region. The study provides valuable insights for policymakers, analysts, and stakeholders to develop strategies to address emerging security challenges and foster regional stability.*

**Key Words:** *Black Sea Region, Geopolitical Competition, Strategic Security, Regional Stability, Security Challenges*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Black Sea is a noteworthy water body, strategically essential because of its volume and location. It creates an important line between Europe, Asia and the Middle East and spans approximately 436,000 square kilometers (Flanagan, Stephen J., et al., 2020). The Black Sea possesses uniqueness due to its geostrategic location, significant economic potential, and proximity to emerging global powers. The environment of evolving power politics in the Black Sea region is bubbling and just waiting for the boiling point. Russia, as part of the revisionist bloc, is challenging the established world order through its dealings in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine (Rahmany, 2022, p. 104). However, the Western countries, including NATO and the European Union, are averse to this plan. The heightened political environment has thrown this region into danger, where clandestine and explicit diplomatic activities among critical players make the abstract medley more apparent. The major players make different strategic triangles to balance out each other. However, the efforts of each key player in search of balance of power is making the situation further complex, leading to unbalancing milieu (Gabrichidze & Reisner, 2021, p. 7).

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Specifically, the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 and the ongoing military showdown since February 2022 between Russia and Ukraine have brought the Black Sea region under the spot light. The region's primary stakeholders, including NATO, Turkey, Russia and the European Union, have deep-seated vital strategic interests, ultimately leading to geopolitical tensions among these states in the region (Demirel, 2020, p. 24). Due to the emergence of the Black Sea as a significant strategic hub, Russia is prompt to show its military power and eagerness to fortify its southwestern borders. The strategic objective of NATO is to increase the defensive system of member states (Romania and Bulgaria), carry out concerted army exercises and enhance patrolling of naval forces as a deterrent to future Russian excursions. The concentration of NATO forces and joint military exercises are attributing to the overall geopolitical threats and conflicts in the region (Chiriac , 2024, p. 78). Control of Turkey over the straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles also plays a significant role in the geostrategic dynamics of the Black Sea region. By controlling these chokepoints, Turkey has established its strategic interest in ensuring regional stability and balancing relations with Russia and NATO (Erşen & Köstem, 2020, p. 234). Turkey's unparalleled position in the Black Sea region makes it the centre of the geopolitical planning parameters as it has an all-inclusive approach to fostering its relations with many other countries in pursuing its strategic goals (Atanasiu, 2022, pp. 82-103). However, the European Union is interested in the fortification of energy supply routes, encouraging a stabilized environment in the region and supportive of the states' sovereignty (Ukraine and Georgia).

Primarily, the Black Sea is considered the main energy transit passageway, hosting a number of pipe channels for oil and gas transmission from the Caspian region to Europe (Abuselidze, G. , 2021, pp. 133-148). This phenomenon has created major regional concerns among key players. Reliance on the energy supply routes over the Black Sea enhances its central and strategic significance. The regional security situation has been extremely intricate compounded by economic issues and the emergence of non-traditional warnings like cyber raids and hybrid warfare, mainly in the security environment. These factors are interrelated and accentuate the complex security situation in the Black Sea region, which demands multifarious solutions to perpetual issues (Åtland, 2021, p. 305). This study revolves around the complex geostrategic landscape of the region, with prime focus on security, employing a multi-theoretical framework. The research significance of the Black Sea region in emerging security milieu with tangible impact on global security dynamics. The research concludes underscoring the need for a comprehensive and subtle understanding of the interplay of different forces, actors and their intersecting interests.

## **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

This paper probes into the complicated and webbed security environment of the Black Sea region, thus focusing on the conflicting interests of power players to aptly analyze the joint implications for broader regional stability and security mechanics. It also examines the potential possible scenarios for cooperation thus reducing the tensions, aiming at fostering a peaceful and enduring future for all.

## **3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

1. To interpret the interests and activities of major powers in the Black Sea region, including Russia, NATO, Turkey, and the European Union.
2. To build and analyze potential future scenarios for the Black Sea region and its security environment.
3. To suggest guidelines, corrective measures and recommendations for regional players to mitigate collective threats and encourage peace and stability in the region.

#### **4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What are the vested interests of countries or clusters of countries like Russia, Turkey, NATO and the European Union in the Black Sea region?
2. How different future scenarios for the secured environment in the Black Sea region can impact the geostrategic mosaic and balance of power?
3. What can be the policy guidelines and recommendations for key players in their drive to pursue regional peace, stability and cooperation?

#### **5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This paper employing hybrid approach, combining qualitative and quantitative strategies, in order to unveil abstract impressions and provide a platform for the key players to create their future interests and plans in the region by collaborating with other stakeholders of the Black Sea region. Moreover, this study after critically analyzing different conflictual scenarios recommends cooperation among major players, thus reducing the prevailing geopolitical temperature.

#### **6. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The conduct of this research faced a scarcity of material and literature that would support the writer in exploring the consequences and implications of ongoing or emerging conflicts in shaping the international power structure in the region of the Black Sea. In addition, the existing literature also lacked an extensive and encompassing investigation of how conflicting interests of central powerful states formulate the structure of strategic security in the region of the Black Sea. Additionally, more in-depth scrutiny of the delicate balance of Turkey is needed between NATO seriousness and its mutual ties with the Russian government. There is a dire need for scenario planning, for enhanced insights, encompassing non-traditional security scourges of cyber-attacks and hybrid warfare. In a nutshell, applicable executive systems are essential for formulating policy commitments in the Black Sea's highly intense and complicated geopolitical matrix.

#### **7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research has been conducted using different theoretical lenses to grasp wholesome view. For this purpose, the important theories of IR including Liberalism, Realism, Constructivism, Marxism, and Game Theory have been applied, thus making the geostrategic landscape more clear and comprehensive. It also utilized various Game Theory models; the Stag Hunt and Prisoners' Dilemma, to analyze the strategic interactions and decision-making choice of important stakeholders in different situation. In addition, the Dominant Strategy concept has been used to validate the prospective scenarios from states' prime interests and approaches.

## 8. BLACK SEA: THE EPICENTER OF EMERGING GEOPOLITICAL CONTEST

The intersecting interests of these major powers in the Black Sea region contribute to a complex and often contentious geopolitical environment, as graphically illustrated in Figure 1 (Kormych, B. & Malyarenko, T. , 2022). The Russian conflict with Ukraine has created an intricate mosaic of interests and strategic stakes in the Black Sea region; in these scenarios, Russian forces are spearheading their efforts towards heading towards establishing control over Crimea and extending its area of direct influence across the region of its concern. However, on the contrary, the challengers comprising the US and NATO are pursuing their agendas by using their power and influence to counterweight Russia, by avoiding direct confrontation. The ongoing war in Ukraine is a reflection of the same, where Ukraine is being used as a proxy to fight on behalf of Europe, with their financial, diplomatic and military support. Within this complex scenario, states like Turkey have to tread their way very carefully, while maintaining balance on both sides. It has deep-rooted strategic interests and stakes in the control of the straits such as the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, thus cannot afford to overtly align with either side; Russia and NATO (Celikpala & Tatlioglu, 2023, p. 748). In the same arena of the Black Sea, though China is not directly involved in the armed race, it has vital interests related to the security of maritime routes, essential for her trade, regional and global relevance as well as for future of its strategic initiative: the Belt and Road (Vincenti, Giacomo, 2021, p. 31).

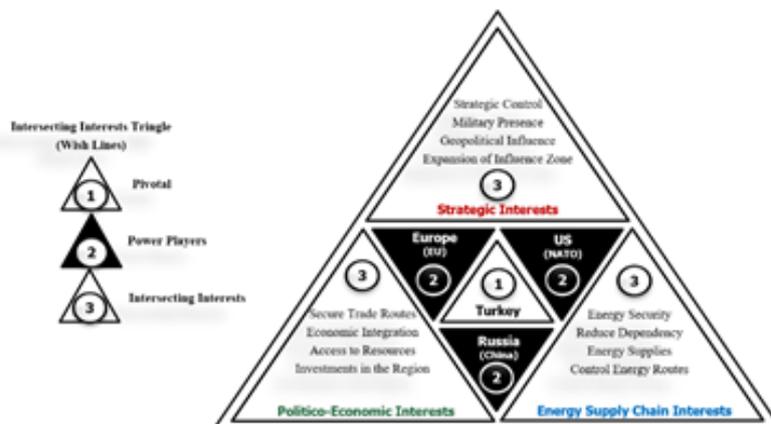


Figure-1: The Epicenter of Emerging Geopolitical Contest (Source: Author)

The Black Sea region hosts the geo-economic interests of key players such as Turkey, NATO, the US and China, which are often at tangent thus making this region extremely important in the strategic game plans of these countries. As for Russia, it greatly relies on energy transit routes for its oil and gas exports to Europe, transiting through the Black Sea (Druzhinin & Lachininskii, 2021, p. 336). The US also has serious concern for the region due to its geostrategic and geo-economic interests. Similarly, Turkey has its interests and concerns relating maintaining critical coastal trading choke-points, investing in trading routes, and keeping its geopolitical relevance intact. China considers the Black Sea a strategic trading route for economic interests especially concerning the future of Belt and Road Initiative. China's interests translates in its investments in region's infrastructural projects and securing the sea routes, connecting China with Europe, the Middle East and Asia. This phenomenon involves a considerable amount of investment for establishing infrastructures of domestic seaports and logistics networks in order to foster connection with global powers for assistance of the economic integrity and improvement of the efficiency of trade mechanisms (Catrinel, 2021, pp. 250-273).

Besides the primary interests and motives, each country has own strategic alignments in the Black Sea region, which influences their choices and options. As for Russians, they enjoy historic lineage and dominance and considers the Black Sea vital for its security and geo-economic interests. On the other hand, the USA is maintaining and looking for its motto of promoting principles of Democracy and Human Rights and supporting Ukraine in its war effort against Russia for perceived collective security of Europe (Rubinson, 2021, p. 696). Turkey has the leverage to exploit its historic lineage, and using its diaspora and geostrategic location in the region to pursue its objectives. Nonetheless, Turkey is faced with the most complex situation of all, where it needs to draw balance in pursuing relations with both sides. China is aiming at its diplomatic presence in the Black Sea, fostering political alliances and boosting its potentials to be dominant player. Since the start of the Russo-Ukraine war, the security landscape of the region is under constant duress and changing rapidly. The thing are volatile and have serious implication on the emerging geopolitical framework, hinting on the new realignments in the region with consequences stretching beyond that (Cafruny, Fouskas, Mallinson, & Voynitsky, 2022). The Black Sea has become a geopolitical flashpoint for major players with intersecting interests. Meanwhile, Turkey establishes an delicate balance between its relations with key regional powers like Russia and NATO (Nyadera & Ceter, 2024). The region’s intricate and complex environment has ripened the mutual conflicts, array of competitions and tensions among the key countries.

## 9. STRATEGIC TRIANGLES

Figure 2 depicts the strategic triangles based on the relational mosaic of countries, their common fears and aspirations, highlighting the emerging alignments. The details of significant strategic triangles are discussed in the ensuing paragraphs.

### 9.1. Russia-Turkey-China

The Russia-China-Turkey triangle is one of the most strategic triangle which has significant impact on the geostrategic landscape of the region. Where Russia and China both are seemingly from anti-west bloc being revisionist states. Russia and Turkey have significant interests attached to the region, while China being not geographically contiguous, is concerned with her geo-economics interests like the Belt and Road Initiative. China is protecting its trading supply routes through the Belt and Road Initiative and making its alliance with the strategic objectives of the Russia. However, Turkey is striving to balance economic collaboration with China and Russia, while still maintaining strategic partnership with Europe. In such a geopolitical scenario, two opposing elements, economic cooperation and strategic animosities, collocate in the delicate force of equilibrium (Shokri Kalehsar, 2021, pp. 45-121).



**Figure-2: Strategic Triangles in the Black Sea region (Source: Author)**

## **9.2. Russia-Turkey-EU**

The triangle among key players like Russia, Turkey, and the European Union has a complicated array of geopolitical, security, and economic interests in the Black Sea region. In this context, Russian is aiming at maintaining its influence in the area, fortifying its energy route networks for energy exports and extending its energy supply to alternative buyer to replace EU. Turkey is a crucial energy transit hub and stabilizing agent, balancing economic ties with Russia and its strategic relationship with the European Union. Energy safety, economic competition and promotion of democratic values are bench marks of Europe's engagement in the region (Rusetsky, Dorokhina, & Boychuk, 2022).

## **9.3. US-NATO-Ukraine**

This triangle is marked by a mixture of common security apprehensions, a regional stabilized environment and mutual political interests of the states (Shelest, 2020, pp. 96-111). The USA supports preventive arrangements with the NATO forces, facilitating Ukraine as its ally, ensuring the region's security framework, and counterbalancing Russia's dominance. As far as Ukraine is concerned, its aspirations to defend itself against Russia as flag bearer of Europe, align itself with Europe and become part of the EU and NATO drives its posturing. This triangle of key players underscores the joint efforts of the countries to assist Ukraine in its defense, and counterbalance Russia through a comprehensive cooperative and collaborative arrangement.

## **9.4. Russia-China-Iran**

It includes a complicated interplay of geopolitical involvement, a collaborative approach towards the economy and regional tendencies (Grajewski, 2022, pp. 164-183). Russia cooperates with China and Iran in various fields of interest. China is securing its trading routes to expand its economic influence in the region with business initiatives, especially developing infrastructure and energy projects with Russia in the Black Sea region. Iran is a key player in the Middle Eastern region with strategic objectives concerned with economic interests especially attached with energy transmission.

## **9.5. US-EU-Turkey**

This triangle is primarily constituting two out of the three extra regional players not directly positioned in the Black Sea region. The relational mosaic among these countries is driven by their common geostrategic and geo-economic interests attached with the region (Poghosyan, 2022). The United States, as a major player and an ally of NATO, has a collaborative approach with the European Union and Turkey in various areas of interest. Turkey is considered an epicenter of energy transportation with regional power status. It develops its balanced approach with the United States and the European Union to secures its regional interests (Rimanelli, 2022, p. 101).

## **9.6. Russia-Turkey-NATO**

In this triangle, Russia is seeking to exert its influence in its immediate neighborhood, while EU is challenging it by supporting Ukraine. The Turkey is trying to be neutral as has energy needs attached with Russia and economic aspirations glued with Europe. Turkey is protecting its interests in the energy transportation routes and focusing on a stabilized environment in the region. The opposing interests of the key countries, their historical tensions and reflections on the intersected geopolitical environment, make the geopolitical landscape of the region extremely complex and unstable (Florensa, 2022, pp. 17-31).

## **10. MULTI-THEORETICAL APPLICATION**

### **10.1. REALISM**

There is a clear manifestation of realism in the Black Sea region, where major key players are struggling to pursue their vested interests by use of any mean. For example, Russia has annexed Crimea, while the US, the EU and NATO are supporting Ukraine as counterweight to Russia in order to pursue their national interests. These all are reflections of realism in classical shape.

### **10.2. LIBERALISM**

In the Black Sea, there is a continuous struggle among the key players to achieve economic independence and mutual collaboration through collaborative efforts, which is manifestation of liberalism. Moreover, the European Union is committed to promoting trade cooperation and developing project infrastructure. China is committed to making investments through the Belt and Road Initiative and highlighting the strategic importance of common interests in shaping the mechanics of the region. Moreover, Turkey is committed to balancing the elements of realism and liberalism, combining security apprehensions to improve business activities and regional stability.

### **10.3. MARXISM**

The supremacy of socioeconomic interests and activities reflect the theory of Marxism in the Black Sea region. It highlights the unbalanced proportionality of the power and disparities in resources. The presence cum dominant stance of the Russian forces and the US in policy-making of the region of the Black Sea reflect the influence of capitalist theory and the unequal balance of relations among the key powers. However, the theory of constructivism emphasizes identity, standards, and conceptions in formulating collaborative steps and initiatives, such as the security cooperation of NATO and the promotion of democracy by the European Union.

### **10.4. CONSTRUCTIVISM**

In this theory, the prime focus is on the contents of identity, criterion, and conceptions in determining cooperative initiatives such as NATO's security cooperation and the European Union's fostering of democratic principles

## 10.5. GAME THEORY

Game theory extends meaningful understandings aimed at intersecting strategic concerns and fostering policy-making across power players. Moreover, evaluating potential scenarios through different game theory techniques, including Prisoners' Dilemma and Dominant Strategy, offered insight into aiming collaboration challenges vis-à-vis probable conflict determinants.

### 10.5.1. CHICKEN GAME (ZERO-SUM GAME)

The zero-sum game contextualizes a potential geostrategic scenario considering Team 1, led by Russia, having China and Iran as members. Team 2, led by the US, has European interests backed by the EU and NATO while keeping Turkey a potential swing player (Table 1). Probability resemblance offered a contesting interests' scenario where either side remains engaged in intermediating the challenges to either resolve or persuade aggressive postures to own advantage. In any future scenario, a Head-on posture by team 1 considering energy supply chain interruptions, economic security threats and the strategic proxy would result in a major confrontation. Meanwhile, the head-on posture by team 2 would escalating the conflict. However, Veer-off posture offered a statuesque, thus following a win-win situation. As a potential swing player, Turkey presented a pivotal place and role in the power play game.

**Table-1: Chicken Game (Zero-Sum Game)**

		Team USA (NATO, EU)	
		Head-on (Hero)	Veer off (Coward)
Team Russia (China, Iran)	Head-on (Hero)	0, 0	4, 1
	Veer off (Coward)	1, 4	3, 3

### 10.5.2. STAG HUNT (NON-ZERO-SUM GAME)

Maintaining the scenarios' Team settings in play, a non-zero-sum game offers concurrent cooperation in the probable scenario (Table 2). The collective good stance fosters regional collaborations, economic relationships and cohesive partnerships among players. Team 1 would lead, while China would increase its economic influence, including BRI exploitations, and offer space for regional cooperation, thus involving Iran in play. Meanwhile, Team 2 would access the way out and maintain the energy supply chain security. However, opting for selfish gains would result in aggressive behaviours and worsen conditions, while Turkey maintains a pivotal role during all stages of the game.

**Table-2: Stag Hunt (Non-Zero-Sum Game)**

		Team USA (Hub)	
		Collective Good	Selfish Gains
Team Russia (Spokes)	Collective Good	3, 3	0, 2
	Selfish Gains	2, 0	1, 1

### 10.5.3. PRISONERS' DILEMMA (NON-ZERO-SUM GAME)

The Prisoners' Dilemma is considered the definitive play where either a situation of cooperation or defection fosters apprehensions (Table 3). Possibly, provided either Team 1 or 2 opt cooperation, would foster reduced escalation, energy supply security and strategic status quo. However, anyone may pose a potential threat of defect during the play. Moreover, if one team opts for cooperation, and other defects, would yield limited gains for the defecting team. However, others will face extreme loss or damage to their interests. Furthermore, contemplated defects by any team would experience escalating behaviours, threatening economic and energy supply chain security concerns. Turkey's role as a swing player can adversely affect either team's decision.

**Table-3: Prisoners' Dilemma (Non-Zero-Sum Game)**

Turkey	Team USA (NATO, EU)	
Team Russia (China, Iran)	Cooperate	Defect
Cooperate	3, 3	0, 5
Defect	5, 0	1, 1

### 10.5.4. DOMINANT STRATEGY ANALYSIS

“Dominant Strategy Analysis” contemplates the above scenario in defining the best strategic choices to each player which they can use as their dominant strategies. It helps countries to envisage and articulate their strategic decisions (Table 4). Therefore, teams 1 and 2 either opt to cooperate or defect, which will conclude the opportunity for optimum advantages. Moreover, strategic dominance is possibly obtained when either Team 1 or 2 cooperates, thus offering optimal opportunities for either team. However, attaining and preserving a balancing state across such a complex scenario necessitates trustworthy strategic-economic realignment by all-power players.

**Table-4: Dominant Strategy Analysis**

USA (NATO, EU) Vs Russia (China, Iran)	Cooperate	Defect	Scenario	Manifestation	Implication
Cooperate	3, 3	1, 4	Mutual Cooperation (3,3)	Cooperative Security Framework	Regional Stability & Economic Growth
Defect	4, 1	2, 2	West cooperates, Russia defects (1,4)	Continued Tension & Military Buildup	Russia gains significant advantages
Cooperate	3, 3	1, 4	Russia cooperates, West defects (4,1)	Unilateral Dominance and Escalation	West (USA) gains strategic advantages
Defect	4, 1	2, 2	Mutual Defection (2,2)	Economic Isolation & Regional Fragmentation	Increased tensions & Latent conflict

## **11. POTENTIAL FUTURE SCENARIOS**

### **11.1. COOPERATIVE SECURITY FRAMEWORK**

For the substantial future outlook on the Black Sea, there is a need to develop a cooperative security system in the region through which all the key players and stakeholders (Russia, NATO and others) can join together. This phenomenon promotes confidence, trust, a fair climate of diplomacy, a balanced and stabilized security approach and mitigation of conflicts among the regional players. Through the collaboration of major powers, measures can be taken to enhance and promote coastal security driven by mutual interests and reducing the political temperature.

### **11.2. ESCALATION AND MILITARY BUILDUP**

An armed race, competitive military enhancement and intensified tensions can surface through display of intersecting interests, historical enmities and regional competitions. Hence, the major key players like Russia, NATO and the US could lead the scenarios of military deployment, strategic military tactics and dominance of the region. As a result, such an accumulation of varied military groups, a competitive armed race, and a likely escalation of tension would significantly bring a potentially threatened environment of chaos to the stability and security of the Black Sea region.

### **11.3. PROXY CONFLICTS AND HYBRID WARFARE**

The geographical zone of the Black Sea may be affected by a surge of hybrid warfare and indirect conflicts through the exploitation and use of non-state agents, irregular warfare, and information strategies by prominent key players to shape up and influence their regional mechanics and set their strategic objectives and goals in the region. This phenomenon could generate proxy conflicts, cyber aggressiveness, propaganda campaigns, and secret operations among the major powers, further threatening mutual diplomatic steps and developing complex issues for the overall traditional and regional security framework.

### **11.4. REGIONAL COOPERATION AND ECONOMIC INTEGRATION**

Ultimately, the future scenario of the Black Sea can be materialized through regional cooperation and economic integrity. This phenomenon promotes economic ties, business contracts, and infrastructure for projects that may further foster collaborative efforts and economic independence among significant countries of the Black Sea. To keep up the momentum in progress, many steps, which include energy relationships, transit road networks and combined business efforts, may bring about economic strength, mitigate vulnerabilities and develop expected benefits in establishing stability, growth, prosperity and a brighter future in the region of the Black Sea.

## **12. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Given the analyzed potential success in the future scenario of the Black Sea, a few viable policy guidelines and recommendations are proposed for enhancing the network of security framework, establishing a stabilized milieu, reducing risks, and creating a cooperative approach among the major stakeholders of the Black Sea. Moreover, energy security, sustainable development, and environmental safety initiatives may be endorsed to ensure a brighter and more prosperous future for the coastal countries of the Black Sea region. There is a requirement to establish a ruling system of international standards, ensuring the states' sovereignty, respecting the states' domestic integrity, and implementing international laws in the Black Sea region.

### 13. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the complex geopolitical scenario of the region of the Black Sea reflects a spectrum of challenges and an array of opportunities for regional and worldwide players. This investigative piece of research also underscores the significance of mutual efforts to enhance the essence of various elements like security, stability, and cooperation in the regional environment of the Black Sea. To achieve the said standards, smooth engagement, combined security mechanics, conflicting resolutions, and economic cooperation are needed. Moreover, the regional issues can be resolved, opportunities can be realized, and a better future can be enhanced for all the Black Sea's regional stakeholders through maintaining a collaborative approach, shared perspective and joint ventures by all the stakeholders.

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# **Redefining Global Security: Towards a New World Order - For Peaceful and Sustainable Security in the Balkans and Black Sea**

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## **Abstract**

The evolving dynamics of the global security landscape in the 21st century have accentuated the need for a paradigm shift towards a new world order that accurately reflects contemporary realities. This paper explores the widening schism between the Global North and Global South, highlighting the diminishing prospects for bridging this gap and the declining relevance of established institutions like the United Nations, perceived to be ensnared in colonial ideologies propagated by the West.

The recent conflict in Gaza serves as a stark reminder of the West's faltering moral compass, necessitating the establishment of an alternative global order anchored around emerging powers such as BRICS. Key to this recalibration is the resolution of longstanding conflicts by regional powers like India, China, Turkey and Pakistan, while Africa contends with enduring legacies of neo-colonialism.

Strategically positioned capitals in Turkey and Middle Eastern countries emerge as potential hubs for alternative models of cosmopolitanism, challenging the traditional dominance of Western metropolises. China's technological advancement plays a pivotal role in facilitating the technological boom essential for this new global order.

However, achieving this vision requires a fundamental recalibration of economic relations with the West, transitioning towards a more equitable framework founded on reciprocal benefits and reduced geopolitical dependencies. The pervasive dominance of Northern Big Tech conglomerates stifles innovation in the Global South, necessitating concerted efforts to dismantle their hegemony and nurture an environment conducive to indigenous innovation.

In the realm of military affairs, the proliferation of nuclear weapons among emerging powers reshapes traditional power dynamics, constraining the interventionist capabilities of the West. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine, compounded by NATO involvement, underscores the Global North's reluctance to address Russia's concerns and engage in constructive dialogue, necessitating proactive efforts to navigate the intricate geopolitical landscape of the Black Sea and the Balkans region.

Decoupling from the hegemonic influence of the Global North is imperative for the Global South to realise its full potential and mitigate artificially induced conflicts aimed at perpetuating Northern control. The establishment of new institutions and the promotion of enhanced interaction among Global South countries can cultivate greater trust and solidarity, fortifying collective resilience against external pressures.

This paper advocates for a more inclusive and equitable global order, emphasising the critical importance of bold and collaborative initiatives to address the multifaceted challenges of the modern world. By focusing on the Black Sea and Balkans region, it underscores the potential for regional cooperation to unlock latent opportunities and foster sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Global Security Dynamics , New World Order , Geopolitical Dependencies , Regional Cooperation

## **Introduction**

World order refers to the structure of power and authority that establishes the framework for global diplomacy and politics. It includes the norms, rules, institutions, and power dynamics that influence the behavior and interactions of countries and other entities on the world stage.

World order can be considered a framework for managing global commons such as the environment, trade, security, and human rights. It reflects the balance of power and interests among various actors and continuously evolves through negotiations, cooperation, and conflicts. Current world order traces its current shape through a five hundred year old churning starting with Westphalian World order following Westphalian peace treaty of 1648 to the current post-cold War world order often also called modern Liberal International Order(LIO). (Raja S, 2020)

John Ikenberry analyzes the modern Liberal International Order (LIO) as a result of gradual evolution, drawing from the legacy of the British Empire, Wilsonian liberalism after World War I, and liberal institutionalism from the Bretton Woods system (1944) and the post-World War II period. He defines the Western LIO as an “order that is relatively open, rule-based, and progressive.” Broadly, the LIO encompasses “open markets, international institutions, cooperative security, democratic community, progressive change, collective problem solving, shared sovereignty, and the rule of law.” (Chu Y. & Zheng Y. 2021)

The most notable feature of the current world order is its shift towards a more multipolar system, challenging the dominance of the United States, which has struggled to provide the moral leadership expected of a superpower. Jeffrey D. Sachs has accurately noted that the USA has failed to adequately address challenges to its global dominance, such as China’s rise, India’s dynamism, Africa’s growing populations and economic activities, Russia’s resistance, control over Middle Eastern events, and Latin America’s desire for independence from its influence. As a result, the world is gradually transitioning into a new World Order. (Raja S, 2020)

The evolving dynamics of the global security landscape in the 21st century highlight the need for a paradigm shift towards a new world order that reflects contemporary realities. There is a growing divide between the Global North and Global South, highlighting diminishing prospects for bridging this gap and the declining relevance of institutions like the United Nations, which are perceived as being entangled in colonial ideologies propagated by the West. The recent conflict in Gaza underscores the West’s faltering moral compass, necessitating the establishment of an alternative global order centered around emerging powers such as BRICS.

Central to this recalibration is the resolution of longstanding conflicts by regional powers like India, China, Turkey, and Pakistan, while Africa grapples with the enduring legacies of neocolonialism. Strategically positioned capitals in Turkey and Middle Eastern countries emerge as potential hubs for alternative models of cosmopolitanism, challenging the traditional dominance of Western metropolises. China's technological advancements play a crucial role in driving the technological boom essential for this new global order. However, achieving this vision requires a fundamental realignment of economic relations with the West, moving towards a more equitable framework based on reciprocal benefits and reduced geopolitical dependencies.

## **2. The Schism Between Global North and Global South**

The divide between the Global North and Global South is becoming increasingly pronounced, driven by economic disparities, political ideologies, and historical contexts.

Rwandan President Paul Kagame highlighted two crises at the World Economic Forum that have exacerbated pessimism in the Global South: unequal access to COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics, and the repercussions of inflation and interest rate hikes in the West, which have worsened following the Ukraine conflict. In Africa, parts of Asia, and the Americas, people who have endured centuries of suffering yearn for not only change but also transformative justice. Beyond political rhetoric, these individuals remain trapped at the lower end of the global hierarchy in political, social, and economic terms.(WEF 2024)

Hyper-capitalism, driven by profit maximization and uncontrolled market forces, has widened the gap between the privileged and the disadvantaged. It is no coincidence that most of the downtrodden are found in the Global South.( Hadebe S. 2023)

Neo-colonial practices have changed forms but not the underlying ideas of control and profit. Six decades after “The Year of Africa,” when Francophone sub-Saharan Africa gained independence in 1960, the legacies of colonialism persist. Many in France continue to focus on the material continuity of neo-colonial dependency.(Timothy G, 2024) Recent political meltdowns in West African countries like Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, along with the growing interest in BRICS, signify increasing restlessness and impatience with the current order.

The Global South is on the rise, marked by China’s emergence as the world’s largest economy, the top trading partner of more than 120 countries, and the leading development financier; the formation and expansion of the BRICS+ bloc; and the resurgence of a Latin American “pink tide” challenging U.S. influence in the region. After decades of U.S. dominance, a new, multipolar world order is emerging, even if its exact contours remain undefined. With increasing power and new leadership emerging in Global South countries, the schism between the North and South is set to grow. (Galant M.2024)

## **3. Diminishing Relevance of Established Institutions**

Established global institutions such as the United Nations are increasingly seen as losing relevance. They are often viewed through the lens of colonial ideologies and their inability to effectively address the needs of the Global South. The international system is structured in a way that perpetuates inequalities, colonial continuities, and oppression. Consequently, marginalised peoples worldwide are looking to China and Russia to challenge the old Western powers that have presided over these systems formulated before and after 1945.

Former Ghanaian president Kwame Nkrumah concluded that “the essence of neo-colonialism is that the state which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality, its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside.” (Hadebe S. 2023) This observation remains relevant, as seen in France's neo-colonial practices, including control over major mineral exports and currency, making its former colonies dependent on French benevolence.

The UN Security Council, with its post-World War II power balance, no longer accurately represents the current geopolitical landscape. The United Nations today mirrors the ineffective body it was meant to replace, the League of Nations. This imbalance in power dynamics allows powerful nations to exploit their positions, often to the detriment of marginalised communities. The divide between the West and the Russo-China alliance has deepened, offering little hope for the subalterns.

To achieve a truly equitable and just world, a new world order based on transformative justice must address these systemic issues and benefit all powers, irrespective of their orientation.

As India’s External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar stated in 2019, “If you have a United Nations where the most populous country in the world - maybe in 15 years - with the third-largest economy is not in the decision-making process, I grant you, it affects the country concerned. But I would also suggest it affects the United Nations’ credibility.” References by Western states to a “rules-based order” often ignite debate within the Indian strategic community, questioning “whose rules?” and “whose order?” As a result, growing concerns in the US and the West about the breakdown of the rules-based global order do not garner much sympathy in India, which finds itself on the margins of such an order. (Jacob H. , 2022)

#### **4. Emergence of a New Global Order**

The recent conflict in Gaza underscores the West’s declining moral authority and highlights the urgent need for a new global order. Emerging powers such as BRICS are at the forefront of this shift. This section will explore the characteristics and potential of this new order.

At the United Nations, African countries have led a campaign to shift global tax policy away from the wealthy nations and end systemic tax avoidance practices that have drained billions of dollars from their economies. At the World Bank and IMF, southern country blocs are fighting for debt cancellation, concessional financing, governance democratisation, and an end to regressive loan conditions. (Galant M. , 2024)

The emerging international order shows no sign of a leading power capable of acting as a dominant military and economic force. Great powers like the United States, Russia, China, and India are not cooperating and have never shared a common world order view. The new international system will neither resemble the European balance of power politics, the bipolar Cold War order, nor the unipolar liberal world order since 1991. This is especially true as Western countries have not demonstrated the flexibility needed to accommodate different values adopted by other states. Greater acceptance could form the basis for relative stability.

The collapse of the international order's foundations is occurring in an environment where the driving principle between great powers is not respect for norms but the possibility of mutually assured destruction (MAD). This supplants every historically known way of maintaining peace. Hopes that these rules will stabilize the new international order are far-fetched. It is wishful thinking to believe that leading states will manage to formally set boundaries.

Fifteen years ago, the United States could have defeated Iran militarily, but today, Iran has the support of Russia and China, making victory with conventional weapons doubtful. The West's weakening is seen as a favorable turn of events by some, reflecting internal expectations and desires.

A core reason why most developing countries are showing restraint about Russia's actions in Ukraine is the West's inability to address these countries' resource demands for development. The power of resources in geopolitical competition was notably demonstrated by the success of U.S. relations with China in the 1970s, when it was the only country able to offer China economic opportunities, facilitating Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms. Today, the West cannot offer developing countries such alternatives. (Bordachev T. , 2022)

The accelerated degradation of international institutions will be another marker of the post-Western world, evident in the global economic shock following the extensive economic sanctions on Russia by the West. Western countries are likely to rely on direct pressure and sanctions to influence other states, highlighting how economic wars have become a new reality akin to conventional wars. A country's ability to manage economic wars to safeguard national stability will mitigate the impact of these conflicts.

## **5. Role of Regional Powers in Conflict Resolution**

In March 2023, China surprised the world with a significant diplomatic breakthrough. Chinese leader Xi Jinping facilitated an agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, longstanding adversaries, to restore diplomatic relations. This achievement has the potential to reshape the Middle East and alter the United States' role in the region.(Schuman M.,2023)

The 45-day war over Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 significantly altered the geopolitical landscape. Azerbaijan's victory led to new borders and shifted the regional balance of power, increasing potential for regional cooperation and changing the role of external actors. Russia brokered the ceasefire and increased its military peacekeeper presence, while Turkey made a strong political and military return to Azerbaijan. This new situation has paved the way for increased regional and international connectivity through new or reopened transport corridors, railways, and energy projects. Trade and transport are likely areas of cooperation that may proceed independently or alongside the peace process between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The war and the Russian-brokered truce dealt a significant blow to European and U.S. efforts to resolve the conflict through the OSCE Minsk Group, which had been criticized for perpetuating the conflict for geopolitical interests.(Neset S. , 2023)

Regional powers like India, China, Turkey, and Pakistan can play crucial roles in resolving conflicts. Long-standing disputes, such as the Israel-Palestine conflict, the India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir, and issues in Kurdish regions, have roots in unresolved colonial legacies often exacerbated by Western policies and interventions. Similarly, Africa's struggle with neocolonial influences, such as French ambitions, has been neglected by global institutions tasked with ensuring peace.

Major and emerging powers must move beyond their colonial pasts and take proactive roles in conflict resolution. By fostering cooperative frameworks and smooth working relationships, these regional powers can address and resolve longstanding disputes, essential for achieving stability and sustainable development.

## **6. Technological Advancements and Economic Relations**

Technological advancements are pivotal in shaping the new global order, with China's strides in AI and Big Tech significantly influencing global power dynamics. However, the dominance of Northern Big Tech conglomerates stifles innovation in the Global South. These companies, akin to the navies of the past, control data and core technologies, perpetuating inequalities and influencing policies of weaker nations through information control. The cultural, aesthetic, social, juridical, and economic structures of the 21st century have been swept away by the empire of the algorithm.

Geopolitics has evolved into digital geopolitics, characterized by competition for digital knowledge and its infrastructure, including cables, software, data centers, metals, and rare earths. Control over these elements is crucial, as traditional resources like missiles, armies, gas, oil, economic power, research centers, universities, and media are ineffective without efficient communication tools.

In a world dominated by Big Tech monopolies, challenging their economic dominance is necessary. However, the real issue is cultural. As Innis explained, to maintain hegemony, those in power must standardize communication tools and methodologies, reducing diversity. Protocols, algorithms, and software must flow uninterrupted globally. Diversity and control are thus opposed, and Big Tech giants perpetuate their power by eliminating competition, buying out potential rivals, and slowing innovation through the "lock-in effect." For example, Google's search page supports up to 348 languages, but this is driven by market value rather than cultural investment. (Fiormonte D. , 2023)

The Global South must promote technological sovereignty, data protection, and equitable technological policies to counter this. Indigenous data sovereignty ensures that nations and communities govern and benefit from their data. Dismantling Northern tech hegemony and fostering indigenous innovation is crucial. Promoting controlled, responsible, and ethical AI in the Global South can drive technological advancements essential for the new world order.

There can be no epistemic or technological diversity without reassessing the role of the so-called "margins" of the planet. The Global South is rich in the material resources necessary for digitalization, and addressing epistemicide, the systematic destruction of rival forms of knowledge, is crucial for overcoming underdevelopment. The southern margins face a dilemma: create their own structures of legitimization or align with groups that provide visibility and access to hegemonic resources. (Fiormonte D. , 2023)

Equitable economic relations with the West are essential for the Global South to realize its full potential. Transitioning towards reciprocal benefits and reduced geopolitical dependencies is necessary. Current trade imbalances and debt dependencies severely impact the Global South. Limited access to technology hinders equitable economic growth, despite a significant consumer base in the Global South. Western reliance on economic wars exacerbates these imbalances. To address these challenges, the Global South must engage in economic exchanges independent of the Global North, fostering a balanced and equitable economic framework.

Challenging Western dominance is critical to creating an equitable global order. Cities like Istanbul, Doha, and Dubai are emerging as new cosmopolitan centers due to their strategic locations and growing influence. Leading countries in the Global South, like China, India, Russia, and emerging African nations, must promote interconnected and open cities while preserving their unique identities. These hubs can drive innovation, global trade, cultural exchange, policy innovation, and diplomatic efforts, acting as catalysts for change in the new world order.

## **7. Military Dynamics and Nuclear Proliferation**

The spread of nuclear weapons among emerging powers is transforming traditional power dynamics. The once uncontested dominance of the P-5 (UN Security Council) and N-5 (Non-Proliferation Treaty) is increasingly challenged. Emerging powers like Turkey and Iran are redefining these dynamics. Turkey's success in deploying drones in conflicts such as Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh exemplifies this shift, as does China's leadership in military advancements. Even smaller entities like the Houthis in Yemen, despite facing some of the world's most advanced weaponry, have managed to disrupt major trade routes significantly.

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine, compounded by NATO involvement, underscores the reluctance of the Global North to resolve conflicts or address competing concerns. Emerging powers in Africa, such as Mali and Burkina Faso, are increasingly looking towards alternative powers like Russia, China, and Turkey to challenge Western dominance. This evolving military landscape necessitates a reevaluation of traditional power structures and the role of emerging powers in shaping global security.

The United States has maintained NATO's structure as a military tool to enforce discipline and obedience globally. Initially formed as a defensive alliance of Western countries, NATO has now become an aggressive organization serving American interests in building a new, neoliberal world order. The US and NATO represent a coalition focused on geostrategic conquests and global control. Despite political and diplomatic declarations, the powerful West appears more inclined to exacerbate problems and destabilize countries rather than solve them.

## **8. Case Studies: Gaza Conflict and Ukraine Conflict**

The conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine have shaken the longstanding narratives established by the Global South over the past 70 years.

