



WAR IN UKRAINE

Strategic Perspectives 2022



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STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES 2022

THE FMES INSTITUTE

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PREFACE

The conflict in Ukraine continues, ever further from the blitzkrieg scenario imagined by Vladimir Putin. This second half of 2022 was marked by the surprise counter-offensive of Ukrainian forces in the east in the Donbass, but also in the south with the recapture of Kherson. American intelligence, Western equipment, but above all the courage, the will to win and the total involvement of Ukrainian society in this existential battle for this young nation have made the difference and raised the question of a possible Russian defeat. This possibility, which is certainly less likely than a stalemate, deserves to be considered.

If this were to be the case, what would be the consequences? Several hypotheses are circulating, based on Russian history. They range from another crack in a worm-eaten system, as in Russia's defeat by Japan in 1905, to a regime change like those caused by the 1917 defeat by Germany and the 1989 defeat by the Taliban. The possibilities of a North Korean-type drift of the regime that would become increasingly bunkered around a single clan, of vassalization by China, or of a Somali-like anarchic evolution are also evoked. All these scenarios must be analysed taking into account the major characteristic of Russian power: it has an unrivalled nuclear strike capability with more than 4,000 operational nuclear warheads. While there is no indication that Vladimir Putin or his generals would be ready to enter into an escalation scenario with incalculable consequences, the hypothesis of a situation of internal chaos, even if transitory, is chilling in this respect.

In any case, whatever the outcome, this high-intensity war that is continuing and intensifying, confirms our entry into a world that, if not actually taking a simple historical step back in time, brings to an end for good the period of strategic weightlessness that has been ours for the last thirty years. The balance of power between the great powers is back and the game will be dominated by the duopoly made up of the United States, which was written off a little

too quickly after the Afghan debacle, and China, which is no longer at the height of its prestige but certainly not its ambitions.

This new kind of cold war (since the two rivals share extremely strong interdependencies) is giving rise to an alignment reflex among vulnerable countries in search of a protector. This is the case in favour of the United States, of Russia's potential targets in Eastern Europe (the Baltic states, Poland, Finland, and Sweden) and of China's potential targets in Asia (Japan, Korea, Australia, and the Philippines). On the other hand, it opens up opportunities for those ambitious middle powers that see new options emerging that allow them to multiply their support, to play off each other and to exploit the spaces left vacant by the two big powers. This is the case for Turkey, the Gulf monarchies, Iran, Israel and India. Finally, it forces the majority of countries too weak to support an autonomous strategy to accept the inevitable and remain close to the two masters of the world in the hope of not paying too high a price for their mutual antagonism. African, Asian and Latin American countries, as well as some Middle Eastern states, are thus trying at all costs to preserve their strategic relations with the two great powers. Their abstentions at the UN bear witness to this. In this new game Europe has not yet made up its mind. On the one hand, its solidarity with Ukraine, the break with Vladimir Putin, the reference to the 'shock' and the 'sudden jolt' reaction to the "return of tragedy", to use President Emmanuel Macron's expression, could indicate that it is time to be lucid, to make an effort and to fight. On the other hand, the ongoing pursuit of the American shield, Europe's disengagement from its southern flank (Africa, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, the Caucasus) and the political priorities given to domestic issues (social and societal) give the impression of a withdrawal from world affairs. If this were the case, the consequences would be disastrous as the position of European countries is structurally unstable. Our Strategic Atlas of the Mediterranean and the Middle East, freely available online (ref), gives the full measure of this.

The Mediterranean Rim and Middle East region, our southern neighbourhood, are indeed an illustration of these radical evolutions which are reinforcing tensions and aggressive initiatives towards us. The impact of regional wars, the Covid pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the global economic crisis and structural inflation are weakening a large part of the southern countries. This is the case in our region of choice for Tunisia, Libya, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen. The fragility of these states, the destabilisation of their societies by hostile forces often manipulated from outside and the impact of migratory flows, particularly sub-Saharan for Africans and Afghan for Levantines, are creating an explosive situation in our neighbourhood. Russia, in difficulty in the North, is using the South to weaken Europe by fanning the glowing embers of anti-Western sentiment already lit by Turkish and Chinese propaganda.

Turkey, on the other hand, is maximising its pivotal position by making itself indispensable both to NATO as the guardian of the Bosphorus and to Russia as an economic gateway to the West. This double dependence leaves Recep Tayyip Erdogan's hands free to complete the work of gaining ascendancy over his neighbourhood. He can now bring Nagorno-Karabakh under control with his Azerbaijani ally Ilham Aliyev at the expense of the Armenians, control northern Syria at the expense of the Kurds and increase pressure in the eastern Mediterranean counter to the interests of the Greeks and Cypriots. With the May 2023 elections in his sights, the Turkish president hopes that his power politics which are very popular with his population will overshadow the economic difficulties.

Iran, for its part, has definitively given up on reviving the JCPOA agreement on nuclear energy: too many technical advances which it was difficult to abandon, too many uncertainties about the stability of Washington's position and too much strategic volatility to commit itself firmly to an agreement with an American power which has become less reliable and as a result less indispensable. After launching a 25-year economic partnership with China at the beginning of the year, it is towards Russia that Tehran has turned

since the summer; in particular in the military domain, exchanging UAVs for immediate deployment on the Ukrainian front for last generation fighters which could be used against its regional rivals in the medium term.

As for the Gulf monarchies, they are benefiting from their newfound autonomy and the delight of picking and choosing between the powers in search of influence: Saudi Arabia has not increased its oil production despite the request of Joe Biden, who came to Riyadh as if to Canossa to reconcile with Mohammed Ben Salman and to give assurances that the United States would not leave a vacuum in the region that could be filled by China, Russia or Iran. The official invitation of Prince Mohammed Ben Zayed to visit Washington did not prevent him from going to Moscow to discuss regional issues and inviting Bashar el Assad to Abu Dhabi for his first trip outside Syria since 2011. Xi Jinping's official visit to Riyadh, invited to the Gulf Cooperation Council and to the first Sino-Arab summit, is another form of thumbing his nose at a West perceived as irresolute and weak.

Thus, in the geopolitical contestation that is beginning, the Americans and especially the Europeans seem fragile, despite the pleasant surprise of their response to Russia's aggression. For all that, their authoritarian opponents have shown their internal vulnerability. While African and Arab-Muslim populations have confirmed their growing anti-Westernism by championing Vladimir Putin, it is interesting to observe popular protests against the established regimes in Iran and China. Despite, and perhaps because of, particularly severe social control these movements are drawing on explicit Western values to demand freedom and equal conditions as the basis of a democratic model.

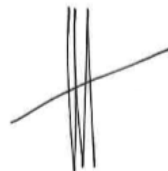
It is therefore a global battle that has begun. It is first and foremost a power struggle between states, in which the European nations must respond blow for blow and show their determination to take up the challenge of gaining the upper hand, be it economic, military

or political. This struggle is also in the field of ideas and perceptions. In this area we have a model to defend and promote: that of freedom, equality and generosity. This is why the war in Ukraine is a test - it confronts us with our ability to defend ourselves, economically, socially, and militarily, but also intellectually and philosophically. If we let the Kremlin win, all those who dream of revenge against the Europeans, or their rivals, will be tempted to step into the breach and we will pay the price.

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Admiral (2s) Pascal AUSSEUR
Director General of the FMES Institute

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several vertical lines and a diagonal line crossing them.

Impacts of the war in Ukraine on the Middle East and North Africa

By Pierre RAZOUX, Academic and Research Director of the FMES Institute.

The countries of the Middle East and North Africa are reluctant to take sides so as not to jeopardize their growing cooperation with Russia; Israel, Turkey and Iran find themselves in a particularly delicate position. While Turkey seems to have temporarily joined NATO, Israel is becoming increasingly isolated. Iran, for its part, fears that the agreement painstakingly negotiated with the United States will be called into question by Russia.

The war in Ukraine has caused wheat prices to soar, but above all hydrocarbon prices, which is excellent news for OPEC countries. The gas exporting countries could restore their image in the eyes of the West by taking the place of Russia, particularly Algeria, Qatar, and Libya. Algeria could take advantage of this to reverse its alliance with Germany and Turkey. Countries with large populations, weak economies and no hydrocarbon resources will suffer; they could be destabilized by food riots. Countries that are very close to Russia or have Russian bases on their territory may have to take a clear position, at the risk of being isolated. Those who are waiting for large deliveries of arms from Russia (Algeria, Egypt, Syria, Iran) may well have to pay the price and wait for their delivery.

All the countries in the region have their eyes on NATO and the European Union, whose sudden reaction has surprised them. Any sign of pusillanimity in the management of the exit from the crisis risks being interpreted as a sign of weakness and will only reinforce the hostile and revanchist discourse, as well as the determination of those who wish to weaken the Europeans.