In his article, Murat Yeşiltaş highlights the ongoing tragedy in Gaza, where civilians face daily horrors. Thousands are losing their lives, including babies, children, and pregnant women. Ambulances carrying the wounded are targeted, and hospitals, schools, and refugee camps are bombed. Essential services like water, fuel, electricity, and internet are cut off. Unarmed civilians are forced to flee, and Palestinians in the West Bank face detention. This prolonged massacre and alleged genocide, justified as Israel's right to self-defense, is supported by rhetoric rooted in Jewish religious supremacy and backed by Washington. Many Western nations, particularly the United States, not only remain silent but also provide substantial support. Mainstream Western media reports these atrocities with a noticeable bias, describing deaths in Gaza as "dead" while those in Israel are termed "murdered." This double standard and hypocrisy, legitimizing Israel's actions, establish a "state of exception" for Israel within the international community. The implications of the Gaza massacres go beyond geopolitics, exposing the malignant nature of the linear historical narrative that purportedly leads to greater good. The brutality of the war signifies the erosion of Western normative hegemony.(Yesiltas M., 2023)

The modern international system, established post-1945 with the UN, aimed to create a rule-based international order. It sought to prevent conflicts, protect victims from aggressors, and build a more peaceful global system through comprehensive human rights documents. However, Western nations, the architects of this system, have often failed to adhere to these standards and have used these institutions to bolster their hegemony.

Regarding the Ukraine conflict, Professor Robert H. Wade argues that the Ukraine crisis reflects a clash between US hegemony and the changing world order. Despite discussions of the US's decline post-2008 financial crisis, the response to Russia's invasion demonstrated US's ability to rally Western states and multinational corporations against a major G20 nation. Joe Lauria suggests that the motive behind the Ukraine crisis is to replace Putin with a regime subordinate to the US. Wade explains that securing a compliant Russian regime is intertwined with maintaining Russia as an enemy to unify the West under US leadership.

Wade further notes the West's consistent rejection of efforts by Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and early Putin to establish non-adversarial relations with Western states. The West needed Russia as an enemy for internal unity and as a deferential partner, especially as China grows stronger. (Wade R. , 2022)

An article by the Indian think tank Observer Research Foundation, titled "NATO's Eastern Expansion: Was the Russo-Ukrainian War Avoidable?" argues that NATO's eastward expansion significantly contributed to tensions leading to the war. It traces the conflict's roots to assurances given during Germany's reunification in 1990, promising no eastward NATO expansion. Despite this, NATO incorporated former Warsaw Pact nations, reaching Russia's borders by 2004. The 2008 Russo-Georgian War serves as a precedent, where NATO's actions led to Russian military intervention. Ukraine's moves towards the EU and NATO, marked by the 2014 Euromaidan uprising and subsequent Russian annexation of Crimea, intensified the conflict. Pro-Russian rebellions in Donetsk and Luhansk further destabilized Ukraine. Despite Russia's annexation of Crimea, NATO continued to engage with Ukraine, making NATO membership a key goal by 2019. The article concludes that NATO's actions, despite clear Russian opposition, escalated the conflict and suggests that addressing Russia's security concerns through meaningful negotiations could have prevented the war, highlighting the devastating losses in Ukraine. (ORF , 2022)

## **9. Critique of Western Influence**

Murat Yeşiltaş argues that the response of Western countries to Israel's actions in Gaza further highlights the erosion of Western normative superiority. The credibility of Western normative hegemony had already been compromised. The U.S. invasion of Iraq, based on false pretenses, resulted in nearly a million deaths. During the Arab uprisings, democracy was selectively applied, exemplified by the portrayal of Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi's violent military coup in Egypt as the "restoration of democracy." Western capitals later welcomed Sisi as a symbol of stability in the Middle East. France allowed the Lafarge company to operate in areas controlled by Daesh. In response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the West collectively demonized Vladimir Putin, portraying him as a ruthless dictator. However, this stance was undermined by Israel's brutal military campaign in Gaza. (Yesiltas M., 2023)

The decline of Western normative supremacy has significant implications. One crucial consequence is the potential emergence of a new international order without established norms. Another is the deepening divide between Western and non-Western worlds, leading to identity-based conflicts. This may not manifest as a clash of civilizations, as Huntington posited, but as a clash of identities shaping the future international order. The West has alienated the global South, and the policies of Russia and China may consolidate further.

Western influence on global affairs has often been criticized for moral inconsistencies and self-serving agendas. The Gaza conflict exemplifies the West's readiness to undermine institutions that do not align with their interests, as seen in the alleged threats to ICC judges and prosecutors. Terrorism is also fueled by the prolonged conflicts like the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Political instability in West African countries like Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, along with growing interest in BRICS, signals increasing restlessness with the current global order. Western interventions have often led to destabilization rather than resolution, as seen in numerous conflicts. This necessitates a shift towards a new world order that is more inclusive and equitable, recognizing the diverse interests of the Global South.

## **10. Strategies for Decoupling from Northern Hegemony**

Decoupling from the Global North's hegemonic influence is crucial for the Global South to reach its full potential and reduce dependencies and promote self-reliance. The UN Security Council, reflecting a post-World War II power balance, no longer mirrors the current geopolitical reality. This imbalance allows powerful nations to exploit their positions, often at the expense of marginalized communities. To create a truly equitable world, a new order based on transformative justice must address systemic issues and benefit all powers, regardless of their orientation.

India's response to various de-dollarization attempts exemplifies dynamic challenges faced by reform attempts. New Delhi views Chinese and Russian efforts with mixed feelings. Some believe de-dollarization could be beneficial, as the US and its allies have weaponized globalization, trade, and the dollar to pressure other countries. India has previously suffered due to US sanctions against Iran and could face similar issues with Russia. However, there are concerns that, non-dollar alternatives are likely to be dominated by China. This reluctance highlights the need for countries like India, China, and Russia to resolve their mistrust and collectively challenge this hegemony. (Jacob H. , 2022)

Russia and Latin America have strengthened ties significantly in the last two decades (Jeifets, Khadorich & Leksyutina 2018). Russia has fostered friendly relations with the region, driven by political affinity, shared visions on the international order, or mutual benefit. There is an opportunity for Latin America's main countries to develop strategic autonomy, allowing them greater freedom in the face of global economic and financial instability. The Southern Cone, with its historical trajectory as a peace zone, can offer a counterexample to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the destabilization of security in Eastern Europe. However, maintaining this peace zone amid increasing global challenges is crucial.

In a new international order, no single great power will be resourceful enough to use foreign policy to promote medium and small economies. The ability of countries to engage in development-oriented partnerships and overcome these challenges will be the strongest factor in determining their significance on the new global stage.

## **11. Potential for Regional Cooperation - Case for Balkans and Black Sea**

The Black Sea and Balkan regions hold significant potential for regional cooperation, unlocking latent opportunities and fostering sustainable development. Historically, the Balkans have been a crossroads between the West and the East, attracting interest from various powers, from Persia and Byzantium to Austro-Hungary, Nazi Germany, and today's architects of a 'new world order.

' These powers have often employed the divide et impera strategy to further their interests, as seen in the recent Yugoslavian conflict, where the Balkans reaffirmed its reputation as a 'powder keg.'(Kovacevic B., 2017)

Regional cooperation in the Black Sea and Balkans is essential for sustainable development and building trust among Global South countries. These regions have historically been prone to instability and conflict due to great power rivalries and identity politics.

Promoting regional cooperation and local engagement is vital to addressing these challenges. Local regional powers are better suited to resolve issues and must be supported in their efforts. By fostering regional cooperation, the Global South can unlock latent opportunities and promote sustainable development, free from the interventionist tendencies of external powers (Sotirović, V. , 2015).

Political tensions and conflicts in the Balkans often arise due to external projections of power. The peoples of the Balkans are often passive observers, with no real say in the geopolitical maneuvers that impact their lives. Powerful geopolitical forces manipulate narratives around 'spreading democracy,' 'protecting human rights,' and 'defending freedom' to justify their actions, using media to build a new world order. Smaller countries like those in Balkans which emerged post-decolonization and after the collapse of the bipolar system in 1991, have relied on a US-led liberal world order and globalization benefits but now face pressures in a rapidly changing global geopolitical landscape and must move strategically so that they don't again become pawns of global power struggle. (Kovacevic B., 2017)

## **12. Conclusion and Way Forward**

A redefined global security framework is essential for fostering peace, stability, and sustainable development in an increasingly multipolar world. There is need for bold and collaborative initiatives to address the multifaceted challenges of our time. Key steps include supporting the establishment of new institutions that promote South-South cooperation, investing in indigenous technological innovation, and advocating for policies that reduce geopolitical dependencies.

Managing the global agenda in a multivalent world order requires embracing complexities, contradictions, and contrariness as realities. It involves delinking issues to prevent singular differences from overwhelming other functional relations, decentralizing global negotiating forums, devising diverse approaches for distinct issues, and encouraging varying clusters of country officials to lead on different topics. Nurturing plurilateral leadership groups with rotating composition, embracing variety, avoiding blocs, inviting innovation, focusing on substance, and dialing back on polemics are also essential.

The Global South is diverse, but generally, most nations believe that the current world order—created by the West and dominated by the United States—is unstable, unjust, undemocratic, and unfriendly to their economic and ecological interests. This order is failing. When the world was multipolar, most of today's Global South was under colonial rule. During the bipolar Cold War era, only Europe had peace, while the Global South faced war, intervention, and exploitation. The liberal world order was essentially a privileged club of the West, marginalizing the Global South.

The Global South needs a new way of thinking about the world order and a new plan of action. This necessitates a "Diverse World Order" without hegemony by any single power or bloc. This order should be developed by multiple actors, including non-governmental entities and social movements, respecting cultural diversity and rejecting the notion of a clash of civilizations.

Economic and other exchanges should be led by the Rest, not the West, with a multi-level governance system where regionalism plays a central role.

In a new international order, no single great power will have the resources to use foreign policy to promote medium and small economies. The ability of countries to engage in development-oriented partnerships and address challenges will determine their significance on the new global stage.

The future of human governance lies in increasing mutual understanding of domestic focal points and defusing misperceptions. The future world order will be highly interactive and relational, with a range of outcomes possible, from a new hybrid negotiated order to fragmentation and conflict. It is likely to be a plural and complex order.

A paradigm shift towards a more inclusive and equitable global order, recognizing the diverse interests of the Global South, is needed. The future of global security lies in a balanced and equitable order that empowers all nations to thrive, contributing to a peaceful and prosperous world. This would also be key to the regions like Black Sea and the Balkans with multiple smaller countries surrounded by regional and global powers .

Creating a just world order that ensures equal rights for all will not be easy. It will require sustained efforts by global citizens, pressuring governments and international organizations for change. However, it is the only way to ensure that "never again" becomes a reality.

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# Russian War of Aggression and Perspectives of the Wider Black Sea Region: Future Studies and Alternative Scenarios

Iulian Chifu<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Russia's full scale, high intensity, long term war of aggression in Ukraine has an important impact on the Wider Black Sea Region. The impact and the trends of evolution have been assessed in time in numerous prospective study frameworks several times in the last years, specifically after the annexation of Crimea and the Russian aggression in the Eastern regions of Ukraine in 2014. But since at this level the only major change was that of the borders of a sovereign state, by force, in Europe, the afterwards evolutions have altered even more the level of security in the region.

So that the impact of the war in 2022 and the evolutions during 2023-2024 have introduced new characteristics in the dramatically changed security landscape by bringing back the war as an instrument of foreign policy in the Wider Black Sea Region, altering the framework of the rules-based order and introducing a new level of stress for the citizens of the littoral countries. In that framework, the methodology of prospective studies introduced a new level of hike in the security expectations and a rise in the risk of a large scale, high intensity, long term war extended in the very region, against the states forming this regional security complex.

So we assessed the critical indicators that imply these probable evolutions, the tipping points, relative certainties and critical uncertainties of those probable evolutions, as well as the worse cases, best cases and most probable scenarios of evolution of this war. The methodology used is the one related to prospective studies discussing continuity, discontinuity and black swan scenarios on the short(6 month to one year), mid(3 to 5 years) and long term(10 to 15 years) periods.

Our thesis is that the uncertainty and perspective of large-scale confrontation between Russia and the West are expanding the level of threats in the Wider Black Sea Region and that an intervention rather sooner than later is required in order to break the spiral of escalation towards a full scale war in our very region, with possible breaking points and a global contagion of this war. Moreover, dichotomy of democracy versus autocracy and the lack of communication is preventing the parties to understand and comprehend one another and is a ground for mistakes of assessments of the other based on beliefs and misunderstandings that would limit the ability for coping with the fundamental causes and ways out from the spiral of violence.

Keywords: prospective studies, critical uncertainties, relative certainties, tipping points.

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## METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

We've introduced the Romanian methodology of prospective studies in 2012 (Chifu, 2013) to solve the problem of strategic surprise (Cancian, 2018), the most pernicious phenomenon that can occur in the case of a system, a domain, or a state. It means that, on the dimension of the fundamental attributions, whose responsibility an institution or a professional or political decision maker has, the phenomenon of surprise is manifested by not being able to anticipate, to prevent and without the right tools to react. In order to cope with the crisis, it reacts on an ad-hoc base, with major consequences for citizens' security and their lives (Chifu, 2023a).

The limits of predictability in strategic surprise come from a number of factors including evolutions that do not respect the rules of the processes that follow easily identifiable tendencies, ruptures in evolution of some indicators appear, rare phenomena emerge like catastrophes in the sense of Rene Thom(Thom, 1986) or black swans in the description of Nassim Taleb(Taleb, 2010). These are rare phenomena, with low probability but with major impact and enormous consequences when they occur.

Unknown unknowns (DoD, 2002; Dang, 2002) - meaning the context where the human mind does not conceive and expects elements that are unknown in their substance. This linguistic formula emphasizes exactly the unknowns that we do not even knowtheyexist, are unknown. This is where surprises, unpredictability and impactful phenomena are born. Here thinking the unthinkable(Walpole, 2012; White, 1992;Cockett, 1995; Gowing&Langdon, 2015). is apparently the solution, meaning find ways to cover the fact that we do not think about certain topics for many reasons, including limits of science, novelty, or even moral, behavioral and common sense limits that tell us "this is not the case", or "this could not happen". Here Nik Gowing has described the nine types of limits (Gowing&Langdon, 2015) to our way of thinking that could lead to this surprise.

Prospective studies are becoming the most attractive useful tool to address global instability and turbulence. It is about being able to anticipate developments and identify alternative rules, trends, or scenarios for an evolution specifically in international relations and global security. In this way, reactions to turbulent developments can be planned and society can be prepared to deal with chronic instability. The name of prospective studies has its origin in a field of confluence of security studies with medicine, more precisely in the study of pandemics(US National Cancer Institute, 2013). They differ from retrospective studies, which involve studying the history of the development of a pandemic. In the case of prospective studies, the thesis is to study populations exposed to a type of pandemic, more broadly to certain categories of threats, and to see where these threats have an impact and what effects they produce/will produce in the future. This method allows in immunology to predict the incidence of a pandemic(Davis, 2013).

We've developed the prospective studies methodology based on a technique used by the Dutch intelligence services –PLATO(Schinkel, Blum, 2013; Chifu, 2015) - plausible tomorrows, that we completed, experimented and used in several cases to identify alternative scenarios for a critical evolution in international relations and security studies. We've developed as well several times the methodology related to Ukraine, the Black Sea Region or the evolution of international relations(Chifu, 2023a).

## **1.ASSESSMENT: FACTUAL CRITERIA FOR THE EVOLUTION OF RUSSIA’S WAR OF AGGRESSION ON UKRAINE**

After the eruption of the large scale, high intensity, long term Russian war of aggression in Ukraine, we’ve identified factually the 3+1 conditions for defining the prospectives of this war(Chifu, 2023d):

- Resilience of Ukraine: a) military, first line; b)people. Support of the war, costs. Contribution and mobilization, reserves.
- Resilience of the West: financial, military capabilities, political will, ammunition/production.
- Capacity of maintaining the frontline. Avoiding domino fall.
- Russia: Putin’s ability to maintain the vertical of power and support for the war.

Those four conditions are consistent during the whole war, and we came back to this in multiple phases to find and check on the basis for defining this war(Chifu, 2022b, Chifu 2023b, Chifu, 2023f).

At the same time, we’ve identified in the multiple studies, political decisions and final documents at the EU, NATO, G7 level three conditions for defining an aspirational endgame:

1. Russia should lose, Ukraine should win
2. Russia should pay
3. All states, individual, companies who assisted Russia to avoid sanctions should pay(Chifu, 2024; Chifu, 2022a,c,d,e).

We can also look at the definitions of victory of the two involved sides, Russia and Ukraine, which are in complete incompatibility: for Ukraine/and the official West, victory means regaining the territory within recognized borders and preventing that Russia would ever, in the foreseeable future, use military force to come back and attack Ukraine anymore(NATO, 2023; Chifu, 2023g; UNGA, 2022; The white House, 2023).

In the case of Russia, its aim is to have a land locked Ukraine, with a puppet government in Kiev, if not a full real union state with Russia(Putin,2021). It is true, we have publicly different addresses, requiring “the recognition of the evolutions on the ground” – meaning the occupation and the illegal annexation of Crimea and four other regions of Ukraine – Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporozhe and Herson – but also a territory wide as the range of Ukrainian artillery inside its territory on Russia’s borders(President of Russia, 2024;Putin,2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2024). Vladimir Putin even defined the victory in the war as existential to Russia’s statehood(Putin, 2024) - “they keep saying they want to defeat us on the battlefield by inflicting a strategic defeat on Russia. What would this mean for Russia? For Russia, it would mean the loss of its statehood. It would be the end of the thousand-year history of the Russian state” - a false claim used in internal propaganda and informational warfare to explain ongoing war and costs as well as effort to recruit more for the combat troops.

## **2.RUSSIA’S WAR OF AGGRESSION IN PROSPECTIVE STUDIES**

The methodology in prospective studies is based on a 3-4 steps approach:

S0: assessment at the moment of the analysis;

S1: brainstorming session for identifying the indicators and influences on the evolution of the issue under discussion, in our case the evolution of the war of aggression of Russia in Ukraine;

S2: extracting the critical indicators system, done through a selection on the previous pool of indicators coming from the brainstorming session, with the conditions of compatibility and coverage. Here we use a combined way between the metatheory selection of axioms in building up a theory (ruling out those which could be deduced and keeping a system compatible and complete)(Willard, 2014) and the Sieve of Eratosthenes(Kandelwal, 2022) that provide us with the prime numbers in basic mathematics;

S3: elaborating the scenarios:

- according to the timeframe: short term - 6-12 month; mid-term - 3-5 years; long term -10-15 years;
- according to the type of evolution of the indicators: continuity of trends; discontinuity(tipping points, ruptures in the trends, turning points); black swan scenarios(low probability, high impact);
- selection based on the axiology of the analysts or designated decision maker(Hart, 1971): best case, worse case, most probable scenario. For the sake of avoiding strategic surprise, we should also keep the black swan scenario with highest impact.

### **S0: Assessment**

We've assessed the situation in the West of the Black Sea and on the sea surface (control or denial of access from Ukrainian drones, trade and transportation of grains and products via economic exclusive zones after the fall of the UN – Turkish mediated agreement. The same assessment with the situation in Crimea, vulnerabilities onshore and offshore (capture by the Ukrainian special forces of the drilling platforms abducted by Russia and transformed in military assets for electronic warfare, recognition, monitoring and control. The same with the strategies and doctrines of the Russian Federation, as they appear on the Minister of defense website (Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 2014; Adamsky, 2015; Gerasimov, 2019; Lester&Bartles, 2016; Kofman 2021; President of the Russian Federation, 2014) and those of Ukraine, inspired by the West(Billy, 2020)as well as attempts to negotiate without capitulation from Ukrainian side(Haas&Kupchan, 2023; Miliband, 2023).

We also assessed the situation of the air and land fight: weapons, ammunition, manpower, infrastructure/energy production (and the future winter impact on the civilian population) as well as rear targeting of drones and missiles on Russia's territory. We also followed the assessment of the intangibles of war: resolution, will to fight, country brand, prestige, international support, etc (Chifu&Simons, 2023; Simons&Chifu, 2019;Chifu, 2024; Chifu, 2023e).

S1-S2: We've built the system of critical indicators as follows:

1. Global clash: US versus China. China's war against Taiwan
2. NATO, US/EU
  - direct attack/hybrid attack below Article 5 threshold in the Baltic Sea(delimitation) or Black Sea;
  - mechanism of continuous financing/support for the war(or not) established for the long run;
  - political support, production capacity, delivery (weapons, air defense, energy, transportation for Ukraine).
3. Ukraine
  - stability, reforms, EU opening accession negotiations;
  - will to fight. Societal cohesion;
  - confidence, resilience.

4. Russia
  - Putin alive/in charge of the vertical of power
  - Putinism, support for the war of the elite around Putin;
  - economic, military, social support for the war.

Black swan scenarios here: implosion of the regime – Russia, Ukraine.

### **Conclusions: Scenarios for Prospective Evolutions**

The drafting of useful scenarios for decision makers, designed to avoiding strategic surprise, is referring to three elements: relative certainties, critical uncertainties (the basic critical indicators, with a strategic relevance), and the tipping or turning points. By applying those elements, we have succeed in selecting four scenarios based on the West choice of axiology as follows:

#### **Best Case Scenario: Ukraine Wins the War**

A nuclear state loses a conventional regional war once again in history – precedents are in Vietnam(US), Afghanistan(both US and the Soviet Union), Algeria and other colonies(France), UK(India) and so on. In 5-7 years, Ukraine regains its territory. Becoming a part of NATO, guarantees and capabilities are developed on the ground to deter Russia and prevent a new aggression.

#### **Worse Case Scenario: War in Europe**

Russia arrives at NATO's Eastern borders; a land locked and isolated Ukraine, change of government/puppet regime in Kiev; territorial claims in the Black Sea/Baltic Sea involving Eastern Flank NATO countries; hybrid attacks and territorial claims on land in the Eastern Flank(Narva, Svalbard, Danube Gorges etc.); Russia's full scale, high intensity war launch against NATO (mid to long term); Trump and isolationism at the White House/US Congress; China launches war against Taiwan, splitting US resources; nuclear sub-tactical/theatre bomb used in Ukraine.

#### **Most Probable Case: War of Attrition and Boots on the Ground of the West in Ukraine**

Ukraine resists on the short term, loosing territory step by step, then a domino effect and retreat on the Dnipro river; challenges to NATO of direct military attack; hybrid and bellow Art.5 threshold; nuclear tactical bomb used on the ground/Russia suspended from the Security Council/isolation; NATO soldiers have to put boots on the ground to help Ukraine resist on the Dnipro river and in Kiev; attempts for Big Bargain in Ukraine, at the expenses of territorial de facto losses(versus NATO accession of remaining Ukraine); US less support – military and financial, on the mid run; EU stops support for lack of resources and other priorities(long run); succession of Putin to Putinism and continuity in war.

#### **Black Swan Scenarios:**

- Trump cut the deal: territory versus NATO accession/guarantees for the remaining Ukraine;
- Putin death/lost of power. End of the war by the successors;
- Zelensky loosing power and credibility: forced to cut an unacceptable deal. Capitulation and surrender to Putin's Russia.

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**DAY 1: 2nd Session**  
**30 May 2024**  
**13:45 pm – 16:00 pm (İstanbul Time)**

**Moderator: Prof. Dr. Aşkın İnci Sökmen Alaca**

**Session-II: Military Threat Perceptions of the States in the Black Sea Region and the Balkans**

**Sub-themes to present papers:**

**Spread of war**

**Possible regional points of conflict: (The future of B-H, Kosovo dispute, Albanian-Macedonian relations in Northern Macedonia.)**

**Terrorism**

**Nuclear threats, chemicals, bioweapons**

**Other subjects related to the main theme**

# Bulgaria's Threat Perceptions in the Black Sea After Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

Idlir Lika<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*As one of the two Black Sea littoral states that is both a NATO and EU member, Bulgaria is at the center of any regional and broader attempts to build a sustainable security architecture in the region. During the post-communist period, the country has been highly susceptible to Russian influence due to historical factors and the pervasive problems of corruption, state capture and political instability. Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 upended the balance of power in the Black Sea. This paper will present a Bulgarian national perspective on security considerations in the Black Sea region. I argue that Bulgarian elites perceive the current situation in the Black Sea as very threatening for their country's security. Their most immediate priority is convincing the U.S. and NATO to devote much more attention and resources to building a new sustainable security order in the region. While they recognize that such a task is challenging given the U.S. strategic imperatives of pivoting to Asia and problems now in the Middle East, Bulgarian elites at the same time are uneasy about the prospect that Türkiye assumes a larger leading role in the security of the region.*

*Keywords: Bulgaria; Black Sea security; Russia's invasion of Ukraine; Türkiye*

## Introduction

Two decades after the end of the Cold War, the Black Sea has become a hotly contested region in the geopolitical competition between a resurgent Russia and the West. Among the six littoral states, three are NATO members (Bulgaria, Romania and Türkiye) and two of the NATO member littoral states are European Union (EU) members at the same time (Bulgaria and Romania). The remaining three Black Sea littoral states are the former Soviet republics of Russia, Georgia and Ukraine. It is of utmost importance to point out that these three former Soviet republics have fought among them a total of five different military conflicts since the end of the Cold War, underscoring the heavy securitization and militarization of the region after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Three of these conflicts have occurred among Russia and Georgia: the Georgian civil war (1991-1993), Georgian-Abkhaz War (1992-1993) and the 2008 Russian-Georgian War. The other two have involved Russia and Ukraine: firstly Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and incitement of separatist rebellions in eastern Ukraine and then Russia's (ongoing) full-scale invasion of Ukraine since February 24, 2022. What all of these conflicts have in common is that they are Russian wars of aggression against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and Ukraine, supporting breakaway provinces and coups against democratically elected leaders in these countries as a way to keep them under Moscow's sphere of influence. Similar tactics were previously used also in other former Soviet republics in the wider Black Sea region. The (ongoing) occupation of Transnistria in Moldova, Russia's support for the Armenian occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh in early 1990s and the Moscow-backed coup against the democratically elected president of Azerbaijan Abulfaz Elchibey in 1993 can be given as examples (Lika, 2022). As such, Russian revisionism emerges as the primary and most immediate security threat in the Black Sea region. After outlining the evolution of Russian revisionism in the region after the end of the Cold War, this paper will present a Bulgarian national perspective on security considerations in the Black Sea, focusing especially in the period after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

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## 1. RUSSIAN REVISIONISM IN THE BLACK SEA AFTER THE COLD WAR

The end of the Cold War ushered in a radically different geopolitical setting in the Black Sea region. The dissolution of the Soviet Union into 15 independent states in December 1991 brought along the end of a very long period of Russian domination of the region (King, 2005; Koçak, 2022). Most importantly, Russia lost the Black Sea littoral state with the longest coastline, Ukraine, and the strategic Crimean port city of Sevastopol, “the only deep-water port on Russia’s Black Sea littoral” and home for the Russian Black Sea fleet (Rutland, 2022). As such, Russian threat perceptions significantly decreased among the other five littoral states. Indeed, it is these decreasing threat perceptions and the decline of Russia’s relative power after the Soviet collapse that led initially to an improvement of Russia’s relations with some of its naval neighbors, most conspicuously Turkey (Aktürk, 2006). However, it was not long before Moscow began to flex its muscles and challenge the new status quo in the region. During the 1990s, it was Georgia which bore the brunt of Russian aggression and revisionism in the Black Sea. And despite claims to the contrary (McFaul, 2020), Russian revisionism actually began during the period of its first post-communist president, Boris Yeltsin, and not under its current leader Vladimir Putin (who was Yeltsin’s hand-picked successor anyhow). Indeed, it was the Yeltsin administration that lent its support to the secessionist coastal region of Abkhazia against Georgian government forces in 1992-1993 and then supported the coup of Eduard Shevardnadze against Georgia’s first democratically elected leader Zviad Gamsakhurdia, developments that led to a bloody civil war in the country. A largely similar scenario unfolded also during the five-day Russian-Georgian War in August 2008 when Russian armed forces, this time under the administration of president Dmitry Medvedev (not Putin, again) invaded Georgia, occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia (which together make up roughly 20 percent of Georgia’s territory) and eventually ousted the pro-Western democratically elected Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili (Dickinson, 2021). As of today, Abkhazia continues to be under Russian occupation and this has a direct bearing on the regional balance of power on the Black Sea because the coastal breakaway province constitutes almost two-thirds of Georgia’s Black Sea coastline (Aronsson and Mankoff, 2023).

Yet, what transformed most decisively the regional balance of power was Russia’s illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula in March 2014, marking the first forceful change of internationally recognized boundaries in Europe since the end of the Second World War. For realist IR scholars like John Mearsheimer (2014) this was a reactionary and rational move of Russian president Putin over the prospect of Ukraine becoming a NATO member and joining the Western camp. For liberal scholars like Michael McFaul (2020) the annexation of Crimea was an irrational decision of Putin who sought to suppress the democratic aspirations of fellow Slavic people. Regardless of Putin’s exact motive(s), what is beyond doubt is that the annexation of Crimea raised again the prospect of Russian hegemony over the Black Sea and as such significantly increased Russian threat perceptions among the other littoral states. The ultimate game-changer, though, was Russia’s (ongoing) full-scale invasion of Ukraine since February 24, 2022. Ukrainian Black Sea port cities were among the primary targets of Russian aggression since the early days of the war. Indeed, by occupying early on the port cities of Mariupol (in the province of Donetsk), Berdyansk (in Zaporizhzhia) and Kherson, Russia clearly sought to cut off Ukraine from the Sea of Azov (Aronsson and Mankoff, 2023). The only major Black Sea port city that still remains under the sovereignty and control of Ukraine is Odesa, but that has also been continuously targeted by the Russian military machine. Moscow indeed has been very clear about its war aims in the Black Sea. It intends to occupy all of Ukraine’s coastline and effectively leave Ukraine landlocked. Putin has affirmed many times his claim that Odesa and other coastal cities of Ukraine historically belong to Russia and they were given away unjustly by the Bolshevik and Soviet leader Lenin (Associated Press, 2023).

Likewise, former Russian president and current deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council Dmitry Medvedev averred in an unmistakably revisionist language: "Odessa, come home. We have been waiting for Odessa in the Russian Federation because of the history of this city, what kind of people live there, what language they speak. It is our Russian, Russian city." (Reuters, 2024). It remains to be seen whether Russia will be able to achieve its war aims in this respect but its rhetoric and actions leave no doubt that what Moscow is ultimately up to is nothing less than turning the Black Sea into a Russian lake.

## **2. BULGARIAN-RUSSIAN RELATIONS AFTER THE COLD WAR**

The end of the Cold War saw Bulgaria radically recalibrate its foreign policy from being the most loyal and subservient Soviet satellite in eastern Europe to a somewhat unconditional Western ally (Katsikas, 2011). For some time the communist regime of Todor Zhivkov even contemplated making Bulgaria the sixteenth constituent republic of the Soviet Union, while the country is presently both a NATO and EU member state (Lika, 2024, p. 332). Still, a significant part of Bulgaria's population and political elite is Russophile due to historical, cultural and corrupt economic interests (Ganev, 2007; Bechev, 2017; Filipova, 2022; Lika, 2023). Even the major Turkish minority party in the country, Movement for Rights and Freedom (DPS), is perceived by many to be often close to Russian interests given that several of DPS founding members were former security agents in the communist regime. While Bulgaria became a part of the Western bloc in the post-Cold War period, it still tried the best not to antagonize Russia and to preserve cordial relations with Moscow. The annexation of Crimea began to increase somehow Russian threat perceptions and hence began to change this equation. Members of the Bulgarian political elite confided to the author in private interviews that they feared that the Bulgarian coastal city of Burgas, which hosts a significant Russian expat community, could one day suffer the same fate as Crimea. While those fears were perhaps unfounded or exaggerated during the time, there is no question that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine fundamentally changed the perception of Russia among even the hitherto Russophile segments of the population and political elite. The fear that "we could be the next target" pervaded the country.

Bulgaria's misfortune was that when Russia launched its full-scale aggression in February 2022 the country was in the midst of deep political instability, holding four early parliamentary elections in just two years. The good part, at least, was that in February 2022, Bulgaria had just begun to be ruled by an unstable four-party coalition government led by a staunchly pro-Western prime minister, Kiril Petkov. And Petkov actually delivered well on his promises of resolutely supporting Ukraine. More specifically, under his short-lived administration (Petkov's coalition government fell after a no-confidence vote in June 2022) Bulgaria joined the Western-led sanctions against Russia, expelled nearly 70 Russian diplomats from its territory, fired its defense minister Stefan Yanev over his referring to the war in Ukraine with Putinist terminology as 'a special military operation' and, most critically perhaps, covertly provided much-needed fuel and ammunition to the Ukrainian army in the early phases of the war (Politico, 2023). In a very recent interview, Petkov publicly explained and justified the then policies of his government: "If Ukraine loses, we will be next. Hence I believe that we must struggle for the freedom of Europe. Still, I have a red line that I can not trespass even if I support Ukraine. We will never send soldiers to Ukraine." (Anadolu Ajansi, 2024).

After the fall of the Petkov government, political instability ensued in Bulgaria as the country held two more early parliamentary elections in 2023 and most recently in June 2024, totalling now an unenviable six elections in just three years. Needless to say, this suits the Kremlin as Russian interests thrive on political instability. Sofia remains committed, rhetorically at least, in condemning Russian invasion and in supporting Ukrainian fight for sovereignty and freedom. However, Bulgarian political elites are still fearful of Russia and are concerned that a too deep involvement of Western countries in the war might eventually lead to an unnecessary and very dangerous expansion of the conflict.

As the current socialist president of Bulgaria Rumen Radev, who is known for his more pro-Russian stances, stated recently, “With the decision to allow for an attack with Western weapons deep in Russia and the formalisation of sending advisers and instructors to the very front line, these red lines have already been crossed and unfortunately our politicians become part of such inadequate decisions with all the consequences.” (bne, 2024).

### 3. BULGARIA’S THREAT PERCEPTIONS IN THE BLACK SEA

As outlined in the previous section, Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its full-scale invasion of Ukraine eight years later fully raised the spectre of Russian hegemony over the Black Sea region. The fear that the Black Sea is becoming a Russian lake is shared by the three NATO member littoral states (Bulgaria, Romania and Türkiye). But there exist differences among the three over how to approach the problem and counter the prospect of Russian hegemony. More specifically, Bulgarian elites perceive the current situation in the Black Sea as very threatening for their country’s security. Their most immediate priority is convincing the U.S. and NATO to devote much more attention and resources to building a new sustainable security order in the region. As former Bulgarian defense minister (May-December 2021) and current Bulgarian ambassador to the United States (since March 2022) Georgi Panayotov explained in an interview given in October 2023:

We see that the threat is there. Historically, you know, historically, Russia has been dominating the Black Sea. And why because the Black Sea is the gateway to the Mediterranean as well, to the eastern Mediterranean, including, and it’s the Russian Black Sea Fleet that projects the Russian influence in the eastern Mediterranean as well. So what happens in the Black Sea doesn’t stay in the Black Sea. And we’d like very much our allies to understand that, to comprehend that, because passive behavior on behalf of NATO in the Black Sea will be very costly at the end of the day (CEPA, 2023)

However, Bulgarian elites see two major problems and obstacles in raising the priority of Black Sea for the U.S. and NATO, one technical and the other geopolitical. Firstly, Bulgarian elites argue that the 1936 Montreux Convention regarding the regime of the Straits and Türkiye’s strict upholding of its clauses practically make it impossible to establish a permanent NATO military presence in the Black Sea. The relevant clause here is Article 18(2) of the Montreux Convention which clearly states that “Vessels of war belonging to non-Black Sea Powers shall not remain in the Black Sea more than twenty-one days, whatever be the object of their presence there.” (Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits, 1937). Bulgarian elites see this clause as too restrictive and somewhat detrimental in view of the threat posed by Russia after its invasion of Ukraine. For instance, Georgi Panayotov complained in the aforementioned interview from October 2023 that no NATO ship of non-littoral countries had entered the Black Sea for almost 600 days (CEPA, 2023). Of course, Bulgaria has shown willingness to cooperate with Romania and Türkiye on Black Sea security. A clear sign of this is the most recent agreement the three countries signed on January 11, 2024 to “clear mines drifting in the Black Sea that have posed a threat to shipping since the start of Russia’s war in Ukraine, officially named Mine Counter-Measures Task Group Black Sea (Aljazeera, 2024). However, as Panayotov made abundantly clear, for Bulgarian elites “the trilateral cooperation between the NATO littoral states in the Black Sea notwithstanding, we think that it cannot be substitution to a robust NATO presence in the Black Sea. We think that we have to, once again strengthen our defenses there.” (CEPA, 2023).

The second obstacle Bulgaria faces in raising the priority of the Black Sea for the U.S. and NATO is geopolitical. The U.S. faces serious resource constraints due to the geopolitical imperative of pivoting to Asia to counter the prospect of China achieving regional hegemony in East Asia (Mearsheimer, 2018). As Panayotov averred in a lecture delivered at Yale University's European Studies Council, the world's center of gravity is shifting toward the East (Yale MacMillan Center, 2019). To all this now is added the catastrophic diplomatic and reputational consequences the U.S. is facing due to its unconditional support for Israel's ongoing genocide of Palestinians in Gaza (UpFront, 2024). As a result, less and less attention and resources will likely be devoted to the issue of security in the Black Sea region. Under these conditions, building a sustainable regional security order will have to encompass a larger leading role for Türkiye and American analysts have already acknowledged this new reality. As a recent report from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) put it:

With NATO's second-largest military (after the United States), control of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, and a political elite committed to bolstering the country's strategic autonomy, Turkey remains the linchpin for U.S. and NATO strategy in the BSR... Given resource constraints and the need to focus on the Indo-Pacific, any U.S. strategy for the Black Sea will have to encompass a larger role for Turkey; as one U.S. defense official put it, NATO's options for a stronger defense posture in the Black Sea are "Turkey or nothing." (Aronsson and Mankoff, 2023, pp. 10; 24)

While Bulgarian elites are cognizant of this new reality and of the need to counter the Russian threat, they are still uneasy about the prospect of Türkiye assuming a larger leading role in regional security. Panayotov's reservations about Türkiye's allegedly inflexible interpretation of the Montreux convention were already noted above. Bulgaria's uneasiness about a more assertive Türkiye stems in part also from historical reasons, having been under Ottoman control for centuries (see also Mankoff, 2022 on this point). Finally, as Lisa Aronsson and Jeffrey Mankoff also note in their recent CSIS report, Bulgaria in general harbors "deep-seated suspicions of a militarily strong and politically independent Turkey, which it fears could use its position in NATO for national purposes. (Pro-Russian forces and nationalists in Bulgaria also exploit this narrative for their own purposes). A Bulgarian defense official claimed he feared the Black Sea could become a "Turkish-Russian lake." (Aronsson and Mankoff, 2023, p. 19). In light of all this, I argue that these two rather contradictory stances – trying to elevate the importance of Black Sea security for the U.S. / NATO and being uneasy with Türkiye assuming a larger leading role in regional security – is not sustainable in the long run.

## **Conclusion**

As one of the two Black Sea littoral states that is both a NATO and EU member, Bulgaria is at the center of any regional and broader attempts to build a sustainable security architecture in the region. During the post-communist period, the country has been highly susceptible to Russian influence due to historical factors and in part due to the pervasive problems of corruption, state capture and political instability that it has faced. Starting from 2014, though, Russia's annexation of Crimea and its full-scale invasion of Ukraine eight years later upended the balance of power in the Black Sea and raised the spectre of Russian threat to the country. This paper presented a Bulgarian national perspective on security considerations in the Black Sea region. It shed light on the following set of questions: How does Bulgaria conceptualize the threats in and around the Black Sea and how have its security interests evolved in the aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine? What form(s) of regional security architecture does Sofia prioritize and how much is it trying to elevate the importance of Black Sea security for the U.S. and NATO? Last but not least, given U.S. resource and attention constraints due to the strategic imperative of pivoting to Asia and the deteriorating security situation in the Middle East, how do Bulgarian elites view the prospect of Türkiye assuming (as part of a general NATO strategy) a larger leading role in the security of the Black Sea region?

I argued that Bulgarian elites perceive the current situation in the Black Sea as very threatening for their country's security. Their most immediate priority is convincing the U.S. and NATO to devote much more attention and resources to building a new sustainable security order in the region. While they recognize that such a task is quite challenging given the U.S. strategic imperatives in East Asia and the ongoing genocide of Palestinians in Gaza, Bulgarian elites at the same time are uneasy about the prospect of Türkiye assuming a larger leading role in the security of the region. Such a perspective is also largely shared by the other Black Sea littoral state that is both a NATO and EU member, Romania. I concluded by claiming that these two rather contradictory stances – trying to elevate the importance of Black Sea security for the U.S. / NATO and being uneasy with Türkiye assuming a larger leading role in regional security – is not sustainable in the long run.

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# North Macedonia Security Threats in the Third Decade of XXI Century: Institutional and Political Framework as a Key Determinant of Instability

Mitko Arnaudov<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract:

North Macedonia in the post-Yugoslav frame was the only republic that has declared independence without any military clashes, as a consequence of the independence declaration. Such circumstances has, on the European level, promoted this state as a so-called oases of peace in the Balkans, bearing in mind the war challenges in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and on the territory of Kosovo and Metohija. North Macedonia, on contrary, has faced with armed clashes on its territory at the beginning of the XXI century. It was clashes in the northern and western parts of the state between Macedonian security forces and self-declared Albanian armed groups. The realistic purpose, from the side of Albanian paramilitary groups, for the armed attacks against military and police forces of North Macedonia was never confirmed, bearing in mind just finished war on Kosovo and Metohija territory, but also the position of Macedonian Albanians, as a dominant ethnic minority which, in that moment has had active role in political and social life within that state. There are many studies and researches that have different positions, stating that the goal of the armed attacks by Albanian armed groups was separation of Macedonian territory for the purpose of creating Great Albanian state, while, from the other side, including the official version of the leaders of that paramilitary groups, was the position that human rights for Albanian society in North Macedonia was the purpose of the battles. But, in this paper our goal is not to find out the purpose of the armed clashes in North Macedonia during the 2001, but to determine what are the main security risks and threats for North Macedonia, whether and to what extent ongoing challenges and threats are ethnically motivated, how much relations between Macedonians and Albanians within North Macedonia are misused as a political instrument and, as a essential question - what is the key determinator of the stability of North Macedonia in the upcoming period. Methodological concretization will be used as an analytical tool in the process of triple analyses, on the political, social and ethnic level, which should lead us to the answers. Triple analyses will be used as an empirical tool, while, from the stands of structural realists, we will try to find out the answer about the security issues which are facing small states in international relations, respectively whether they are exporters of instability, do they have capacities to lead sovereign security policy and what are key determinants of their security mosaic. The ultimate, essential goal of the research would be to show up that North Macedonia does not have ethnic security challenges and threats, that its security mosaic essentially is not endangered from "imported" threats and, finally, that its stability and sustainability depends on internal threats which have raised as a consequence of challenges within the institutional and political framework.

Keywords: North Macedonia, security threats, institutional and political challenges, sustainability

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## **Introduction**

Since the research given by first scholars within the science of international relations, there were clear positions related to the security threats faced by small states. There was a precise parallel between small states and their capacities (economic, political, military, etc.), from one side, and their security threats, from the other side. General position was established that small states are in a huge manner limited in facing with security threats because of the lack of the resources, previously mentioned as capacities. Protection of political sovereignty and territorial integrity were classical, or so-called “hard” security threats of the small states that were continuously endangered by the bigger regional and global powers. Classical realists were firmly positioned to these claims. But in such scenario, from today’s perspective, it would be almost unreal conclude that small states still exist within the international relations framework. But it is reality. On the world map there are numerous of so-called small and micro states with substantially limited capacities and resources when it comes to security threats. But, if we back to so-called classical security threats, after World War II, it was established OUN international framework which precisely places small and micro states on the same ground with great and regional powers and provides them a certain international security in the context of potential endangering of their political sovereignty and territorial integrity. And in a huge manner, probably, this is the *raison d’état* of existence and sustainability of such group of independent states. This principle of equality was generally respected, except in the few cases in the world, including the Western Balkans issue with Kosovo and Metohija. But from today’s perspective, we are witnessing contemporary and ongoing security threats, especially within small and micro states, including developing ones group, which OUN infrastructure could not manage, especially those security threats raised by internal institutional and political grounds. In fact, those are security threats which could not be managed by the traditional security and defense mechanisms, including mechanisms given by international defense organizations. On that basis, North Macedonia represent a so-called textbook example about the phenomena of how internal - institutional and political instability produces threats which are endangering not only North Macedonia’s efficiency and effectiveness as an independent state, but also endangers its pillars of statehood, as those are political sovereignty and territorial integrity, including its sustainability as a whole.

### **1. ECONOMIC UNSUSTAINABILITY**

According to the latest data from the State Bureau of Statistics, almost 452,000 people in North Macedonia live below the poverty line. The state debt reached a record level of over 7.1 billion euros, or more than 60 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) (Mitevaska, 2022).

Since its independence in 1991, North Macedonia has made progress in liberalizing its economy and improving its business environment. Its low tax rates and free economic zones have helped to attract foreign investment, but they are still low relative to the rest of Europe (Moody’s Analytics, n.d.). Some businesses complain of opaque regulations and unequal enforcement of the law. In fact, corruption and weak rule of law remain significant problems (Moody’s Analytics, n.d.).

From the other side, president of the Union of Trade Unions of North Macedonia, Slobodan Trendafilov explains that the cost of living in his country is really high and even domestic workers cannot survive on the salary they receive. As he explains, the cost of living in North Macedonia is increased by 13 percent last year and this shows that Macedonian citizens have so much less income in their family budget (Kosovo Online, 2024). From the other side, Trendafilov expresses his concerns by the position of domestic, Macedonian, companies, which strategy for the future is compensation for qualified domestic work force with the importation of labor, instead of retention of domestic qualified workers with increase in wages and more acceptable working conditions (Kosovo Online, 2024).

Additionally, the new data show that in 2022 compared to 2021, the number of active population in North Macedonia has decreased by almost 12,000. The trend of labor force outflow does not stop, but “imports” from abroad are also on the way. Companies from the construction sector, trade, and hospitality are warning that they are facing a labor shortage and that they are ready to import it from abroad. On the labor market, through intermediary agencies, contacts is already established between foreign workers and domestic companies (Meta, 2023).

From third side, actual economic trends in North Macedonia still are not promising. Economic growth slowed to 1% in 2023, from 2.2% in 2022. At the same time, the labor market lost momentum towards the end of 2023, with employment stagnating in the fourth quarter. Labor market participation, already low, dropped further in 2023. The labor force continued to shrink, in particular concerning young workers. The outlook for the forecast period is more muted than in recent years, as employers will have to accommodate higher wages while already faced with a shortage of qualified labor supply (European Commission, 2024, pp. 150–151). When it comes to FDI, inflows in North Macedonia totaled €616.7m in 2023, 17% lower than a year before, data by the country’s central bank shows. FDI inflows during the fourth quarter of 2023 reached €232.6m as a result of intercompany lending, while increased investments in equity stood at €49m (Dojan, 2024).

Fourth, but from the economic and sustainability perspective, substantial security challenge for North Macedonia is the question of emigration. In fact, it is a real problem “that North Macedonia is continuously facing during the last thirteen years caused by the unwillingness of the national and public system to face with the modern security challenges that are not related to the so-called “traditional” or “hard” threats of sovereign states, such as threats to political sovereignty and territorial integrity” (Arnaudov, 2022, p. 27). As Arnaudov explains “low living standards, low income, lack of jobs for qualified labor, together with political clientelism and corruption have greatly contributed to the encouragement of increasing emigration in Macedonian society” (Arnaudov, 2022, p. 28). “The Macedonian political elite has not found an appropriate strategy that, on the one hand, will attract foreign investors and thus dynamize the Macedonian economy, while, on the other hand, keep the young and qualified workforce in the country in order to have basic capacities and prerequisites for attracting foreign investments” (Arnaudov, 2022, p. 28), adds Arnaudov and, at the same time, refers to the statement of Gocevski and Gjurovski who claim that “the theories of security and peace unequivocally indicate that one of the key factors for the promotion and preservation of world peace is precisely raising the level of economic development of countries” (Arnaudov, 2022, 30).

From today’s perspective, the economy largely generates the internal stability of a country, including its sustainability. The economy has actually become a kind of foundation of sustainability, because it has a multiple impact on all other streams, but at the same time it can itself be a consequence of the policy and institutional framework. In the case of North Macedonia, and based on existing knowledge, extremely limited institutional capacities and a markedly high level of political corruption, as part of the pervasive corruption in Macedonian society, are key contributors to limiting the economic performance of this country, which lead to the fact that the poor economy is not only a consequence, but also one of the generators of emerging consequences - such as the previously mentioned migration. The economy of North Macedonia is actually a “hostage” of political and institutional inefficiency that contributes to the creation of new security challenges on the internal level, which eventually raise the question of the country’s sustainability, because they are a danger in themselves, and at the same time, the state infrastructure is unprepared to face even the “imported “ challenges.

## 2. POLITICAL INSTABILITY

The political instability of North Macedonia is a kind of traditional phenomenon in this country, which, on the one hand, can be attributed to the fact that it is a developing country, while, on the other hand, it can be attributed to the actions of political elites contrary to the interests of the state. In fact, the political instability in North Macedonia can be analyzed in two ways: as a consequence of the country's institutional inefficiency and weakness; on the other hand, as an additional generator in the process of weakening institutions, and thus the entire state infrastructure. However, the essence of political instability is not the question of whether it is a consequence or a generator, but the fact that it affects the creation of new security and internal challenges that further weaken the functioning capacities of this country.

On the social level, political instability affects the process of social polarization of this country - on a party, national, religious and economic basis.

"Trench" policy management by political leaders has a negative impact on reaching social consensus on key state issues. A "trench" division is created between party sympathizers, and the political game is increasingly perceived as a battle ground in which winners and losers are assumed.

On the other hand, the multi-ethnic mosaic of the country is threatened, because political leaders instrumentalize the national and ethnic interests of the people they represent. Thus, at the political level, the thesis about the marginalization of one ethnic group at the expense of another, as well as limited rights along ethnic and national lines, is promoted. And such a trend is still very current, bearing in mind this year's parliamentary elections in that country. Namely, the political "conflict" between the Albanian parties reached the level of open verbal threats between the political leaders of the Albanians, which also influenced the instrumentalization of the Albanian ethnic factor in North Macedonia for exclusively political purposes. But in the essential context, such instrumentalization can contribute to social destabilization along ethnic lines. Such a political trend additionally endangers the internal security environment of North Macedonia and creates potential risks for inter-ethnic disagreements at the basic, social level, which in the long run can threaten the country's sustainability in the given political format defined by the Constitution.

Thirdly, religion is also politically instrumentalized and exploited in political confrontations between elites in the daily-political scoring of points. In this way, imaginary dangers from one or another religious group are created, which increases tensions within the Macedonian society along the religious vertical.

And when it comes to economic conditions, political instability threatens the economic stability of this country twice: initially, it affects the attraction of foreign investors, bearing in mind the fact that large and strategic investors avoid politically unstable investment destinations; on the other hand, political instability is collapsing the internal merit system, endangering the labor market and largely contributing to the negative emigration trends of the able-bodied and qualified population.

According to Arnaudov, „the main problem in North Macedonia is the lack of political consensus on any state issue. Regardless of whether it is about the country's foreign policy course, internal political decisions, or decisions that directly concern the citizens of that country. The largest parties on the political spectrum of North Macedonia have always had conflicting opinions and this was visible in the past period, which greatly weakened the position of that country in resolving bilateral issues“ (Arnaudov, 2022a, p. 112).

### 3. INSTITUTIONAL WEAKNESS

"When it comes to the institutional infrastructure of the Republic of North Macedonia, we have to point out that there are numerous institutional problems which accompany the change of the political elite, and are continuously piling up despite the rhetorical insistence on the necessity of public administration reform as one of the key preconditions on the way to European integration. Numerous international organizations and institutions in their annual reports emphasize the necessity of public administration reforms, emphasize its cumbersomeness, as well as the inefficiency in providing services to citizens. Political elitism, pervasive corruption, and incompetence are one of the main challenges of the institutional system in the Republic of North Macedonia", explains Arnaudov in one of his research.

This is very easy to establish in key documents that directly concern the achievement of the country's foreign policy goals, such as the annual reports of the European Commission, bearing in mind the fact that North Macedonia, after joining NATO, sets membership in the European Union as its primary foreign policy and strategic goal.

If we put our focus on public administration reform, as one of the key pre-conditions on the so-called EU path, we will find out, according the 2023 European Commission report, that North Macedonia did not reach any improvement in the previous period: "North Macedonia is moderately prepared in the reform of its public administration. Limited progress was made in the reporting period with the adoption of the new public administration reform strategy and the accompanying action plan in July 2023. Despite having started the process 5 years ago, the country still has not adopted the revised legislative framework for human resources management, which includes the revised law on administrative servants and the law on public sector employees and new legal provisions on top level of management" (European Commission, 2023, p. 13). Further, in the same report it is noted that "legislation in North Macedonia has not yet taken on board the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption's recommendations on nepotism, cronyism and political influence in the recruitment of public sector employees and in the appointment of members of supervisory and management boards. Improvements in accountability in the public administration are undermined by the failure to adopt the new law on state organisation" (European Commission, 2023, pp. 13-14).

On the basis we have mentioned previously, European Commission openly states that last year's recommendations were only partially addressed and in the report for 2023 requests from the Macedonian authorities to:

- adopt and start implementing the revised law on administrative servants, the revised law on public service employees and the legal provisions on top management service;
- adopt and start implementing the law on state organisation and other related laws in line with the recommendations on the new organisation of state administrative bodies;
- ensure full implementation of the law on general administrative procedures by completing the digitalisation of institutions' registers and data exchange, and simplifying electronic procedures (European Commission, 2023, p. 14).

The so-called recommendations from the European Commission actually represent a kind of instructions that bear witness to the limited capacities of the institutional framework of North Macedonia, its weakness in terms of effectiveness and its external dependence, which bears witness to the political independence of the country, which has become a questionable category under threat as a result of internal challenges and threats.

But, the major institutional challenges for North Macedonia is not public administration reform - but pervasive corruption and organized crime. North Macedonia is facing with both phenomena in each institutional level which blocks any potential reform process or measures in the sustainability direction. Organized crime, as an external factor, boosts corruption within institutional framework as a mechanism for further weakening of it - making it unable for facing with internal challenges and risks. From the other side, corruption, as an internal institutional factor, essentially blocks any potential for reforms, as a consequence of its networkness with organized crime, as a consequence of political nepotism and as a consequence of weak and corruptive personnel which at the basic level are blocking implementation of the principles and measures which leads to the direction of stable and reliable state institutional framework.

Re-calling to the previously mentioned report by the European Commission from 2023, corruption is also defined as one of the key obstacles for North Macedonia: "The country is in between some and moderate level of preparation in the prevention and fight against corruption. No progress was made. Corruption remains prevalent in many areas and is an issue of concern. Delays and reversals in trials of high-level corruption cases increased, resulting some cases in the expiration of the statute of limitations. The Criminal Code was amended through an expedited parliamentary procedure. The maximum legal penalties for specific corruption-related criminal offences were reduced, having implications on the application of the statute of limitations and affecting, halting or even terminating, a large number of high-level corruption cases, including from the former Special Public Prosecutor's Office (SPO). The amendments also hamper the authorities' ability to investigate and prosecute such offences. This is a matter of serious concern. Efforts to improve the functioning of the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption should continue, especially by allocating additional funding for the recruitment of specialist staff. Additional human resources and financial means should also be made available to the PPO, investigative centres and law enforcements units in charge of investigating corruption. The sectors most vulnerable to corruption require targeted risk assessments and dedicated actions" (European Commission, 2023, p. 21).

From the other side, from the perspective of organized crime, as a phenomena that in a huge manner endangers the institutional framework of North Macedonia, European Commission report states following: "Certain forms of crime, such as money laundering and financial crimes still need to be addressed more effectively. The capacity of the National Coordination Centre for the Fight against Organised Crime needs to be improved. Coordination remains crucial for all stakeholders involved in fighting organised crime, including coordination between prosecutors and police. Most of the recommendations from last year remain valid. In the coming year, North Macedonia should in particular:

- Improve its track record on investigations, prosecutions and rendering convictions in organised crime and money laundering cases with a focus on confiscation of proceeds of crime;
- Adopt and implement the necessary legislation for an Asset Recovery Office;
- and strengthen human and financial capacities of the law enforcement agencies investigating organised and serious crimes, financial crimes and money laundering" (European Commission, 2023, p. 40).

Similar findings have been reached also in the 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices prepared by US State Department in which, in the case of North Macedonia, it is stated following: serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence and threats of violence against journalists; serious government corruption ("North Macedonia - United States Department of State", 2024).

Concretely, this report lists several domains which are representative example about internal challenges North Macedonia is facing:

- „The courts operated with significant delays, especially in high-profile corruption and multidefendant cases. High-profile trials and their appellate reviews were often prolonged on various procedural, health-related, or unexplained grounds.
- Freedom of expression was undermined by justice system ineffectiveness, lack of transparency regarding media advertising by state institutions, inappropriate conduct on behalf of public officials in their interaction with journalists, pressure on journalists investigating corruption, disinformation, hate speech in online and social media, and self-censorship.
- There were numerous reports of government corruption. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) argued that as the country’s largest employer, the government’s dominant role in the economy created widespread opportunities for corruption.
- There were significant delays in trials involving serious corruption, with only a few concluded as of September, including those against former government officials“ (“North Macedonia - United States Department of State”, 2024).

In fact, North Macedonia is facing intersecting determinants and the consequences of internal security challenges and risks that threaten the stability of the country at all levels, and in the long term call into question its sustainability. As such, internal challenges make the country's institutional infrastructure incapable of facing "imported" or so-called global threats, challenges and risks, which makes North Macedonia even more vulnerable. Although it is a small country, with limited political, military, economic, diplomatic and energy resources, the assumption of a stable political, economic and institutional environment on the internal level would create preconditions for the sustainability of this country in the given international framework. While, faced with the internal challenges that we mentioned in this paper, this country becomes a double target for contemporary challenges and threats: domestic and "imported".

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Bearing in mind the current challenges that North Macedonia is facing internally, which we can freely define as authentic security challenges and risks for this country, we can state that these same challenges and risks will represent essential security issues until the end of the third decade of the 21st century for case study country. North Macedonia is actually facing internal security challenges, on the political, institutional and economic level, which permeate and intertwine as determinants and consequences. As such, these challenges largely render the country’s institutional infrastructure inefficient and ineffective, which in the medium term threatens the fragile internal stability on all grounds, while in the long term it threatens the country’s sustainability, given its limited capacities and the pervasive nature of internal security challenges. North Macedonia’s membership in NATO also testifies to the fact that these are security challenges that require only internal action to deal with them. North Macedonia’s NATO membership, as such, has contributed very little to overcoming the existing internal security challenges. NATO, as the largest defense and security organization in the world, despite its numerous mechanisms in the direction of improving the security and defense capacities of its members, failed in the case of North Macedonia to create a reliable and long-term sustainable ally, precisely because of the country’s internal weaknesses that “rock” the comprehensive institutional infrastructure, namely corruption, crime, political instability, emigration of the able-bodied and qualified population, revanchism. In such circumstances, membership in any international or regional security and defense organization does not mean creating stability and ensuring sustainability on the internal level, which can be seen through this paper in the case study of North Macedonia.

That is why in this paper, on the one hand, we tried to explain how much internal institutional "anomalies" affect the security circumstances of a country in contemporary international relations, while, on the other hand, to indicate how much internal security challenges determine the sustainability of a country in the current world order, along with the fact it is a country that is in no way threatened by "imported" threats to its political independence and territorial integrity. In fact, we came to the conclusion, on the example of North Macedonia, that developing countries, with significantly limited economic, political, military and diplomatic resources, are most endangered as a result of internal institutional challenges and that it is internal security risks that determine stability, and then sustainability of these countries.

Based on the above, we conclude, in the case of North Macedonia, that the following steps are necessary towards the essential stabilization of the country, and then ensuring its sustainability:

- Revision of the constitutional framework that will prevent the long-term political crises through a model of strengthening the position of the president of the country in relation to the executive power (government) - as an arbitrator in a de facto two-and-a-half party system

- Prohibition of registration and existence of political parties with ethnic, national and religious characteristics
- Changes in the electoral system to one electoral unit, so that each candidate for deputy has the same "value"
- Revision of the criminal code for corruption and crime in the direction of increasing prison sentences, including the ban on public functions
- Revision of the criminal code in the domain of financial and economic crime in the direction of increasing prison sentences
- Creation a national strategy (mid-term) for identification, management, coordination and facing of modern and current internal security challenges, threats and risks.

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# From Three Pillars to Three Variables: Quo Vadis, Black Sea Region's Military Security?

Leonid Polyakov<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The key question with regard to the Black Sea region's military security evolution is how the standing of the three pillars Türkiye, US/NATO and Russia will transform, and how the main military actors in the region may look in the future. Türkiye, by progressively increasing its military potential and pragmatically performing the role of mediator, is strengthening its credibility as a major regional power. The question remains in what form. Cautious position of the USA during the Russo-Ukrainian War would likely precipitate the decline of the US role in the region. NATO would maintain its standing but its particular components would be rearranged among the European actors and Turkey. Russia will remain aggressive, but this can be deterred. Ukraine is determined to restore its borders, and it is supported by Türkiye, the US/NATO and the EU, though with certain reservations. Three options at the end of the war will be assessed on the premise that the main challenge of current military security is control over Crimea. The paper highlights the key challenges, which need to be mitigated, and the promising trends, which need to be reinforced for achieving the stable peace and security in the region.

Keywords: Black Sea, military, Türkiye, US, NATO, Russia, Ukraine, Crimea

## Introduction

It is an axiom that for all participants in the current "International Security Congress – 2024" the desired outcome of any possible future development in the area of the Black Sea region's military security should bring peace and stability. However, growing uncertainty and turbulence increasingly characterizes the regional security environment. This is provoked by Russian armed aggression against Ukraine, naturally contributing to a higher degree of variability in the prospective regional military security architecture, than during the three rather peaceful post-Cold War decades.

Since the moment the Cold War ended with the disintegration of the former USSR in 1991, the Black Sea region's military security environment endured three noticeable shifts. The first happened immediately after the relatively peaceful collapse of the Soviet Union, and the following dissolution of the Soviet Army resulting in a temporary "security vacuum" in the region. The second shift occurred after the terrorist attack on the United States on 11 September 2001 (the so-called "911" terrorist attack), and signified a transfer of security focus to "non-traditional" military threats of terrorism, dangers associated with the spread of nuclear and other hazardous substances, and regional security risks related to illegal trafficking of drugs, arms, people, goods, etc. "The August War" of 2008 started the third shift, when a Russian armed attack on Georgia manifested the return of the region to the quasi-Cold War hard security instruments of regular military and coercive diplomacy.

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These shifts took place in a mostly peaceful environment in the Black Sea proper, except for the relatively small scale skirmishes near the Georgian port of Poti during the Russo-Georgian War of August 2008, when Russian naval forces arrived from their base in Sevastopol to block the Georgian sea coast and attacked Georgian missile boats and border guard vessels. This event signalled that a “traditional” hard security environment was returning to the Black Sea. However, the regional military security environment still rested on three rather traditional regional pillars/actors — Türkiye, the United States of America (US)/ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Russian Federation (Russia).

Things started to change radically from relative post-Cold War stability towards current volatility in 2014, when one of the regional security pillars, Russia, occupied and, illegally annexed the part of the Ukrainian sovereign territory of Crimea, namely the Crimean Autonomous Republic. Then, in 2022, Russia continued its aggressive adventures in the region by launching an unprovoked full-scale aggression against Ukraine; in particular, blocking Black Sea traffic routes, randomly mining waters of the Black Sea in proximity to the Ukrainian coast line, and attempting to seize all of the Northern Black Sea coast line to include attacks on Ukrainian ports in Mykolayiv, Kherson, Ochakiv, Odesa, and Chornomorsk. These attacks ultimately failed, in spite of the temporary occupation of Kherson, but Russia continues regular missile and drone strikes against these Ukrainian ports and adjacent facilities.

In reflecting on these Black Sea region military security developments, scholarly studies of the past three decades have posited many good observations on the subject of the region’s military security evolution. This particular contribution to the International Congress in Istanbul Arel University is a next attempt to capitalize on such previous studies, while incorporating new lessons learned during the more-recent years of the ten-year Russian-Ukrainian War.

Evidently, there are many new and old challenges to be effectively studied. Some of these need to be mitigated. Others are promising trends and opportunities which need to be reinforced to achieve a timely and desired result in building a stable peace and security for the future. The key question with regard to the direction of the Black Sea region’s military security evolution is whether and how the standing of the aforementioned three pillars (Turkey, the US/NATO and Russia) have or will transform, and how the main military actors in the region may look in the near, middle-term and longer-term future.

The following assessment of the Black Sea region’s prospective military security architecture will be grounded on two premises. The first premise is generally-conceptual, suggesting that the main factors influencing strategies and policies of any military actor are security interests and military capabilities. The second premise is regionally-specific and grounded on logical requirements to scrutinize the particular policies and activities of specific regional actors, security situation developments, and trends.

From these premises let’s start with the first pillar of the Black Sea region’s military security — Türkiye.

## 1. WHITHER TÜRKİYE?

Let's start with Türkiye, because, at the moment, Türkiye looks to be the most stable regional power amongst the three pillars. Türkiye is demonstrating a stable progress in building the national military capabilities and flexible and pragmatic policies to support its security interests.

In terms of security interests, Türkiye's balancing approach towards relations with Russia and Ukraine has an important distinction. In the military domain Türkiye cooperates with Ukraine only and not with Russia. By progressively increasing its own military potential and, in parallel, pragmatically performing the roles of mediator and transit actor/referee, Türkiye is strengthening its credibility as a major regional power.

Regarding its military security policy, in 2015 Türkiye displayed an ability to be quite assertive when necessary by shooting down a Russian Su-24 bomber, which multiple times provokingly violated the country's airspace from Syria. Contrary to Russian expectations Türkiye also was open to conduct foreign military sales with Ukraine. It sold to Ukraine the operational level reconnaissance-attack drones Bayraktar TB2, which played an important role in Ukrainian air defence at the initial stage of the war in early 2022. Furthermore, Turkish manufacturer Baykar Defense and its Ukrainian counterparts became cooperative partners in development of several drone prototypes like Bayraktar Akinci and Bayraktar Kizilelma. There are also several other cooperative defence production projects. The most prominent are Turkish drone manufacturing in Ukraine, and building Ukrainian military vessels, e.g. corvettes for Ukraine in Turkish shipyards.

Since the start of the Russian full-scale invasion in Ukraine in February 2022, Türkiye is strictly observing the Montreux Convention forbidding the passage of military vessels through the Straits during wartime. In 2023, Türkiye – contrary to Russian demands – freed Ukrainian commanding officers who surrendered during the Russian siege of the Ukrainian city-port Mariupol and were placed in Turkish custody.

In the foreign policy area Türkiye managed to improve relations with Greece and stabilize relations with the US. Türkiye also played, together with the United Nations (UN), an important role in reaching the so-called “grain deal” with Russia to restore shipment of Ukrainian agricultural products through traditional Black Sea traffic routes.

Regarding development of regional military cooperation, in January 2024, Türkiye, Bulgaria and Romania signed an agreement on the creation of a joint demining force in the Black Sea, aiming to provide for safe traffic by sea during the Russo-Ukrainian War. All three participating powers are members of NATO although this arrangement was created outside of any existing NATO framework.

But how enduring is Türkiye as a stable pillar of the Black Sea region's military security? The question remains as to how likely crises such as the attempted military coup of July 2016 may happen in the future, thus contributing a degree of unpredictability to the Turkish role in the Black Sea region's military security architecture.

There is also a question in what form Turkish role in the Black Sea region will be shaped as a result of the current balancing act of competing trends, relying on growing military capabilities, and cooperative, national interests-based, trends in Turkish regional security policies. This requires an analysis of all the elements of Turkish national power, beyond the current scope of this paper.

Further on, if the recent overall regional activity of Türkiye in the security domain is considered, the most visible instances of Turkish security activities are related to events in countries of the South Caucasus, or of the Middle East. The resulting impression is that for the contemporary Turkish foreign and security policy near-term issues in relations with neighbouring countries like Azerbaijan, Iran, Israel and Syria are more important than longer-term issues of most if any NATO agenda or the security of the Black Sea region.

## **2. WHITHER US/NATO (OR EU)?**

There are three key factors having a decisive impact on the current and future standing of the US in the Black Sea region's military security, and these directly relate to NATO, where the US remains a leading power. On one hand, the military capabilities of the US globally are still second to none, but on the other hand, the foreign and internal set of America's security interests since the end of the Cold War have changed. Therefore, when looking the answers to the question in the heading for this section, it looks more expedient to discuss the shifting security interests of the US, rather than specifics of their still dominating military capabilities.

When compared with the end of the Cold War, the focus of the current United States' global attention is shifting from Europe towards the Asia-Pacific region, for the most part towards China and North Korea. At the same time, despite some attempts at disengagement, the US is preserving much of the traditional focus on the Middle East.

US-Turkish security interests have diverged considerably in the three decades since the downfall of Soviet/Russian empire. In particular, this resulted in shifting the US regional security partnership within NATO from Türkiye towards the other NATO Balkan countries, namely Bulgaria and Romania.

Meanwhile, Russia's destabilizing military actions in Ukraine forced the US to preserve and even reinforce a reduced presence in the region. In Section 1247 "Black Sea security and development strategy" of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024, US President Joseph Biden directs the National Security Council "to develop an interagency strategy with regard to the Black Sea region and Black Sea states", and for this purpose "(1) to increase coordination with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union; (2) to deepen economic ties; (3) to strengthen energy security; (4) to support efforts to bolster their democratic resilience; and (5) to enhance security assistance with regional partners in accordance with the values and interests of the United States." (Biden, 2023)

Generally speaking, it is expected that for the near- and mid-term future the US will preserve its leading role in NATO, where regional countries Türkiye, Bulgaria and Romania are members, and where Ukraine wants to be in the future (as well as Georgia, in case its intentions are not reversed by a currently pro-Russian government). Therefore, NATO would continue to value and maintain its standing in the Black Sea region (Dupuy, 2024).

Regarding the Black Sea region's security-related internal aspects of the US security policy; they are reflected in what must fairly be described as the seriously over-cautious position of the US regarding the war in Ukraine. The rise of isolationism and bitter political infighting inside the political sphere of the US if not timely mitigated, is fraught with negative repercussions for many issues of US security policy, including Black Sea region's policy. As noted with Türkiye, any analysis of this area requires an examination of all elements of US national power, especially the political situation and the state of the national will. Nevertheless, these aspects of US power obviously may contribute to various shifts in the current US posture in the Black Sea region.

Even given the above considerations, American influence in the Black Sea region still seems rather certain, though possibly a bit lower in priority and less robust in terms of resources and activity. According to the declared intentions the prospects for the US to reassert itself in the region look optimistic, but given a potential lack of political stability inside the US the probability of implementation of these intentions becomes unclear.

It seems fairly natural then, that the EU, given its geographical proximity to the Black Sea region, and visible economic and humanitarian interests of the EU, could not idly watch as the changes in the security environment in this obviously important region for the EU evolve.

The EU has an interest in Ukraine's securing control of the northern part of the Black Sea coast line – in order to provide credible security for sea ports in Bulgaria and Romania and navigation of the Danube River all the way from the coast to Germany.

The EU has the potential to strengthen its role in the military security sphere in the long run. But in the near-term there are only individual military capabilities like that of France which can be considered as solid representation of the EU in the region. France has a mature nuclear potential and has already declared its readiness to oppose Russians in the Black Sea region. There is also the currently resolute standing of the UK, which is not a member of the EU, but is also interested in deterring Russia globally, including in the Black Sea region.

### **3. WHITHER RUSSIA?**

The Russian Federation, unlike Türkiye and the US/NATO, cannot be regarded as a pillar of the Black Sea region's security any longer. Just the opposite, in the recent years, by steadily increasing its aggressiveness, culminating in the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia unequivocally became the source of aggression and instability. Moreover, even the future of the Russia's presence in the region looks to be transforming from a given constant to more of a variable. The end state of the on-going Russo-Ukrainian War is likely to be defined by the future role of Ukraine in the Black Sea. This will depend in large part on the potential variations of control over Crimea. This is discussed in more detail later in this paper.

The key to Russian aggressiveness lies in the legacy of the Russian imperial heritage, primarily, in the form of Russia's surviving imperial ideology. This perverted ideology precipitates a hegemonic military policy – based on the pretence that Russia is the defender of all Slavs, and/or defender of Orthodox Christianity (implying the “liberation of Constantinople”), etc. This was on vivid display in the history of Russian wars of 17-20th centuries, particularly, and during military campaigns leading to occupation and annexation of Crimea at the end of 18th century. This ideology has in large part also been transferred in Putin's mind to the recreation of the last Russian imperial incarnation – the Soviet Union.

The key demonstration of the Russian imperial heritage in 21st century is still on display in Russian expansionist policy in the Black Sea region, first in 2008, in Georgia, then, in 2014, in Ukraine... In 2016, soon after occupation of Crimea, Putin “jokingly” stated that Russia’s borders never end... In 2022, Ukrainians more clearly recognized that it was not a joke. Russia continues to claim officially those Ukrainian regional capitals like temporarily occupied Donetsk and Luhansk, already liberated Kherson, and never occupied Zaporizhia. To this list can be added the routine assertions of the “historically” grounded “Russian” status of cities such as Kyiv, Odesa, Chernihiv, Kharkiv and Mykolayiv...

The continuity of Russian traditional aggressiveness through the 20th century, when for some 70 years Russia existed in the form of the Soviet Union, was famously noted, for instance, in the “Fulton speech” (1946) by former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. It is remarkable that many observations of Russia in Churchill’s analysis of almost 80 years ago now sound like revelations in light of the current war.

For instance, Churchill effectively predicted the current nuclear blackmail by Russia, implying that the atomic bomb in possession of “some Communist or neo-Fascist State”...might easily have been used to enforce totalitarian systems upon the free democratic world”. Churchill also emphasized yet another factor universally recognized these days as typically Russian, that force is the only argument respected by Russians: “[T]here is nothing they admire so much as strength, and there is nothing for which they have less respect than for weakness, especially military weakness.” (Churchill, 1946).

There is also one more distinctive feature of typical Russian behaviour in the occupied territories. Russian occupiers became notoriously famous in their disregard of humanitarian needs on the captured territories by destroying cultural and historical heritage items and sites and torturing the local population. In 2024, this was reflected again in a Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights judgment that The 2017 OHCHR Report noted in particular, “multiple and grave violations... such as arbitrary arrests and detention... ill-treatment and torture” which involved “elements of sexual violence. The victims were kept incommunicado, tied blindfolded, beaten up, ... electrocuted..., and threatened with rape”. The Court’s judgement reiterated that the victims of these wide spread violations were predominantly Ukrainian soldiers, pro-Ukrainian activists, journalists and Crimean Tatars. Further on, there are many instances in the judgement confirming Russian occupational authorities’ cruelty and numerous violations such as, for instance, “there had been a pattern of prohibiting public gatherings and manifestations of support for Ukraine or the Crimean Tatar community, as well as intimidation and arbitrary detention of organisers of demonstrations” (European Court of Human Rights, 2024).

The Russo-Ukrainian War once again proved that Russian aggressive hegemonic interests and policies are alive. It manifested in annexation of Crimea in 2014, and pretention to label Crimea as an “unsinkable aircraft carrier” threatening everything and everyone in the Black Sea region. And this Russian expansionism further progressed in attempts to occupy Ukrainian city-ports of Kherson, Mykolayiv, Odesa and Chornomorsk all along the Ukrainian Black Sea coast. However, once again it so happened that these interests Russia could not sustain by the relevant military capabilities and Russia failed.

So, it would be safe to expect that Russia's old habit of pretending to dominate in the Black Sea, and disrupting the freedom of navigation across the Black Sea, will persist again in the future. This has begun to reveal itself in the Russian harassment of US/NATO reconnaissance flights over Black Sea international waters. Whether successful or not, it will continue to provoke military conflicts in the Black Sea region, until the moment, when Russia is ultimately deprived of control over Crimea and possession of Crimean ports, and when Russia is facing a much stronger opponent (country or alliance) in the region.

#### **4. UKRAINE**

Meanwhile, it is the question of the future of Ukraine that contributes primarily to the variability of the future ultimate direction of the Black Sea regional military security architecture equation.

Since gaining independence in 1991, Ukraine conducted a policy of peaceful coexistence in the Black Sea region. Ukraine allowed Crimean Tartars to return to their native lands in Crimea in 1994, following their exile by Soviet dictator Stalin. Ukraine agreed to denuclearize in exchange for security assurances from the US, Russia and the UK contained in the Budapest Memorandum. Ukraine adhered to peaceful resolution of territorial and other disputes, and in this manner, for instance, it resolved differences with Romania on sea borders and with Russia on sharing the Soviet Black Sea Fleet's assets.

Since 1993, Ukraine and Türkiye successfully developed military cooperation, which started with the first visit to independent Ukraine of the Turkish Minister of Defence. In particular, since 1998, Ukraine strongly supported the Turkish initiative on creation and operation of the BLACKSEAFOR naval coalition of Black Sea bordering countries.

Unfortunately, a belligerent Russia repeatedly displays a habit of interpreting any signs of non-aggressive behaviour as signs of weakness. Russia launched an unprovoked aggression against Ukraine in 2014, intensifying it in 2022, and Ukraine had no choice but to fight back.

Ukraine is determined to restore its internationally recognized borders, to punish Russian war criminals, and to make Russia pay for all human and material damages. In this intention Ukraine is supported by Türkiye, the US/NATO and the EU, though with unfortunate delays and reservations.

The growing ability of Ukrainian Armed Forces to carry out air and missile strikes are slowly but steadily degrading the Russian occupiers' strength in Crimea. In particular, innovative Ukrainian techniques enabled the country to design, produce and employ different types of naval drones which have already forced the bulk of the Russian Black Sea Fleet's combat ships to move from the port of Sevastopol in Crimea to the port of Novorossiysk on the Russian seacoast. This radically reduced the operational capability of Russian warships in the Black Sea (O'Brien, 2024).

Regarding the possible impacts of the Ukrainian struggle on the Black Sea region's military security, three options at the end of the war may be assessed on the premise that the main challenge of the current military security environment in the Black Sea region is control over Crimea.

#### **4.1. If Russia Maintains Control of Crimea**

The outcome of this option may be even worse than a status quo prior to the start of the Russian full-scale aggression in February 2022.

While Ukrainians are determined to fight and sustain losses, the fact of the matter is that there is a huge numerical disadvantage between Ukraine and Russia in terms the population, economic, and military potentials, which evidently plays to Russia's benefit. To mitigate this disadvantage, Ukraine is asking its partners in democratic countries to provide support. Fortunately for Ukraine, critical military, financial and economic support is being provided. However, most of the partners and, primarily, the biggest one the US, appear not to be ready to deliver in timely, comprehensive and effective manner.

Slow delivery and politically driven halts of US support to Ukraine already have demonstrably benefitted Russia on the battlefield, allowing it to accumulate reserves and consolidate its forces. Moreover, artificial restrictions on the use of the foreign armaments, as well as periodically increasing pressures on Ukraine allegedly aimed at avoiding "uncontrolled escalation" on the part of nuclear Russia, led to missed opportunities and big losses for Ukraine.

As a result, the prospects for Russia to preserve control over already-occupied Ukrainian territories, including Crimea, are growing. In event this war turns into a frozen conflict, Russia will definitely use this opportunity to reconstitute its military forces, particularly in Crimea.