Initial findings

The massive invasion of Ukraine by Russia (February 24th, 2022) has surprised the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, placing them in a very uncomfortable situation. Most of them maintain close relations with Russia in many fields (energy, arms, agri-food, tourism) and are perfectly comfortable with the autocratic and revisionist discourse of the master of the Kremlin. Their leaders as well as their population have not been insensitive to his provocations against the Americans and the Europeans; no doubt some of them secretly hope for a Russian victory that would only further weaken a Europe that is considered soft and ready for any compromise. Others are questioning the reliability of American protection and are looking for new sponsors. The United Arab Emirates, the only Arab member of the Security Council, abstained from the Council vote (27th February) to condemn the Russian invasion, despite American pressure.

The firm, supportive and immediate reaction of most European countries, led by France and Germany, came as a surprise to the states of the Middle East and North Africa. The growing isolation of Russia on the international scene, coupled with strong American and Asian pressure, forced them to review their position, especially since the Russian precedent could revive the use of force to settle border tensions, which no state in the region seems to want at the moment. Only Syria unsurprisingly¹ voted against the text of the resolution submitted to the vote of the UN General Assembly (March 2nd), which is non-binding; Algeria, Iran and Iraq abstained; Morocco, which was absent, did not participate in the vote. All other states in the region supported the resolution condemning the Russian invasion and calling for an end to

¹ Bashar al-Assad knows that he owes his survival to the presence of Russia in Syria; his total loyalty to the Kremlin remains his only guarantee of remaining in power in Damascus.

hostilities. Pragmatically, these same states have been observing the evolution of the conflict in order to adapt their posture accordingly, because in essence, many of them probably remain well disposed towards Vladimir Putin's Russia.

First consequences

Regional issues are now taking a back seat, whether it be the Iranian nuclear issue and the return to the JCPoA, the war in Syria, the war in Yemen, the risks of confrontation between Israel and Iran supported by Hezbollah (or vice versa), the collapse of Lebanon, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Libyan conflict, the conflict in the Western Sahara, the resulting tensions between Algeria and Morocco, the instability of the Sahel-Saharan strip, or the tensions in the eastern Mediterranean between Turkey, Greece and Cyprus, which are currently muted but could quickly resurface. While the international community is focused on Ukraine, the Black Sea and Eastern Europe, some global (China) and regional (Iran, Turkey, Qatar) players could be tempted to push their pawns into the North African and Middle Eastern region to improve their positions.

Soaring wheat prices. Ukraine and Russia are major exporters of wheat and grain. The absence of their production on the world market, coupled with the uncertainty created by the risks of slippage in this crisis, which encourages cautionary buying, has led to a doubling of wheat prices (to 320 euros per ton), which remain a staple in North Africa, the Levant and the Arabian Peninsula. The countries of the region, which were massively supplied by Russia and Ukraine², will have to face the sudden rise in prices and quickly

² Egypt (60%), Algeria (50%), Libya, Lebanon, Jordan and most of the Gulf monarchies (30-40%).

turn to other exporters. Those countries that subsidize bread and have a large and relatively poor population could face food riots that could weaken or radicalize their regime.

Soaring hydrocarbon prices. For net oil and natural gas exporting countries, this price surge is a bargain. With a barrel of oil that has exceeded \$130 (its highest price in ten years) and the price of gas reaching 190 euros per megawatt hour (+50%), these countries are bolstering their coffers and can consider buying social peace, particularly in order to cope with the sudden rise in the price of wheat and other raw materials. The main beneficiaries are Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Libya, Qatar, Kuwait, Iraq and the United Arab Emirates; Iran to a much lesser extent, since the quantity of hydrocarbons that the Islamic Republic can export is very limited by the weight of the sanctions, which leads it to hope for a favorable and rapid outcome of the Vienna negotiations to be able to fill its coffers again. Tehran has also proposed to the Europeans to deliver gas³ to them on a massive scale. By replacing Russia to supply European countries that were previously very dependent on Russian deliveries, these states can also hope to restore their image in the eyes of the West, especially for the most autocratic among them.

Putting Russia on the index. The countries which host official or informal Russian bases (Syria, Sudan, Libya), as well as the states which maintain strong links with Russia (Algeria, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia) risk being summoned to choose sides, or failing that to incur a certain form of isolation. The two most targeted countries are undoubtedly Syria and Sudan. The others have assets that give them some room for negotiation, such as Egypt, whose isolation and instability would have immediate

³ Iran is credited with the second largest natural gas reserves in the world.

repercussions on the security of the Suez Canal. For this reason, President Sissi cultivates good relations with the five permanent members of the Security Council.

On the other hand, those who are awaiting the delivery of Russian arms (Algeria, Egypt, Syria), who were negotiating important arms contracts (Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia) or who depend on the Kremlin to supply their stocks of ammunition and spare parts (UAE, Kuwait, Iraq, Yemen) may have to wait a long time. There is no doubt that the Americans, Chinese, Europeans, Turks, and Israelis see this as an opportunity to regain market share in the long term.

Those who are likely to suffer

Countries that have little or no hydrocarbon resources and that will have to buy their oil, gasoline, gas, and wheat even more expensively will undoubtedly suffer, especially if they are diplomatically isolated because of their proximity to Russia and if they are penalized by a large population and a fragile economic situation. Syria, Lebanon, Sudan, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Yemen, Tunisia and, to a lesser extent, Egypt and Iraq seem particularly vulnerable today.

Those who could make most of the game

Algeria could take advantage of this crisis to make a change of alliance by turning away from Russia to turn resolutely towards Germany, Spain, and Italy, with which it has forged strong partnerships in recent years (energy, arms), but also towards Turkey, which is becoming increasingly popular in Algeria. In exchange for massive deliveries of gas at good prices, Germany

could invest heavily in Algeria to modernize the gas and oil infrastructure, to develop the renewable energy sector and to support the Algerian regime diplomatically on the regional scene while promoting its cause with the European Union. Germany and Turkey (and to a lesser extent Spain and Italy) could take advantage of this to replace Russia as the main suppliers of the latest weapons to Algeria. A strategic partnership with Turkey would allow Algeria to counter the Morocco-Israel-US axis and to negotiate the future of Libya under better conditions. China, unless it follows Russia's example by invading Taiwan, would remain a privileged economic partner for Algiers. This development would undeniably put France and Morocco in difficulty. The main obstacle to this scenario, however, is the ideological proximity of the Algerian old guard to the proto-Soviet model advocated by both the FLN and Vladimir Putin.

Libya seems to be on the way to agreeing on a national unity formula that preserves the interests of each of the main protagonists. The neutralization of Russia, at least for a while, and the gradual fading of the United Arab Emirates, which has other more pressing concerns to deal with, could facilitate the resolution of the crisis. Libya remains a rich and relatively sparsely populated country – and therefore less vulnerable to socio-economic risks – which benefits from the upturn in hydrocarbon prices. Anticipating an agreement that would not be in its favor, Russia is strengthening its military presence in Libya.

Qatar should also benefit from the consequences of the war in Ukraine. The dramatic rise in gas prices and the temporary ostracization of Russia by the Gulf monarchies (Qatar never got close to the Kremlin), as well as the prospect of an agreement on the Iranian nuclear issue, structurally strengthen Qatar's room for negotiation in the region and its role as the new preferred

intermediary of the United States in the Middle East. However, this observation is subject to two conditions: that Joe Biden does not lose both houses in the November 2022 mid-term elections and that a Democratic administration remains in power in Washington at the end of his term. The Republicans are notoriously less supportive.

Three special cases: Israel, Iran, and Turkey

The invasion of Ukraine is very bad news for Israel, which has many citizens of Russian and Ukrainian origin, not to mention the many Jewish oligarchs who hold either Russian or Ukrainian passports. Several of them have fled to Israel in the past few days. Israel has strong economic ties to both countries, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is of Jewish origin, which is very important to Israeli society; his assimilation to a “Nazi” is not acceptable in Israel. The failure of Prime Minister Naftali Bennett’s first attempt at good offices shows Israel’s limited influence in this matter, even if Vladimir Putin subsequently agreed to receive him in Moscow. For the already weakened Israeli Prime Minister, taking sides with either of the belligerents would mean alienating the voters he needs to stay in power. In fact, the Israeli executive refuses to deliver new weapons (armed and suicide drones, anti-aircraft, and anti-tank missiles) to Ukraine and divides up the roles: Naftali Bennet talks to the Russians and the Europeans; Deputy Prime Minister Yair Lapid talks to the Ukrainians and the Americans.

Beyond the economic and political dimension, Israel needs Russia strategically to contain Iran in Syria and Lebanon, but above all to push the Pasdaran out of Syria. By condemning the Russian invasion as they did during the UN General Assembly vote, the

Israelis know that they are annoying the Russians, who may be tempted to make a pact with Iranian forces in Syria, while at the same time provoking them to attack Israel, especially if the Vienna negotiations on the nuclear issue fail. They also know that it would be much more difficult for them to strike Iranian interests in the Levant if the Russians activated their denial of access bubble in the face of the Israeli air force. Above all, Israel knows that it will no longer be able to count (A2AD) on Russia to deal with an Iran close to the nuclear threshold if the Vienna negotiations fail. And in the event of an agreement, it is the United States that will exert pressure on Israel not to sabotage Iran's return to the JCPOA. Israel is thus increasingly isolated on the regional scene, even if the Abraham Accords open up interesting prospects for it. More than ever, many Israeli officials consider that Israel can now only count on itself. Does this mean that they plan to remove the ambiguity about their nuclear arsenal?