Thus, given the history of Russian invasions, there is no chance that Russian policies will become more peaceful than during any time in the past. Just the opposite, an emboldened Russia, as has been already proven many times, will represent an even greater threat to the Black Sea region than before.

#### **4.2. If Ukraine (Not a Member of NATO) Restores Control of Crimea**

In spite of the Russian numerical dominance, Ukraine has demonstrated a remarkable endurance and ability to achieve success in economic, technological, diplomatic and, most importantly, in military spheres.

In the currently most crucial sphere, the military domain, Ukraine demonstrated the ability to conduct successful independent operations in the Black Sea region using Ukrainian and Western cruise missiles, as well as Ukrainian and Turkish drones. Moreover, Ukraine managed to develop independently a wide array of aerial, sea surface and sub-surface drones and conducted successful raids even in the absence of partners' support. This provided Ukraine with the ability to conduct a series of attacks on Russian air, naval and logistical targets in Crimea and in the neighbouring regions of Russia as well.

Following the loss of dozens of naval vessels and combat aircraft in and around Crimean bases, the most capable part of the Russian Black Sea Fleet was transferred from Sevastopol to Novorossiysk, and combat aircraft relocated to continental Russian bases. Continuous Ukrainian attacks on Russian headquarters and ammunition depots in Crimea, on naval, aviation, anti-aircraft and logistical assets in Crimea, as well as in Rostov, Krasnodar, Dagestan and other regions of Russia steadily degrade Russia's ability to hold the Crimean peninsula. This particular trend, if Ukraine is able to sustain it further, will sooner or later force Russia to abandon Crimea (Economist, 2024).

All this will work to restore the basics of international order and provide for justice, but leaves open the issue of who will be the guarantors of a stable peace and security in the Black Sea region. Moreover, if the issue of deterrence against possible Russian repeated aggression is not answered properly, then the next round of confrontation, this time probably centred on Crimea, is only a matter of time, as in previous cases...

Meanwhile, Ukraine, by reducing Russian dominance in the Black Sea region and restoring its sovereignty over Crimea, strengthens the Turkish position in the region. An outcome such as this is therefore quite congruent with Turkish national interests.

### **4.3. If Ukraine Restores Control of Crimea and Joins NATO**

In the context of this war, Ukraine's strongest partner is the collective security alliance NATO. While the EU and some distant countries provided mostly financial and humanitarian support, NATO unequivocally supported the military needs of its "distinctive partner" Ukraine.

On one hand, absent a clear formal accession prospect, Ukraine nevertheless appeared already deeply integrated into modes and standards of NATO military operations. Ukraine is fighting and individual NATO member states are providing critical support with armaments and logistics. On the other hand, NATO as an alliance offered Ukraine only political and non-lethal support. Thus, Ukraine's "half-integration" into NATO took the form of a number of ad hoc arrangements between different members of the alliance and Ukraine (Polyakov, 2024).

The lessons of cooperation between Ukraine and NATO learned during the war would definitely help if a positive political decision on Ukraine's accession were made. However, abundance of caution – perhaps an overabundance of caution – on the part of the key Western partners makes unclear Ukraine's prospects for NATO membership, which could provide the country with credible security guarantees.

If Ukraine liberates Crimea and joins NATO, the situation in the Black Sea region will be very similar to the situation in the Baltic Sea. In this case, Ukrainian deterrence capabilities will be augmented by the much stronger potential of the Alliance with its nuclear umbrella, boots on the ground, no-fly zone, etc. NATO would in effect become the guarantor of a stable security environment in the Black Sea region. Therefore, the chances for peace and stability in the Black Sea region will be much better than in the alternative scenarios noted earlier. Unfortunately it seems that the probabilities of this last scenario at the moment are much lower than the chances of the previous two.

### **Conclusion**

The Russian attack on Georgia in 2008 signified the ultimate turn away from the earlier post-Cold War security vacuum and focus on the war with terrorism and other non-military threats, back towards the new military confrontation. In 2022, this trend culminated in Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine. In this war Ukraine and its partners managed to reverse the Russian advance and solidify resistance, including many successes in the Black Sea region.

The role of Türkiye as regional security pillar will steadily grow. Declining impact of the US in NATO brings more military presence of the European powers, already visible with the UK and France, and more-distantly visible return of Germany.

Current lack of stability in the region contributes to variability and uncertainty. The best way to provide for predictability is for regional powers to take tougher action against the chronic aggressor Russia, and to harmonize the security interests. The main aim of such cooperation should be to help Ukraine to win and to regain and solidify control over Crimea. This would be in everyone's interest except Russia's.

In general terms, the future of the Black Sea region's military security will be defined as a result of the strategic juxtaposition between the interests of regional powers and their capabilities. If interests potentially can be harmonized, or if there arises a dominant power in the Black Sea region capable of deterring Russian aggression, then the situation is likely to be stable. If not, then the region will drift further towards instability, and its military security will be at the mercy of unpredictable variables...

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**DAY 2: 3rd Session**  
**31 May 2024**  
**9:30 am – 11:30 am (İstanbul Time)**

**Moderator: Assist. Prof. Dr Selma Şekercioğlu Bozacıoğlu**

**Session-III: Non-Military Threats Perceptions**

**Sub-themes to present papers:**

**Hybrid threats including cyber threats**

**Criminal threats**

**Mass migration, energy insecurity, food shortages, and environmental pollution.**

**Other subjects related to the main theme**

# God and Money: Radicalization and Financial Motivation in Terrorist Attacks: The Case of Crocus City Hall Moscow

Iulian Chifu<sup>1</sup>  
Iulia Mihaela Drăgan<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

Terrorist attacks are back in Europe and in the Wider Black Sea Region after the beginning of the war of aggression in Ukraine, connected to the evolutions in Gaza and the forced recruitment and discrimination against Islamic Russian citizens and autonomous republics in Northern Caucasus. With the same occasion, a full debate has been relaunched related to the role of radicalization and jihadism versus the impact and financial motivation in the 21st century new wave of terrorist attacks. In that sense, the research aims to answer three research questions: 1. How strong is the financial motivation in the radicalization process? 2. What might be societal vulnerability factors in Central Asia, Northern Caucasus and the Volga regions that can be used by ISIS in the recruitment process? 3. What evolutions are used to enforce the ideological narrative of ISIS in order to attract recruits and justify carrying out terrorist attacks?

The methodology used aims to investigate the societal evolutions and roots that would challenge the balance between the impact of financial motivation in the recruitment in terrorist organizations versus radicalization processes and this complementarity, and is achieved based on an encyclopedic and comparative study of this evolution and criteria leading to recruitment based on terrorism mercenaries or foreign fighters. We are looking at the radicalization of people joining ISIS, but also at the vulnerabilities of the target recruitment areas, as well as the elements of demonization of Russia that ISIS promotes for discrimination reasons. Data reflecting previously existing trends linked to radicalized individuals and their motivations for committing terrorist attacks against Russia will be used in a comparative manner.

Our study case is related to ISIS, ISIS-K and the Crocus City Hall terrorist attack near Moscow. ISIS still represents a strong threat globally given its relative revival in the Middle East and the new spheres of influence acquired in Africa and Asia. A special reference is to ISIS-K and its newly achieved attacks in Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan, as well as its announced expansion in Russia and the world. The Crocus City Hall terrorist attack on March 22, 2024, which left over 150 dead and 140 injured, brings into sharp focus warning signs linked to the identity of the four suspects arrested, their affiliation with ISIS-K, their recruitment and training in the Wider Black Sea Region itself.

Keywords: Radicalization, ISIS-K, financial motivations, mercenary terrorism

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## **Introduction**

The starting point in our study was the terrorist attack at the Crocus Theater near Moscow (Cho& Masih, 2024). It was a purely terrorist operation, even though no suicidal, with a pre—planned exit strategy (no suicidal action and a perspective to flee Russia either to Belarus or Ukraine). The allegation was that the attackers, originally from Tajikistan, were paid for the attack and even could have been part of a false flag terrorist attack supported and orchestrated by Ukraine, according to Russia’s official statements (Scollon, 2024). ISIS Khorasan claimed the attack and even posted pieces of recordings from body cameras belonging to some of the attackers during the operations(Keating, 2024; Litvinova, 2024).

That prompted us to look more broadly into the relationship between God and money purposes, motifs and ways to move to terrorist attack. If money could be a way and motivation in order to do it. For sure, Jihadists do not exclude money needed for their operations. But the claim of the Russian officials, done in known conditions of the large scale, full intensity long term war of aggression of Russia against Ukraine, is debatable - one unique statement, obtained most probable under torture (Roth&Sauer, 2024). Our assumption is that the mechanism behind a terrorist attack could not lie only on money. Jihadists are not mercenaries, but have a cause, an ideology and a purpose.

Even if an escape was hoped or even prepared by the perpetrators, the terrorist attack required radicalization and preparation for the attack. It wasn’t a criminal gang or mercenary operation.

Especially not in Russia where terrorists couldn’t expect any clemency or correct treatment by counterterrorist forces, as we’ve seen in Dubrovka, Budionovsk or Beslan - no human rights observance, no priority in capturing the attackers alive, to punish them in court and to learn from their radicalization, recruitment, networks etc.

## **METHODOLOGY**

We took a wide study on the behavior of terrorist organizations related to sources of money, payments and attraction, sociological and psychological motifs and mechanisms for recruiting, purpose and structures of those terrorist organizations. And encyclopedic study allowed us to pass via numerous studies and we identified those related to interviews and sources directly from the heart of terrorist organizations. Our aim was to identify how important is the role of religion, radicalization, ideology, how important are the sociological and psychological incentives offered by belonging to such an organization and how much money plays a role in terrorism. Comparative studies of different organizations in different time frames and stages allowed us to draw our conclusions in this extensive study and to answer our research questions.

There are few studies generally tackling motivations for foreign fighters. Bruce Hoffman noted “The reasons why someone picks up a gun or throws a bomb represent an ineluctably personal choice born variously of grievance and frustration; religious piety or the desire for systemic socio-economic change; irredentist conviction or commitment to revolution. Joining an organization in pursuit of these aims is meant to give collective meaning and equally importantly cumulative power to this commitment”(Hoffman, 2016). A 2007 United Nations report, *Combatants on Foreign Soil (COFS)*, notes that people who voluntarily join armed groups typically have multiple motivations, that are similar to that of “ordinary combatants”(OSAA, 2007). Borum and Fein also note that voluntary involvement in armed conflict typically is driven by multiple motivations and conditions, rather than a single cause(Borum, R & Fein, R., 2016).

The literature mentions several motifs for joining terrorist organizations. Moore and Tumelty identified religion, kinship, and/or ideology rather than pecuniary reward as a motivation (Moore & Tumelty, 2008). Non-pecuniary motivation is noted also by Thomas Hegghammer (Hegghammer, 2011), when Vinci noted a component of economic incentives (Vinci, 2006), in the sense of possible material or economic gain, but not as the reality for most foreign fighters, nor as a strategy used to recruit them, but just the fact that belonging to such an organization can provide immediate and differential benefits to those who actively participate, (See also Keen, 1998; Collier, 2000) who agree with that assessment. The most comprehensive study is that of Matt Venhaus, based on interviews from 2,032 “foreign fighters” detained by Coalition forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Motivations vary from revenge, need of a status, identity and belonging to something meaningful or prospects for excitement, adventure, and glory (just 5% of the group) as a main motivation, not unique in any case, but no money has been involved (Venhaus, 2010). Therefore, for clarifying the matter, we also looked into the specificities of ISIS and its evolution in time that could lead to such manifestations.

## **1. MONEY AND IDEOLOGY**

Money is an important part of any terrorist organization. It ensures survival, paying attacks, creating means of the terrorist activity and ensuring the outcomes needed. But different organizations in different times procure that money through different means. Donations and support in a strictly Islamic believers’ life of operatives from Al Qaeda shifted to mercantile and criminal gang typology of getting money in ISIS, in some periods, with a full interest for money and less or no devotion at all for the Islamic religion and the aims and values formally defended by the group.

Members of a terrorist organization would expect to be recruited and paid for survival and preparation of the terrorist operations. But money per se is less expected to be an incentive for terrorist activities. Jihadists could expect that the organization is taking care of the families of the martyrs after an attack (Kuperwasser, 2017). But mercenariat of any kind in carrying out terrorist attacks is unexpected and somehow unethical for terrorist organizations (Al-Dairi, 2015).

Recruiting through radicalization and devotion to Islam was the original way of doing things. But money plays a role, with an important difference from Al Qaeda vs Islamic State, the last being sometimes a quasi-government or an insurgency. And it is not only extracting the poor believer from a miserable life and ensuring his survival or the perspectives of its family life that counts. Money could become not only a side result of the activities, but the main purpose of such organizations (Khatib, 2015). How this could transform it into an insurgency, a job as employee of a regime in a quasi-state or a mercenary fulfilling a number of needed tasks for the terrorist organization, without taking part in terrorist attacks? Or even the sliding of terrorist organizations towards a simple criminal group, when only the illegal collection of money is important and the organization do not deliver anymore on the operation track.

Mercenaries and foreign fighters have been brought inside terrorist organizations/especially in Jihadi wars. That was ISIS novelty. Administration under terrorist regime shifted the purpose and structure of ISIS as a terrorist organization in Iraq and Syria. Salaries for terrorist activities is a false description, since IS acted more as an administration (Speckhard & Ellenberg, 2020) of a territory and the terrorist attacks, especially suicide ones, were carried out by specialized persons in the group, willingly opting for engaging in such activities (Mironova, 2019). We are talking about an approach and evolution closer to quasi-states entities (administration of territory and a type of governance), insurgencies (military activities, not terrorist ones, done by mercenaries and not jihadists), criminal groups (collecting money but not acting in terrorist operations).

Jihadists have a strong ideology and purpose. It is proven that those individuals arrive in such organizations and are going quickly to action. Here the issue is how they are choosing a cause (linked to Jihadi ideology, suicide bombers, suicide action) as well as an organization. Here money counts in terms of image of the organization, important operations carried on, prestige and brand as well as taking care of families (Ford, 2017). But suicide terrorists come already radicalized and prepared before reaching the organization's ranks. Radicalization inside the group is more of a communality and maintenance of the cohesion and identity, not a purpose for creating suicide terrorist fighters.

But after recruiting new members, a certain radicalization and raising the aspiring novice to enter the organization (and benefiting from it) require a certain stage of ideological indoctrination, radicalization for those who join for survival, for money. Moreover, there is a lot of literature discussing if terrorism could be based on mercenaries. The presupposition is that people join a terrorist organization not purely for money. Not only for money. And this is another line of our study.

ISIS Khorasan is recruiting from Tajikistan (Dyner, Legieć, & Rękawek, 2015). Using Türkiye as an intermediary destination is also very well-known and documented, different recruits in different stages are hiding inside Türkiye, coming like tourists, smuggled to Syria, trained there especially for operations in their native countries, and then coming back illegally (Noah, 2018). Training is especially designed for IED fabrication and use, but also for other instruments and means of terrorist operations. But from that known behavior to mercenariat in order to an attack like Crocus theater there is a long way.

## **2. ORGANISATIONAL SOCIOLOGY OF TERRORISM**

Terrorist organizations are most often comprised of ideologues, criminal mercenaries, and captive participants. Ideologues provide political purpose and direction and have a strong group commitment. Each group needs money to survive. So mercenaries serve the organization for getting money, but have a weak group link and may corrupt the organization's ideological purity (Hausken, 2019).

Al-Qaeda was historically funded and behave as a purely terrorist Jihadi organization based on individuals radicalized but true believers (Napoleoni, 2005). Ideologically less pure terrorist organization may acquire financial gains from crime, e.g. hijacking, hostage taking, illegal drugs, human trafficking, prostitution, money laundering, extortion counterfeiting etc. For example, the Colombian FARC guerilla had a Marxist ideology, but gradually became criminal through illegal drug trade and kidnapping (Betancourt, 2011; Gupta, 2008). Abu Sayyaf resorted to kidnapping and extortion (Ban-laoi, 2006). Various spinoffs of the Northern Irish IRA also resorted to crime (English, 2004).

To ensure continued financing, when sponsors are lacking or constrained, the ideologues may decide to recruit criminal mercenaries. Mercenaries engage in criminal activities. Organizations consisting only of captive participants lack commitment and effectiveness, and disintegrate. Captive participants join to avoid the cost of not participating, and not for the positive payoff which may be non-existent. They increase the organization's payoff through supporting the ideologues and mercenaries in achieving their objectives. Only with ideologues, the organization needs outside resources to survive. Some organizations such as Hamas, Hezbollah, the Provisional Irish Republican Army and Laskar-i-Taiba succeed in that regard, and dislike crimes that could have tarnish their image. But without sponsors, crime may be needed, and mercenaries are recruited.

So terrorist organizations are often comprised of two types of participants: ideologues or “true believers” dedicated to the group’s cause, and mercenaries, who are adept at raising money through illegal means. The latter are interested primarily in their personal gains and have relatively little ideological commitment. Terrorist groups need both participants in order to function effectively. The most common motivations of terrorist groups are to change the political order of a society and to fight for certain social issues or causes, the benefits of which do not remain confined to the members of the group (public goods). By contrast, the primary motivations of criminal groups are to obtain money and power for their members (private or club goods). Similarly, Hoffman(Hoffman, 1998) points out that, “the terrorist is fundamentally an altruist: he believes he is serving a ‘good’ cause designed to achieve a greater good for a wider constituency. The criminal, by comparison, serves no cause at all, just his own personal aggrandizement and material satiation”.

We have also to look at the behavior of the mercenaries. They are part of criminal operations and fights, see wars, but are not a part in terrorist activities, even though this could bring them money. They are inclined to survive. Members of the terrorist organizations choose and are not constrained whether or not to participate in a terrorist attack. The group becomes a criminal organization because fund-raising activities by the group (which necessarily are extra-legal) continue to pay for planning and logistics; however, the payoff from a successful attack never arrives, causing ideologues to abandon the cause, leaving mercenaries behind to continue the extra-legal fund-raising activities. In the case of IS, joining the group could potentially provide recruits with access to money, power and protection. The Islamic State was joined by a very large number of recruits. The estimates on the number of fighters in the ranks of Islamic State after 2014 varies widely, from 9,000 up to 200,000. The high estimate of 200,000 members also includes personnel who joined its police and security-intelligence apparatus(Mironova, 2019). The recruits to the Islamic State joined for different reasons. Some joined the group for ideological reasons, others for personal gains(Weiss and Hassan, 2016, p.160-172). That’s why there have been ideological tensions and disagreements within the group(-Bunzel, 2019).

### **3. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MOTIVATIONAL INSTRUMENTS FOR RECRUITING AND TERRORIST ACTIVITIES**

Money alone rarely satisfies a person’s psychological needs, and may have the opposite effect. To recruit a member successfully, the Taliban, for instance, needed to be able at a minimum to convince him that it can satisfy his basic needs (e.g., food, water, and shelter). If the recruit is truly destitute and starving, this may be the only motivation he needs. The Taliban offers further incentives to motivate behavior, such as a sense of belonging, friendship, recognition, self-esteem, and even the prospect of self-actualization(Ford, 2017).

Not only money is important: emotional satisfaction and status are also critical. Operatives describe the emotional satisfaction of their work, and the status they earn in their community. ‘One becomes important due to his work. Successful operations make a militant famous and glamorous among his fellow men.... (Stern, 2003, p.213-17). But a certain level of radicalization is also needed in such organizations as an identity and cohesion factor. In some cases, like the IS, the attraction of mercenaries needed in war have transformed the aims of the organization and created special treatment for foreign fighters that introduced new tensions in the ranks.

Those who respond to ISIS recruitment on social media by liking, retweeting, sharing or otherwise endorsing ISIS propaganda messages are then contacted by ISIS recruiters. The recruiters pay them lavish attention and try to meet their needs in efforts to attract them into the group. Others attract recruits by drawing them into religious and political conversations designed to take them down the ISIS pathway (EC, 2019). Many of these youth joined expecting the ISIS training camp to deliver good meals, pay, and other financial benefits. “[I] started living the criminal life in my youth, smoking and drinking...do what your friends do, trying to be with them. Joyriding, stealing cars, making money to smoke and enjoy women.” “until I was 23. [Then,] I started focusing on my religion, praying and going to mosque. I started having other friends” (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020).

Psycho-social vulnerabilities to ISIS recruitment were coded in terms of emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect, exposure to domestic violence, substance abuse in the household, mental illness in the household, parental separation or divorce, having an incarcerated household member, having a parent die when the participant was a minor, having unmarried parents, having a father with multiple wives, family conflict, poverty, leaving home early, personal divorce, previous criminality, and unemployment or under-employment. The subjects themselves mentioned most of these variables in presenting their brief family histories. However, the first ten psycho-social vulnerability variables are the Adverse Childhood Experiences, life events and circumstances that - when occurring in combination with each other - exponentially increase a child’s risk of mental and physical health difficulties in adulthood (Felitti, 1997).

ISIS also recruited many Western women to their ideology and territory. Female foreign ISIS members’ motivations for joining are varied, but it is clear that ISIS used a specific recruitment strategy, namely, using women as online recruiters and glamorizing the ISIS lifestyle, even developing online magazine articles specifically targeting them (Perešin, 2015). A charismatic recruiter telling her it was her duty to come live under the newly declared Caliphate was only one of the many experiences that interviewed terrorists said caused her to believe that she could not fully pursue her religion in Ireland, and therefore needed to make hijrah to the Islamic State (Speckhard, 2020). But women in ISIS are also trained as fighters, learned to handle machine guns, grenades, and IEDs. One woman was reported to wear a suicide vest at all times. They also trained as spies and carried money and messages (Speckhard and Shajkovci, 2017).

How naive many Muslim recruits were in regard to their hope that ISIS would be able to deliver a promised utopia. For foreigners, the dream of becoming significant, having purpose, and a positive Islamic identity were strong drivers to ignore the warning signs about joining ISIS. Likewise, the ISIS provision of free housing and what appeared to be a high-quality life appealed to many. Local Syrians and Iraqis were often so hungry, literally and figuratively, for justice and dignity that they joined. In all cases, the joiners were yearning for an Islamic dream of dignity, justice, purpose, prosperity, and Islamic living. Ideology was not the group’s primary purpose; it was a tool to acquire power and money. The group (...) continuously interprets Sharia in ways that justify its actions (Khatib, 2015).

However, jihadists were a part of IS without doubt. Those recruits volunteered for suicidal missions immediately after arrival. Some of such group members would intentionally choose a group to switch to where the line of fighters waiting to conduct suicide missions was the shortest (Mironova, 2019).

There were tensions between IS and Al Qaeda when they recruited at the same time with the same means and in the same areas. But the choice came from brand and prestige, mostly. Money had also a role, but in a different sense: ISIS was already supporting the widows and orphans of ISIS dead fighters. In the event of a resurgence, these people were likely to join ISIS, with young sons becoming fighters, if ISIS would offer them even a basic salary(Speckhard, 2020).

#### 4. CENTRAL ASIANS IN IS

ISIL has built its ranks by recruiting fighters from across the globe(Lister, 2015). While the majority of ISIL recruits originate in the Middle East, the Maghreb, and Western Europe, Central Asia is the third largest source of foreign fighters in Syria. Central Asians are over represented (Falkowski and Lang, 2015). As of 2015, Central Asia has accounted for the third largest source of Islamist foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq.

Central Asian recruitment has been made by Islamist extremists, with the majority of Central Asians being recruited outside of the area. In fact, they were radicalized and recruited from the diaspora in Russia (Tucker, 2016). Low paid jobs and discrimination were the context for Islamist radicalization and recruitment. A majority of Central Asians fighting for ISIL and the al-Nusra Front in Syria and Iraq were proved to be recruited while working abroad in Russia, often from low-wage jobs under poor conditions, making the recruits ripe for radicalization (Lynch III, Bouffard, King, and Vickowski, 2016).

#### Conclusions

1. How strong is the financial motivation in the radicalization process?

Very weak and marginal, if it is for terrorist purposes. Important when administrating territory or making a war. Mercenaries are involved. But terrorist activities per se and especially suicide and jihadi operations require radicalization, ideological formation and commitment, devotion to the cause.

2. What might be societal vulnerability factors in Central Asia, Northern Caucasus and the Volga regions that can be used by ISIS in the recruitment process?

Here we have a debate between well prepared and radicalized operatives, with a survival financial status at least, and recruits radicalized from the poor levels and requiring survival status that lead them to join terrorism. But other psychological and social incentives need to be added too. Money is not enough. And a certain level of radicalization is happening even for the constraint participants in a terrorist organization/administration.

3. What evolutions are used to enforce the ideological narrative of ISIS in order to attract recruits and justify carrying out terrorist attacks?

Money plays a role, when it is up to carrying for the families or paying respect to the martyrs. But prestige, relevance, the brand of the organization, medializations and image have an important part in the choice of the organization, attraction and recruiting.

Our conclusion is that the Crocus Theater terrorist attack was run by terrorist radicalized individuals and not by paid mercenaries.

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# “A Geo-digital Approach to Immune Trade Routes amid the Black Sea Tension”

Ana Yousefian<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The Importance of the Black Sea has heightened since the war erupted between Russia and Ukraine. Since then, the geopolitical and geo economic importance of the region around the Black and Caspian seas have increased. Therefore, the so – called economic corridors have become a trending debate high on the agenda of policy makers in order to evade disruptions in energy and commodity transfer. The Chinese Belt & Road initiative alongside other attempts like India-Middle East –Europe Economic Corridor or the Middle Corridor will shape a new competitive sphere which may trigger future conflicts in the region. Considering the new global order which is neither a bipolar one as it was during the Cold War nor a uni-polar in the decades after, a multi polar economic order will bring with itself both challenges and opportunities. The emergence of several big non-western economic powers at the same time is the main cause of the fundamental change in the weight of the world economy, which started from the borders of Europe in the past 30-40 years and is now located on the borders of Iran and Turkey. Emerging economies are key players in the current context of economic order and connection is the most determining factor to lead trade and transaction. As Parag khanna put in his book “Connectography” we are witnessing the revival of ancient and medieval trade networks that once flourished in Africa linking Arab, Persian, Indian, Chinese, and Southeast Asian civilizations. Today, trade in goods and services and finance is the fastest growing in emerging markets. Over the past decade, between the four fastest-growing regions—China and Africa, South America and the Middle East, India and Africa, Southeast Asia, and South America—the volume of trade has increased from 500% to 1,800%. This shows the great potentials of growing shared benefits and interests among the regions and sub regions of Asia. Taking into account the recent developments both in terms of trade and connections the research questions is how it is possible to avoid future conflicts and build a regional security complex, boosting interdependence. It is hypothesized that with the help of institutions that foment interconnectedness both geographically, digitally and by setting norms, economic security and benefits might be achievable for the countries of the region. The theories applied to support the idea of the paper are the regional security complex and interdependence.

Key words: Black Sea, trade routes, interconnectedness, geo-digital

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## Introduction

Prominent authors have written on the new global order. Parag Khanna a distinguished author in the field of International Relations who wrote a book named “Connectography” in which he refers to a shift in global order and the two turning points that at the same time are accelerating the shift: connectivity and the trade volume. He believes that connection will play a greater role than globalization in trade, transportation of goods and financial services among emerging economies. (Khanna, 2016, p. 41) The thrust of his argument is that today the world is witnessing the revival of the archaic and Medieval Age trade networks that used to connect the civilizations of Africa, Arab, Persian, Indian, Chinese and South East Asians. During the last four decades emerging markets in four regions – China and Africa, South America and the Middle East, India and Africa, South East Asia and South America- have experienced a tremendous growth rate in trade from 500% to 1800%. (Khanna, 2016)

Michael O’ Sullivan in his book “ The Levelling: What’s Next after Globalization?” argues that the world is becoming multi-polar while there are not enough institutions ready to welcome the new order. He believes the new order will comprise three large regions: America, the European Union and a China- centric Asia, with each region choosing a different approach regarding economic policy, liberty, warfare, technology and society. ( The Economist, 2019) The world is on the verge of a systemic shift due to the changing weights of countries and regions economically. Asia is a system due to the volume of diplomatic and economic interactions among Asian countries which is more than the sum of Asia's relations with other parts of the world considering the sub-regions of East Asia, Asia Pacific, Southeast Asia, West Asia and Southwest Asia. In the meantime, Southwest Asia has had the characteristics of a system during many periods in history: the caliphate era, the colonial era, and even after the division among the European powers, it still has this systemic feature. Even now that there are a number of independent states such as Turkey, Persian Gulf countries, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Central Asia, we are seeing a gradual increase in the revival of systemic features. Economic links, construction of infrastructure, war, trade relations and illegal trade are prominent systemic features of this region. Relations between West Asia and East Asia have experienced significant progress during the past three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union. (Barboza, 2020)

The second half of the 20th century is marked by a turn from a global economic divergence to a global economic convergence. The first 150 years of industrialization widened the gap between rich and poor countries, and certainly placed a large part of the developing world under the powerful control of European industrialized states. However, after the Second World War, many poor regions were able to increase their growth rate by gaining independence from the colonial rule. Political sovereignty granted newly independent countries greater freedom to invest publicly in health, education, and infrastructure. By and large, developing countries saw a greater increase in GDP per capita as their relative income gap decreased. This pattern continued until the 21st century, and the result was that developing countries outpaced developed countries by 1-5% per year, except for a slight decrease experienced in 2010. With the increase in GDP, along with the increase in population growth, the share of global production of developing countries increased significantly. Although developing countries had a 57% share in global production in 2000, this amount was reduced to 41% in 2018, and compared to the 43% share of developed countries, it went from 34% to 59%. During 19 years, the position of two regions changed. Taking into account the current trends from a regional and not a national perspective, we see three regions enjoying internal growth in the global economy: the United States, the European Union, Northeast Asia, which includes three research and development powerhouses: China, Japan, and South Korea. This is the first time since the industrial revolution that the focus of innovation has left the North Atlantic region, and we are witnessing a two-way flow of key technologies between the East and the West. (Sach, 2020, p.90-92)

Ian Bremmer, the founder and president of Eurasia Group, a political risk research and consulting firm, recently discussed in a Ted Talk video that today we are living in a leaderless world unlike the Cold War era and the coming decades after that. At this moment in history we no longer have a super power therefore this is neither a unipolar world nor a multipolar one. We have countries that are exerting power in every domain. In other words we have multiple world orders that at the same time are separated but interconnected and regarding economics we are witnessing a multi-polar economic order. (Bremmer, 2023)

Recent geopolitical tensions, the Black Sea as a major one in global trading system has added a new dimension to the economic order since it holds a key maritime trading route. For that we are witnessing changes in routes, the prices of goods and many other implications that bring new challenges over the longer run. Therefore the research questions of this paper is how it is possible to avoid future conflicts and build a regional security complex, boosting interdependence. It is hypothesized that with the help of institutions that foment interconnectedness both geographically, digitally and by setting norms, economic security and benefits might be achievable for the countries of the region. The theories applied to support the idea of the paper are the regional security complex and interdependence.

## **1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

A security complex includes a group of countries that have a shared take and concern regarding security in a way that their national security issues are intertwined and cannot be analyzed and understood separately. The first framework depicted for this theory placed states in the center of its analysis as the sole main actors. The classic version of this theory lays its focus on military and political aspects leading to the formation of security complexes through balances of power and patterns of enmity and friendship. However the new analytical framework is not limited to states and their political and military relations by considering other factors and security issues of different kinds.

Another issue worth noting is the dominant bottom top approach by which security complexes are formed in regions. In some cases such as environment and economics this can turn into a top bottom approach giving birth to patterns inside systemic processes in which a group of countries experience the same repercussions of climate change and even the surrounding counties of the region that may be affected.

By expanding the security agenda what is more conceivable is that the regional security interdependence is more about collective actions resulted from external systemic pressures rather than the interaction between the units. For instance the regional security interdependence based on shared concerns triggered by the instability of international liberal economic order or the interaction of climate change and water resources. When security interdependence is built on a top bottom approach it is more likely that the security complex is placed on the friendly pole of the spectrum rather than the belligerent one. Shared threats are better at bringing the units together that leading to clashes between them. (p. 295-297)

According to the classical version of security complex theory, states are the main actors when thinking about political and military sectors therefore security regions had these features:

1. Including two or more than two states
2. These states form a consistent geographical group since they share more or less same political and military threats due to proximity

3. The distinctive feature among these states is their security interdependence more than what each state may have with countries outside the region
4. The security interdependence should be deep and durable

Rationally thinking in order to bring parts other than politics and military like non state actors, playing a role on the security complex stage there are two possible ways:

1. Homogeneous complexes: In this approach there is still the classic hypothesis that security complexes are centered in specific segments. Therefore there are special interactions between same units (for example power competition among states) leading to the formation of security complexes. This logic comprises different types of complexes of different subjects

2. Heterogeneous complexes: This approach is not limited to security complexes related to definite subjects, but it hypothesizes that the regional logic is capable of bringing together different types of actors that have interactions in two or more segments.

The second type, heterogeneous complex, has the advantage of connecting actors from different areas and enriches our analysis by putting the whole picture in the same frame and lets us monitor the inevitable spillover effects between different segments such as the military effects on economic transformations and so on. (Buzan et al, 1998)

## **2. THE BLACK SEA TENSION**

### **2.1. THE CHAOTIC TRADING ROUTES**

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development published an analysis titled “Navigating Troubled Waters: Impact to Global Trade of Disruption of Shipping Routes in the Red Sea, Black Sea and Panama Canal” in which it considers the disruptions as a driving force reshaping global maritime networks and rearranging the world trading maps. If the leading forces behind the disruptions persist like the war in Ukraine there will also be upheavals in global supply chains. Moreover these disruptions have made vessels reroute by taking longer routes, therefore increasing sailing speeds. This is how ship operators safeguard schedule integrity and manage the fleet capacity. It is worth noting that the speeding up strategy leads to more carbon emission and also impacts the shipping costs and rates. (p. 12) Overall the overlapping disruptions is depicting a challenging operating landscape for shipping and trade. As a result of the overlapping disruptions of two major maritime trade waterways they are also trying to adapt to recent changes. Meanwhile developing countries are more prone to be harmed due to the shifts in trade patterns and the increasing costs resulted from the change in their connectivity and access to the marketplace. (UNCTAD, p. 16)

#### **2.1.1. THE REPERCUSSIONS OF INTERRUPTED TRADING ROUTES**

The interruptions mentioned before will definitely pose a threat to global supply chains leading to risks such as delayed deliveries and higher costs.

Given that global trade is vulnerable to geopolitical tensions and climate-related challenges there is an urgent need for collective efforts to reach sustainable solutions. To depict a problem-solving procedure we need to pinpoint the problems first. To be more precise the tensions in the Black Sea have key implications over the longer run:

1. Longer shipping routes and more fuel consumptions leading to more carbon emission and greenhouse gases

2. Spill-over effects of trade route disruptions on other countries in the region
3. Trade pattern shifts (re-routing) chosen by ships and an increase in freight rates and food prices

The UNCTAD assessment highlights the situation of developing countries regarding their vulnerability to disruptions in shipping networks, shift in trade patterns, and finally the influence on their connectivity and access to marketplace. The report introduces some key issues to pursue for tackling the repercussions such as: tracking shipping schedules and service reliability, security measures for ships and ports, delays in shipments and delivery timelines, freight rates and insurance charge and finally shipping connectivity and the geography of trade. (UNCTAD, p. 17)

### **3. EVOLVING DEMANDS AND INITIATIVES IN TRADE AMID GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS**

#### **3.1. GREEN TRANSITION**

The world Economic Forum in May 2024 published a report on top global trade stories in which it mentions the demand surges for critical minerals as one of the key trends in 2023. According to 2024 Critical Minerals Outlook provided by the International Energy Agency critical minerals such as lithium, nickel, cobalt, and rare earth elements have experienced a dramatic increase from 8% to 15%. The demand surge may bring development opportunities for resource-rich countries. However there are key concerns in terms of both geopolitics and climate change.

When it comes to climate change there are concerns such as greenhouse emissions, rising sea levels that have roots in melting ice because of rising temperatures and leading to a mess in key oil ports, coastal refineries and petrochemical facilities. (Dabre, 2024) On the contrary some trade routes like the Panama Canal is struggling with severe drought that has caused a 36% reduction in total transits, leading to ships' rerouting and faster travelling and finally burning more fuels and CO2 emissions. (Noatum Logistics, 2024)

Moreover the geopolitical tensions are a source of grave risk to global trade. The maritime trading routes are one key example of how global economy is being fragmented. (Dabre, 2024) A 42% decrease in trade volume in the Suez Canal in the first half of 2024 marks several factors including the Red Sea and the Black Sea disruptions due to the conflict in Ukraine that reshaping oil and grain trades. (Noatum Logistics, 2024)

#### **3.1.2. BLACK SEA COUNTRIES' INITIATIVE**

As an aftermath of the Black sea tensions the countries of the region have gained momentum by taking initiatives such as the Black Sea energy submarine cable project and the development of Anaklia deep water seaport in Georgia that had put its focus on the region's transit role as part of the Middle Corridor. ( Chkhenkeli et al, 2024)

### **4. FRAGMENTION RISK AND HOW TO AVOID IT**

#### **4.1. RISKS OF A FRAGMENTING WORLD**

The investment management business of Prudential Financial (PGIM) recently published a report in which the emphasis is that we are living in an era of de-globalization where on the global stage there are three main trading blocs: the US, the EU and China with each turning inward due to national security concerns and competitiveness.

For that it refers to the slowing pace of globalization which kicked off in 2008 following the financial crisis. At this time in history each mentioned trading bloc is seeking strategies to remake its economy through independence in fields like CHIPS, semiconductors that has led to regional inclinations. Even payment strategies differ from that of before. For instance Russian commodities bought by the China and India are paid in renminbi which sounds like de-dollarization in regional financial transactions. Regarding supply chains the perspective ahead is more about re-shoring, on-shoring and near-shoring unlike off-shoring that was prevalent before the pandemic and rising concerns over climate change. (Singh, 2023) The world economy is interconnected but not global as it was before and the connection is built on regional ties.

Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) as an economic union in Eurasia comprising Armenia, Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Iran as a newly added member is a telling example of a prosperous horizon. Mentioning these developments does not mean that there is a flawless future staying ahead. Geopolitical tensions like the war in Ukraine will definitely have repercussions leading to discriminatory regionalism.

In a time of conflict regionalism may change and be reshaped and inclined to a discriminatory regionalism where barriers increase in trade with non-members, a change that will lead to a weak regionalism. (Ruta, 2023)

Gita Gopinath the first deputy managing director of the International Monetary Fund in an for Foreign Policy warned about the new economic cold war and the how it is possible to avoid the worst case scenario. She believes that global trade is fragmenting due to strategies such as friend-shoring, de-risking and self-reliance taken by many countries in order to guarantee their national security and build resilience. Over the longer run she believes that this will lead to an economic cold war which has its own repercussions such as less peace, less security and less prosperity. She alludes to another time in history when after the First World War economic fragmentation gave rise to nationalist and authoritarian leaders that pave the way for the Second World War. This trend was extended during the Cold War between 1940s and 1980s when trade and investment flows were shaped by geopolitical considerations. The opposing trading blocs experienced a considerable decline from 5-10 % to less than 5% of global trade.

Factors such as the recent pandemic and the Russia's war in Ukraine has slowed down the trade everywhere. (Gopinath, 2024) Pierre Olivier Gourinchas, the Economic Counsellor and the Director of Research of the IMF recently in an article published on the IMF blog wrote about the risks from trade and fiscal policies dismantling multilateral trading system. He believes that the imperfect trading system resulted from increased unilateralism will not only impede lasting and shared global prosperity but also will weaken trade and resource allocation, spur retaliation, decrease growth, diminish living standards and make further and more important collaborations on key global challenges like climate transition more complicated. His solution to this controversial status is focusing on sustainably improving medium-term growth prospects via more efficient allocation of resources within and across countries, better education opportunities and equality of chances, faster and greener innovation and stronger policy frameworks. (Gourinchas, 2024) He reiterates that international trade is not and has not been a zero-sum game since Bretton Woods within a multilateral framework.