The war in Ukraine is not better news for Iran, as it increases tensions, internal divisions and the risk of China taking an even stronger hold on the country in the long term. The Iranian government has therefore been very cautious in its positions, refusing to support Russia without condemning it, stigmatizing NATO without directly attacking the United States. It also abstained from the vote in the General Assembly. He knows that in order to hope for an agreement in Vienna, he has to appease both Moscow and Washington.

All those in Iran who reject democracy and dream of revenge against the West are delighted to see Vladimir Putin openly challenging the Americans and Europeans. But these same people understand that a military confrontation between Russia and the West would be harmful to Iran if the conflict were to spread to the Middle East, especially if Israel took advantage of the situation to

intervene militarily in Lebanon or Syria to eliminate Hezbollah for good, with a view to an Iran that has reached the nuclear threshold. It is probably the meaning of the recent Iranian ballistic missile strike hitting allied Israeli assets in Erbil (Iraq) on March 13th. They also suspect that a defeat for Vladimir Putin would encourage protest in Iran. For their part, all those who hope for a positive conclusion to the Vienna negotiations in order to bring cash into the state coffers fear that the diplomatic polarization linked to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict will cause the negotiations to fail, to the great benefit of China. They are worried about the recent statements of Sergei Lavrov, who is holding the compromise reached by American and Iranian negotiators hostage. In the meantime, they are delighted with the surge in hydrocarbon prices, which offers them an unexpected boost.

Those who advocate the failure of the Vienna negotiations, believing that Iran would have every interest in getting closer to the nuclear threshold (like former Admiral Ali Shamkhani, Secretary of the National Security Council), point out that Ukraine would not have been invaded by Russia today if it had kept its nuclear arsenal in the aftermath of the Cold War. Finally, the military, which is hoping for large deliveries of arms from Russia, which are essential for modernizing its obsolete equipment, understands that a stalemate in the war in Ukraine, as well as the placing of Russia under an embargo, will not allow them to obtain the desired arms; they are therefore hoping for a rapid victory for the Kremlin or, failing that, for a cessation of hostilities, as are those who fear that Russia will no longer be able to ensure the maintenance of the civilian nuclear power plant in Bouchehr (under the supervision of the IAEA).

The Russian-Ukrainian war presents Turkey with a dilemma because, like Israel, it maintains close relations with both

belligerents. It has been moving closer to Ukraine for several years, especially in the industrial and arms fields, but needs Russia in the fields of energy (including civil nuclear power), tourism, trade and arms. As the guardian of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits (Montreux Convention of 1936), it knows that a head-on collision with Russia would have serious military, economic and strategic consequences. It would be difficult for it to challenge Russian air-sea supremacy in the Black Sea.

Its membership in NATO and its historical role as the shield of the Southern Flank against the USSR, then against Russia and Iran, have certainly pushed the United States to ask it the question of confidence: “are you with us or against us?” President R.T. Erdogan’s statements show that he has provisionally chosen his camp, that of the United States and the Atlantic Alliance, at least while waiting to see how the conflict will evolve⁴.

The Turkish president does not spare the Kremlin any less. He refuses to apply the economic sanctions against Russia, just as he refuses to deliver to Kiev the arms (UAVs and missiles) that Ukraine declares itself ready to buy. It continues to transport Russian gas through its territory, has not suspended Russian flights over its territory and has instructed its representative in Strasbourg to abstain from the vote temporarily suspending Russia from the Council of Europe. Although he threatened to close the straits to Russian ships under Article 19 of the Montreux Convention, which allows ships of belligerent nations to be prevented from leaving, he did not carry out his threat. However, it has discreetly sent Syrian mercenaries to fight in Ukraine,

⁴ R.T. Erdogan is facing a very deteriorated economic situation (50% inflation; decline in GDP); he knows that his power would probably not withstand major economic sanctions imposed by the United States, which is also safe heaven to Fethullah Gülen, his main political opponent.

recalling that the Crimea was an Ottoman land populated by Turkish-speaking Tatars.

For the moment, Turkey is playing the good pupil in NATO, cooperating with the Atlantic Alliance's navies, and muffling its resentments and provocations against the European Union. But what would happen if European unity were to crack in the face of the war in Ukraine, if the United States were to turn sharply to the Asian front, or if Vladimir Putin were to succeed in securing a ceasefire that was favourable to him?

It is too early to assess the durability of the impacts of the war in Ukraine on the North Africa and Middle East region. But if Russia's marginalization persists and if the European states most concerned with the future of this region do not seize this opportunity to re-engage, it is possible that China will take advantage of it to advance its pawns all over the place, thus improving its position vis-à-vis the United States, provided that it has not also embarked on a military adventure. One thing seems certain: the Arab world, Turkey, Iran, and Israel are watching with the utmost attention how the European Union and NATO will position themselves and manage the post-conflict situation when it arises. Any sign of weakness or pusillanimity will then be paid for dearly and in cash.

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War in Ukraine: what are the stakes for Greece?

By Aris MARGHELIS, Researcher at the University of Littoral Côte d'Opale (LARJ & TVES) and associate researcher at the Maritime and Oceanic Law Centre (University of Nantes).

The Ukrainian conflict is impacting Greece's strategic fundamentals. Greece was among the first countries to send arms to Ukraine, besides adopting a very harsh language towards Moscow. It thus seems to be breaking with its traditional position consisting in adhering to EU and NATO policies, while, at the same time, keeping working relations with Russia where possible. Indeed, Greece is trying to use the opportunity offered by the Ukrainian conflict to enhance its position in the regional security architecture in the making, to secure its interests. This move is especially vis-à-vis Turkey, still perceived as a threat, given the apparent benefits of the war in Ukraine for Ankara and NATO's indulgence towards its designs in the Aegean Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Greece was among the first countries to supply Ukraine with arms: 400 AK-47 assault rifles, rocket launchers and ammunition. It had also agreed with Berlin¹ to deliver Soviet BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles in exchange for the prior acquisition – due to the perceived Turkish threat – of more modern German Marder vehicles. This marks a major milestone, as Greece never sends weapons abroad as a matter of principle². On the other hand, Athens has so far³ not

¹ “Berlin to supply arms to Greece, Athens to deliver Soviet weapons to Kyiv -Scholz”, *Reuters*, 31 May 2022.

² With the exception of Patriot missile sent to Saudi Arabia.

³ As of the beginning of June 2022.

agreed to Washington's request⁴ to deliver Harpoon anti-ship missiles, which are considered too important for its defence against Turkey. At the same time, Athens has adopted a very tough language towards Moscow, similar to that of Eastern European countries and the United States. This indicates a second break: the move away from a traditional position of unambiguous but not overzealous fulfilment of Greece's obligations as a member of the EU and NATO, given that – unlike its partners – its primary security problem is Turkey, rather than Russia.

This Greek position on the Ukrainian conflict and the latter's effects on Greece's strategic fundamentals should therefore be explained, given that this conflict had immediate consequences in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Changing positions vis-a-vis the ongoing recompositions

The announcement of French-Greek-Turkish cooperation⁵ for a humanitarian mission in Mariupol is symptomatic of the uncertainty that followed the Russian invasion. The idea was initially a soft-power initiative to display a willingness to cooperate at low cost, in a climate in which being responsible for a resurgence of intra-NATO tensions was to be avoided⁶. However, its implementation was problematic⁷ from the beginning and its relevance was quickly undermined by the operational reality on the ground. The ability of France, Greece and their Turkish rival to

⁴ “Tank dispatch to Ukraine conditional”, *Ekathimerini*, 8 May 2022.

⁵ “France working on 'humanitarian operation' for Mariupol evacuations with Turkey, Greece”, *RFI*, 26 March 2022.

⁶ The Greek Defence Minister's statement that “this is not the best time to talk against Turkey in NATO” is quite symptomatic of the mood in the Alliance at the beginning of the conflict.

⁷ “France says Mariupol humanitarian mission not possible 'at this stage'”, *RFI*, 30 March 2022.

carry out low-level cooperation together was therefore not tested.

At the same time, the visit⁸ of the Greek Prime Minister K. Mitsotakis to Turkey in mid-March 2022 gave the impression of a lasting lull. However, a resumption of tensions⁹ quickly followed in the Aegean, indicating that Ankara was not giving ground. Denouncing the escalation, Greece eventually activated its air defence system, a rare move, while placing its armed forces stationed on land border and in the Aegean Sea on heightened alert. Turkey in turn denounced violations¹⁰ of its airspace by the Hellenic air force, with the press loyal to R. T. Erdogan suspecting that Greek pilots had been trained to use Rafales long before they were purchased, and even that they were piloted by French pilots. These reactions came after the signature, at the end of March 2022, of the final agreement for the sale of six additional Rafales to Greece and three Belharra frigates. In late May 2022, Turkey terminated unilaterally¹¹ its political cooperation with Greece. These developments suggest a continuation of existing positions and a confirmation of the French breakthrough in the Greek-Turkish equation which, besides, seems compatible¹² with the American comeback in the region.