## **4.1.2 A GEO-DIGITAL APPROACH FOR AVOIDING FRAGMENTATION**

A geo-digital approach, a combination of geography and digital innovation might be a solution to trade routes in case countries of the region prefer multilateralism to bilateralism and an open regionalism to a discriminatory one. Technological innovations bring both challenges and opportunities depending on the collective response by the countries of the region.

### **4.1.2.1. AI AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH**

For decades Earth Observation (EO) carried out by satellites, aircrafts and ground-based sensors has collected data on climate for governments and businesses for making better decisions with regards to sustainable growth. In the past decade due to technological innovations, new satellites, advanced sensors, data from GPS-enabled and internet of things (IoT) the scale of the data has gone beyond the analysis capacity. However Artificial Intelligence has come to the scene providing low-cost, high performance computing for EO. The Catalytic Potential of Artificial Intelligence for Earth Observation shows how AI makes EO easier for use with some developments as such: putting together contrasting datasets for enabling a more holistic situation analysis, providing training data for AI / machine learning ( ML) systems, identifying causes such as methane emissions, landfills, farms or pipelines, predicting natural disasters like cyclones, floods, ...

This is how vital insights are provided to support organizations contributing to a nature0positive and net-zero economy by setting science-based de-carbonization targets. Overall EO datasets could be transformed into data visualizations for actionable insights when industries need to make environmental friendly decisions and policies. (Singh, 2024)

### **4.1.2.2. AI AND TRADE**

50 % of marketing in the USA, Canada and India depends on Artificial Intelligence technology for activities based on paid advertisement. AI tools in marketing are software or platforms that use AI technology for automated decisions. P. 18 These tools make decisions using market trends, collected data and analyzing them. The goal is to prepare an effective strategy for predicting a customer's next move. This process proceeds in seconds without any human interference which turns it to a powerful tool for businesses. Artificial Intelligence plays a significant role in producing more effective and personalized contents in different businesses by analyzing the interests of the users and collecting information about their lifestyle. AI tools can also immune the data banks and impede cybercrime. When it comes to pricing the products AI is of great help by considering the factors that have an impact on the value of products and recommending the most profitable price. Another determining AI service is market segmentation based on companies' measures and their target market, making it easier to manage customer relations. Providing a prediction on sale by referring to customers' previous behavior and decisions is another benefit of AI tools. They can encourage the customers to purchase and also can notify the businesses to overhaul the marketing pattern considering the periods in which there is a decline in sale. A key development facilitated by AI is personalization which helps companies have a better image of their customers' tastes leading to a better and more specified content production. (Oghabayie, Amani, 2023)

## Conclusion

The recent geopolitical tension in a key water way, the Black Sea has raised many concerns in the global trade domain from mounting prices of goods and food to environmental ones. Some countries have come up with initiatives and alternative solutions for avoiding such repercussions. Over the longer run initiatives as such like rerouting may have irreparable side effects. However technological innovations bring a silver lining to the scene where Artificial Intelligence can play a role both in helping the shipping with needed information on environmental costs of each route by taking into consideration the shortest route for reaching the target market based on the data collected. However on order to reach that level steps need to be taken.

1. Avoiding policies that lead to a more fragmented world
2. Providing opportunities for more foreign direct investment in digital infrastructure filling the existing gaps and preventing more to emerge
3. Bringing in environmental and marketing analyses for choosing trade the best trading routes by the data collected with AI
4. Making use of digital innovations on order to boost a multi-lateral, multi- corridor approach, augmenting interdependence, building a security complex for addressing shared concerns in field of environment and economic security

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# **WAR AND ENERGY: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF THE RUSSO-UKRAINE WAR ON THE GLOBAL ENERGY SUPPLY CHAIN (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO WESTERN EUROPE'S ENERGY SECURITY)**

Rifat Ullah Rifat<sup>1</sup>

The current Russo-Ukraine War has triggered unpredicted energy supply disruptions throughout the global energy markets, signifying their heavy reliance on Russian energy and highlighting the vulnerabilities of the global supply chain with particular reference to Western Europe's energy networks. The investigation employs integrated SWOT-PESSTEL analysis technique, where an additional 'S' denotes security. The paper also highlights application of multidisciplinary theoretical lenses to achieve a wholesome view: Complex Regional Security theory of International Relations and Supply Chain Management theory of Economics. Research hypothesis focused on recent Russo-Ukraine War impacts on the global energy supply chain, primarily the energy security construct of Western Europe. The findings underscore the serious disruptions in energy transmissions and compelling strategic realignments within the global energy supply chain, hinting at major strategic policy shifts to safeguard their energy security, especially in Western Europe. These global energy supply chain disruptions have led to increased energy prices, demanding reevaluation and recalibration of energy strategies globally with particular emphasis on Western Europe, including diversification of energy sources and energy transmission routes. The research findings suggest that the world will have to modify its approach toward any conflict of this nature to enhance supply chain resilience, which is critical to mitigate any future risks.

Key Words: Russo-Ukraine War, Regional Complex Security Theory (RCST), Supply Chain Management, Energy Security, Supply Chain Resilience, SWOT & PESSTEL Analyses

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Russo-Ukraine War has significantly impacted the global supply chain and Western Europe's energy security. This section analyses the energy situation amidst the War, using SWOT and PESSTEL integrated analysis. The traditional PESTEL analysis has been modified by including an additional 'S' for security, one of the most crucial dimensions of the decision-making process. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats have been identified in all contexts: political, economic, social, security, technological, ecological, and legal. The comprehensive, integrated analysis helps in understanding the whole issue in detail. Where strengths and weaknesses of every domain are internal, opportunities and threats are futuristic in nature and external in complexion.

## **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The current Russo-Ukraine War has triggered unpredicted energy supply disruptions throughout the global energy markets, signifying their heavy reliance on Russian energy and highlighting the vulnerabilities of the global supply chain with particular reference to Western Europe's energy networks.

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### **3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

To investigate the impact of the Russo-Ukraine War on the global energy supply chain with a prime focus on consequences for Western Europe's energy security.

### **4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

How has the recent Russo-Ukraine War impacted the global energy supply chain, primarily the energy security construct of Western Europe?

### **5. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Where the Russo-Ukraine War has magnified the energy security challenges of the Western Europe, exposing its heavy reliance on Russian fossil fuels, it has also offered numerous opportunities especially in realm of diversification of energy suppliers and accelerated renewable energy initiatives aiming at enhanced energy security. While the existing literature on the subject explored the challenges and opportunities, but lacked comprehensive analysis framework. In addition, no research has applied SWOT and PESSTEL in unison. This study comprehensively addresses the identified research gap by investigating the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in all dimensions of PESSTEL, with an addition 'S' for security, thus offering enhanced understanding and nuanced insights.

### **6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The paper employs a mixed methods approach (qualitative + quantitative), a case study as a research design (Western Europe), integrated SWOT-PESSTEL analysis technique to investigate and finally application of two theories as theoretical framework.

### **7. DISCUSSION**

**7.1. Political.** The detailed SWOT analysis of the political sphere is covered in the ensuing paragraphs.

#### **7.1.1. Strengths**

- **Unified EU Policy.** A unified EU energy policy to collectively counter the impact of the Russo-Ukraine War on its energy security is a significant strength of the EU's system. The European Green Deal is one such initiative aimed at making Europe climate-neutral by 2050.
- **Diplomatic Influence.** Europe's extended diplomatic influence is yet another strength of the European system. Owing to the same strong diplomatic drive, the EU could also ensure gas supplies from countries like Norway, Qatar, and the United States, bridging the demand-supply gap to a manageable degree.
- **Robust Renewable Energy Investments.** In order to pursue the policy of reducing its dependence on fossil fuels, especially from Russia, Europe, with a better economic outlook, invested heavily in a fast-track program for robust renewable energy.

### 7.1.2. Weaknesses

- **Political Fragmentation.** The political fragmentation driven by national interests, conflicting priorities, somewhat weakened the EU's collective, cohesive response to crisis management.
- **Dependence on External Players.** This energy dependence emerges as a crucial weakness in Europe's energy system, which makes it vulnerable to exploitation by external players, especially in case of geopolitical tensions causing an energy crisis.
- **Limited Domestic Fossil Fuel Resources.** The scarcity of resources to meet the vital energy needs, on the one hand, costs heavy import bills and, on the other hand, makes Western Europe susceptible to energy supply chain disruptions.

### 7.1.3. Opportunities

- **Strengthening Alliances.** In order to reduce their dependence on Russian energy imports and to diversify energy sources, the EU and its member states have leveraged their diplomatic relations with other suppliers. Germany brokered LNG supply deal with Qatar in March 2022, and Italy signed a gas supply deal with Algeria and an LNG deal with Egypt.
- **Proactive Diplomacy.** EU acted proactively to thwart a severe energy crisis using diplomatic tools. In response, the US increased its LNG exports to the EU and also different countries negotiated deals for gas, LNG, oil, and coal supplies with suppliers other than Russia.
- **Diversification of Energy Imports.** The energy disruptions forced Western European countries to accelerate their diversification efforts. For example, Germany built a gas terminal to import LNG from the USA and Qatar (MSC, 2022), Italy increased its LNG imports from Algeria (Reuters, 2022), and France spent heavily on renewable energy, including wind farms (Wind Europe, 2023).

### 7.1.4. Threats

- **Prolonged Geopolitical Tensions.** This prolonged conflict had severe implications for the global energy supply chain. EU's Aggregate EU Initiative, launched in 2023, helped it to reapportion its energy imports by reducing dependence on Russian fossil fuels; gas imports reduced from 45% in 2021 to 15% in 2023 by securing deals with Norway and the USA (European Commission, 2024). Nonetheless, the future resilience of Western Europe is still vague, unless requisite infrastructures are developed. In addition, the prolonged conflict can also impact present unified response of the EU.
- **NATO/EU Fragmentation.** Any political fragmentation in the EU or NATO, driven by differing national interests of member states based on their different levels of reliance on Russian energy, can be highly detrimental to the EU's collective response mechanism.
- **Economic Sanctions and Counter Sanctions.** Europe imposed price-cap sanctions on imports of Russian crude oil, barring its purchase price under \$60 per barrel. On the other hand, these sanctions have hurt Europe more than Russia, as the EU has been purchasing the same oil through Laundromat states. In 2022, gas supplies dropped by 13% more than the previous year (Zeniewski, Molnar, & Hugues, 2023).

8.1. Economy. The supply chain disruptions due to the Russo-Ukraine War profoundly impacted Western Europe's economy, which was deeply reliant on energy imports from Russia. The detailed analysis on economic domain is given below.

### 8.1.1. Strengths

- **Robust Energy Market Infrastructure.** The robust infrastructure includes the extensive gas pipeline networks like the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) from Azerbaijan and the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) to access gas from non-Russian sources (International Energy Agency (IEA), 2023), re-gasification units near to importing ports and increased strategic gas reserves (International Energy Agency (International Energy Agency (IEA), 2023).
- **Economic Leverage.** Economic and financial leverages, to pursue energy diversification, the EU invested USD 370 billion in 2023, surpassing their investments in fossil fuels (International Energy Agency (IEA), 2024). In addition, the EU invested Euro 132 billion in energy infrastructure developments and renewable energy assets (Tillier, 2024).
- **Strong Financial Institutions.** EU's well-developed financial institutions supporting the European Green Deal with a net budget of Euro 1 trillion. These firms financed USD 110 billion in renewable energy projects in 2023 (International Energy Agency (IEA), 2024).

### 8.1.2. Weaknesses

- **Dependence on Russian Energy.** Historically, Europe depended on Russian energy. The EU has significantly reduced its energy imports from Russia, since the start of the War; Natural gas imports have been reduced from 40% in 2021 to 8% in 2023 by switching to alternative suppliers like the USA, Algeria, and Qatar. Regarding oil imports, direct Russian crude oil imports dropped from Euro 4.6 billion per month in 2022 to Euro 0.8 billion per month in 2023, exhibiting a decline of 83% (European Commission (EC), 2024)(European Commission, 2024). However, still a reasonable share of EU's energy imports are coming from Russia directly or through third-party.
- **Energy Prices' Volatility.** Europe, largely dependent on energy imports with limited domestic resources, Natural gas prices witnessed an unprecedented hike, from Euro 18 per megawatt-hour (MWh) before the crisis to Euro 300 per MWh in 2022. Similarly, crude oil prices soared from a pre-crisis average price of \$70 per barrel to \$120 per barrel by mid-2022. The crude oil prices kept fluctuating in 2023-24 from \$80-100 per barrel, way higher than the pre-war period (International Energy Agency, Oil Market Report - March 2024, 2024); (Trading Economics, 2024).
- **Limited Domestic Fossil Fuel Resources.** As per the statistics of 2024, the EU imports around 96% of its oil, 83% of its natural gas, and approximately 41% of its coal, making it heavily reliant on energy imports. This heavy dependence on external players makes the EU highly susceptible to manipulation in case of energy disruptions due to geopolitical conflicts (OECD, 2024).

### 8.1.3. Opportunities

- **Investment in Renewables.** Following the trend of converting to renewables, the EU has pledged to invest around \$370 billion in 2024 (International Energy Agency (IEA), 2024). Germany is expected to generate 80% of its electricity from wind and solar by 2030. Similarly, France is investing heavily in wind, solar and next-generation nuclear power plants (Motyka, Thomson, Hardin, & Amon, 2024).
- **Economic Diversification Potentials.** The European countries are among the top performers as per the Economic Diversification Index (EDI) (Prasad, et al., 2024). The European Green Deal is a major policy initiative towards making Europe a climate-neutral region by 2050.
- **Green Financing Initiatives.** The European market is expected to cross \$500 billion' Green Bond investments in 2024 (IMF, 2024). These funds financially support organizations and companies that meet the environmental, social, and governance criteria (ESG).

#### **8.1.4. Threats**

- **Global Energy Market Instability.** Since the start of the Russo-Ukraine war, the European gas prices surged as high as 300% in 2022, owing to supply disruptions from Russia (IMF, 2024). The other significant impact was on Europe's inflation, which peaked at 10.6% in 2022. Though it has been reduced to 5.4% in 2023, these levels are still higher than in the pre-war period (Guindos, 2023).
- **Supply Chain Disruptions.** The gas and coal supply chain disruptions and higher price tags impacted the electricity supply chain and its prices.

9.1. Social. The social dynamics of the energy crisis triggered by the War are evident from the implications for the public sector. However, it has also highlighted the social strengths and opportunities for Europe.

#### **9.1.1. Strengths**

- **High Environmental Awareness.** As per a survey, 90% of Europeans considered climate degradation a severe challenge and thus supported renewable energy (European Union, Climate Change, 2021). This public support was reflected in governments' initiatives like the European Green Deal and Green Financing.
- **Active Advocacy by Civil Society.** In addition to education, active social society in the form of numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Europe plays a vital role in shaping public opinion about climate change and the need to pursue renewable energy more vigorously.

#### **9.1.2. Weaknesses**

- **High Levels of Energy Poverty, Cost of Living and Inequality.** In the winter of 2022 and later in 2023, over 41 million Europeans could not afford adequate home heating arrangements (BPIE, 2024). By the start of 2023, the inflation increased to 9.2%, housing costs by 18%, water by 12.1%, and food by 11.9%. This all contributed to the cost-of-living crisis, where 21.6% of the Europeans were at risk of poverty. As a survival issue, 93% of the Europeans declared the cost of living their prime concern (Jones, 2023).
- **Global Goeconomic Fragmentation (GEF) and EU's Vulnerabilities.** A policy reversal of globalization and global economic integration has become a reality where emerging geopolitical alignments drive investments and trades, including fossil fuels (Baba, et al., 2023).

#### **9.1.3. Opportunities**

- **Unified EU's Energy Security Framework.** The collective energy REPowerEU Plan, announced in May 2022, aimed at reducing fossil fuel consumption and transiting to renewables, is a reflection of an opportunity cashed by the EU. Through this plan, the EU helped reduce Russian oil imports by 90% and gas imports by 72.5% in 2023 compared to 2021. In addition, the EU reduced its gas demand by 18%. Regarding the drive for renewables, the EU set legislative targets to achieve a minimum share of renewables to 42.5% and preferably to 45% by 2030. In 2022, the EU generated record high 22.3% of its electricity from wind and solar, surpassing for the first time nuclear which is now contributing 21.9% and gas. Solar energy generation increased by a record high of 24% in 2022, saving Euro 10 billion from gas spending (Dunne, 2023).

- **Community-Based Renewable Energy Projects.** An example of one such project is the Samsø Island project in Denmark (UN, 2023), where 100% of the energy needs have been shifted to renewables. Other such projects are the Isle of Eigg in Scotland (Tucker, 2023), community managing and operating its grid, the Brixton Energy Solar project in London (Brixton Energy, 2023), and the Feldheim Energy Village project in Germany (Di Nucci, Krug, Schwarz, Gatta, & Laes, 2023).
- **Energy Communities and Energy Citizenship (EC2).** The EC2 is a step towards citizens and community engagement in energy projects. As per the EU's objectives for 2050, 50% of its citizens would be contributing half of the EU's renewable energy (Crosse, 2023).

#### **9.1.4. Threats**

- **Resistance to Change.** While on one side, the public, in general, supports the EU's stance to support Ukraine, reduce energy dependence on Russian fossil fuels, and transition to renewables, they are also skeptical about the reliability of alternative suppliers in the long run and the cost involved (Schellekens, 2023).
- **Volatile Energy Situation Breeding Social Unrest.** The energy inflation due to the War surged to 40% in Europe by mid-2022, which led to massive protests across the EU, especially in Germany, witnessing 395 protests (Glucroft, 2022).
- **Increased Refugees and Migrants Influx and Changing Demographics.** As of 2024, over 7.7 million refugees have taken shelter in different countries of Europe, with over 4.3 million already applied to seek residency (Guenette, Kenworthy, & Wheeler, 2023).

**10.1. Security.** Security has also been included in the PESSTEL analysis as an essential and additional factor, as it plays a crucial role in analyzing any geopolitical conflict with multidimensional implications for comprehensive security framework. The significant strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in this domain are discussed in ensuing paragraphs.

#### **10.1.1. Strengths**

- **Collective Security Mechanism.** The extended deployment of NATO, and the strategic coordination between NATO and the EU is beneficial in safeguarding the energy supply chains.
- **Strategic Energy Reserves.** The IEA has mandated all countries of Europe to maintain emergency energy reserves for all energy products: oil for 90 days (EU, 2024), gas to maximize the utilization of the available capacity, presently at 80% and aiming to reach 90% (European Commission, Gas storage, 2024).
- **Robust Cybersecurity Measures for Energy Infrastructure.** The revised version of the EU directive on cybersecurity, NIS2 Directive 2023 (European Commission, 2023), has expanded scope of cybersecurity by including certain critical sectors including energy and water. Towards this end, EP3R is one of the initiatives of this agency to foster better public-private cooperation in all security dimensions including cybersecurity.

#### **10.1.2. Weaknesses**

- **Energy's Infrastructural Vulnerabilities.** As per the European Commission report, more than 40% of Europe's grids are over 40 years old. In addition the systems are not fully customized to accommodate energy contributed by community sources. The European Commission recommended Euro 584 billion investments to address these vulnerabilities (European Commission, Digitalising the energy system - EU action plan, 2022).

- **Reliance on Single Point of Failure.** Still, all exports of LNG and gas from Yamal are for Europe. In the first four months of 2024, EU member states got around 100 shipments worth \$40 million each, reaching a new high, totaling \$4 billion (Humpert, 2024). The heavy reliance on such critical nodes can cause single point of failure in case of an attack.
- **Susceptibility to Cyber Attacks.** The energy infrastructure remains highly prone to sophisticated cyber-attack techniques and technologies. The ENISA has notified increased frequency and sophistication in cyber-attacks against European energy installations.

### 10.1.3. Opportunities

- **Augmenting Energy Infrastructure Security.** By improving the protection of the critical energy infrastructure, these can be made more resilient and damage immune against different dimensions of attacks, physical or cyber.
- **Energy Independence Initiatives.** The EU has undertaken initiatives towards relative energy independence by investing in domestic renewable projects, energy citizenship and energy communities, and heavy investments in offshore solar and wind parks.

### 10.1.4. Threats

- **Energy Dependence Paradox.** Europe has reduced its gas imports from Russia, and accelerated its Green Deal transition maneuver. However, in contrast, the EU's solar energy drive, which is 40% higher in 2023, has made Europe now dependent on China, which has become an exporter of 95% of solar photovoltaic (PV) to Europe being cheaper than Europe (Ichord, 2024).
- **Nuclear Energy Dilemma.** Nuclear energy is still considered a crucial pillar of energy in Europe. Though the US has started stepping up its domestic capacity, much must be done. The enrichment of Uranium within the US gets a boost of \$2.7 billion through a bill approved by the Senate, but its future is still hazy (Martucci, 2024). However, the accident like Chernobyl can prove to be extremely dangerous for Western Europe.

**11.1. Technological.** A detailed SWOT analysis of technological domain is covered in the ensuing paragraphs.

#### 11.1.1. Strengths

- **Leading Renewable Energy Technology.** This aspect allows the EU to answer domestic demands as well as export to earn revenue needed for further R&D. Fraunhofer ISE of Germany is pioneering innovation, efficiency, quality, reliability, and sustainability in solar energy. However, compared with the Chinese version, such as Jinko-Solar, the system lacks cost effectiveness and mass production.
- **Nuclear Energy Innovations.** Compared to the older version of nuclear energy plants, Europe is mastering Small Modular Reactors (SMRs), which are safe, stable and cost-effective. When fully operationalized, the SMRs can be a game changer for Europe's energy security.
- **Hydrogen Production and Utilization.** Hydrogen, which can be produced from multiple sources like gas, water, and biomass, is emerging as a crucial element of the energy mosaic. Germany's national hydrogen strategic framework uses this technology for energy storage as a backup for low renewable energy periods (The Federal Government of Germany, 2024).

### 11.1.2. Weaknesses

- **High Cost of Technological Advancements.** The initial setups, research, and development in advanced renewable energy are often tagged with higher costs than traditional energy sources. For example, the cost of green hydrogen is Euro 5-6 per kilogram compared to Euro 1-2 per kilogram for grey hydrogen produced from gas (Motyka, Thomson, Hardin, & Amon, 2024).
- **Dependency and Competition on Acquiring Raw Material.** For the Critical Raw Materials (CRM) for different renewable energy industry manufacturing, Europe depends on imports from other countries, thus remain susceptible for future supply disruptions or manipulations by the suppliers.
- **Market Competition for Cost Effectiveness.** Concerning cost-effectiveness, Europe faces challenges in competing with China regarding technology development, due to higher labor charges, energy cost and industrial production costs. China dominates 95% of global wafer production, similar to the solar PV supply chain. For obvious reasons related to higher production costs, European companies are at a 20-25% disadvantage compared to China (Bettoli, Nauc ler, Nyheim, Schlosser, & Staudt, 2022).

### 11.1.3. Opportunities

- **Green Hydrogen Productions.** The EU can potentially lead the global green hydrogen production and energy utilization industry, where Germany is extensively working on the initiative. The EU has plans to install 6 GW- 1 million tonnes of green hydrogen by 2024 and 40 GW of hydrogen electrolyzer, producing 10 million tonnes of green hydrogen by 2030 (European Hydrogen Observatory, 2023).
- **Advanced Battery Storage Systems.** Towards this end, Northvolt's gigafactory in Sweden has been working on this since 2017. Like green hydrogen, the EU focuses on quality and longer sustainability of advanced battery storage systems, compared to its market competitors like China.
- **Offshore Wind Technological Potential.** EU's serious effort in this regard with UK and Germany in lead, where the UK is constructing the Dogger Bank Wind Farm, the world's largest wind park with a capacity of 3.6 GW, which will be completed by 2025 (SSE Renewables, 2023).
- **Solar Cell Efficiency.** While Chinese are leading, German Fraunhofer ISE is an expert in multi-junction technologies. Where China has achieved 26.1% efficiency in monocrystalline silicon cells, Germany has acquired 47% efficiency in multi-junction solar cells (Fraunhofer ISE, 2022).

### 11.1.4. Threats

- **Cyber Risks.** Technology-intensive infrastructures and systems are becoming prone to cyberattacks. Cyber incidents in the energy sector have recently been on a sharp increase. In 2023 alone, more than 200 attacks were reported, out of which over 50% were Europe-specific. Year 2023 witnessed 602 Malicious Activities of Interest (MAI) against Europe's energy infrastructures (ENISA, Cyber Europe tests the EU Cyber Preparedness in the Energy Sector, 2024).
- **Energy Regulatory Policy Shifts.** The regulatory policies related to the energy sector in Europe can also impact the energy market, especially renewable energy. These changes significantly influence investments and market trust levels.

12.1. Ecological. The strong commitment, reinforced by tangible actions, reflects Europe's resolve to support environmental protection. The detailed SWOT analysis of ecological field, is covered in the following paragraphs.

### 12.1.1. Strengths

- **Strong Public Commitment to Climate Protection.** The high public awareness and strong support for environmental protection help the EU direct its energy policies that are aligned with them. As per the EU's survey, 85% of the people polled for the EU to aggressively pursue renewable energies like wind and solar power (Wettengel, 2024).
- **Serious Renewable Drive to Protect Environment.** EU has shown firm resolve and commitment to renewable energies. In the revised Renewable Energy Directive EU/2023/2413, the EU raised the compulsory renewable targets for 2030 from the previous benchmark of 42% to 42.5% (Directorate-General for Energy, 2024). Of the seven countries in the world that are 100% powered by renewable energy, two are from Europe, Albania, and Iceland, while Norway is closely behind, with 98.38% of energy from solar, wind, or water. In addition, Germany can run 100% on renewables for a short period (Frost, 2024).

### 12.1.2. Weaknesses

- **Heavy Reliance on CRM's Imports for Environment-Friendly Renewables.** As of 2024, most of the raw materials required for renewables are imported: 100% of heavy rare earth materials from China (required in most of the renewable technologies), 98% of boron from Turkey (required for wind turbines), 71% of Platinum from South Africa- essential requirement of hydrogen energy (European Commission, 2024). These highlight Europe's excessive dependence on external players, though vital to pursue renewable energy drive.
- **Ecological Waste Issues.** The recycling mechanism for renewable energy components like solar panels and blades of wind turbines is still underdeveloped and poses serious waste management issues, thus leading to ecological waste issues, especially when the volume of the waste items grows exponentially. However, the EU has highlighted the need to recycle the maximum CRMs in its CRM Act, which was approved in March 2024 (Ragonnaud, 2024).

### 12.1.3. Opportunities

- **Green Financing and Circular Economy Initiatives.** The Green Financing framework promotes investments in sustainable projects through programs like the EU Taxonomy and the InvestEU. Similarly, the Horizon Europe Work Programme 2023-24 offers funding for projects for different thematic clusters, including climate, energy, and mobility- cluster 5 (CEN, 2024).
- **Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.** In this regard, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 focuses on the preservation and resilience of the ecosystem. It aims to protect 30% of land and sea (EUR-Lex, 2020), especially the areas used by the energy sector.

### 12.1.4. Threats

- **Extension in Use of Environment Hazardous Processes/Sources.** Despite the EU's earnest efforts to minimize emissions, in 2023, the air pollution levels experienced in 97% of the urban centers were higher than the prescribed limits of WHO guidelines (EEA, 2023).
- **Resource Depletion and Conflicts.** Europe heavily depends on CRMs necessary for renewable energy, like lithium, cobalt, and boron, primarily from China and Africa. For example, against lithium extraction in Barroso, Portugal, the government faced severe challenges from the public and environmental activists (Ej Atlas, 2023).

**13.1. Legal.** Europe has a comprehensive and well-laid legal framework supporting its energy security drive. The main highlights of the EU's strength are the unified response, mature legal systems, and appropriate enforcement mechanisms. However, the detailed analysis is given below.

### **13.1.1. Strengths**

- **Harmonized Environmental Regulations and Strong Enforcement Mechanisms.** The EU has a comprehensive environmental protection regulation package in the form of the Green Deal and Regulation 2020/852- Taxonomy Regulation (European Union, 2020). Due to the enforcement of these policies, the EU reported a 15.5% reduction in greenhouse emissions in 2024 compared to 2023 levels (Directorate-General for Climate Action, Record reduction of 2023 ETS emissions due largely to boost in renewable energy, 2024).
- **Cohesive Internal Energy Market Regulations and Single Market.** One of its major strengths is the EU's acting as a single energy market and presenting a cohesive response to the recent energy crisis. REPowerEU plan 2022, is a binding force for the EU to collaborate, while regulations like (EU) 2022/1032 define the minimum gas storage capacity to be maintained by the members.

### **13.1.2. Weaknesses**

- **Legal Interpretations as per National Interests.** Towards the start of the War, Germany and Poland had different stances over cutting supplies from the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, being heavily dependent on Russian gas. Similarly, the draft National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs), in its assessment report of 2023, has highlighted certain discrepancies in implementation and approach to policy objectives (Connors, 2024).
- **Slow Legislative Responses and Legal Inadequacies.** The process is sometimes slow and inadequate in grasping emerging challenges. Even with the updated version, the full implementation is still not possible till 2025 (ENISA, 2023).

### **13.1.3. Opportunities**

- **Solidifying Energy Security through Unified Regulations.** The EU needs to work on identifying pitfalls in the existing rules, regulations, and policy frameworks and then addressing the same to achieve more pragmatic, comprehensive, and applicable legislation. REPowerEU Plan and Green Deal are reflections of a more inclusive approach.
- **Innovative Legal Approaches to Absorb New Technologies.** With the evolving trends in renewable energy and cyber security threats, the EU, unless continuously adapting itself, would endanger the energy security of Europe.
- **Fostering International Legal Support for Energy Security.** Though the EU has already signed several bilateral Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with countries like Qatar, Morocco, Egypt, and Ukraine, there is a need to orchestrate multilateral agreements with enhanced mandate for assured supplies and to ward of manipulations by any single supplier.

### **13.1.4. Threats**

- **International Legal Disputes.** The cross-border transmission projects and future issues on newly crafted MoUs can lead to international disputes in future. In addition, the previously concluded pipeline agreements with Russia, like Nord Stream 2, can also create international legal problems for the EU.

- Withdrawal of EU from the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT). ECT is a multilateral treaty that outlines the legal bindings covering the promotion and protection of investments, energy efficiency, and resolving disputes concerning energy trade and transit (Pacheco, 2024). As of 30 May 2024, the EU has formally decided to revoke its membership, declaring ECT not aligned with the EU's climate change goals (Pacheco, 2024). The withdrawal from ECT may create uncertainties in case of any investment issue with any partner or stakeholder. Without investments' assurance of ECT, the EU must strike multiple new treaties with other energy players for investment protection.

## **8. Application of Theories**

### **8.1. Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)**

- The theory developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever postulates that states' security dynamics are interconnected and can be best understood in a cluster of states at the regional level. The geographic proximity, states' historical lineages, and interplay of common threats are the fundamental factors that constitute different complexes.
- The practical manifestation of the RSCT is visible in the unified responses generated by the EU in the form of sanctions against Russia, accelerated plan for collective transition to renewable energy, increased investments, formulations of comprehensive legislations, the interconnectedness of the energy transmission across borders to help each other in emergencies, joint purchase mechanism, the establishment of the single energy market, shared responsibilities, and pursuing common agenda relating environmental protection.

### **8.2. Economic Theory of Supply Chain**

- The concept of supply chain deals with the smooth and secure flow of goods, services, information, and finances from supplier to end users while mitigating the risks of disruptions. When not entirely tenable, the supply chain has profound implications for the consumer markets.
- More than anything, the Russo-Ukraine War has impacted the energy supply chain the most. The EU, which has been historically reliant on Russian fossil fuels, faced the worst brunt in terms of shortages of energy sources, delays, price hikes, energy market volatility, and inflation, hurting governments and people alike.
- The supply chain disruptions, which are economic, can lead to geopolitical implications, tensions, and conflict. In addition, the development and deployment of a more integrated energy market in Europe are also aligned with the dictates of the supply chain by striving for resilience and responsiveness.

## **9. Conclusion**

The integrated SWOT-PESSTEL analysis suggests that understanding all strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats across the full spectrum of PESSTEL, including the additional domain of security, is vital for comprehensive policy formulation to address the energy security concerns of the EU. This comprehensive analysis is a cornerstone for future EU undertakings related to energy.

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# The Russo-Ukraine War: Navigating the Future of Europe's Energy Security Using Scenario Building Technique

Rifat Ullah Rifat<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract:

The Russo-Ukraine War has exposed the vulnerabilities of Western Europe's energy security, which has traditionally relied heavily on Russian energy supplies. This excessive dependency has resulted in energy shortages, price volatility, and inflation due to continuing disruptions. By employing the scenario-building technique, this study offers insight into the implications of the War on energy security, strategic choices, and policy considerations for stakeholders as a result of scenario-building. The study projects potential scenarios by leveraging the modified scenarios building and development technique. The study employs a mixed-method approach, using Western Europe as a case study research design while integrating statistical (quantitative) and thematic data (qualitative). The theoretical framework rests on the Input-Process-Output (IPO) model. In this framework, the input comprises the two foundational theories, Regional Complex Security Theory and Supply Chain Management Theory, complemented by an extensive review of established international laws and regulations. The process helps crystalize the key forces and drivers used in the scenario-building matrix. In sum, these scenarios underscore the critical need to pacify the conflict, anticipate the long-term risks and their mitigation, diversify the energy sources, enhance energy efficiency, formulate resilient energy policies, the collaborative framework within the European Union, collective energy purchase and storage mechanism.

Key Words: Russo-Ukraine War, Europe's energy security, Modified scenario Building Technique, Strategic Choices

## 1. INTRODUCTION

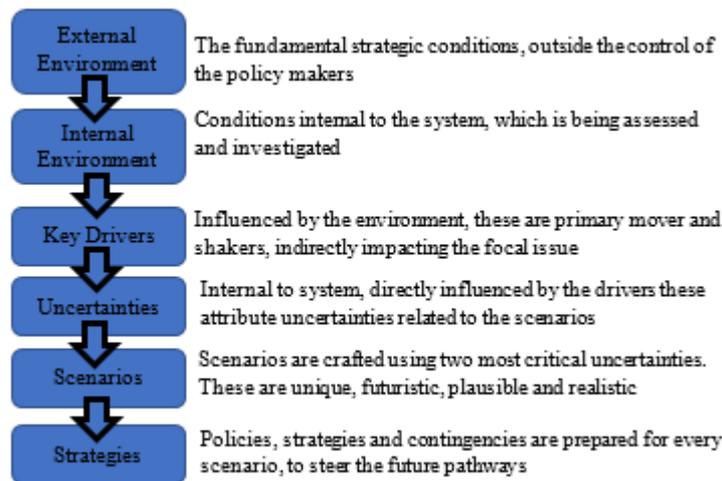
Scenario building, also known as scenario planning, is an important strategic planning tool used to craft long-term plans, considering the uncertainties of the future and their likely impact on the likely outcomes of probable situations. It assists policymakers in envisioning the different courses of action available and the potential consequences of each, thus empowering them to anticipate and apply course corrections proactively. The techniques involve several steps, starting the process by identifying the focal issue (Schwartz, 1991, p. 45), followed by identification of key drivers and uncertainties (Schoemaker, 1995). The two most influential uncertainties qualifying on the uncertainty and impact index are identified and plotted on the scenario matrix. Through this process, four scenarios emerge based on different combinations of chosen critical uncertainties. As a litmus test, the scenarios generated should be unique and diverse, covering a wide array of possibilities, challenging the established thinking (Van der Heijden, 1996, pp. 12-14). Accordingly, the risk mitigation and application strategies are prepared for each scenario (Peterson, Cumming, & Carpenter, 2003). These scenarios are not absolute but instead fluid in nature, thus demanding continuous monitoring and updation. The external environment is continuously monitored, and accordingly, changes are made (Ringland, 2006, pp. 89-92). Correspondingly, strategy changes are implemented as course corrections.

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Nonetheless, it needs to be understood that scenario building is not about predicting the future but rather providing a structured model to visualize key factors and their impacts, which can shape it. In scenario building, identifying all key drivers and uncertainties and then shortlisting the two most significant uncertainties is the most crucial step, which decides the efficacy of the scenarios crafted. Figure 1 below illustrates the whole process by defining the key ingredients, their hierarchy, role, and impact on each other.

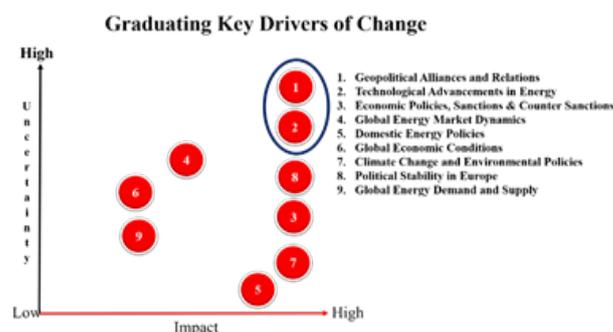


**Figure-1: Key Ingredients**

## 2. IDENTIFICATION AND GRADUATING KEY DRIVER.

Based on the impact and uncertainty indices, the key drivers have been ranked 1-9: 1 representing the highly uncertain with the highest impact, while 9, representing the low impact and less uncertain. Figure 2 below displays the graduation matrix of all key drivers discussed below:

- Key Driver 1: Geopolitical Alliances and Relations. This driver is highly impactful and also highly unpredictable. Such drivers can significantly influence uncertainties and probable futures. The War can drastically influence the alliances and relations among key players, impacting the energy security of Western Europe.
- Key Driver 2: Technological Advancements in Energy. This driver is high-impact and highly uncertain, depending on multiple factors such as the flow of investments, regional and national policies, shelf lives of these technologies, market competition by China offering low-price solutions, efficiency vs. cost matrix, availability of CRMs, and cyber threats.

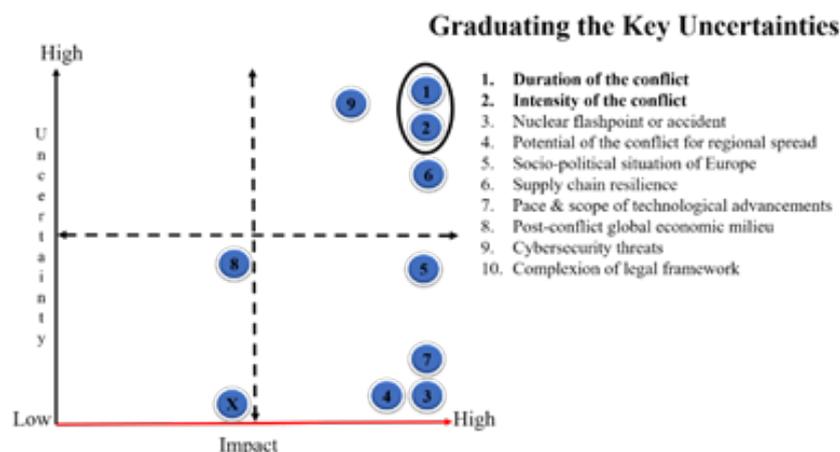


**Figure-2: Graduation Matrix of All Key Drivers**

- Key Driver 3: Economic Policies, Sanctions, and Counter Sanctions. This driver has a high impact but is moderately uncertain. Such drivers play a significant role in shaping future scenarios but are comparatively predictable and not entirely dependent on the external environment.
- Key Driver 4: Global Energy Market Dynamics. Diversification of sources and suppliers will moderately impact Western Europe's energy security. On the other hand, owing to the role of global powers and international organizations, there will be moderate uncertainty.
- Key Driver 5: Domestic Energy Policies. Domestic energy policies that are internally managed and controlled at the EU level will be more predictable and, in return, have a significant impact on Europe's energy security.
- Key Driver 6: Global Economic Conditions/ Health. The global recession is not in favour of any country or region, is less likely to occur, and similarly will have a relatively lesser impact.
- Key Driver 7: Climate Change and Environmental Policies. Though Europe is bound to follow international protocols on environmental protection, this issue is internal to the EU, which is otherwise vigorously pursuing its climate-neutral goals. Therefore, it will be more predictable with high impact.
- Key Driver 8: Political Stability in Europe. The EU has so far been successful in presenting a unified and cohesive front. However, due to the nature of future issues on energy security among member states and the internal socio-political dynamics of these countries, this driver has ranked high on impact and moderate on certainty.
- Key Driver 9: Global Energy Demand and Supply. Europe has been able to find alternative routes and suppliers. In addition to its own extensive drive for renewables, the global energy demand and supply would be low in impact and uncertainty.