It is in this context of structural changes – thus of uncertainty – that R. T. Erdogan tries, for his part, to accelerate the normalization of his relations with some regional actors: Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Greece's

⁸ “Turkey, Greece agree to improve ties amid Ukraine conflict”, *Reuters*, 14 March 2022.

⁹ “25 violations of Greek airspace reported day after Mitsotakis-Erdogan meeting in Istanbul”, *In*, 14 March 2022.

¹⁰ “Turkey accuses Greek warplanes of violating airspace '30 times in last 72 hours”, *The New Arab*, 29 April 2022.

¹¹ “Turkey's Erdogan says Greek PM Mitsotakis 'no longer exists' for him”, *Reuters*, 24 May 2022.

¹² “Greek parliament approves defence pact change on eve of PM's visit to U.S.”, *Reuters*, 12 May 2022.

concerns about the possible end of Turkey's isolation are therefore not unfounded. However, a return to the previous situation – Athens' solitude in a "tête-à-tête" with Ankara – now seems to have been overcome¹³. Greece, therefore, seems to be getting closer to its objectives: becoming a reliable player able to counterbalance a disproportionate and potentially destabilizing Turkish regional presence, and most importantly, fulfilling its role as the main energy, the strategic and economic interface between Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean.

The Cypriot issue and the Ukrainian conflict

Some similarities between the two conflicts

Even if their impact on international security is different, the Ukrainian and Cypriot conflicts share legal and factual similarities: invasion and occupation in name of population protection, secession, and recognition of pseudo-states. In his address to the US Congress, K. Mitsotakis linked these two conflicts, as Greece and Cyprus have a vested interest¹⁴ in seeing the fundamental principle of territorial integrity and independence applied in Cyprus as in Ukraine.

On the opposite, Turkey, despite having expressed itself in favor of Ukraine's integrity, has a greater interest in managing the territorial and political consequences of military *faits accomplis* than in seeking to nullify them. This is what is suggested¹⁵ by the diplomatic approach of R. T. Erdogan,

¹³ The fact that every step of rapprochement of these states with Turkey is systematically preceded or followed by steps towards Greece and/or Cyprus shows that the Abraham Accords are working.

¹⁴ "Dendias: 'For us, the territorial integrity of states is sacred gospel'", *OT*, 19 March 2022.

¹⁵ "Turkey ready to host Putin-Zelenskyy meeting, Erdoğan says", *Daily Sabah*, 31 March 2022.

initially overplayed by¹⁶ the pro-government press¹⁷, but which now seems to have run out of steam¹⁸. The application of this logic in Ukraine would allow Ankara to increase the threshold of acceptability of its interventions (Cyprus, Syria¹⁹, Iraq²⁰, Libya²¹) and trivialize expeditionary and expansionist logics as well as territorial and political restructuration, as to reflect the balance of power. The current juncture is precisely one of a hardening Turkish position over Cyprus. Moving towards a two-state solution²² and opening the Famagusta²³ area to settlement²⁴, Turkey is increasing the militarization²⁵ of the occupied areas of Cyprus while organizing the political and economic²⁶ conditions for a *de facto* annexation.

The energy crisis and Cyprus

The cut-off of Russian gas inevitably raises the thorny issue of the exploitation and transit of natural resources in the Eastern Mediterranean. The pressure for their exploitation – and thus for the settlement or mitigation of regional conflicts – is expected to increase. In this context, it is Cyprus that is most likely to become the receptacle of such pressure, which will be added to the

¹⁶ “The eyes and ears of the world are in Turkey for peace”, *Daily Sabah*, 10 March 2022.

¹⁷ “ANALYSIS - Turkiye's role in progress towards peace in Ukraine”, *AA*, 31 March 2022.

¹⁸ As of the beginning of June 2022.

¹⁹ “EXPLAINER: What is behind Turkey’s Syria incursion threats?”, *AP News*, 3 June 2022.

²⁰ “Turkey launches new military offensive in northern Iraq”, *Euronews*, 18 April 2022.

²¹ “Turkey’s presidency asks Parliament to extend military mission in Libya”, *The Libya Observer*, 13 June 2022.

²² “Erdogan calls for 'two-state solution' in Cyprus”, *DW*, 15 November 2022.

²³ Both actions are contrary to Security Council resolutions. K. Mitsotakis also reiterated to J. Biden that a two-state solution was unacceptable.

²⁴ “UN Security Council condemns Turkish move to reopen Cyprus ghost town Varosha”, *Euronews*, 23 July 2021.

²⁵ “Cyprus makes representations to UNSG over Turkish violations”, *CyprusMail*, 27 April 2022.

²⁶ “Ankara asserting ‘absolute authority’ over north”, *CyprusMail*, 29 May 2022.

challenges raised by the systematic dismantling²⁷ of its dense relations²⁸ with Moscow.

Therefore, more than reflecting a lack of vision, the withdrawal²⁹ of American support for the East Med gas pipeline – on the eve³⁰ of a conflict that Washington had foreseen – is first and foremost a desire to organize the Russian-Turkish disconnection. One of the effects of this disconnection is expected to be the increase in the strategic sealing between Russia and Turkey; the closure³¹ of Turkish airspace to Russian aircraft bound for Syria is a prime example. In return, it can be expected that the strategic porosity on Turkey's southern flank will increase. The words of the Deputy Secretary of State V. Nuland that “the Eastern Mediterranean needs energy, whatever the conditions”, and the Turkish Foreign Minister Cavusoglu's call³² for the EU to put pressure on Nicosia to accept the solution of a gas pipeline from Israel to Turkey via Cyprus without first resolving³³ the Cyprus problem, clearly show the logic at work. At the same time, Greece, Cyprus³⁴ and Israel³⁵ remain in limbo on the East Med.

²⁷ “Russian government voices veiled threat against Cyprus”, *Ekathimerini*, 5 December 2018.

²⁸ “US asks Cyprus to transfer its Russian made weapons to Ukraine”, *Ekathimerini*, 4 April 2022.

²⁹ “Nuland: No time or money for pipelines”, *Ekathimerini*, 7 April 2022.

³⁰ “US informs Israel it no longer supports EastMed pipeline to Europe”, *The Jerusalem Post*, 18 January 2022.

³¹ “Turkey Closes Airspace to Russian Planes Carrying Troops to Syria”, *Haaretz*, 24 April 2022.

³² “If Turkey recognises Cyprus all energy deals on table”, *Financial Mirror*, 15 April 2022.

³³ “Could Turkey-Israel rapprochement lead to gas agreement?”, *Al-Monitor*, 1 June 2022.

³⁴ “Pilides cautious over prospects for reviving EastMed pipeline”, *CyprusMail*, 16 March 2022.

³⁵ “Israeli Ambassador: Energy survival is safeguarded with different means, Russia cannot be “put in the corner” after the war”, *Greek City Times*, 13 April 2022.

What about Libya?

With its oil and gas reserves, Libya could play a role in making Russia's energy isolation project more credible. It is therefore not to be excluded that Turkey might try to regain the initiative³⁶ in the country. This would allow Turkey to restore an efficient tool for exercising regional pressure. Turkey might be hoping to make its intervention there harder to criticize the basis of its opposition to Russia, also operating in Libya. Such a development would be highly detrimental to Greece, which is seeking to dissolve the 2019 Turkish-Libyan³⁷ agreement that deprives it of access to the Eastern Mediterranean and large areas South of Crete. Despite its massive rejection by regional actors³⁸, this agreement persists and continues to serve Turkey's regional strategy of undermining the enforcement of conventional law through the accumulation of *faits accomplis*.

In this respect, none of the concessions that Greece has just granted³⁹ to launch its hydrocarbon production, in response to the energy crisis, is located in an area directly claimed by Turkey, which shows that Athens does not want an escalation for which it could be considered responsible. However, some of the blocks granted in southwest Crete overlap with the area claimed by the Tripoli government under the 2019 agreement. Moreover, Greece takes very seriously⁴⁰ the project – this time supported by Washington – of an electrical interconnection by submarine cable with Egypt, which passes through the area.

³⁶ "Bashagha visits Turkey to unblock political crisis in Libya", *Atalayar*, 13 May 2022.