### 3. IDENTIFICATION AND SELECTION OF TWO KEY UNCERTAINTIES.

Figure 3 below displays the graduation matrix of all (10) key uncertainties, and also figure-outs the selection of two key uncertainties:



**Figure-3: Graduation Matrix of All Key Uncertainties**

- Key Uncertainty-1: Duration of the Conflict (Prolonged or Short). The duration of the Russo-Ukraine War, shortened or prolonged, will have the most significant impact on Western Europe's energy security. The extended length of the War would continue to hurt the energy supply chain, with the inherent capability to affect the price volatility of energy products.

- Key Uncertainty-2: Intensity of the Conflict (High or Low). The intensity of the conflict decides the nature and degree of damage. If the conflict remains low in intensity for a prolonged duration, it will continue negatively impacting the economy and energy security.
- Key Uncertainty-3: Nuclear Flashpoint or Accident (High or Low). The nuclear flashpoint is a remote possibility but can have disastrous effects if it materializes. It can either be a planned occurrence against the opponent or accidental, like a Chernobyl nuclear power plant episode.
- Key Uncertainty-4: Potential of the Conflict for Regional Spread (Most Likely or Less Likely). The spread of the Russo-Ukraine War to geographically contiguous Eastern Europe or beyond will endanger or may even make the energy supply lines redundant.
- Key Uncertainty-5: Socio-political Situation of Europe (Stable or Volatile). The socio-political turmoil in Western Europe, owing to any reason, shortages of energy supplies, energy price hikes, inflation, excessive immigration and refugee load, and concerns over the loss of biodiversity and natural habitat, will lead to reduced focus on energy security measures.
- Key Uncertainty-6: Supply Chain Resilience (Robust or Fragile). Western Europe's supply chain resilience, as an outcome of various energy initiatives, positive or negative, will impact the region's energy security drive.
- Key Uncertainty-7: Pace and Scope of Technological Advancements (Rapid or Slow). The slow pace and limited scope of energy-related technological advancements in Western Europe will keep Europe dependent on existing energy sources and external sources. However, rapid breakthroughs would free Europe from outside dependencies, thereby adequately addressing its energy security vulnerabilities.
- Key Uncertainty-8: Post-conflict Global Economic Milieu (Economic Growth or Recession). Post-conflict economic growth would yield increased economic activity, including enhanced investments in energy infrastructure and a stabilized energy market, thereby positively impacting the energy security of Western Europe. In contrast, the post-conflict recession would seriously impinge upon the investments in the energy sector, especially the EU's drive for renewables.
- Key Uncertainty-9: Cybersecurity Threats (High or Low). High cybersecurity threats would make Europe's energy infrastructures vulnerable to frequent disruptions, damages, and losses, while low cybersecurity threats would reflect effective countermeasures applied, thus ensuring the robustness, reliability, and integrity of these systems.
- Key Uncertainty-10: Complexion of Legal Framework (Proactive or Reactive). The proactive approach to formulation and implementation of legal frameworks concerning Europe's energy security would involve an anticipatory mechanism to address issues before they arise. On the other hand, the reactive approach would cost Europe legal delays, misinterpretations, violations, and even loss of capital and resources.

#### **4. EXPLANATION OF SCENARIO BUILDING MATRIX.**

The scenario-building matrix is given in Figure 4 below. The explanation of the matrix is as follows:

- Constant Values: A 2x2 standard matrix has been used to plot the uncertainties, duration of the conflict on the Y axis, and the intensity of the conflict on the X axis. Both axes represent maximum and minimum ends; the duration of the conflict is prolonged and short, while the intensity of the conflict is high and low. The general convention of 4 quadrants has been followed, from Q1 (right top corner) to Q2, Q3, and Q4 (right bottom corner) in anti-clock direction. Similarly, the standard values have been used for each quarter; Q1 (+, +), Q2 (-, +), Q3 (-, -) and Q4 (+, -), where positive values denote increase, while negative values represent decrease or negative trends.

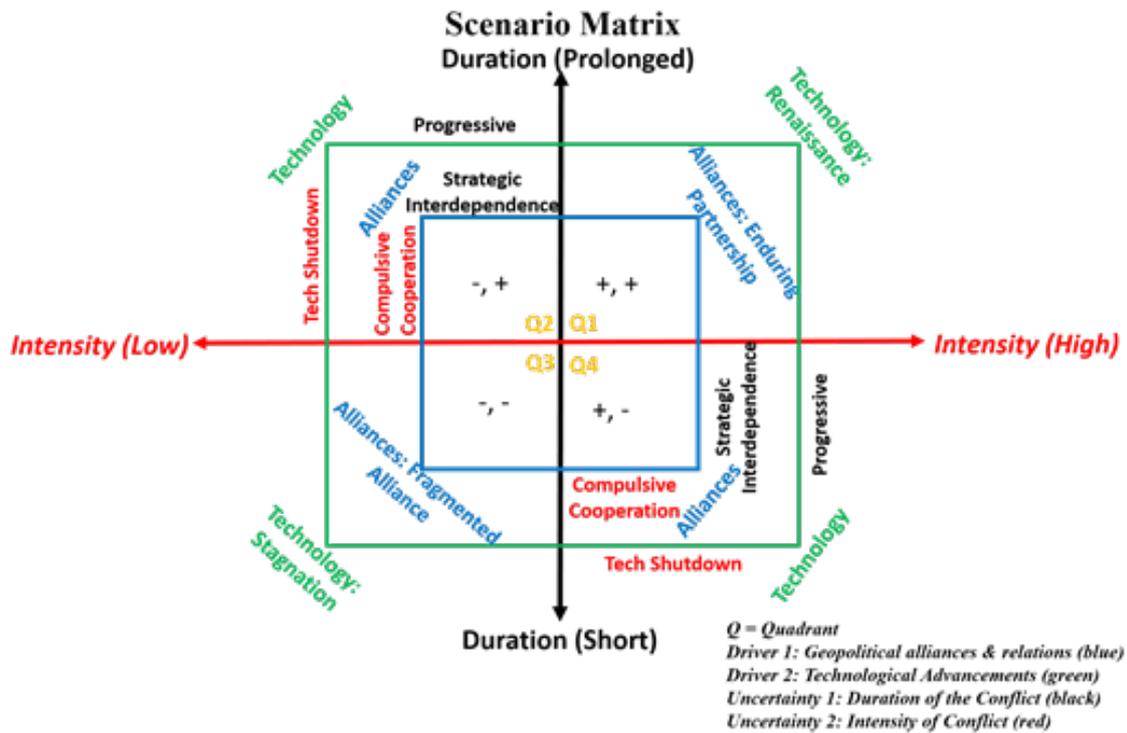


Figure-4: The Scenario-Building Matrix

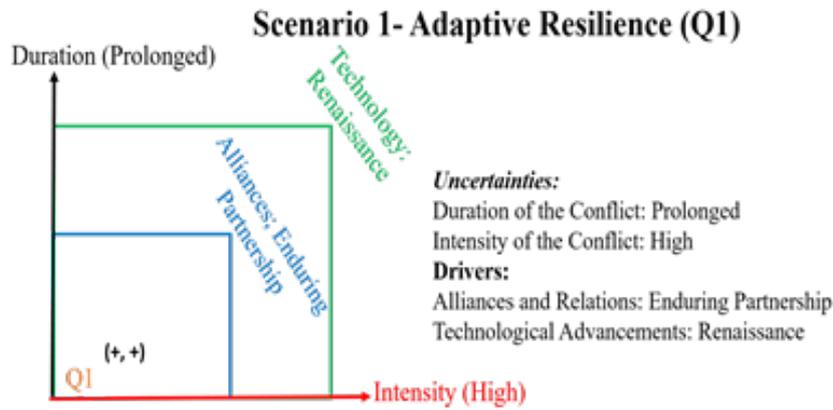
- Two primary drivers chosen from the integrated SWOT-PESSTEL analysis with the highest uncertainty and impact have been drawn as blue (alliances and relations) and green (technological advancements in energy) boxes.
- Q1 and Q3 are based on similar values (+, +) and (-, -), respectively; therefore, the highest and worst shades of alliances and technological advancements have been grouped. On the other hand, Q2 and Q3 carry positive as well as negative values, (-, +) and (+, -) respectively; the 2 middle shades of these drivers have been clubbed with these, thus will have two sub-scenarios each.

## 5. SCENARIOS.

The details of different scenarios by pitching two critical drivers and two critical uncertainties are covered in the ensuing paragraphs:

### 5.1. Scenario 1: Adaptive Resilience (based on values in Q1) •

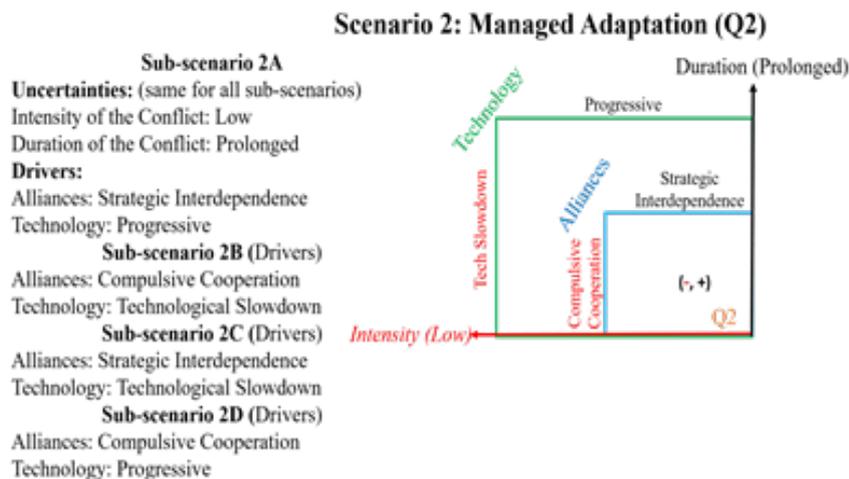
- Scenario Statement. The war in Ukraine is prolonged and intense. However, despite severe external challenges, the EU internally leverages its diplomatic and technological strengths to achieve energy resilience.



- Explanation. The prolonged and intense Russo-Ukraine war has caused serious energy supply chain disruptions. However, the EU vigorously pursues its renewable energy drive through an accelerated technological surge to effectively minimize its need for fossil fuels. In addition, by exploiting its diplomatic influence, the EU successfully negotiates secured energy deals with alternative suppliers. It would demand primarily an Inward-out approach.
- Strategic Recommendation. Converting a challenge into an opportunity would require fast-tracked technological investments, enhanced and speedy technological output, consolidation of alliances within and with extra-regional partners, accelerated energy diversification, upgraded energy supply chain resilience, and formulation and practice of contingency plans.

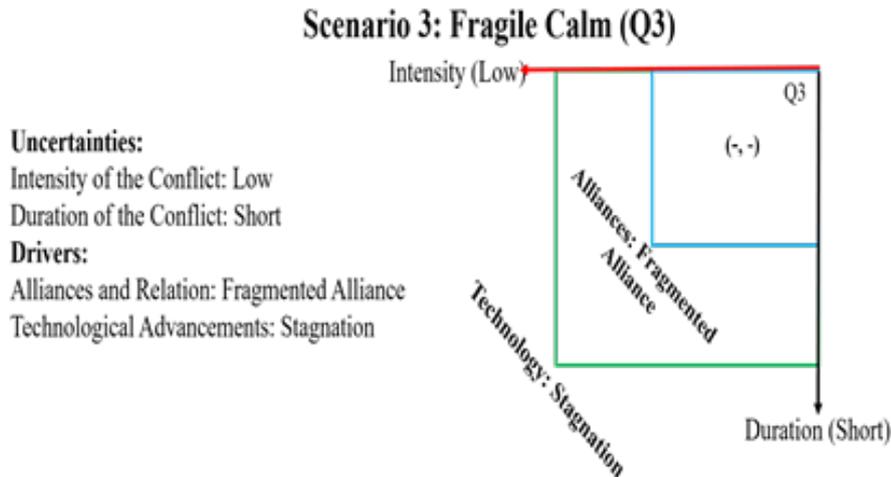
### 5.2. Scenario 2: Managed Adaptation (based on values in Q2)

- Scenario Statement. Western Europe manages adaptation to low-intensity and prolonged conflict in Ukraine by leveraging its internal strengths in technology and geostrategic alliances to mitigate energy security risks.



- Explanation. Both external factors (uncertainties) have negative trends, prolonged duration, and low-intensity conflicts that impact the energy security of Western Europe. However, the internal strengths in technological advancements and relations within and outside are capitalized to address the energy concerns. The uncertainties, duration (prolonged) and intensity (low), representing absolute positive and negative values, are constant and plotted along the Y and X axes. As in this quadrant, both values are different (-,+), and two moderate shades for each of the two key drivers, technological advancements and geostrategic alliances, have been used. In technological advancements, ‘progressive’ being positive is aligned with the Y axis, while ‘Technological slowdown’ is more towards the declining trend and is aligned with the negative X axis.
- Similarly, regarding geostrategic alliances, ‘strategic interdependence’, which has an upward trend, is aligned with the positive Y axis. In contrast, ‘compulsive cooperation’, which represents a declining trend, is aligned with the negative X axis. As a result, this scenario has been further divided into four sub-scenarios.
- Sub-Scenario 2A: Alliances- strategic interdependence and Technology-progressive. In this sub-scenario upper shade positive values from both drivers have been taken. Despite external odds, prolonged duration, and low intensity of conflict, Europe moderately exploits its technological strength to expedite the renewable energy drive and conduct meaningful negotiations and agreements with other energy partners for assured and price-competitive energy supplies. The policy directions in this regard are: firstly, increased funding for R&D as well as investments in renewables. Secondly, strike better energy deals with partners by taking advantage of its diplomatic influence.
- Sub-Scenario 2B: Compulsive Cooperation and Technological Slowdown. In this scenario, lower shades of both the key drivers have been picked. Out of the four scenarios in Q2, this sub-scenario poses the maximum challenge, where alliances are not voluntary but instead driven by necessity and, therefore, not dependable in the long term. Similarly, technological growth is on a declining trajectory, but it is still better than technological stagnation. The policy directions in this regard are firstly, efforts supplemented by increased investments to improve technological drive towards renewables, thus offsetting the chances of dependence on other markets. Secondly, work on improving the energy relations, inside-out.
- Sub-Scenario 2C: Strategic interdependence and technological slowdown. With prolonged low-intensity conflict in Ukraine, Western Europe manages to harness its geostrategic relations within Europe and abroad; however, it fails to fully maximize its technological potential, primarily due to a lack of investments, slow pace of R&D, delayed deployment of requisite infrastructures and being less competitive in the international market. In this scenario, the recommended policy directions are: firstly, a renewed focus on technological investments and developments for speedy recovery and, secondly, leveraging relations with partners like the US to accelerate its technological drive in joint ventures.
- Sub-Section 2D: Compulsive Cooperation and Progressive Technology. This scenario is the reverse of scenario 2C, where despite lesser cooperation among allies, the individual countries of the EU enthusiastically pursue their technological expedition. The suggested policy directions in this regard are addressing the irritants that are hurdles in the way of fostering stronger relations inside-out and maximizing the existing strengths in a unified response while minimizing the centrifugal forces. Secondly, continue pursuing technological goals, reducing production time and cost, making the products more competitive in the international market, thus reducing own dependence on external players instead of increasing their dependence on EU’s technology.

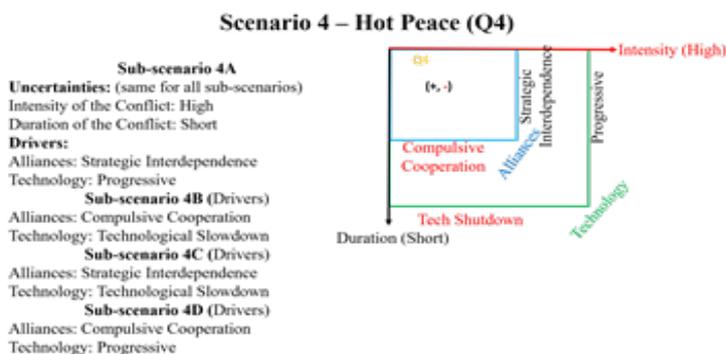
### 5.3. Scenario 3: Fragile Calm (based on values in Q3)



- **Scenario Statement.** In “Fragile Calm,” the duration of the conflict is short. Following Ukraine’s surrender or backing out from claims to join EU/ NATO, which may usher in a period of Low-Intensity Conflict (LIC), the EU’s technological drive faces stagnation due to the military threat on its borders. The alliance is fractured, especially if the USA distances itself from the EU and China sides with Russia.
- **Explanation.** The abrupt end of the Ukraine war, against the liking of Europe, stemming LIC, can be highly detrimental to the EU’s geostrategic and geo-economic objectives in the region. The situation can get further aggravated if the new regime in the US abandons EU/NATO and, at the same time, China plays a more assertive role in geopolitics. This will not adversely impact the EU’s cohesion, but would also force the member states to divert their resources towards physical security more than energy security. Besides military threats knocking on Eastern Europe’s border, the increased influx of refugees can create a humanitarian crisis.
- **Strategic Recommendations.** If this scenario materializes, it will demand a major overhaul of the EU’s policies, including its foreign and energy security policies. As a result, new geostrategic alignments will emerge, forcing Europe to recalibrate its relations and stance. Nonetheless, the moderate to softer stance towards Russia will rehabilitate the historic energy supplies, offering time for Europe to revitalize its technological base, aiming at energy independence in the future.

### 5.4. Scenario 4: Hot Peace (based on values in Q4)

- **Scenario Statement.** The conflict in Ukraine is intense but settles down quickly. The EU navigates through different sets of possibilities concerning its future alliances and technological pace—the external environment plays a crucial role in shaping the internal dynamics of Europe.

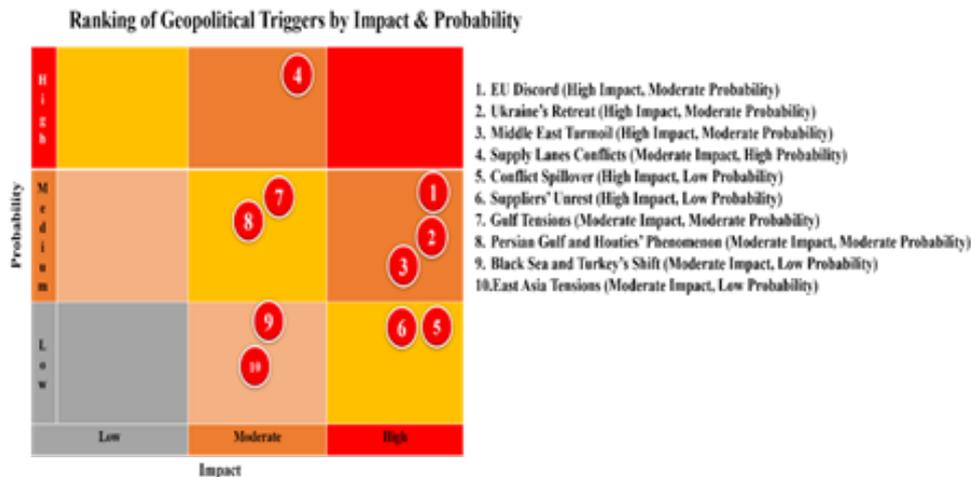


- Explanation. The quick resolution of the conflict can be a result of either of the contenders or both backing off from their present stance and agreeing to renegotiate. The scenario will become more plausible if the USA distances itself from EU/NATO. The ‘uncertainties’ are the reverse of scenario 2, while drivers remain the same. The scenario has different values; (+, -) will have multiple permutations, but the four most significant combinations have been picked, similar to scenario 2. The term ‘Hot Peace’, denoting the return of peace at a higher cost, is opposite to ‘Cold War’, which is prolonged low-intensity tensions.
- Sub-Scenario 4A: Strategic Interdependence and Progressive Technological Outlook. The conflict resolves quickly with heavy human and material costs, offering a chance to strive for its strategic interdependence by further cementing the EU’s cohesion while focusing on its technological prowess. The recommended policy directions in this scenario would be to first support the peace process between Russia and Ukraine by playing an active role, thereby renegotiating future security adjustments. Secondly, the focus should be on internal dynamics, including cooperation at the EU level and pursuing a collective technological drive to achieve energy independence in the mid-and long term.
- Sub-Scenario 4B: Compulsive Cooperation and Technological Slowdown. Despite its short duration, the conflict in Ukraine is intense, exacerbating European challenges. Western Europe struggles to meet its energy needs due to fractured alliances primarily driven by the necessity and slowing technological progress. The EU is heading towards international isolation, with its traditional partners recalibrating their foreign policy options. The much-needed finances to propel technological drive are directed to address physical security concerns. In this regard, the policy directions are as follows: firstly, realign its foreign policy quickly and correctly, based on the emerging geostrategic landscape, and divorcing the wrong obsession of the past. Secondly, after negotiating the physical security concerns, invest the requisite funds in renewables, thus addressing the concerns of comprehensive security.
- Sub-Scenario 4C: Strategic Interdependence and Technological Slowdown. The conflict in Ukraine settles down quickly with higher costs; Europe succeeds in achieving strategic interdependence among member states and favourable support from outside. Nonetheless, the threats continue looming on borders, forcing them to divert resources needed for accelerated technological progression. Europe remains dependent on external players and suppliers for their energy supplies and support. Energy security remains at serious risk, vulnerable to exploitation in any energy crisis. The policy directions in this regard are: firstly, carefully weigh the options before going into new alliances, and secondly, pool up resources to pursue its renewables initiatives. In addition, Europe will have to establish regional energy hubs as a result of joint ventures while drastically reducing demand and consumption.
- Sub-Scenario 4D: Compulsive Cooperation and Progressive Technology. The necessity-driven compulsive cooperation among member states in the face of intense but short-duration conflict in Ukraine, with serious EU efforts to speed up its energy independence through accelerated technological advancements in the energy sector, especially renewables. The conflict wanes quickly but expensively, emanating no direct physical threat, thus sparing investments and focus for technological pursuits in the energy sector. The policy directions are as follows: firstly, while delinking and distancing itself from the conflicting parties, the EU should be more concerned about the emerging balance of power in the region while addressing its future security concerns. Secondly, by securing projected security adjustments, Europe to spare enhanced funding for energy independence through technological progress.

## 6. POTENTIAL TRIGGERS IMPACTING ENERGY SECURITY IN WESTERN EUROPE

### 6.1. Geopolitical Triggers:

- EU Discord (High Impact, Moderate Probability). The dissensions within the EU, in the case of the Russo-Ukraine war, and certain countries are hit more adversely than others, though a moderate probability, but if it happens, it can have a high impact on the energy security of Western Europe. Such disagreements, if not addressed in time, especially if the US distances itself from the EU, can prove dangerous for Western Europe.



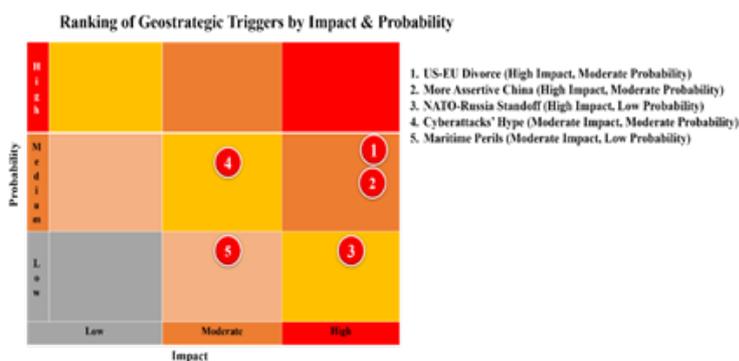
- Ukraine's Retreat (High Impact, Moderate Probability). If Ukraine lets go of its aspirations to join EU/NATO, though it has a moderate probability, it can profoundly impact Western Europe's energy security. This trigger will alter the balance of power in the region. It will also have the potential to undermine the unity within Europe, where countries may look for geopolitical and geo-economic realignments. In this case, the strategic choices available to the EU would be; cooling off the political temperature in the region, pacification efforts to normalize relations with Russia abstaining NATO from further expansion towards Russia's backyard, developing and securing alternative transit routes like Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) from Azerbaijan through Caspian region to Europe and its three pipeline segments namely; The South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) from Azerbaijan to Turkey through Georgia, The Trans- Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) across Turkey to the Greek border, and the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) through Greece, Albania, and under the Adriatic Sea to Italy.
- Middle East Turmoil (High Impact, Moderate Probability). The Middle Eastern region is crucial for global energy supply, especially in Western Europe. If the ongoing Palestine-Israel conflict gets aggravated and involves regional players, it can severely impact the energy supply chain, thus causing price volatility. The EU, reducing its historic reliance on Russian fossil fuels, has contracted new suppliers from MENA for oil and gas imports; states like Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, and Egypt as alternative energy suppliers. The Widespread conflict in the region can endanger Western Europe's energy security. If this trigger gets actuated, Europe has the strategic choices to keep the conflict localized, work on conflict resolution, accelerate the renewables drive, maximize emergency storage, increase energy interconnectedness among member states, and reduce its dependence on energy supplies from other regions like North America.

- **Supply Lines' Conflicts (Moderate Impact, High Probability).** This trigger relates to disruptions seriously affecting critical energy transmission routes, pipelines, or maritime routes. Such issues can arise from the increased geopolitical tensions in regions like the Middle East, the Black Sea, and the Persian Gulf, through which vital energy supply lines pass. Western Europe depends on an intricate network of maritime energy routes and a complex network of pipelines, which renders this trigger a higher probability with moderate impact. The disruption in one segment of a pipeline or route would make the whole supply line redundant. In this regard, the tensions or blockade in the Strait of Hormuz, tensions over SGC in Eastern Europe or damage to energy infrastructures in the conflict zone are a few significant examples relating to the energy security of Western Europe. The strategic choices for Europe in this regard are enhanced security of critical pipelines, collaborative maritime security of energy supply routes, diversification of suppliers and supply lines, increased LNG import capacity, enhanced deployment of Floating Storage Regasification Units (FSRUs) as a quick fix solution to pipeline disruptions, improved strategic energy reserves capacity, effective cybersecurity mechanism, besides effective diplomatic outreach.
- **Conflict Spillover (High Impact, Low Probability).** This trigger denotes the spread of armed conflict in different forms, low, medium or high, extending the boundaries of the conflict zone beyond Ukraine and into Eastern Europe. The probability of this trigger getting actuated is low due to NATO's presence and international pressure, but if it occurs, it will have a high impact on the energy security of Western Europe. The spillover to Eastern Europe, Caucasus, towards the Caspian Sea or the Black Sea, besides endangering the energy supply routes, would also drag the broader geographic zone into conflict. The strategic choices for Western Europe in this regard are; proactive diplomatic engagement to quarantine the conflict zone, effective deterrence, meaningful but defensive NATO signatures and posturing, enhanced eastern cooperation and partnership, diversified energy suppliers and routes, fully operational and commissioned emergency response mechanism, and taking advantage of global energy spot markets.
- **Suppliers' Unrest (High Impact, Low Probability).** This trigger refers to the socio-political or armed conflict in key energy-producing regions, where these events can disrupt energy production and supply of oil, gas, coal or CRMs. Despite its low probability of occurrence, the impact would be severe for the energy security of Western Europe. The countries where suppliers' unrest can impact energy imports to Europe are Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Nigeria and Venezuela. The strategic choices for Europe in this regard are pacification of conflict, support for reconciliation among warring factions, international energy partnerships with other major energy-consuming and producing countries, improved strategic reserves, reduced consumption and energy efficiency, accelerated renewable energy drive, and diversification of suppliers and sources.
- **Persian Gulf and Houthies' Phenomenon (Moderate Impact, Moderate Probability).** The Persian Gulf is a region of immense importance for the global energy supply chain, being the hub of energy. However, the region has an equally volatile security situation with sleeping conflicts. Due to international stakes in the area, the probability of this trigger is moderate, with a moderate impact on the energy security of Western Europe. With the Saudi-Iran historic rivalry, the Houthi phenomenon is the latest version of rivalry, where, besides challenging Saudi Arabia, they have successfully targeted ships carrying oil and supplies for Israel. These attacks have exacerbated the regional instability mosaic, endangering the future of maritime energy transmission routes like Bab al-Mandab, which are critical for oil and gas supplies via the Suez Canal if they get aggravated. The strategic choices for Western Europe in this regard are enhanced maritime security through collaboration with the International Task Force, escort services from GCC, strengthened intelligence sharing and surveillance, support regional stability initiatives through strategic partners like the US, KSA and UAE, increased reserves for increased disruptions and emergencies, diversification of energy suppliers from alternative routes, and augmented diplomatic engagement to resolve issues.

- **Black Sea and Turkey's Shift (Moderate Impact, Low Probability).** The Black Sea region carries enormous strategic value for energy transmission, particularly gas pipelines from the Caspian region to Europe. Along this supply route and in the region, Turkey is a transit country and a regional power. Though low probability, if it materializes, it will have a moderate impact on the energy security of Western Europe. A shift in Turkey's foreign policy or geostrategic realignment, pivoting away from EU or NATO, and being frustrated by the EU's promises for membership can significantly impact the energy transit dynamics. This may affect the energy supply through TANP or exploiting critical chokepoints like the Bosphorus Strait. The strategic choices for Western Europe in this regard are strengthening the bilateral energy transit agreement with Turkey for secured supplies, working for enhanced regional cooperation, reevaluating the possibility of extension of EU/NATO membership to Turkey, and engaging in multilateral efforts for a regional security framework for the Black Sea, besides energy security measures at EU level.
- **East Asia Tensions (Moderate Impact, Low Probability).** Although the probability of this trigger getting activated is low, it will moderately impact the energy supply chain. The tensions in East Asia may involve the region's economic giants, including China, South Korea, Japan and Taiwan, with an extended impact on the global economy. The major potential flashpoints include the tensions in the South China Sea, the Taiwan issue, rivalry between China and Japan in the East China Sea over the Sankaku Islands, and a territorial dispute with South Korea in the Yellow Sea. The strategic choices in this regard are collective security arrangements with strategic partners like Japan, long-term LNG contracts with alternative suppliers, enhanced maritime security through strategic partners like the US and Japan, and pursue own renewable energy drive.

## 6.2. Geostrategic Triggers:

- **US-EU Divorce (High Impact, Moderate Probability).** With moderate possibility, the severing of the relations between the weather geostrategic partners will have a high impact on the energy security of Western Europe. The new regime in the US after upcoming elections, if it decides to distance itself from the EU/NATO by adopting unilateral policies, will drastically affect strategic cooperation between the two on key issues: collective security, energy and trade. The US may continue offering energy exports and conditional diplomatic support, but this will raise serious concerns for the EU's future alignments, which have followed the US strategic direction since World War II. Though low in probability, the trigger, if activated, will be the game changer to reshape the geostrategic landscape of Europe. The strategic choices in this regard available to Western Europe are a proactive approach towards reevaluation and recalibration of foreign policy, pacification and normalization of relations with Russia and other rivals of the past, resuscitating energy supplies from Russia and gradually reducing the size while pursuing diversification effort, efforts to rejuvenate transatlantic alliance, strengthen intra-EU energy collaboration through EU energy union and more meaningful regional energy partnerships, and increased investments in defence and security within Europe.

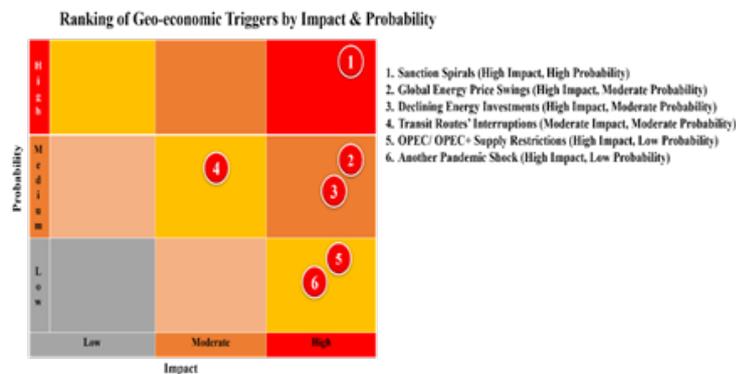


- **More Assertive China (High Impact, Moderate Probability).** In pursuit of claiming its renewed role in global politics, China adopts a mixed proactive and assertive foreign policy option, overtly displaying its regional power. Though moderate in probability, the trigger will have a high impact on the region's geostrategic landscape, especially Western Europe's energy security. The increased tensions in East Asia, the Taiwan issue, lingering territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas, enhanced realization of BRI, increased military signatures in the Indian Ocean and Asia Pacific region challenging the US supremacy, and geostrategic partnership with Iran, would significantly impact the energy supply routes, as well as EU's strategic partnership with her allies like Japan. The manifestation of this trigger would reflect power transition, which may not be in absolute terms but in a specific region- the Asia Pacific region. The space ceded by the US is immediately occupied by China, playing a more assertive role as a regional uncontested power. The strategic choices for Western Europe in this regard are renegotiating its future relations with China, enhancing diplomatic engagements, cementing regional cooperation within the EU, balancing its diversified trade and economic ties with China and transatlantic region, focusing on Eastern Mediterranean and African energy partnerships, diversification of energy sources and suppliers, with increased energy reserves and energy interconnectedness among member states.
- **NATO-Russia Standoff (High Impact, Low Probability).** Either the War in Ukraine gets intense, raising serious concerns of a humanitarian crisis, it spreading beyond Ukraine into Eastern Europe, or episodes of evidence reflecting each other's involvement in domestic affairs, including increased cyberattacks, will have the potential to pitch Russia and NATO directly in conflictual situations. The tensions escalating from minor occurrences, disproportionate responses, and exaggerated posturing, resulting in limited military conflict, can prove extremely detrimental to Europe's geostrategic and geoeconomic position, ultimately impacting its energy security. With low probability, the trigger has a high impact, given the higher stakes involved, and the consequences can be severe. The strategic choices for Western Europe if this trigger gets actuated are; pacification of situations through extensive proactive diplomatic engagement, diversification of energy supply sources, enhanced renewable energy drive leveraging her technological advancements and strong base, and other internal measures to improve EU's internal comprehensive security apparatuses including energy security.
- **Cyberattacks' Hype (Moderate Impact, Moderate Probability).** The increased volume of attacks and their sophistication in execution make energy infrastructures extremely vulnerable to extended damages. These attacks can be state-sponsored or by hacktivist individuals or groups. In either case, the sides would blame the states, not the individuals. Though the probability of such massive attacks is moderate due to enhanced security shields, the impact on Western Europe's economy, especially the energy sector, would range from high to moderate. The heightened cybersecurity risks would drain Europe's resources and efforts. The strategic choices for Western Europe to safeguard its energy security are augmented and interconnected cyber defence systems insulating its energy infrastructures, effective surveillance, monitoring, joint reporting and incidents response mechanism, strengthening international protocols on cybersecurity and orchestrating global security alliances for joint efforts for protection and response, stringent regulatory frameworks, enhance energy resilience through backup systems and diplomatic engagement of opposing sides to avoid in attacking critical energy infrastructures.
- **Maritime Perils (Moderate Impact, Low Probability).** These denote maritime threats to the energy supply chain and routes due to increased geopolitical tensions. If blocked partially or entirely, the critical maritime chokepoints can seriously impact the global energy supply chain, including energy supplies to Western Europe. These risks can emanate from tensions among littoral states, piracy, and environmental disasters. Low in probability, fewer environmental disasters, due to serious international concerns, will have a moderate impact on Western Europe's energy security in the presence of alternative routes and suppliers. The energy supply chain of Western Europe is reliant on critical maritime choke points like the Strait of Hormuz, between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman a vital passage of oil and gas for global market including Europe, Suez Canal (between Mediterranean Sea and Red Sea in Egypt, carrying oil and gas tankers for Europe and North America), Bab al-Mandeb

(on the mouth of Arabian Peninsula, with Yemen enjoying considerable influence over it, the location is vital for energy supplies from the Middle East to Suez Canal and onward to Europe, and Strait of Malacca (primarily important for supplies from Persian Gulf to Asia). In addition, certain critical pipeline chokepoints are crucial for secured and assured energy transmission to Europe. These include the Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline, the Georgia-Turkey border, Turkey's Eastern region and the Turkey-Greek border region; the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC), Azerbaijan-Georgia border and mountainous region in Georgia; Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP): Greek-Albanian border, Adriatic Sea crossing and Italy's landing point, TurkStream Pipeline: Black Sea crossing, Turkey's Thrace region and Balkan connections. These maritime and critical points on pipelines are crucial for the energy supply chain. the strategic choices for Western Europe in this regard are; collaboration with partners for enhanced security at these chokepoints, strengthened diplomatic engagements, proactive maritime security in unison with partners like the US, diversified energy suppliers and routes, and effective contingency plans.

### 6.3. Geoeconomic Triggers:

- **Sanction Spirals (High Impact, High Probability).** The EU levied sanctions on Russia, and in response, Russia imposed counter-sanctions on the EU, which has set the sanctions' spiral in motion. Besides economic complexities, this has seriously impacted the geostrategic landscape of the region, with serious consequences for the energy security of Western Europe in the mid to long term. The energy shortages, price hikes and inflation have already hit Europe's economy badly, while Russia has significantly adjusted itself with sanctions by finding alternative markets and buyers. With sanctions and counter-sanctions already in place, the probability of further escalation is very high, with an even higher impact. If extended more, this downward spiral can be out of control and may lead to a severe energy security crisis. The strategic choices in this regard for Western Europe are to de-escalate the situation, reevaluate the efficacy of these sanctions as these have failed to achieve intended results and continue to proactively pursue internal measures to mitigate the risks of the energy crisis.



- **Global Energy Price Swings (High Impact, Moderate Probability).** The world, in general, and Europe in particular, has witnessed unprecedented energy shortages, price hikes and energy inflation since the start of the war. Any further energy disruptions due to geopolitical tensions in the Middle East or along any other choke point would cause a surge in global energy prices, especially in Western Europe's energy market. Such energy price swings are detrimental to markets and investors' confidence, besides increasing the cost of living for the commoner. The strategic choices in this regard are enhanced engagement of international and domestic market players to manage prices, strengthened regional cooperation through the EU Energy Union to collectively respond to price swings, cross-border interconnectedness to support each other in case of a severe energy emergency, enhanced domestic market transparency, supporting energy efficiency and demand response initiatives, long term energy contracts employing hedging strategies, fast-track renewable energy drive, and increased energy strategic reserves.

Due to an effective international mechanism to check undue price volatility, the probability of this trigger is moderate, but the impact is high if it occurs.

- **Declining Energy Investments (High Impact, Moderate Probability).** This trigger can actuate in multiple scenarios, where public and private investments in energy, especially the renewable energy sector, face a negative trend. At government levels, the potential reasons can be economic recession, economic constraints like the budget deficit, debt levels and economic priorities like defence, higher dependency on energy imports, and challenging market competition, such as from Chinese cost-effective products. Regarding private investments, the potential reasons for political instability are regulatory uncertainty, tough regulations, high market volatility, higher capital cost and lower returns, difficult access to financing, stricter lending criteria, consumer demand and public perception, and higher R&D and transition costs. The trigger has a moderate probability but can have a high impact on the energy security of Western Europe. The government's incentives and subsidies in renewables, public-private partnerships, nuclear energy expansion, business-friendly regulatory and policy framework, incentivizing low carbon investments, joint R&D to reduce the cost, joint investment initiatives at the EU level and with strategic partners, issuing green bonds to raise capital, and establishing public-private energy investment fund.
- **Transit Routes' Interruptions (Moderate Impact, Moderate Probability).** The conflict escalation, sanctions' spiral, physical or cyber-attacks against energy infrastructures, insecure land and maritime transit routes, port access restrictions, trade restrictions, and sudden changes in international regulatory compliances in transit countries may become the reasons to actuate this trigger. The probability is low due to international involvement and concerns, while it can moderately impact Western Europe's energy security. In this scenario, the strategic choices available to Western Europe would be increased diplomatic engagements to resolve the issue, security of transit through host countries, route and source diversification, efforts to enhance infrastructure resilience, and energy emergency response plans.
- **OPEC/ OPEC+ Supply Restrictions (High Impact, Low Probability).** Repeating the Oil Crisis of 1973 episode, the oil consortium may reduce production, cut supplies to certain countries or apply additional restrictions. Though the probability of this happening is low due to international oversight and concerns about revenue losses incurred by the OPEC countries, it will seriously impact Western Europe's energy security if it materializes. On one side, the EU has imposed sanctions on Russian oil, and on the other hand, OPEC applies restrictions that would adversely impact the global oil market, prices and availability. The increased tensions in the Middle East and especially in Palestine, where Muslim OPEC countries unanimously decide to use oil as a weapon or the West imposing economic sanctions against more OPEC countries, can actuate this trigger. The OPEC countries can use oil supply restrictions as political leverage to negotiate a favourable outcome in a geopolitical conflict. The strategic choices available to Western Europe in this regard would be alternative oil supply agreements with non-OPEC countries like the US and Canada, short-term spot market purchases, increased petroleum strategic reserves at EU and countries' levels, effective and proactive energy diplomacy, short-term oil market stabilization mechanism like price caps and subsidies to save domestic consumers and selected industries, and enhanced crisis management framework.
- **Another Pandemic Shock (High Impact, Low Probability).** The probability of serious supply chain disruption due to a pandemic is low, and now, the world, after experiencing COVID-19, is better prepared with contingency plans in place. Nonetheless, if it happens, it will seriously impact the global energy supply chain and Western Europe's energy security, which is highly dependent on energy imports. The strategic choices in this scenario are accelerated renewable energy drive, cross-border interconnectedness to support each other in a severe energy emergency, improved conservation and energy efficiency, enhanced storage and reserves, contingency plans to mitigate risks, and maximum usage of smart grids and other automated systems.

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## 7. CONCLUSION

A detailed sketching of scenarios related to the energy security of Western Europe amidst the Russo-Ukraine War has been conducted using the author's refined version of the scenario-building exercise. Two key drivers and uncertainties were identified by gauging their relevance on 'impact' and 'uncertainty' indices- the factors with the highest impact and uncertainty. By plotting two key uncertainties on the X and Y axes, impact on the X axis and intensity on the Y axis with two extreme shades on either end, the basic structure of scenarios was crafted based on a traditional scenario-building framework. Then, by employing my refined version of the scenario-building matrix, the two most critical drivers with four shades of impact levels were plotted to see how these drivers and uncertainties interact, resulting in the development of a number of plausible scenarios. Subsequently, critical potential triggers from geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic domains were identified, followed by proposing strategic choices available to Western Europe in response to these triggers. This wholesome exercise analyzes the complete context threadbare and offers potential scenarios and strategic choices for each, which can be of value to all policymakers in Europe.

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# The Consequences of the Trans-Caspian Pipeline on the Energy Security of Iran and Türkiye

Rahmat Hajimineh<sup>1</sup> , Ebrahim Rezaei Rad<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

Energy transmission lines have a critical position, impact on the economy, and have political and military dimensions. Due to being landlocked, Turkmenistan has tried to have plans to export natural gas to other parts of the world in the years after its independence from the former Soviet Union. Trans-Caspian pipeline is one of the plans. This article uses the theoretical framework of energy security and the combined method. The main question is, what are the consequences of the Trans-Caspian pipeline on the energy security of Iran and Turkey? The hypothesis of the research indicates that if the Trans-Caspian pipeline is implemented, this issue can weaken Iran's energy security by reducing its transit role, supply security, and environmental problem on the one hand and strengthening Turkey's transit and pivotal role in exporting natural gas to Europe on the other hand. The research findings indicate that implementing the Trans-Caspian pipeline reduces requires of Turkmenistan to Iran for gas export. This pipeline strengthens Turkey's transit role as an energy hub. Gas sources after the war in Ukraine can serve as an additional driver for the Trans-Caspian pipeline, and its connection to the southern gas corridor will increase the transit efficiency of this matter.

## Keywords

Trans-Caspian pipeline, Energy security, Iran, Türkiye, Turkmenistan

## 1. Introduction

Energy security, a term referring to the uninterrupted availability of energy at an affordable price, has become an essential and influential issue in the world. This can be seen in all aspects of life in global societies. For this reason, the countries of the world are trying to diversify their energy import and export routes based on energy security, and in the meantime, they are following plans. Considering the prominent role of natural gas and its very low pollution, as well as its use in industries and other cases such as use in homes, this issue has caused the countries of the world to look for their natural gas supply and the plans that import gas for the countries To provide the consumer and export of gas for producing countries(Marques,2018). This point has caused the natural gas transmission lines to become very important due to the geographical location.

Considering its geographical conditions, which do not have access to open waters and are landlocked, in the years after independence from the Soviet Union, Turkmenistan has been striving to export its natural gas to other parts of the world, such as Europe. Turkmenistan needs Iran to export natural gas to the Caucasus(Begjanov,20221). The Trans-Caspian pipeline project, which will transport Turkmenistan's natural gas to Azerbaijan and then to Europe, holds the promise of significant economic and strategic benefits. The creation of a gas pipeline, while causing geopolitical and security changes, especially in the field of energy security for neighboring countries, also opens up new opportunities for energy trade and cooperation. The two countries of Iran and Turkey, due to their proximity and connection with the Trans-Caspian pipeline, will experience different effects on their energy security.

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Considering that Iran is an energy producer and depends on Turkmenistan to export natural gas to the Caucasus, the new pipeline will have a serious impact on Iran's energy security. On the other hand, due to Turkey's presence on the route and its transit role, the implementation of the Trans-Caspian pipeline will fundamentally change the energy security of this country, like Iran. For Iran, the pipeline could potentially reduce its influence in the region, while for Turkey, it could enhance its role as a key energy transit hub.

This article uses the theoretical framework of energy security and the combined method. The main question is, what are the consequences of the Trans-Caspian pipeline on the energy security of Iran and Turkey? The hypothesis of the research indicates that if the Trans-Caspian pipeline is implemented, this issue can weaken Iran's energy security by reducing its transit role, supply security, and environmental problem on the one hand and strengthening Turkey's transit and pivotal role in exporting natural gas to Europe on the other hand. The research findings indicate that implementing the Trans-Caspian pipeline reduces the requirements of Turkmenistan to Iran for gas export. This pipeline strengthens Turkey's transit role as an energy hub. Gas sources after the war in Ukraine can serve as an additional driver for the Trans-Caspian pipeline, and its connection to the southern gas corridor will increase the transit efficiency of this matter.

## **2. Literature Review**

This section will review the research literature review on the article's topic.

Melintei (2021). In the article titled Energy Asymmetry of the Caspian Region Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline Project: An Opportunity to Strengthen the Security of European Energy, the author said that the Caspian Sea area has attracted the attention of the world's countries in several ways. On the one hand, conflicts in the post-Soviet space, and on the other hand, large reserves of fossil fuels. These dimensions have caused the aspect following several international actors' influence of the "Caspian dispute" to create a complicated situation. The essence of the "Caspian dispute" is both in controlling oil and gas production and controlling the routes, mainly land and submarine pipelines, through which energy resources are transferred to world markets. For this reason, in the current system of international relations, the Caspian Sea region achieves the "energy circle" position in Central Eurasia, where investments, interests, and initiatives of regional and global power centers will be concentrated in the next decade. As a result, the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline project becomes an opportunity to strengthen Europe's energy security, which can create a great rapport in this regard.

Shirvanova(2020). In The article titled Trans-Caspian gas pipeline-real Opportunities or Endless Promises. In this article, the author said that the energy wealth of Central Asia and the Caspian region is an important opportunity In fact, natural resources have become the driving force of the economy in regional development. Therefore, Fossil fossil fuel resources make this battle a great opportunity to expand into European markets and China. From this perspective, the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline can become a symbol of Iran-Eurasian communication in this article the current prospects and opportunities for the Implementation of the long-term Trans-Caspian gas pipeline project. This infrastructure can Turkmen gas can be transferred from Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan and from there to Europe thanks to the Southern Gas Transport Corridor. Such a global gas network Pipelines could connect Western Europe and the Far East thanks to Turkmenistan's gas reserves. But it seems that the implementation of the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline is far from reach The "responsibility" for this rests with the main partners and other regional stakeholders.

Cutler(2021). In The article titled The Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline for Peace-building in the South Caucasus. In this article, the author says that It expresses several recommendations and forecasts regarding the conditions of the Trans-Caspian pipeline and its effects. One of them is that Baku hopes for more active interaction with European partners. European Union observed that it was a peace process after the Second World War, which was first based on the recognition of physical borders and then gradually moving these borders to create a common space. This is the best model for the South Caucasus. The next recommendation is that peace in the South Caucasus also actually started with natural gas through the Southern Gas Corridor. The Trans-Caspian pipeline project also increases the security of supply, for example by diversifying routes through suitable connections on the one hand, and sustainability, for example by reducing emissions, supporting intermittent renewable generation, and increasing the deployment of renewable gases.

As can be seen, no research has done a detailed examination of the above research.

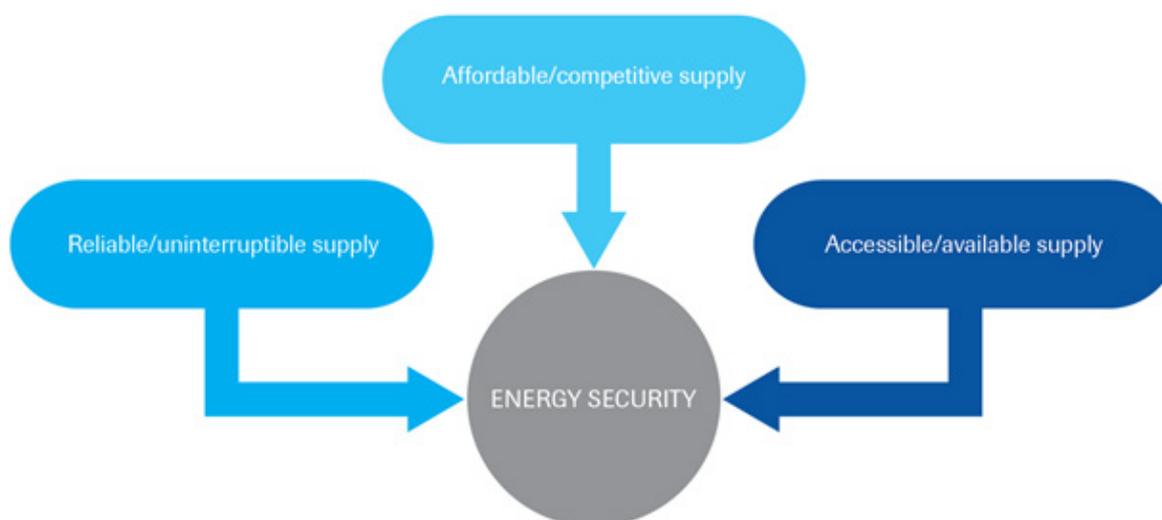
### **3.Theoretical Framework**

In the field of international relations, we are faced with a multitude of theoretical frameworks, each addressing distinct issues. However, the theoretical framework of energy security has emerged as a pivotal concept in recent years, particularly following global crises such as the Ukraine war. This has led nations to take a proactive stance, recognizing energy as a fundamental component of their security. This recognition has prompted the formulation of comprehensive energy security policies. To fully grasp the concept of energy security, we will first define it, then delve into its components and model, and finally explore the rationale for its use in this article.

Suppose we want to provide a simple definition. In that case, this definition is also a definition that the definition of energy security has gone beyond the initial definition of access and has taken in a broader dimension. Energy security includes a more comprehensive range of factors, often used as the four headings of energy security - availability, affordability, access, and acceptability. These four concepts are the main concepts of energy security(Jones,2017). Another definition of the concept of energy security belongs to the International Energy Agency, which considers energy security as uninterrupted access to energy resources at an economically justifiable price(IEA,2024). The critical issue in both types of definitions is access to energy at a reasonable price and permanently. This point shows that continuous access to energy at a reasonable price is essential for energy security. In addition, energy security has taken on broader dimensions in recent years, including environmental issues and sustainable development. European countries seek to replace renewable energies with fossil fuels due to environmental issues and high and fluctuating prices. That issue is a dimension of energy security: sustainable development.

Two essential concepts regarding energy security are the security of supply and demand and the diversification of energy export and import routes(Romanova,2013). Security of supply, used for countries that import or buy energy, is the same as that of European countries in this article. On the other hand, the security of demand for a country like Iran means that if the Trans-Caspian pipeline is implemented, it will decrease customers and sales of Iran's natural gas and Turkmenistan's dependence on Iran. On the other hand, one of the essential concepts in this regard is the diversification of export and import routes. Based on this, Turkmenistan tries to export gas to Europe through the Trans-Caspian pipeline, and Turkey also increases its transit role and plays a central role in this regard. For a better understanding of this issue, the conceptual model of energy security is given below, and explanations regarding its relationship with the article are presented.

**Figure 1: Energy security model**



**Source:** [www.clingendael.org](http://www.clingendael.org)

In Figure 1, we can see that the three main principles are mentioned in addition to diversification. There is a point in this regard that after the war in Ukraine, European countries are looking to diversify the route of imports from other parts of the world except Russia. Implementing the Trans-Caspian pipeline will reduce Turkmenistan's desire for Iran to export natural gas to Azerbaijan, and this issue, in addition to economic benefits, will significantly enhance the security of Iran's demand. On the other hand, completing the Trans-Caspian pipeline, which complements the southern gas corridor, will increase Turkey's transit role and turn this country into an energy hub in the Caucasus and the Mediterranean Sea, further bolstering energy security in the region. After defining the theoretical framework of energy security, we will first discuss the characteristics of the Trans-Caspian pipeline and the southern gas corridor, and then we will discuss the effects of the implementation of this pipeline on the energy security of Iran and Turkey.

#### **4. Trans Caspian Pipeline**

The Trans-Caspian pipeline, a strategic energy infrastructure, spans 338 kilometers, connecting the Turkmenbashi gas field in Turkmenistan to the Sengchal terminal in Azerbaijan. With an annual capacity of 30 billion cubic meters of natural gas, this pipeline is a crucial component of the region's energy landscape. The estimated cost of its completion, a staggering 5 billion US dollars, is a clear indicator of the scale and importance of this project (Chumakov, 2019). However, as of this writing, its construction remains ongoing, underscoring the complexity and meticulous planning required for such a project.

The year 2006 was a turning point for the Trans-Caspian pipeline. Against the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the potential disruption of Russian gas exports to Europe, the pipeline gained significant attention. It was during this time that Saparmurat Niyazov, the prime minister of Azerbaijan, emerged as a key figure, lending his strong support to the pipeline's implementation, a move that would shape its future trajectory (Cutler, 2020). The European Union's support for the design and completion of the Trans-Caspian pipeline. In addition to EU officials, Azerbaijani officials strongly supported the plan and declared their support for implementing the pipeline. Instead of implementing the pipeline for broad political and economic reasons, Russia worked harder than ever to keep the project incomplete.

In this regard, Russia tried to sign a tripartite agreement between Russia, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan to strengthen and revive gas transmission routes from Central Asia to Europe. In some ways, Russia's action can discourage Turkmenistan from implementing the Trans-Caspian pipeline. After four years, in 2011, the European Union, recalling the incident of 2007 and the suspension of Russian gas exports to Europe, tried to announce negotiations for implementing the Trans-Caspian pipeline, giving freedom of action to European energy. The commission announced that it would purchase gas through the Trans-Caspian pipeline, which encouraged Turkmenistan to implement this pipeline (Sabou, 2016). The Trans-Caspian pipeline puzzle was completed with the creation of the TAP and TANAP pipelines. Its central part, the Trans-Caspian pipeline, was also in the final stage. Also, the war in Ukraine and the diversification of the natural gas import route to Europe caused the renewed attention of European countries to the Trans-Caspian pipeline.

**Figure 2: Trans-Caspian pipeline**



Source: [mapsontheweb.zoom-maps.com](http://mapsontheweb.zoom-maps.com)

Figure 3: Trans-Caspian pipeline



Source: Iskandarov,2020

## 5. Southern Gas Corridor

Figure 4: Southern Gas Corridor



Source: <https://socar.de>.

The creation of the Southern Gas Corridor can be followed in line with the EU's policies in reducing dependence on Russian gas and diversifying energy routes. A policy that is based on the theoretical framework of energy security, based on which countries must seek to reduce dependence on a specific route for their energy supply in the field of energy. This factor reduces the bargaining power of the exporting country against the energy-importing country (Pirani, 2018). The European Union also paid special attention to this issue after the gas crisis in 2009. On the other hand, European countries have welcomed plans and projects that will strengthen and export natural gas, whether through pipelines or other ways and have provided political and economic support for such projects. The South Gas Corridor project is one of these projects. The Southern Gas Corridor was designed by the initiative and proposal of the European Commission in 2008 (Rezaei Rad, 2022). The South Gas Corridor project started from the Shah Deniz gas field of the Republic of Azerbaijan and will reach Europe by connecting three pipelines. First, this project starts with the BTE pipeline.

### **5.1. BTE Pipeline**

The BTE gas pipeline, which stands for a city that includes Baku, Tbilisi, and Erzurum, is a significant energy infrastructure project. The pipeline, which starts from Azerbaijan and passes through Georgia to Turkey and Erzurum, is 692 km long and transports 25 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually from Azerbaijan to Turkey (Dadwal, 2018). Of the 692 km pipeline, 444 km is in Azerbaijan and 248 km in Georgia. Azerbaijan is trying to increase the capacity of every second part of the pipeline to 60 billion cubic meters, which is possible by creating an additional well in the control field and developing this field. This pipeline can be connected to the Trans-Caspian pipeline, strengthening its export capacity. This pipeline can be considered the pipeline highway of the Caucasus region because it connects to the Trans-Caspian and the TANAP pipeline and through it to the top.

### **5.2. TANAP Pipeline**

This pipeline is also known as the Trans Anatolian Pipeline. The TANAP pipeline, which runs to the BTE pipeline and passes through Turkey, connects to the Top pipeline that exports Azerbaijani gas to Europe via Turkey. TANAP pipeline capacity will initially be 16 billion cubic meters per year and, by 2023, will increase to 23 billion and, in 2026, will reach 31 billion. If the Trans-Caspian pipeline is completed and connected to the TANAP pipeline, the export capacity of TANAP will reach 60 billion cubic meters per year. This issue is in the group completing the Caspian Trans-Pipeline and connecting it to this project (Yesvei, 2018). This project started in 2015 and was put into operation in 2018.

The TANAP pipeline, as it traverses 20 provinces of Turkey, plays a crucial role in the region's energy geopolitics (www.dr-hair.com). Starting from the Sangchal terminal in Azerbaijan, it reaches the famous Turkish ski city and crosses the Turkish-Greece border to Greece and then to Italy. This route, via the Top Pipeline, is significant as it allows Azerbaijan to export its gas to Europe without the intervention of Russia, thereby reducing Europe's dependence on Russian gas. The TANAP pipeline's route is strategically important, as it bypasses Russia and directly connects Azerbaijan to European markets, thereby enhancing the energy security of both Azerbaijan and Europe.

On the other hand, Turkey has found a transit and pivotal role in the region and has increased its position Pre-strengthens. Turkey's strategic location and role as a transit country for these pipelines have significantly enhanced its geopolitical importance in the energy sector. The other significant issue is diversifying the energy routes for European countries and reducing their dependence on Russia for natural gas supply, allowing them to gain a good advantage.

The TANAP pipeline connects Azerbaijan's gas and the Trans-Caspian to the TAP project.

### **5.3.TAP Pipeline**

The Trans Adriatic Pipeline is a gas transmission pipeline designed in 2003, which started in 2016 and will operate in 2020. The initial point of the mentioned pipeline is in the Shahid field and is connected to Azerbaijan gas by BTE and TANAP pipelines. BP and SOCAR own a portion of the pipeline. The TAP pipeline has a capacity of 10 billion cubic meters per year, of which 8 billion are exported to Italy, 1 billion to Greece, and 1 billion to Bulgaria. The TAP Pipeline on the Greek-Turkish border in Kipoi is connected to the Trans Anatolian Pipeline(Mocavini,2019). The TAP pipeline passes Greece and the Adriatic Sea and reaches the Italian coast near San Foca. The length of the pipeline is 878 km. The total cost of building the TAP pipeline was \$ 4.5 billion (Salejko,2021).

The BTE pipeline, TANAP, and TAP can be considered related projects. These three lines connect the gas of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan to Italy. In the meantime, Turkey can strengthen its position as a country that, in addition to meeting its gas needs, has an essential position in the region's energy, which is the focus(Iskandarov,2020). The vital point mentioned above is the diversification of the route for Turkmenistan by completing the Trans-Caspian pipeline and connecting it to the BTE pipeline, as well as Azerbaijan, which previously relied on Russia for exports. European countries have also welcomed such projects because, based on the production of energy security, they diversify the energy path, find new customers for the producing countries, and reduce the dependence of European countries on Russian gas.

## **6. Trans-Caspian Pipeline and Iran Energy Security**

Naturally, the implementation of any pipeline affects the energy security of the region through which the pipeline passes and significantly affects that region. The trans-Caspian pipeline has increased the importance of the impact of this pipeline on Iran's energy security due to passing through Central Asia and reaching the Caucasus region in the neighborhood of Iran's borders and especially crossing the Caspian Sea, where Iran is one of the coastal countries. For this reason, we will first address the security of Iran's demand. Due to the extensive sanctions imposed by the United States of America and European countries, especially in oil and gas, Iran has restricted the sale of oil and gas. This issue and the need for more infrastructure have reduced the role of Iran in the sale of natural gas to European countries, on the other hand, and the lack of excess production capacity in Iran for the export of natural gas(Hajimineh,2024). This issue has caused Iran to try to play a transit role for natural gas in recent years due to its convenient geographical location and corridors, such as the North-South Corridor or BRI. This critical issue, based on the principle of diversifying export routes and future dependence, Iran, due to its geographical advantage over Turkmenistan and land-locked nature, needed Iran to export natural gas to Azerbaijan and Europe. On the other hand, if the Trans-Caspian pipeline is implemented, Turkmenistan will be directly connected to Azerbaijan and Europe, and this issue can cause severe challenges for Iran's energy security. Iran also invests in the field of renewable energy to increase energy security(Hajimineh,2024).

On the other hand, the connection of the Trans-Caspian pipeline will make Turkey unnecessary to import natural gas through Iran's Pars pipeline, and this will cause economic problems for Iran, considering the dependence of Iran's economy on the sale of oil and gas. In addition to the challenges of demand security for Iran, if the Trans-Caspian pipeline is implemented, it could also lead to environmental problems and hinder sustainable development in Iran. The proximity of the Caspian Sea, considered a kind of lake, could lead to severe environmental pollution, posing significant challenges for Iran and the coastal countries, which is contrary to the principles of sustainable development in energy security.

## **7. Trans-Caspian Pipeline and Türkiye Energy Security**

Turkey has different conditions from Iran. Despite oil and natural gas discoveries in recent years, Turkey still needs to be far from Iran in terms of energy resources. Moreover, this country is not recognized as an energy exporter, and it needs to import energy from countries such as Iran and Azerbaijan to supply It with the energy it needs. In recent years, Turkey has tried to act as a transit hub for the Caucasus region and the Mediterranean Sea. Türkiye's transit role has benefited this country in two ways. First, this country creates the dependence of neighboring countries such as Azerbaijan to export natural gas to Europe and other European countries. This point becomes important when we know that the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus, despite their history and profound political, economic, and similar ties, seek to reduce their reliance on Russia to export their energy to different regions such as Europe or China. The issue that Turkmenistan has followed through the pipeline project to China(Oxford Analytica,2023). This issue has caused the creation of the South Gas Corridor, which was discussed above in detail, to attract the attention of European countries and Azerbaijan. Note that the puzzles of this corridor were completed step by step. In the meantime, Turkey plays a role as the middle link of this corridor, which has strengthened the position of this country. The second benefit of Turkey is that through energy transit, it has provided part of its internal needs, which is very important for this country for domestic and industrial use.

Implementing the Trans-Caspian pipeline can complete the puzzle of the southern gas corridor. The completion of this corridor has a significant place in the policies of European and Western countries. On the other hand, the increase in the volume of transit benefits Turkey by allowing it to earn money from the right of transit, which helps the country's economy, especially after the Ukraine war(Tastan,2022). An important point regarding implementing the Trans-Caspian pipeline can help strengthen Turkey's transit role, which aligns with the country's efforts to stabilize and strengthen its position as an influential and vital country for energy in the region and the world. On the other hand, implementing the Trans-Caspian pipeline, based on the theory of dependence, will cause the countries of Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan to become more dependent. This issue can turn Turkey into a significant transit hub in the field of energy in the Caucasus and the Mediterranean Sea(Novikau,2023).

## **8. Conclusion**

As mentioned, implementing the Trans-Caspian pipeline will significantly affect Iran's and Turkey's energy security. The war in Ukraine and the energy problems of European countries, especially in the field of natural gas supply, caused the European countries to seek to diversify their energy import routes based on the theoretical framework of energy security. The Central Asia and the Caucasus region, due to having abundant reserves, became effective.

The trans-Caspian pipeline can be a suitable area and route in this regard. Regarding the implementation of the Trans-Caspian pipeline for Iran and Turkey, this issue is mutual and different from each other. In recent years, due to the sanctions, Iran considers the implementation of the remaining Trans-Caspian pipelines, or the TAPI pipeline, to be against its energy security. It believes that the implementation of such projects is supported by the West, especially the United States of America. In line with the policy of energy projects in the region without the presence of Iran, this issue has seriously shaken Iran's position in the energy field, especially oil and gas, and other countries have replaced Iran in the field of energy production and export. On the other hand, implementing the Trans-Caspian pipeline is considered an opportunity for Turkey to strengthen the country's position in the transit field.

This is a position that can be reciprocal with Iran and, on the one hand, reduce Turkmenistan's position and dependence on Iran for the export of natural gas to Azerbaijan and the Caucasus, and on the other hand, strengthen the position of Turkey for the countries of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan and further intertwine to have an economy for them. Plans such as the Trans-Caspian pipeline, if implemented in the Caspian Sea and Caucasus region, can lead to competition from more countries in this regard. A competition that is sometimes faced by weakening the energy security of a country like Iran in the Trans-Caspian pipeline. However, despite these challenges, the implementation of the Trans-Caspian pipeline holds the potential to stimulate economic growth in the region, creating a more interconnected and prosperous energy market.

The main thing about pipelines like the Trans-Caspian for Iran and Turkey is the long-term challenges they create for the energy security of these pipelines, which can act as a double-edged sword. While some projects can benefit a country, in some cases, their interests and energy security may suffer serious problems. In the case of the Trans-Caspian pipeline, it seems that the problems faced by the pipeline are solvable. If it is completed, Iran's energy security will face a severe challenge, unlike Turkey. Its presence in the Caucasus region will be reduced to some extent, and Turkey will act as a transit hub from the opposite side. It is introduced in the Caucasus region and the vital highway of the southern gas corridor.

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**DAY 2: 5th Session**  
**31 May 2024**  
**14.15pm – 16.15 pm (İstanbul Time)**

**Moderator: Prof. Dr. Uğur Özgöker**

**Session-V: Foreign Policies of Regional Countries and Their Role in Providing Security**

**Sub-themes to present papers:**

**Policies of regional countries**

**Bilateral and multilateral attempts**

**Other subjects related to the main theme**

# THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR: SOLIDARITY AND UNITY OF THE STATES IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

Prof., Ph.D. Victor Korendovych<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The article examines the topical issue of the war unleashed by Russia in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and occupation of Donbas and emphasizes the need for international solidarity for Ukraine's survival and restoration of security in the Black Sea. Ten years of war did not affect the unity and cohesion of Ukrainian society. Such determination allows Western countries to continue providing aid to Ukraine. What is the limit of the West's solidarity with Ukraine's struggle for its independence? The article answers three critical questions: the willingness of the aggressor to end the war, the willingness of Ukrainians to continue resistance, and the possible ways to achieve peace and defeat the aggressor. The answers to these questions focus on the importance of national cohesion based on national identity, trust in state institutions, and the will to fight. The article also emphasizes the importance of economic sustainability and the development of international solidarity and unity of the Black Sea states to overcome the aggressor.

Keywords: security environment, social unity, national resilience, Black Sea, international solidarity.

## Introduction

The geopolitical landscape of the Black Sea region has been significantly affected by the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war over the past few years. This conflict began in February 2014 with Russia's annexation of Crimea and occupation of Donbas. At the time, it was called a hybrid war, and in Ukraine it was called an "anti-terrorist operation." The unique nature of the aggressor, a member of the Security Council, contributed to the fact that it was not punished by the UN Security Council. The unpunished crime led to another crime - Russia's unprovoked full-scale aggression against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, which significantly changed the world order, and Ukraine was forced to fight for survival. The war has resulted in thousands of casualties, the displacement of millions of civilians, a humanitarian crisis and a threat to the security of the entire Black Sea region.

The resilience of the Ukrainian society and the determination of the Defense Forces played a decisive role in resisting the aggressor's attempts not only to seize territory but also to destroy the Ukrainian nation. Ukrainian society rallied around the idea of victory, and the lines of volunteers at military recruitment offices in the first months of the war changed the world's perception of Ukraine and its potential. This resilience was largely supported by broad international solidarity, including material and military assistance from the EU, NATO, G7 countries, and other partners, which allowed Ukraine to liberate half of the occupied territories in 2022. An important example of this support is Turkey's assistance to Ukraine since the beginning of the aggression. Turkey's adherence to the Montreux Agreement makes it impossible for Russian warships to pass through the Turkish straits and is important for limiting Russia's naval potential in the Black Sea.

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Despite the significant difficulties in gaining an advantage in land operations in the summer of 2023, Ukraine has achieved significant success at sea, destroying a third of the warships of the Russian Black Sea Fleet and restoring navigation in the Odesa-Bosporus corridor. But the war continues. These days, Russia continues to conduct offensive military operations in new areas and strikes at civilian and energy facilities. To better understand the context of this war and the importance of international solidarity and determination in the fight for peace and security, it is useful to answer the following three critical questions:

1. Is the aggressor ready to end the war?
2. Are Ukrainians ready to continue the struggle and how long will Ukraine be able to resist aggression?
3. How to achieve peace? What support is needed to stop the aggressor and return security to Ukraine and the entire Black Sea region?

We will try to provide answers to these questions.

## **2. THE AGGRESSOR AND ITS GOALS**

Initially, Putin declared the goals of the war to be the “demilitarization and denationalization” of Ukraine. These goals have been frequently adjusted, but the real goal is the destruction of Ukraine as a state. Putin is in a hurry to seize as much territory as possible and to inflict as much damage as possible on Ukraine’s energy sector and economy before Western aid arrives in full.

Putin’s ambitions extend not only to Ukraine, but also to the Baltic States, Poland, Central Asia, and the Black Sea region, as evidenced by Russia’s “List of Unfriendly States” [1] and the blackmail it uses, in particular, in its attempts to revise maritime borders in the Baltic Sea.

At present, it can be stated that Russia is waging two wars: a large-scale conventional war in Ukraine and a hybrid war against the democratic world, using various means: political, economic, psychological, cyber, nuclear blackmail and environmental. For example, the blowing up of the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant dam resulted in more than 1 million people losing access to centralized water supply, hundreds of tons of fuel and lubricants, toxic substances and garbage, mines and other munitions falling into the Black Sea.

At first, the international community failed to fully realize this threat, which grew into a revival of Russian Nazism and became apparent only in February 2022. If Putin is not stopped, the conflict risks escalating into World War III. The international community must prevent this from happening. The events on the frontline in recent days and Putin’s statements indicate that he is ready to continue fighting. If Russia stops fighting, the war will end. And if Ukraine stops fighting, then there will be no Ukraine and other European countries will be forced to deter further Russian aggression and fight for their existence. As a result, the war continues, and the only way to stop it is to defeat the prevailing aggressor.

So, answering the question of whether the aggressor is ready to stop, it is certain that Russia is continuing the war, and for the aggressor, the ceasefire is just a break to restore and prepare the next even more insidious attack. The only way to defeat the superior aggressor is to unite the efforts of partner countries to mobilize, strengthen resilience and joint defense capabilities.

### 3. RESILIENCE AND SOCIAL COHESION OF UKRAINE

War changes society. The sudden outbreak of full-scale war in February 2022 shocked Ukrainians, creating a sense of confusion, uncertainty, and unpreparedness. However, despite these challenges, the Ukrainian nation has demonstrated remarkable unity, resilience, and a strong will to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity. So, what exactly has allowed Ukraine to survive, continue to fight, and strengthen its resilience after the invasion?

By studying the interaction of society, the government, and the reaction of citizens, the main trends and drivers of social cohesion have been identified: a sense of belonging to the country and identification as a citizen of Ukraine; a sense of civic duty and focus on the common good and action for it; trust in political institutions and a sense that the Ukrainian authorities cares about citizens [2]. Here are some indicators that demonstrate the social cohesion of Ukrainians.

The optimistic belief in victory unites the vast majority of Ukrainians, as evidenced by the results of a sociological survey by the Rating Group [3]. The impact of the war on the perception of the Russian Federation was very significant. Until February 24, the Russian Federation was not exactly associated with the horrors of war, including death and starvation. However, with the escalation of hostilities, Ukrainian society began to view it as a terrorist state and a formidable enemy, which further strengthened the idea that victory in the war is an integral part of the process of strengthening the Ukrainian nation. Ukrainians' belief in victory increased from 56% in January 2022 to 97% in February 2023. In the third year of the war, the vast majority of Ukrainians continue to believe in victory and now stands at 89%.



Fig. 1 Elements of social cohesion

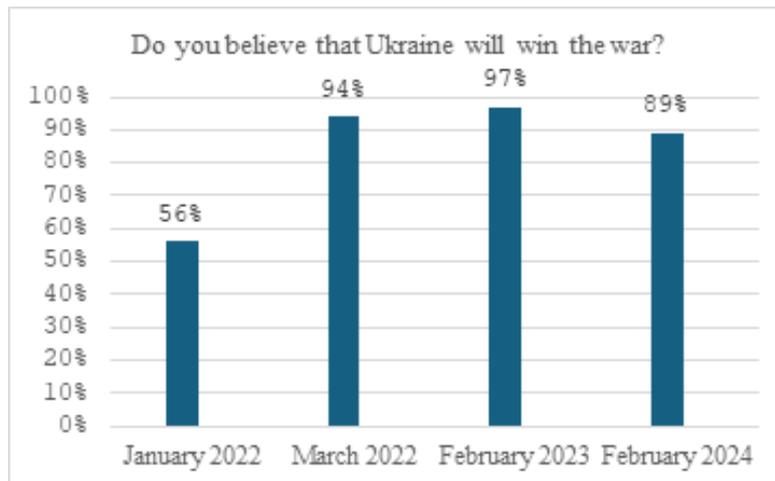


Fig. 2 Results of the sociological survey "Belief in the Victory of Ukraine"

This collective belief in victory has provided a powerful impetus for resilience and strengthened the resolve to face the challenges of the ongoing war.

Over the same period, Ukrainians' trust in the armed forces increased from 68% to 96%. It is much higher than trust in the church (61%) [4]. 62% of Ukrainians surveyed are ready to go to war for their country, which is almost twice as many as those who are not ready - 33% (Table 1).

Table 1. Ukrainians' trust in political institutions (The Razumkov Centre research)

	December 2021	March 2023	June 2023
The Armed Forces of Ukraine	68 %	96 %	96 %
President of Ukraine	36 %	83 %	80 %
Volunteer organizations	64 %	88 %	84 %
Church	64 %	70 %	61 %

In addition, there has been a sharp increase in the number of people identifying themselves as citizens of Ukraine, reaching a historic peak of 84.6% in July 2022 [5]. This growth in national identity has been complemented by a strong sense of national pride. Ukrainian identity is inclusive, and the main marker is an emotional connection to Ukraine, followed by being born in Ukraine and willingness to defend it. Studies of national identity show that it grows in times when the state faces great challenges [6]. This was the case during the first civic mobilization of the Orange Revolution in 2004-2005, the second civic mobilization of the Revolution of Dignity in 2013-2014, and the national civic consolidation of 2022. 92% and 89% of Ukrainians want to see Ukraine as a member state of the European Union and NATO, respectively.

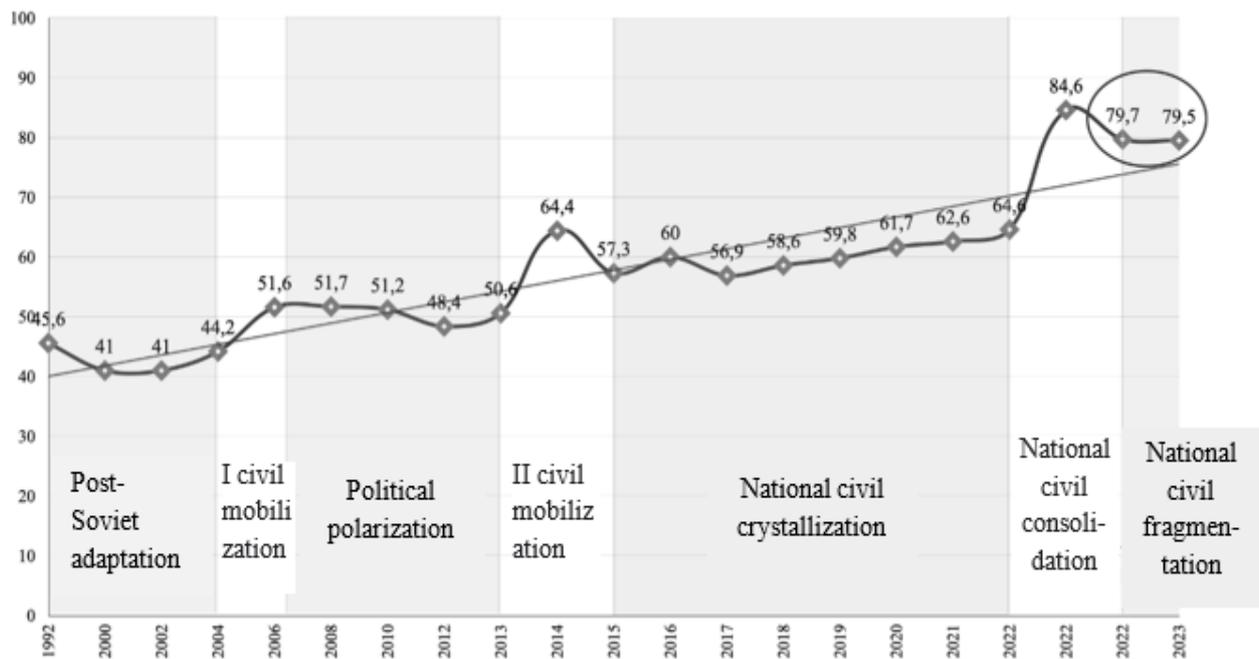


Fig. 3 Results of the survey of self-identification of Ukrainians [5 ]

The results of the study emphasize the importance of the Ukrainian formula of resilience. This formula, which includes public optimistic belief in victory, public trust in social institutions, and a sense of national identity and pride, proved to be an important tool for motivating tens of thousands of citizens to participate in the mobilization process and join the Defense Forces in the early days of the war. Society's response to risks and challenges has been crucial in shaping the resilience of Ukrainian society during the ongoing conflict.

#### 4. ECONOMIC RESILIENCE AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

War requires enormous resources: for security and defense, for restoring the destroyed economy, for overcoming the consequences of environmental disasters created by the war, for helping refugees, and many other expenses. As the country faces the horrific circumstances of the war, the role of economic resilience, assistance from allies, and volunteers becomes a crucial factor in the process of recovery and rebuilding the state.