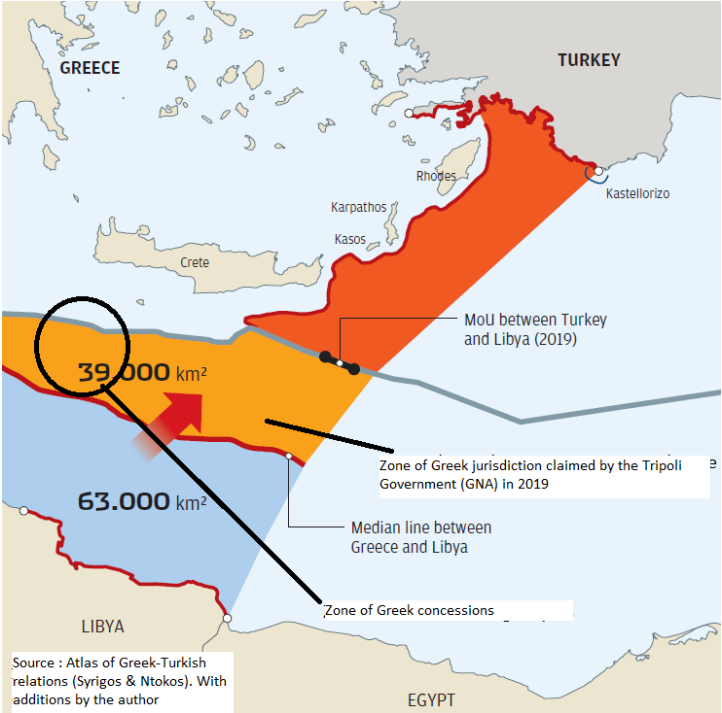
³⁷ "Turkey signs maritime boundaries deal with Libya amid exploration row", Reuters, 28 November 2019.

³⁸ "Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Greece, Cyprus, Bahrain urge UN not to register Turkish maritime boundaries deal with GNA", *Ahram Online*, 13 July 2020.

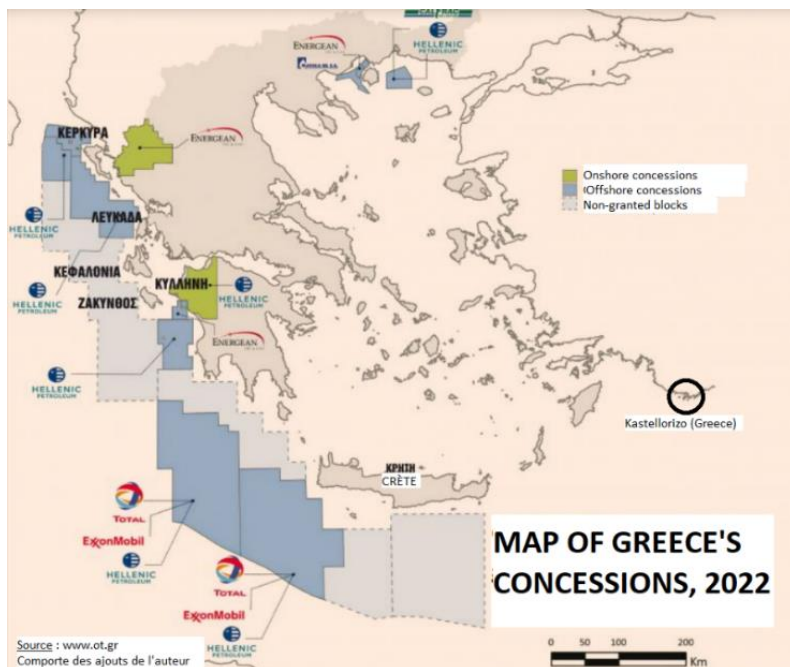
³⁹ "The three scenarios for Greece's natural gas deposits", *OT*, 28 March 2022.

⁴⁰ "Greece-Egypt electricity interconnection will upgrade Greece's geostrategic role in energy security", *Ekathimerini*, 14 April 2022.

Will Turkey defend “Libyan” interests – which are its own? In the volatile context of Libya, will the Turkish-Libyan agreement be broken, or will it become consensual among the country’s political elite? These are all crucial questions for Athens, which may arise soon.



*Source: Atlas of Greek-Turkish relations (Syrigos & Ntokos).
With additions by the author*



Source: www.ot.gr. With additions by the author.

The port of Alexandroupolis

In the 2010s, the Russians attempted to gain influence⁴¹ in Northern Greece, particularly around the port of Alexandroupolis. Through a combination of investments, socio-cultural initiatives and rapprochement with local authorities, Moscow hoped to make this area – which is the interface between the Mediterranean and the Balkans/Black Sea area – inhospitable to American interests. The growing Turkish ambivalence was already serving this purpose, and Greece – weakened by the financial crisis – was the next target: indeed, Greece and Turkey are locking this space,

⁴¹ “Greece draws in the US – and edges out Russia”, *Politico*, 9 February 2022.

which is the very reason why they joined NATO the same day, in 1952. To counter this attempt, the Greek government, with the support of the very active American ambassador in Athens⁴² – and former ambassador to Kyiv during the Maïdan events, J. Pyatt- tried to reverse the trend by transforming this marginal port into Western energy and military hub.

Alexandroupolis is now developing into a hub for liquefied natural gas (LNG) which will flow there by sea, with a transit capacity of 6.1 billion m³ per year. This project, supported by the European Commission and involving Northern Macedonia and Bulgaria, has the full support of the US. In this respect, the turn towards LNG, accelerated by the Ukrainian conflict, is rather good news: for this second-rate port, whose importance increases considerably; for the United States, since the LNG that will transit there will be partly American and will contribute to making the energy disconnection⁴³ with Russia more credible; for Greek shipowners, who will transport this LNG.

Alexandroupolis also becomes a military nexus through which the US can project⁴⁴ forces from the Aegean to Romania, thus bypassing the limitations imposed by the Montreux Convention on the transit of armed forces through the Bosphorus and freeing itself from Turkish ambiguity and transactionalism. Yet, the Ukrainian conflict highlights the strategic value of Romania, which could find itself bordering a Russian-controlled zone if Moscow were to dominate the entire Ukrainian coastline⁴⁵. Russia⁴⁶ is

⁴² Whose mandate, which has just come to an end, saw the transformation of Greece into a real American military corridor towards the Balkans and the Black Sea.

⁴³ “Moldova and Ukraine to Receive Gas from Greece”, *Balkan Insight*, 4 May 2022.

⁴⁴ “Northern Greek port becomes new key to NATO efforts”, *Ekathimerini*, 12 April 2022.

⁴⁵ According to the situation in late June 2022.

⁴⁶ “Kremlin highlights concerns over transportation of NATO’s equipment through Greek port”, *Tass*, 11 December 2022.

therefore unhappy⁴⁷ with the upgrading of this port, which highlights the chronic ineffectiveness of its diplomacy and soft power in Greece. In this respect, the recent expulsion⁴⁸ of 12 Russian diplomats is, according to Greek intelligence, linked to new attempts by Moscow to intrude by manipulating the military, regional media, academics and “leaders” of the anti-vaccine movement.

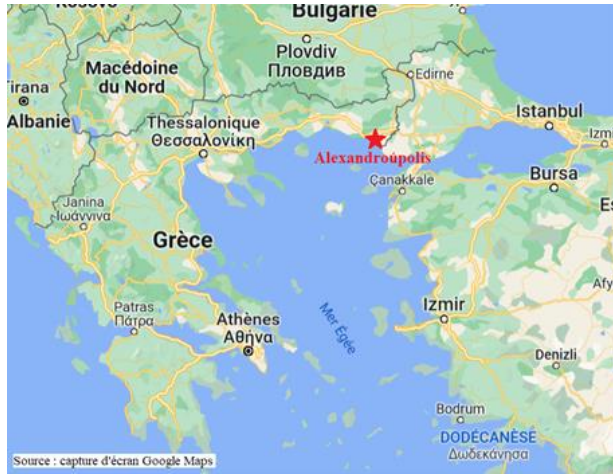
The rise of the strategic value of this port located near the Turkish border also irritates Ankara⁴⁹, leading to an oversensitive reaction⁵⁰ from the pro-government press. On the one hand, it undermines Turkey’s strategic value, which is indeed the key to Ankara’s ability to maintain a low-cost ambivalence that would have been unforgivable to any other NATO member. On the other hand, because a US military presence in the region is seen by Athens as a guarantee of security, based on the assumption that the more Greece plays an important role in the US strategic framework, the less easy prey it is.

⁴⁷ “Lavrov: Russia is “annoyed” for the US base in Alexandroupolis”, *ThemaNews*, 14 January 2022.

⁴⁸ “Greece: Threats from the Russian embassy after the deportation of the 12 diplomats: “It will not be left without consequences””, *ThemaNews*, 6 April 2022.

⁴⁹ “The presence of American helicopters in Alexandroupolis is a challenge: Turkish media”, *Greek City Times*, 30 January 2021.

⁵⁰ “A horrific deal was made to topple Erdoğan! US troops in Alexandroupoli are set to cross the border. An unprecedented betrayal is afoot!”, *Yeni Safak*, 13 December 2021.



Source: Screenshot, Google Maps.