After the outbreak of war, it became clear that the planned budget for the security and defense sector needed to be revised. The State Budget for 2022 was amended fourteen times, and by the end of 2022, defense spending had increased to USD 44 billion [6]. For comparison, in 2021 it amounted to ≈ 9, 1 billion USD. Significant losses in GDP, up to 30.4%, negatively affected state budget revenues and the growth of its deficit [7, 8] (Fig. 4). Ukrainians are grateful for the help of our partners. At the same time, the economic situation in the country is beginning to stabilize. In 2023, GDP grew to 5% [8], and in 2024, according to the forecast published by the National Bank of Ukraine (NBU), GDP will grow by 3.0%.

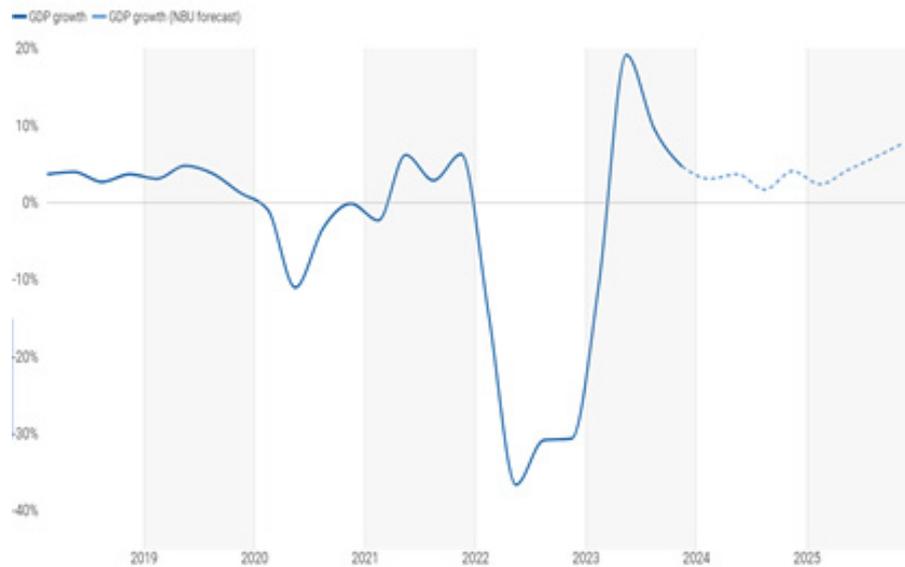


Figure 4. GDP of Ukraine (change per quarter, y-o-y, %)

Despite the war, the economic situation in Ukraine is showing signs of stabilization. Here are some economic indicators. The financial situation during the war remains under control. The gap between the official and cash exchange rates remains minimal. In early May, the NBU introduced the most significant package of currency restrictions easing since the beginning of the invasion. Deposit volumes continue to grow. Inflation in April 2024 was 3.2%.

Ukraine's strategic successes at sea, including the destruction of a third of Russia's Black Sea Fleet, have largely restored shipping in the Odesa-Bosporus direction. Sea grain exports reached pre-war levels (Fig.5) [9].

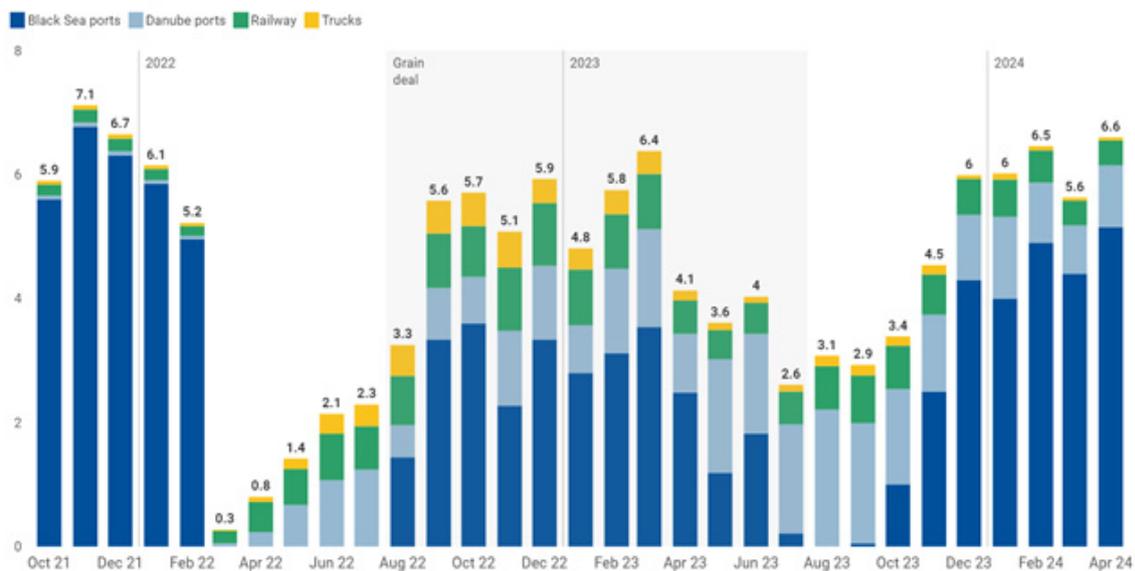


Fig. 5 Volume of grain exports by sea, mln tonnes

Steel production is gradually increasing (Fig.6).

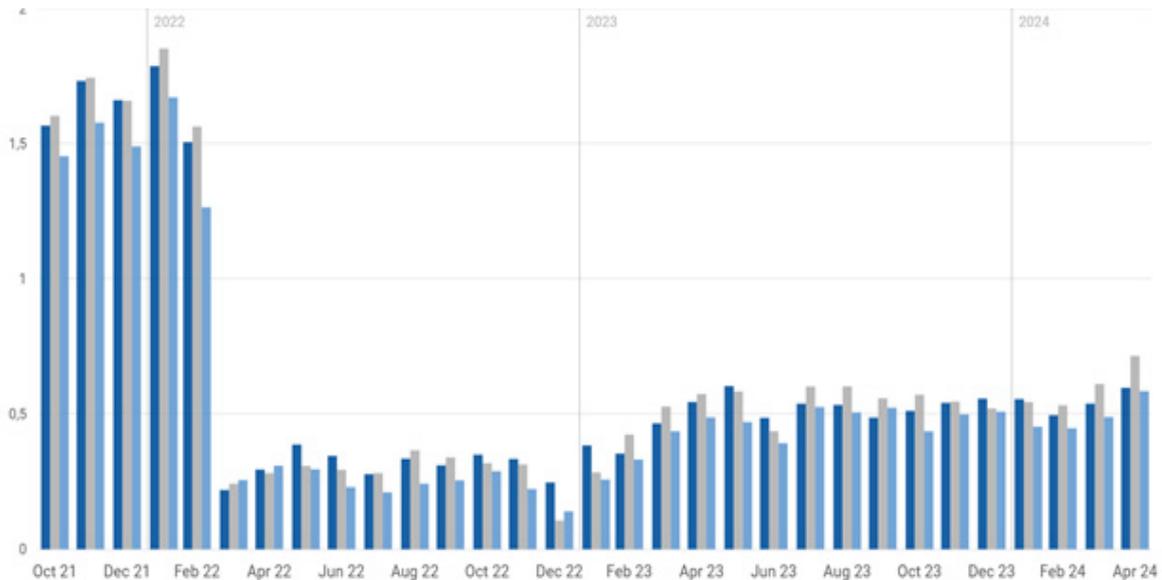


Figure 6. Production of ferrous metals, mln tonnes

During the war, the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine resulted in a large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. Ukraine lost 5.5 million (over 30%) of its working-age citizens. The government has taken significant steps to meet their needs and spent \$1.4 billion on housing assistance for 2.3 million IDPs. At the same time, bureaucratic procedures have been simplified as much as possible with the use of the digital application “Diya” in mobile phones to register IDPs and provide them with the necessary assistance, including transportation, accommodation in modular camps, food, medical care and financial support.

Of course, Ukraine has many problems to solve related to the war and its aftermath. One of them is the problem of mobilization. In addressing it, the Government is trying to take measures to attract the necessary quantitative and qualitative personnel to the Armed Forces and to preserve the younger generation.

To conclude the issue of resilience and cohesion of Ukrainian society, it should be emphasized that Ukraine is suffering from the war, but the state and the unity of Ukrainian society retain the ability to continue the fight against the aggressor. Ukraine remains committed to victory and is actively mobilizing resources and personnel to continue its resistance. This gives our partners confidence to continue their policy of solidarity with Ukraine and provide it with the necessary assistance. The cohesion of society gives confidence to the partners, and the assistance of partners raises the public’s faith in victory and the will to fight.

## 5. INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT AND WAYS TO ACHIEVE PEACE

How to stop the aggressor and return security to Ukraine, the Black Sea region and the Balkans? It is quite clear that it is impossible to stop the aggressor Russia through of a deterrence policy. The only way is to defeat it politically, economically, informationally and militarily. Russia remains powerful and dangerous. It has an advantage in terms of manpower and weapons. Russia’s efforts to occupy and destroy Ukraine are far-reaching. It will continue to use all means to extend its influence to other states in Eastern Europe, the Black Sea region and the Balkans.

The priority of this influence is to disrupt the unity of the democratic community through economic measures and propaganda, and to use its agents of influence inside these countries. It blackmails politically and intimidates the world with the use of nuclear weapons. Intimidation by the use of nuclear weapons is today the main weapon of the Russian Federation in its fight against the West.

The EU, NATO countries, and a significant number of partner countries have already determined the amount of financial and military assistance to Ukraine. Ukraine's task is to implement it efficiently on the battlefield and to restore the economy. However, it should be borne in mind that such assistance will be needed again. A significant caveat to this assistance is certain restrictions on the use of weapons against the aggressor on its territory. This limits Ukraine's capabilities and at the same time leaves the aggressor unpunished on its territory.

International solidarity in support of Ukraine is crucial for establishing peace in the Black Sea and the Balkans. The way is to stop being afraid that Russia must be defeated and to firmly believe that Ukraine and its partner countries will acquire such a level of defense capabilities that it will not be profitable for Russia to continue the war and it will be forced to retreat from the occupied territories, as it was in Kherson and Kharkiv regions. Today, there is no need to be afraid of nuclear intimidation by the aggressor.

The Peace Summit held in Switzerland on June 15-16, 2024, showed that international support for Ukraine remains strong. The joint statement of the leaders of the participating countries following the summit [10] states that the participants have a common vision in three aspects. First, any threat or use of nuclear weapons in the context of war in Ukraine is unacceptable. Secondly, it is emphasized that it is extremely important to ensure free, full and safe commercial navigation in the Black and Azov Seas, as well as access to seaports. Attacks on merchant vessels in ports and along the entire route, as well as on civilian ports and civilian port infrastructure are unacceptable, and food security must not be used as a weapon in any way. Third, all prisoners of war must be released through a full exchange. Specific measures will be taken in the future to achieve this with the further involvement of representatives of all parties.

The final communiqué of the summit was supported by 90 countries and international organizations. And this, as President Zelensky noted, is evidence that "Russian influence is still powerful. Russia's opposition to this summit shows that the unity and solidarity of partner countries is an extremely important and truly influential tool against terrorism and aggression. At the same time, we should not forget that Russia is an aggressor country, so a just peace is possible on Ukraine's terms.

Experience has taught us that we cannot trust Russia. We cannot hope that a ceasefire and peace talks will bring us peace and security. The cessation of hostilities can only strengthen the enemy, who does not give up its intentions to destroy you. Having restored its military potential, Russia will repeat its aggression. The aggressor must be stopped by economic and military means. Effective application of sanctions is one of the problematic issues and priority areas of pressure on the aggressor. Russia has already learned to circumvent them. In March-April of this year, Russia's oil export revenues recovered from the level reached in January-February 2023 to the highest level since November [11], see Fig. 7. In the first months after the EU's ban on crude oil imports came into effect (in early December 2022), export revenues fell significantly.

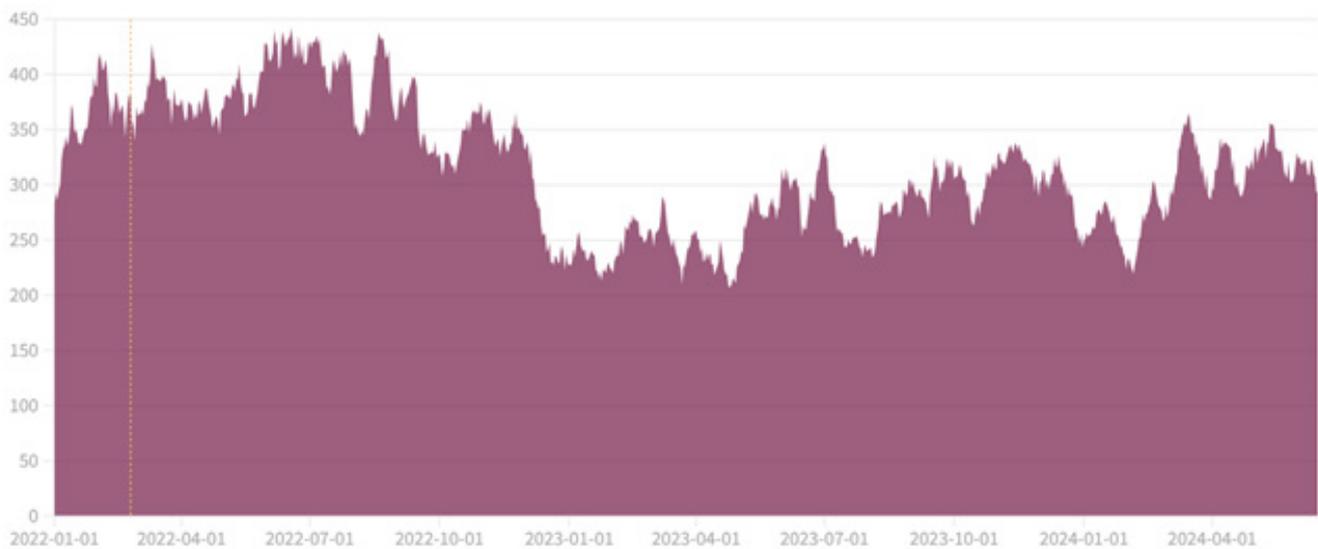


Figure 7. Russian crude oil export exports, mln euro

We have proved from our own experience that the Ukrainian Armed Forces are capable of fighting and defeating the aggressor at the sea, in the air and on the land. The unity of Ukrainian society and military assistance from partner countries are key elements in ensuring international solidarity and unity in support of the victory of Ukraine and the entire democratic world. It is impossible to defeat the aggressor without military assistance.

The states of the Black Sea region have a unique history of national interests. However, the russian-Ukrainian war has served as a unifying factor, bringing these countries together in their common goal of promoting peace and security in the region. Through diplomatic initiatives and multilateral forums, states should build effective cooperation around a sustainable solution to the conflict.

### Conclusion

The russian-Ukrainian war continues, and the intensity of the battle is not decreasing. Under these conditions, it is important for the Black Sea states to remain vigilant and united, to develop cooperation and maintain a dialogue aimed at ending the war and achieving peace, creating a more stable and secure environment in the region. In addition, the involvement of international organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union will be crucial in mediating peace talks and providing humanitarian assistance.

Thus, the russian-Ukrainian war has become a test of solidarity and unity among the states of the Black Sea region and the Balkans. Despite the challenges posed by the conflict, the countries have united to support Ukraine and achieve peace in the region. By working towards a peaceful settlement and developing cooperation, these states can build a more secure and stable future for all.

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# Changing Geopolitics of Central Asia: Challenges and Prospects

Guli I. Yuldasheva<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*The goal of the paper is to analyse the state, challenges and opportunities of the ongoing process of integration between the Central Asian (CA) states in the context of the aggravated geopolitical situation. It is stated that CA integration is the logical outcome of the increasingly globalized world and the growth of objective demands in managing the indivisible security context, building single regional economy based on common transport outlets, energy networks, and coordinating foreign policy steps. To achieve the goal methods of systemic and strategic analysis, comparative and problem approaches have been used. The analysis shows that new challenges, risks and opportunities arising in the context of the aggravated Middle East and the Ukraine conflicts, in the period after the Moscow Crocus events caused some changes in the foreign political and economic preferences, ways and speed of the Central Asian integration. Much depends therefore on the outcomes of the coordinated fruitful international efforts in the stated areas that also stimulate activation of the Central Asian countries.*

**Keywords:** *Geopolitics, Central Asia, integration*

## Introduction

Now, rapidly changing geopolitical environment around the Central Asian region with the growth of unpredictable challenges and threats to it due to aggravation of the Palestinian-Israel and the Ukrainian crisis, Moscow Crocus events demand sober scientific assessments necessary to avoid new spots of crisis and military conflicts with possible involvement of the Central Asian countries having their own huge Muslim population. These processes are accompanied by consolidation of the earlier started integrational tendencies in the region.

Considering these realities, the paper is aimed to analyse the state, challenges and opportunities of the ongoing process of integration between the CA countries in the context of the aggravated geopolitical situation. Current assessments of this process are still somewhat partial concentrating more on this or that aspect of the problem. In contrast to such an approach this article examines Central Asian integration as the logical outcome of the globalized world and the growth of objective demands in managing the indivisible security context, building single regional economy based on common transport outlets and energy networks, in coordinated foreign policy steps. In addition, the novelty of the research consists of the fact that the author investigates new challenges and risks, arising opportunities for consolidating regional partnership. To achieve these objectives methods of systemic and strategic analysis, comparative and problem approaches have been used.

It is stated that the above-mentioned challenges have served as an impetus towards the ongoing integrational tendencies in Central Asia. The exacerbated socio-economic problems of the region and the need to speed up construction of the available transport corridors demand deeper and more efficient cooperation and coordination between the CA countries to survive and develop in these circumstances. The process is facilitated both by the commonality of arising challenges and threats, commonality of their foreign political preferences.

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To analyse efficiently this complex phenomenon the author examines first the current theoretical debates on similar international relations (IR) problems, gives general characteristic of the contemporary Central Asia, describes new trends in geopolitical situation and arising opportunities for the region, concludes and provides some recommendations for the involved sides.

## **1. Theoretical Approaches to Present Day International Problems**

The existing theoretical discussions in IR field can be summarised around most important issues of the reasons of current conflicts, new challenges, opportunities and possible solutions.

### **1.1. Reasons of Conflicts**

Despite some differences in approaches, majority of scientists still consider that determining factors of the ongoing changes in the international life remain to be economic and ideological interests of states in conditions of the globalized world. Economic problems presuppose getting an access to economic resources, including territorial ones, most important here are income and geographical distance in determining bilateral trade flows. Meantime ideological moment of the international life is expressed in counteraction of democratic values, supposedly fostering international trade and moderating the potential negative impact of geopolitics, and non-democratic, autocratic values, which somehow block democratization of the developing world, thus slowing down their development.

International Monetary Fund (IMF) expert Serhan Cevik finds (02 February 2024) that geopolitical developments are not as important as income and geographical distance in determining bilateral trade flows and that democracy fosters international trade and moderates the potential negative impact of geopolitics.

According to Mongolian Prof. Zorigt Dashdorj, the geopolitical cleavage is portrayed primarily in terms of “democracy versus totalitarian rule” and “freedom versus oppression” (21 July 2023). The end game is not balancing, but the prevalence of one ideology over the other.

### **1.2. New Challenges**

At the same time, other social scientists write (The Global Risks Report 2024, January 2024) about the world, which is undergoing societal discontent in many countries with news cycles dominated by polarization, violent protests, riots and strikes. The world is undergoing interconnected trends related to climate change, demographic bifurcation and technological acceleration, geostrategic shifts.

In this global context, that thinking needs to change from a national perspective to a global perspective, stress other specialists. Geopolitics now encompasses “low political” issues, including economics, culture, race, gender, and emotion, reflecting a broader understanding of global interactions (Topalidis, Kartalis, Velentzas & Sidiropoulou, 2024).

On the other hand, new “World Disorder” paradigm is being developed (Bounjoua, 03 January 2024), according to which states remain the most critical actors in world affairs, but cultural and civilizational factors increasingly shape their interests, priorities, and decisions. In its turn, multipolarity and de-risking are influencing (McCaffrey, Jones & Krumbmüller, 2024) government approaches and will affect companies’ sustainability requirements, costs, competitive opportunities and strategy. This will pose both challenges and opportunities for companies around the world.

And at last, any discussion of the contemporary geopolitical structure of Central Eurasia should proceed from the fact that it consists of three segments – Central Europe, the Central Caucasus, and Central Asia (Ismailov, Papava, cited in Tsygankov, 2010). And Eurasia is currently immersed in a new cycle of revival, in which China is emerging as the main Pivot Area to the detriment of Russia, allowing Central Asia to materialize its historical geopolitical role (De Goñi Arreya, 26 October 2021).

### **1.3. Possible Solutions**

As solution to the emerging challenges Björn Hettne thinks that coexisting regional communities or even inter-regionalism (rather than asymmetric multilateralism) may be the best world order we can hope for in the medium term (Cited in Söderbaum & Shaw, January 2003).

For experts of Global Risk Report 2024, the present international situation demands localized strategies, breakthrough endeavours, collective actions and cross-border coordination that could all play a part in addressing the stated risks.

Thus, in the globalized context economic and ideological motives continue to determine any conflict that gives rise to many new challenges and threats. And only joint, concerted actions of states, growth of regionalism can somehow help them to survive and build new world order. The following will illustrate whether these ideas can be applicable to the present-day Central Asian realities.

## **2. General Characteristics of the Contemporary Central Asia**

Central Asian states include five post-soviet countries: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan with population almost 81 million people. Their foreign political preferences are predetermined by peculiarities of their geographic location: just in the centre of Asia, being mostly isolated from the sea routes to the world markets, and its closeness to such fundamental countries and Eurasian powers like Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, China and Russia.

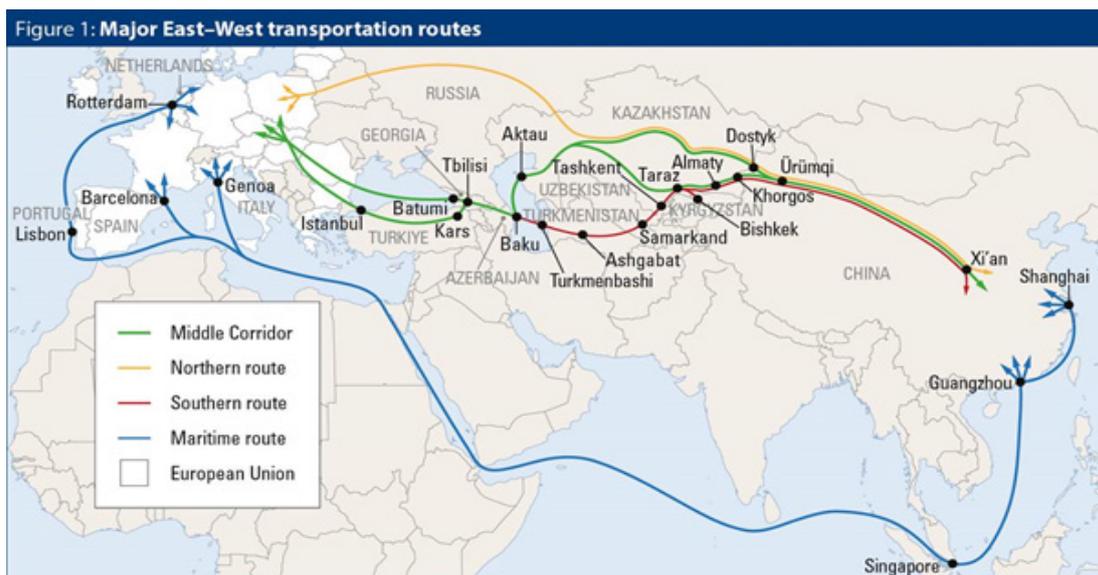
Today, importance of the Central Asian region is still to be defined by:

- geostrategic location at the juncture of all acting, potential and planned transport and pipeline routes;
- richest natural and human resources;
- territorial/geographic, historical/cultural and demographic closeness to the unstable Islamic world;
- concentration, in the region, of the majority of global challenges;
- and threats to the world (territorial, ethno-national, religious and ecological, and others) (Yuldasheva, 2017, p.21).

In view of the inner problems and external global context, the security of CA countries and their sustainable economic development are comprehensive and essentially indivisible (e-cis.info, 28 October 2023). To overcome social-economic problems and reduce geopolitical tension, achieve sustainable growth and prosperity, the CA countries need

- to overcome the geographical isolation that means building multiple transport corridors from the region (see Map 2.1). Such corridors, including the competing North-South and Transcaspian corridor, can consolidate existing global interdependence and at the same time, provide an opportunity for the competing sides thus being able to reconcile some rivals.

- To pursue an open, pragmatic, multilateral policy, searching for mutually acceptable compromises on all, even the most pressing issues.



Source: World Bank (2023). 'Middle Trade and Transport Corridor: Policies and Investments to Triple Freight Volumes and Halve Travel Time by 2030'. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Map 2.1. Major East-West Transportation Routes.

Such regional approach has brought some tangible mutual benefits. According to President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, the region is turning into a real subject of the international life. The consultative meetings of the heads of states of Central Asia have transformed into an effective and efficient platform for finding and implementing mutually acceptable solutions to multilateral cooperation in almost all areas (zakon.kz, 16 May 2024).

Indeed, over the past 20 years, the region's gross domestic product has increased by an average of 6.2 % per year in real terms, reaching \$347 bln. Since 2000, foreign trade turnover has increased sevenfold (uz.usembassy.gov, 14 May 2024). The volume of mutual investments increased almost 6 times, the influx of foreign direct investment into the region – by 45%. Even in the current difficult conditions, the region demonstrates stability and economic growth, which by the end of 2023. will increase by more than 5% (e-cis.info, 28 October 2023).

At the same time, the region still faces some problems in the regional development, such as uneven development and complex economic situation. While Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan anticipate relatively stable growth rates, with Kazakhstan rebounding to 5.6% growth in 2025 and Uzbekistan maintaining consistency around the mid-5% range, Tajikistan experiences a downturn in growth, projected to slow to 6.5% in 2024 and further decline to 4.5% in 2025. This contrasts with Kyrgyzstan's relatively stable growth projections of 4.4% in 2024 and 4.2% in 2025. At the same time, Kazakhstan witnessed a significant reduction in unemployment from 4.8% to 3.4%, Uzbekistan experienced a decrease from 8.4% to 7.4%, and Kyrgyzstan's unemployment rate remained steady at 9% (daryo.uz, 22 April 2024).

Still, one of the most serious challenges for Central Asia is the geopolitical tension around the region. Central Asia turns into a battleground for geopolitical competition between the Russian-Chinese lead Eurasian block of states within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the US-lead Euro-Atlantic community. Consequently, the CA region is influencing direct and indirect pressure from this geopolitical confrontation.

### **3. Geopolitical Challenges**

#### **3.1. Global Level:**

At the global level, main long-term ideological confrontation lies between the West and Russia, aggravated now by the Ukrainian crisis. As Eldaniz Gusseinov concludes (25 December 2023) in his review of the national security strategies of the US, Germany, France, and Japan, Russia is more frequently cited as a concern than China and Iran. In his turn British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak mentions the "axis of authoritarian states," including Iran (iranintl.com, 13 May 2024).

The tendency is accompanied by deepening of the US-China tension due to the rise of Chinese weight and influence in the global and regional economic affairs (miragenews.com, 27 February 2024) through gradual realization of its Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI), and potential ability to remove the US from its leading position.

Hence, ideological counteraction between western democracy and Eurasian authoritarian regimes is obvious.

#### **3.2. Regional Level**

At the regional level, such Western policy is being strengthened by the Islamic Republic of Iran's advancement of the Axis of Resistance strategy (Levy, 09 January 2024) in the Middle East to oppose Israeli policy in Gaza.

Another tangible regional tendency is the latent Russian-Chinese competition in Central Asia. Due to Chinese-Russian division of spheres of influence in the region, Russia still plays the role of "regime security guarantor" while Beijing consolidates its economic stand (Paramonov, 2023). However, Russia is struggling not to fully cede the region to rapidly rising Beijing's weight here. Thus, China remains the first trading partner of Uzbekistan in the first four months of the year, but Russia is close to returning this status – the volume of Uzbek trade with Russia in January-April increased by 29.4% - to \$3.84 bln (in January-April 2023, the increase was 15%) (Gazeta.uz, 24 May 2024).

It's worth here also to mention about the complex Russian-Central Asian relations. The relations are complicated by the Russian-Ukraine war, which is not unanimously supported in the CA countries. The conflict has its immediate economic and political outcomes for the region. For instance, the Ukrainian crisis stimulated problems with the Central Asian labour migrants, remittance flows and sanctions. In 2023, the volume of remittances expectedly decreased, but still far exceeds the level before the war in Ukraine. In January-September, Uzbekistan received \$8.4 bn of cross-border transfers, a decrease of 33.7%. At the same time, the sanctions on Russia have disrupted logistics between the People's Republic of China and Europe. 85% of Uzbek firms, involved in foreign trade, have experienced problems with the supply of raw materials, equipment, and components since the onset of the conflict due to the disruption of supply chains (daryo.uz, 25 February 2024). Moreover, in the summer of 2022, Uzbek companies began appearing on the stop lists of the United States and the European Union. The situation was aggravated by the Crocus City Hall tragedy that stimulated Russian xenophobia and anti-migrant rhetoric (hrw.org, 05 April 2024).

Uncertain situation in Afghanistan also contributes to the regional insecurity. Especially as some well-known disputable issues between Afghanistan and Pakistan, key actors in the pacification process in Afghanistan, are still far from being solved.

#### 4. Central Asian Partnership with the World

To preserve peace and security and realize its long-term economic and political goals the CA region pursues multivector policy based on the system of checks and balances. The following geopolitical trends can be mentioned in this context.

**US** – The US tries to maintain its relations with the CA region within “C5+1” formula and supports accession of the CA countries into the World Trade Organization (WTO). In particular, the WTO Secretariat, in partnership with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the International Trade Centre (ITC), and the Government of Kazakhstan, organized the second Central Asia Trade Policy Forum in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 3-5 June 2024 with the focus on the issues of economic integration through WTO accession and membership. The Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan became members of the WTO in 1998, 2013 and 2015, respectively. Uzbekistan has intensified its WTO accession negotiations. As a result, Katherine Tai, the US Trade Representative visited Tashkent on June 11 (gov.uz, 12 June 2024) with the objective of advancing discussions on Uzbekistan's accession to the World Trade Organization and deepening regional cooperation within the "C5+1" format.

**EU** – The EU's efforts in Central Asia are aimed now at partnership to transform global challenges into joint opportunities. A significant part of the EU's commitment to the region is its investment in the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor (€10bn). Thus, the first formal summit of the EU and Central Asia took place in Uzbekistan in April 2024. On January 29, during a forum in Brussels, the European Investment Bank signed memorandums of understanding totaling €1.47bn with the governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, as well as with the Development Bank of Kazakhstan (daryo.uz, 31 January 2024). Moreover, in March, during the U.K. Foreign Secretary David Cameron's tour of Central Asia and Mongolia, 50 million pound (\$62 mln) were promised that “may help the U.K. increase its soft power and influence in the region (Rickleton, 26 April 2024). Three priority areas for taking British-CA relations to a new level were highlighted: the global order based on the core principles of the UN Charter and the OSCE, deepen economic and educational ties (gaz.uz, 23 April 2024).

**China** – China continues its steady intrusion into the region under the proclaimed mutually beneficial BRI strategy. To facilitate the process, in June 2023, Xi Jinping hosted the first C5+1 China-Central Asian summit in Xian, a platform to push for greater institutionalization of their activity. Beijing is ready to provide the CA countries with free aid of \$3,7bn (fergana.media, 19 May 2023). Within this trend, in October 2023, the Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing was held. In January 2024, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev paid a state visit to China. In whole, the economic impact of Chinese investment in Uzbekistan was substantial, with the volume of investment skyrocketing to \$14bn by the end of 2023. Trade turnover between the two nations also reached \$14bn (daryo.uz, 02 June 2024).

**Russia** – The CA countries and Russian interests converge in the security – in counteracting global challenges and threats – and in the economic spheres, where the sides can fruitfully supplement their economies, which could be especially beneficial after construction of such regional projects as the North-South corridor. Correspondently, on May 26–27, Russian President Vladimir Putin made his third foreign visit after his re-election to Uzbekistan. Trade turnover between Russia and Uzbekistan reached \$10 billion in 2023, and now the leaders of the countries have set a goal of \$30 billion at once. Russia's share in Uzbek trade is 15.5%. Russia's direct investments in the economy of Uzbekistan amount, according to Putin, to the same \$10 billion. Moreover, one of the 27 agreements signed was a document on cooperation between Rosatom and Uzatom on the construction of a low-power nuclear power plant in the Jizzakh region (vedomosti.ru, 28 May 2024).

At the same time, struggling to preserve its own religious-cultural identity, especially topical in conditions of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the CA region is oriented to the Moslem world, including first kindred Turkey and Iran, and the region of Persian Gulf – trends also justified by geo-economic considerations and the need for multiple transport corridors from Central Asia. Not surprisingly, Uzbekistan calls on the parties involved in the Middle East conflict for restraint and political settlement (gazeta.uz, 15 April 2024).

**Iran** – In this context, the CA countries continue the process of rapprochement with Iran bilaterally and multilaterally within the SCO. Tehran continues under sanctions its long-term policy of good neighbourhood, where Central Asian countries play specific role due to their historical, religious and cultural proximity. The tendency has been lately strengthened by the ideas of transport-transit cooperation and realization of Chabahar project supported by Indian huge investments. In line with this tendency, India and Iran have inked a deal allowing India Ports Global company to develop and control the management of an Iranian port in Chabahar for 10 years (Khatinoglu, 13 May 2024) that fully corresponds the interests of the CA countries.

At the same time, the CA countries support Iran, Turkey and Russia's joint statement at the 21st international meeting on Syria in the Astana Format (mid.ru, 22 June 2023) emphasizing the need to stop the Zionist regime's attacks on the Gaza Strip and to send humanitarian aid to the enclave. They positively assess Iran-Turkey agreement on creation of a free trade zone, and Iran's entry into BRICS that has made reviving the 2015 nuclear deal irrelevant. The CA region will gain much from the rapprochement of such regional actors as this can accelerate fulfilment of mutually beneficial projects.

**Turkey** – In parallel, the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) partnership is gaining force. Thus, on November 3, 2023, the 10-th OTS Anniversary Summit was hosted in Astana. The CA states are interested both in success of the Turkish all-round "soft policy" in the region and in the OTS efforts to unite Europe with Central Asia. However, Turkish experts believe that despite Turkey's renewed interest in the region and new institutional mechanisms aimed at deep strategic cooperation, Ankara's influence in Central Asia is limited. Turkey is now guided by pragmatism, rather than ideological considerations, in relation to the OTS (Djumaeva, 09 February 2023). However, it seems that due to the Central Asian preferences and cultural-civilizational closeness, the Turkish role in the region will be growing although not rapidly enough.

**Persian Gulf** – One of the newest trends in the regional development is rapprochement with the Persian Gulf Arab states. In particular, the Second Gulf Cooperation Council GCC-Central Asia joint ministerial meeting on strategic dialogue took place in Tashkent on April 15, 2024 (gcc-sg.org, 15 April 2024). The sides reaffirmed their joint commitment to forming a sustainable and forward-looking partnership based on common values and mutual interests, expressed similar stand on Israel, and their hope to intensify cooperation between the GCC and Central Asia in security and border control, as well as in the joint fight against many global threats and challenges. The trend is consolidated by the recent rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, that is welcomed in Central Asia since each side is interested in the increased economic and trade cooperation in the Persian Gulf.

#### **4. Outcomes and Opportunities**

As the above examined tendencies show us the complex geopolitical trends ongoing around Central Asia present both challenges and opportunities. Opportunities can include but not limited by possibilities for developing regional trade and investments, energy and security cooperation between the regional actors as the most expedient and rational to oppose global challenges and threats, reduce geopolitical tension. In general, we can observe the following outcomes and opportunities arising in Central Asia:

First, Central Asia has acquired great importance in geopolitical and economic strategies of different actors both as part of the unstable Islamic world, and as the most stable and steadily developing region, located strategically at the crossroads of all projected and functioning routes leading to Asian and European markets.

Secondly, the process of Central Asian integration as an adequate response to common economic and security interests has been accelerated. Central Asian states are knocking down trade barriers, addressing a prerequisite for the formation of a unified regional market. Central Asian ministers are ready for regional cooperation to restore ecosystems and prevent climate change, coordinate efforts regarding the management of transboundary rivers in Central Asia (gazeta.uz, 16 February 2024), etc.

Thirdly, interest to Afghanistan as the source of instability and future perspectives for the region is preserved. On March 11, 2024, for instance, the annual US intelligence assessment reported on remaining threats connected with activity of the regional affiliates of ISIS, al Qaeda and ISIS-Khorasan. It's clear that the problem can be solved only collectively by organizing global counter-terrorism efforts. At the same time, the US remains one of the nation's largest humanitarian donors in Afghanistan, having spent about \$2 billion on aid since leaving the country (Gannon, 03 January 2024).

Fourthly, the profound impact of the Ukraine crisis on the global transport and logistics system has highlighted the parties' need for new routes through Central Asia. As a result, the eastern branch of the International North-South Transport Corridor is experiencing a surge in activity. At the same time, the Trans-Caspian international transport route, which connects China and the European Union via Central Asia, the Caucasus, Turkey, and Eastern Europe, gained prominence, the works are also under way over the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway project (kun.uz, 14 June 2024), over feasibility of Lapiz Lazuli Corridor through Turkmenistan (tolonews.com, 28 February 2024), which would connect Afghan trade to Europe, and over transit corridors via Pakistani and Iranian ports. Not surprisingly, on 26 April 2024, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan held a trilateral meeting on transport issues in Kabul.

#### **Conclusion**

Thus, the examined empirical evidence on the geopolitical situation around Central Asia certify the reviewed theoretical assumptions on the main reasons, challenges and solutions of the current international conflicts.

The long-term ideological confrontation between the “democratic” West and “authoritarian” Eurasian states – Russia, China and Iran have been only deepened, complicated by geoeconomic competition in Central Asia. This is accompanied by the rise of Chinese world influence, including in Central Asia.

In this context, CA countries strive to overcome their geographical isolation from the world markets to receive income and solve inner social-political problems, provide bilateral and multilateral trade flows to and from the region. Being mostly authoritarian and in transition, they try to preserve their sovereignty and self-identity by equilibrating their preferences between the West and Eurasia. At the same time, the CA states try to accommodate their national policies to global environment and interactions, a state remaining the most critical actor to define their strategies.

But current Middle East and Ukraine conflicts, the Moscow Crocus events have first, accelerated process of the CA integration along the cultural and civilizational lines, both between themselves and Islamic civilizational neighbours like Turkey, Iran and the Gulf countries. Secondly, this process is stipulated by necessity to manage the indivisible security context and build single regional economy based on common transport and energy outlets, coordinated foreign policy steps. Thus, CA integration is the logical outcome of the increasingly globalized world and the growth of objective demands in managing the political and economic security context.

It is obvious that already mentioned global and regional challenges and threats, global multipolarity and de-risking strategies will influence government approaches and affect their competitive opportunities and strategies. This will certainly pose both challenges and opportunities for the region.

The evidence also demonstrates that the CA countries have been more and more relying on their localized strategies, collective actions and cross-border coordination that has brought the region to a new level of subjectivity in the world affairs. In this sense, Björn Hettne is quite right to say that coexisting regional communities or even inter-regionalism may be the best world order in the future. Much depends now on the outcomes of the coordinated fruitful international efforts that will further stimulate activation of the Central Asian countries.

However, steady development of the CA region logically presuppose solution of the Palestinian-Israeli and the Russian-Ukrainian conflicts, of the Iranian-Western discrepancies, and, hence, some conciliatory gestures towards Russia, China, Iran, as well as Afghanistan without which the CA countries cannot realize some vitally important projects of regional and global character.

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