Implications in terms of weaponry

As the Ukrainian conflict marks the return of conventional power as a foreign policy tool in Europe, it also points to the end of Greek exceptionalism, whereby Greece was the only post-Cold War European country to maintain a massive (and expensive) conventional military capability due to the perceived Turkish threat. This is rather good news for Athens, which has joined⁵¹ the call of European States⁵² to exclude military spending from the public deficit, despite the reluctance⁵³ of Berlin and The Hague. Moreover, Greece hopes that the context of unabashed rearmament will discredit the Turkish demand for the demilitarization of the Eastern Aegean islands. This is an

⁵¹ “Greek PM says defence spending should be excluded from public deficit”, *Euractiv*, 11 March 2022.

⁵² “Poland to ramp up defence spending, army as Ukraine war rages”, *Reuters*, 3 March 2022.

⁵³ Big countries play down calls to waive defense from EU deficit rules, *Politico*, 7 March 2022.

existential issue for Athens, as Turkey is now officially and increasingly challenging Greek sovereignty over the islands in question.

However, this phase of Western rearmament could also lead to the lifting⁵⁴ of restrictive measures on the sale of military equipment to Turkey, as evidenced by the State Department's and J. Biden's⁵⁵ favourable opinion on the modernization⁵⁶ and sale of F-16V fighters⁵⁷ to Turkey. This would be detrimental to Greece, which would see an increasing disparity in the balance of power with Turkey that it has been working so hard to reduce. However, as far as the American equipment is concerned, this would mean overcoming two obstacles: the CAATSA sanctions and a passage through Capitol Hill, which remains difficult. Aware that it is in Congress that the battle will be waged⁵⁸, K. Mitsotakis addressed⁵⁹ his members on the implications of arms sales to Turkey.

Ukrainian conflict and the “Hellenosphere”⁶⁰

To bolster its strategy, Greece strives to mobilise the three vehicles that amplify the country's international influence: the maritime world, Orthodoxy and the diaspora. The Ukrainian conflict

⁵⁴ “Will Ukraine crisis help Turkey dodge Western arms embargoes?”, *Al-Monitor*, 28 March 2022.

⁵⁵ “Biden supports F-16 sale to Turkey, is confident about congressional approval”, *Reuters*, 1 July 2022.

⁵⁶ “Turkey Wins Biden Backing for Its F-16 Fighter Jets Upgrades”, *Bloomberg*, 12 May 2022.

⁵⁷ “U.S. says potential F-16 sale to Turkey would serve U.S. interests, NATO – letter”, *Reuters*, 8 April 2022.

⁵⁸ “Advocacy groups press Congress to reject Biden weapons sale to Turkey”, *Yahoo!*, 13 May 2022.

⁵⁹ “Greek leader warns Congress against weapons sales to Turkey”, *The Hill*, 17 May 2022.

⁶⁰ Term used by G. Prévelakis, professor at the Sorbonne and representative of Greece at the OECD.

happens to involve them all.

The maritime world

The turn towards LNG is proving particularly favourable to Greek shipowners⁶¹ who hold⁶² nearly a quarter⁶³ of the world's LNG transport. In addition, the know-how⁶⁴ they possess makes it possible to cultivate regional synergies⁶⁵. They have also increased⁶⁶ their share in the transport of Russian oil, as several European companies have stopped their activities due to the Ukrainian conflict⁶⁷. Moreover, the increasing impermeability of the Russian-European borders, likely to slow down the development of the rail vector of the Chinese Silk Roads, could redirect part of the flows towards the Mediterranean and thus benefit the port of Piraeus, the first regional entry point for Chinese products.

The Ukrainian conflict thus appears to be an opportunity for Greece to make a qualitative and quantitative breakthrough in the maritime domain, at a time when it is trying to revitalise its maritime status and its role in Europe's energy security, two key elements of its regional strategy.

⁶¹ "South Korea Dominates LNG Shipbuilding", *Marine Link*, 13 February 2022.

⁶² "Greek tanker owners moving to LNG", *Lloyd's List*, 3 October 2019.

⁶³ "Greeks rule global LNG carrier market", *Shipping Herald*, 17 March 2022.

⁶⁴ "Dynagas Ltd. and Uniper facilitated the charter of two FSRUs for Germany", *Uniper*, 5 May 2022.

⁶⁵ "Greek group in talks with Egypt for investments in ship bunkering with LNG", *Egypt Independent*, 19 March 2022.

⁶⁶ "Russian sanctions provide opportunity for Greek shipowners", *Lloyd's List*, 29 April 2022.

⁶⁷ Hence Greece's opposition to the EU ban on the transport of Russian oil by ships flying a European flag.

The Orthodox clergy

Although Slavs, and in particular Russians, constitute the demographic substance of the Orthodox world, the spiritual and institutional “keys” remain mainly in Greek hands. Over the past few years, we have witnessed a reconfiguration of the geopolitics of Orthodoxy in which the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which intimately linked to Greece, plays a pivotal role.

Very close to the United States⁶⁸, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew used his spiritual and institutional power to give the Ukrainian church its independence (autocephaly) in 2018, a controversial decision. He thus ended the Moscow Patriarchate’s centuries-old tutelage over Kyiv, thereby leading⁶⁹ to a rupture⁷⁰ between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Moscow Patriarchate. Bartholomew’s recent recognition⁷¹ of the Archdiocese of Ohrid (Northern Macedonia), until then entirely dependent on the Serbian Church, confirms this desire to break the “Slavic-Orthodox” tandem, insofar as it is perceived as a vector of Russian influence and participates in the common project of V. Putin and the Russian Patriarch Cyril to cement the “Russian world”. For its part, the Russian Church is now seeking to undermine⁷² the power⁷³ of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The stakes are rather high because on the perpetuation of the Greek spiritual and institutional preeminence in the Orthodox world

⁶⁸ “Pompeo meets Orthodox spiritual leader in Istanbul”, *AP News*, 17 November 2020.

⁶⁹ “Ukraine-Russia tensions reach Greece’s holy Mount Athos”, *The Guardian*, 14 December 2018.

⁷⁰ “Orthodox Schism As Russian Church ‘Breaks All Ties’ With Constantinople Over Ukraine”, *Greek Reporter*, 15 October 2018.

⁷¹ “Moscow: Intrusion with political motives from the Phanar to the Serbian Church”, *Orthodox Times*, 11 May 2022.

⁷² “Moscow “adopted” 102 clergymen of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, forms “Exarchate of Africa” (upd)”, *Orthodox Times*, 29 December 2022.

⁷³ “Extreme challenge by Moscow: It wants to establish an exarchate in Turkey”, *Orthodox Times*, 2 January 2022.

depends the obstruction of Russian power strategy in its religious dimension – which Washington has perfectly understood⁷⁴ – but also Athens’ access to a dense and efficient international network.

The Greek national minority in Ukraine

Founders of Mariupol in 1780 and accounting for a quarter of its 400,000 inhabitants, the Greeks of Ukraine⁷⁵ are established precisely in the arch of crisis from Odessa to the Donbass. For Athens, the stakes are twofold: to play a leading role⁷⁶ in their protection⁷⁷ and, at the same time, to cement its rapprochement with this community – which has long been distant from Greece because of the Iron Curtain – in order to acquire a vector of influence in Ukraine, where Turkish penetration has considerably increased. On the other hand, because they live in an area where Russian influence is historically important, if not dominant, it is not certain that the Greeks of Ukraine as a whole pledge allegiance to Kyiv. In this respect, the Greek communities in Crimea and Donetsk seem to have come to terms with Russian tutelage. The danger of fragmentation of Ukrainian Greeks into “pro-Russian” and “pro-Ukrainian” is therefore real⁷⁸. Moreover, it is difficult to predict what the future geographical distribution of Greeks will be between areas controlled by Kyiv and by Moscow.

Faced with these uncertainties, Athens’ resolutely pro-Ukrainian

⁷⁴ “U.S. Support to the Ecumenical Patriarchate After Orthodox Schism”, *Greek Reporter*, 16 October 2018.

⁷⁵ “Greeks of Ukraine Celebrate Hellenic Heritage in Spectacular Festival”, *Greek Reporter*, 22 October 2021.

⁷⁶ “Greek foreign minister wants to lead humanitarian aid mission to Mariupol”, *Reuters*, 22 March 2022.

⁷⁷ “Greece seeks war crimes probe in besieged Ukrainian port of Mariupol”, *Reuters*, 7 April 2022.

⁷⁸ In this respect, V. Zelenski’s choice to present two members of the Azov battalion, allegedly of Greek origin, before the Greek parliament is not without significance and has given rise to strong criticism.

stance raises questions: if the territories where the Greeks live end up under Russian control, will the link with this community resist a second iron curtain, at a time when Greece meets⁷⁹ all the conditions⁸⁰ to be qualified as an unfriendly country by Russia?

What prospects?

The Ukrainian conflict confirms the Greek strategy of the last few years: that of moving away from a “Turkish-centric provincialism”⁸¹ to position itself more widely as a receptacle, producer and redistributor of security, capable of shaping regional developments through new alliances and a credible military tool. Nevertheless, Greece must increase its vigilance because its revisionist neighbour is entering a phase of uncertainty, and is therefore dangerous, while the Ukrainian conflict has an accelerating and amplifying effect.

The prolongation⁸² of the war restricts the space for strategic ambivalence and transactionalism, which gives Ankara its freedom of action. While it can be expected to gradually adapt its strategy to this reality, Turkey must nevertheless work on its re-linkage to the Western strategic framework. Indeed, its transition to “strategic self-sufficiency”, which would have spared it these difficulties, has not been fully completed to date, partly because of French-Hellenic synergy. In addition, the elections scheduled for 2023 require the Turkish president to display some successes. In the absence of a

⁷⁹ “Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman decries Greek stance”, *Ekathimerini*, 6 March 2022.

⁸⁰ “Russia-Ukraine war stirs Greek concerns in the Mediterranean”, *Al Jazeera*, 8 March 2022.

⁸¹ “Turkey now ‘acting without logic,’ says Dendias”, *Ekathimerini*, 27 September 2021.

⁸² “Turkey’s FM says some NATO allies want ‘longer’ Ukraine war to weaken Russia”, *Alarabiya*, 10 March 2022.

positive record, will he be tempted to take action against Greece or Cyprus⁸³, an idea that is becoming more and more consensual⁸⁴ among the Turkish political elite? He has shown in recent years that he would be capable of doing so and the Ukrainian conflict does not seem to have rendered prohibitive for Ankara the cost of revisionism and the use of force as a means of exercising foreign policy.

Turkey has long aspired – including through military threat – to a reshaping of its relations with Greece, which would allow it to enshrine a balance of power that it believes has shifted in its favour over the past decades. It could well perceive the current context of structural reorganization of international relations as an opportunity to finally achieve this objective. Moreover, it would dismantle Greece’s attempt to extricate itself from its position of eternal strategic hostage to Turkey, an attempt whose success is a *sine qua non* condition for the successful implementation of Greece’s regional strategy. It is precisely this dangerous situation and the choices it implies that the Greek Chief of Staff wanted to describe when he said that “we would rather be at the table than on the menu”⁸⁵. Hence the strategy of curbing this Turkish mechanism by strengthening and diversifying the Greek “security portfolio”, to which the Greek-French partnership belongs fully, but which has not yet been achieved in terms of rearmament.

The modalities of a Turkish-Western reconnection are therefore the central issue for Athens and Nicosia, which do not wish to become the bargaining chip of this reconnection in the name of strategic necessity. From this point of view, we can expect Greece to continue strengthening its security to neutralize Turkish

⁸³ In particular by annexing the occupied part of Cyprus.

⁸⁴ “Turkish opposition backs Erdogan over Greek island claims”, *Ekathimerini*, 2 June 2022.

⁸⁵ At the Delphi Economic Forum on 8 April 2022.

strategic harassment and to discredit the postulate of “East Mediterranean exceptionalism”, supported by Turkey, which demands the application of alternative rules to the detriment of conventional law. Otherwise, the perpetuation of Turkish ambiguity is probably preferable for Athens: its zealousness on the Ukrainian issue will allow it to contrast with Ankara and remain the “safe bet” in the region, in order to collect “geopolitical dividends” and secure its borders.

Thus, if one could expect that the complexity and the overlap of the stakes raised by the Ukrainian conflict would give rise to the most balanced position possible, it is precisely these stakes that have pushed Athens to fully⁸⁶ embrace the American dialectic on the Ukrainian conflict, hoping to make this crisis the occasion for a qualitative geopolitical gain. The choice seems, at first sight, relevant, since the role of energy, strategic and economic interface between Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean implies becoming the hub of European and American interests in the region, which is not an easy task. Indeed, the Ukrainian conflict has increased the strategic convergence between Europe and the United States, has diminished Germany, traditionally close to Ankara, and has not led to a “strategic re-domestication” of Turkey that would have restored it as the centerpiece of the Western strategic apparatus in the region. Against the backdrop of the energy crisis, Athens perceived this situation as a rare opportunity to push its agenda. Given the above, its posture on the Ukrainian conflict could not have been different.

However, this ambitious choice will be tested by three major unknowns. First, is the nature of future Russian-Western relations, which will determine the cost to Greece of moving away from its

⁸⁶ “Biden thanks Mitsotakis for supporting Ukraine, says US-Greece relations at peak”, *In*, 16 May 2022.

traditional position towards Russia. Second, Turkey's choices between now and the elections scheduled for 2023 and the situation that will emerge from them. Finally, the question of who, between the Turks and the West, will end up having the upper hand in defining the modalities of the reorganization of their strategic relationship.

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Iran: the bomb is ticking

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Iran's advancement in nuclear and ballistic missile programs has raised concerns not only in the Middle East, but also in the western hemisphere. Despite the world denunciations, Iran continues the development of both programs. Regional powers see such programs as a threat to regional stability, international peace and security, and consider it an existential dilemma. The international community must confront Iran and not let it subvert peace and security. If Iran becomes a nuclear power, a nuclear arm race in the Middle East is inevitable. Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia are the runner-ups. Furthermore, Israel is existentially the most provoked State in the Middle East.

Brief introductory

The talks on the Iranian Nuclear deal are on the verge of collapsing. Josep Borrell, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, said that the possibility of a deal to revive the nuclear deal with Iran is diminishing. The international community has expressed its worries if there is no deal. Rafael Grossi, IAEA Director General, stated that Iran's access to the capabilities needed to build a nuclear weapon is a matter of time, and the information given to the IAEA by Iran is just not enough. The Iranian nuclear program has been under great suspicion by the international community, and it requires serious measures to ensure international peace and security in the Middle East. The negotiations taken place in Vienna are not very promising, and the

danger of Iran becoming a nuclear power is looming on the horizon. Will the world awaken, or will it release the Kraken?

Background

The world still suffers from legacy of the Cold War. The United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics wooed many nations in order to secure as many allies as they could through various programs; India, Libya, Iran, Pakistan, North Korea to name a few. In December 1953, US President Dwight Eisenhower announced a historical event that would change world peace. Under the hall of the United Nations, he presented to the world a program; Atoms for Peace, to commit the US to assist other nations establishing their own nuclear programs for peaceful use. He said:

“...if a danger exists in the world, it is a danger shared by all; and equally, that if hope exists in the mind of one nation, that hope should be shared by all”.

Although “Atom for Peace” Program had high goals, it caused the world many problems; Pakistan, India, and North Korea are mere example to how “*Atoms for Peace*” turned such states to be nuclear weapon states instead.

Iran the Shah

In 1957, the Shah of Iran Mohammed Reza Pahlavi being a strong US ally, Iran was among those who enrolled in the program. The program laid the foundation for Iran’s nuclear program through the transfer of nuclear technology, research reactors, nuclear fuel equipment laboratories, and scientific training. Only in 1967 did Iran receive its first nuclear reactor, 5 megawatts known as Tehran Research reactor powered by high-grade enriched uranium (HEU)

with a capacity to produce 600 grams of Plutonium yearly. A year later, Iran has signed the non-proliferation treaty of nuclear weapons (NPT).

The Shah evidently strengthened Iran's nuclear program by insuring in-house nuclear R&D through the establishment of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran. In 1973, he announced a plan to build 20 nuclear power reactors, a uranium enrichment facility, and other auxiliary premises with an ambitious goal to achieve 23 Gigawatts of electric power before the end of the millennium. Iran continued its hefty investment in its nuclear program. In 1974, a German contractor, Siemens, signed a contract to build a nuclear plant with two reactors at the Iranian city, Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant. In 1976, Iran became a stakeholder with fifteen percent of shares in the RTZ uranium mine Rossing in Namibia and acquired ten percent of stakes in the Eurodif Tricastin uranium enrichment plant in France. In addition, it purchased seven hundred million dollars' worth of the so-called yellow cake from South Africa. Today, Iran nuclear program has the capability to produce weapon-grade uranium. Consequently, Iran's nuclear program has thus far crossed the Rubicon. It had matured in various aspects from the transfer of technology, to training, infrastructure, supply chain mechanism, and ownership of raw materials.

Iran the ayatollahs

In 1979, a revolution spurred by the Ayatollahs, Shia religious scholars, led to the overthrow of the Shah's regime and placed the Ayatollah's in power transforming Iran from a US ally to becoming a US Foe. Eventually, the US and its allies ceased cooperation with the Iranian nuclear program. Nevertheless, the Ayatollah regime continued to advance the nuclear program through illicit networks.

Such networks involve the renegades such as North Korea, Pakistan, Libya and part of the suspected so-called Abdul Qadir Khan's underground nuclear network during the 1980's. Such networks also helped Iran gain access to other programs like the North Korea missile program that seems logical to complement its nuclear program and fits into its leadership's ambitious plans. Unsurprisingly, many intelligence reports have leaked plans of the Iranian regime's intention to acquire nuclear weapon expertise. Yet more, many intelligence agencies such as the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV), and the US National Intelligence have warned and predicted that the Iranian regime is few years away to construct its first nuclear bomb.

Iran objectives: a nuclear powers' ambition, or a problematic game of diplomacy

Iran like other States has its own reasons to seek nuclear weapon capabilities. The regime's structure and its political stance converge to the necessity in obtaining nuclear weaponry. Even more, the collaborative work with North Korea on both missile and nuclear programs have yielded to Iran's greater goal to be a nuclear power. In addition, the regime has a deep sense of insecurity coming from the turbulent geopolitical relations with its surrounding region; the eight-year war with Iraq, and the superpowers internationally. Besides, the war with Iraq by the coalition contributed to the advancement further in that direction secretly. Subsequently, Iran's infiltration into geo-strategical areas such as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen and to some extent Kuwait, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia are evidence of a master plan and desire for regional supremacy. The transition of a peaceful nuclear energy and research programs to a military nuclear program has required a great deal from the Ayatollah regime

clandestinely and diplomatically. An undisclosed cooperation between Russian scientists and their Iranian counterpart continued in many projects such as Natanz Enrichment Complex, and the 40 megawatts heavy water research reactor at Arak and many other locations kept on surfacing to the international community: the United Nations, and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Ever since the fall of the Shah's regime, Iran has been under constant investigation by the IAEA, US sanctions, and UN Security Council resolutions. Eventually, the international community on many lawful grounds has accused Iran of malpractice (non-cooperation, or non-compliance) and sanctioned its nuclear program. Nonetheless, Iran has long experiences in evading such imposition. Utilizing its diplomatic skills, Iran has entered into a trail of agreements and negotiations until 2015; the year of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)

Also known as the Iranian nuclear deal, JCPOA is an agreement among the following nations: US, France, UK, Russia, China, Germany and Iran (5+1 & Iran). It consists of a 25-year nuclear agreement to limit Iran's nuclear capacity in order to lift the imposed sanctions. Despite the imposed economic sanctions, Iran has continued advancing its nuclear program. Concerned nations have tried to persuade Iran to initiate a dialogue and to regain trust of the international community that its nuclear program is of a peaceful nature, but none has resulted in a formal agreement. In 2013, the former Iranian President Hassan Rouhani expressed his desire to bridge the gap between Iran's truthful intentions of peaceful nuclear program and gaining a mutual understanding of

the necessity utilizing nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Vienna, in July of 2015, the JCPOA parties, (P5+1 & Iran), sealed a deal in an effort to slow Iran's progress towards the development of nuclear weapon through the reduction of uranium enrichment activities. The deal has survived many hurdles to be implementable with several violations to the deal, then prolonged negotiations and paused periods that benefited Iran to gain more time in its race to achieve a weapon-grade highly enriched uranium. Until today, and after 7 years, the deal has encountered many challenges and created a case of mistrust due to the many surfacing evidence of Iran's regime misconduct such as secret centrifugal facilities, the presence of uranium substances in undisclosed areas, and many others. Presently, it is idling with little or no hope for the deal resurrection again. The deal safely aims to witness a peaceful nuclear program of Iran not to be overturned into a nuclear weapon program.

Iran's objectives: what if the deal fails

Many spectators who are following the negotiations are convinced that the deal is close to be announced as "*no deal*". Iran in its case is benefiting so far in gaining time that is highly valuable in order to break the threshold and officially enter the nuclear club much like its precedents: India Pakistan, and North Korea. Nevertheless, what supports such a conclusion? There are series of factors that tend to lean towards the deal's failure.

First is the strengthened influence of hardliners inside the Iranian parliament. Many years of tension between Iran and the United States have proven that the greater the American pressure and threats to the Iranian regime, the harder the extreme fundamentalist conservative movement can tighten its grip on

Iran's internal affairs. In addition, more obstacles are hindering the efforts to establish channels of communication with the (P5+1), or reaching deals, or a common understanding with them. The economic sanctions imposed on Iran have given this faction the opportunity to campaign against the former president of Iran, Hassan Rouhani, Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif, and the moderate movement. This became all too apparent during Trump's withdrawal from the nuclear deal, accusing them of reaching a deal that included significant concessions by Iran in exchange for the few economic returns it has received. The result of the late presidential election held in June 2021, has strengthened the influence of the extreme fundamentalist conservative movement. This movement supported President Ibrahim Raisi winning the post of the Presidency, who constantly confirms that the Iranian economy will not depend on the nuclear agreement and that Iran will not rely on its relations with European Union, or the lifting of United States sanctions.

Second, this is due to the escalating instability in the region. The failure of the efforts to reach a final agreement in Vienna may lead to an escalation of instability in the Middle East, especially as Iran plays a key role in crisis countries such as Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen. To raise the cost of failure, Iran may tend to target US interests in some of these countries, especially through pro-Iranian militias in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, and/ or the US allies in the region, like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. In addition, it could lead to a new war in the region, mainly in the observance of the continuation of Iranian nuclear activities. Such activities will contribute to the exacerbation of other crises such as the continued flow of refugees, drugs, and migrants from the region to Europe, and thus increasing the risk of carrying out new terrorist attacks both in the region and within the

European Union too. Iran doesn't remarkably seem to be keen on ruling this possibility out, as it is evident in its insistence on developing its missile program and leave it off negotiation table. During negotiation, Iran has made several provocative announcements.

To mention a few:

1. In December of 2021, it announced the Simorgh rocket space launch.

2. In February of 2022, it announced a new indigenous surface-to-surface missile, "Khiber Shaken" with a range of 1,450 kilometers.

Astonishingly, in April 2022, Iranian President Ibrahim Raisi made a confrontational statement at a ceremony revealing nine nuclear achievements as part of Iran's national day of nuclear technology. He said that Iran's nuclear technology is "*irreversible*" and search in the nuclear field shall not abide to other's requests. This is a clear defiant message to the United States' imposed sanctions, and the pressure of more continues, Iran can still develop its own technology, launch long-range missiles, and advance its own nuclear capability indigenously.

Third is the growing roles of other powers in the region. The failure of Iran negotiations may strengthen the influence of many regional and international powers in the Middle East such as Turkey, and Russia. Especially the latter, which seeks to regain its status as an international superpower, which explains some aspects of its policy towards the Ukrainian crisis. It is also close to "the edge of abyss", mainly after Russia's decision, in February of 2022, to recognize the Donetsk and Luhansk republics as independent States.

Forth is the Biden administration declining popularity. It has

created a sense of failure to salvage the nuclear deal and a major blow to President Joe Biden as his foreign policy decisions have come under increased scrutiny, especially in the wake of the humiliating withdrawal from Afghanistan and the escalation of the Ukraine crisis. Taken together, these developments could directly affect President Biden's fortunes in the upcoming US mid-term elections.

Then, there is the impact of the outcomes of the talks on the Ukraine crisis, there have not yet been direct US, or even NATO comments, talking about the expected effects of the negotiating tracks on the Ukraine crisis. However, the possibility of reaching an agreement in Vienna could ease the energy crisis created by the Russian military operations, and the combined US- EU sanctions on Russia. Paradoxically, Iran is coming out stronger and in much better position than ever to negotiate the deal. That is due to its possible role in easing up energy market prices if the sanctions on its oil and gas industry are lifted.

Iran nuclear program: in comparison to who!

Many countries have started secretly their own nuclear programs. Iraq, Iran, Libya, Syria, Pakistan, India, North Korea, and others. The Libyans, the Iraqis, and lately the Syrians were not successful due to the early intervention militarily to cease their nuclear programs by force with favorable conditions. In the case of Iraq, in 1981, Israel conducted an air strike to the Iraqi nuclear reactor site, Osirak, (Operation Opera). At the time, Iraq was at war with Iran (the eight-year Iraq-Iran war). In the case of Syria, in 2007, a rudimentary nuclear program that was annihilated through an Israeli air strike during the Arab offspring revolution. Moreover, In the case of Libya, in 2011, NATO forces intervened and captured

the Sabha yellowcake storage facilities through the IAEA confiscation during the Arab Spring-related Libyan crisis.

Covertly, Iran nuclear program has evolved secretly under the cover up of its Peaceful nuclear energy program that began with the US “*Atom for Peace program*”. What makes the Iranian case different is the diplomatic practices of long negotiation processes with the international community, much like North Korea.

North Korea’s nuclear weapon program development also shares similar footprints with the Iranian one. Surprisingly, it constitutes a similar process of long negotiation campaigns with the international community; NPT ratification but with the exclusion of safeguards agreement, the presence of strong evidence of nuclear advancement until it succeeded in detonating its first nuclear explosion in 2006, and the Six-Party Talks much like the (P5+1).

The Iranian Nuclear Program manages to survive until today for it has not been dealt with the same way as in the case of Iraq, Libya, or Syria. In contrast, these countries nuclear program have been eradicated at very early stages. Similarly, North Korea has profited from long negotiations in order to avoid any possibility for aggressive disarmament. As a consequence, its nuclear weapon program has advanced ultimately.

The Iranian nuclear program maturity is incomparable to the Iraqi, Syrian, or Libyan cases. The Iranian regime has safeguarded its nuclear program through the massive investment in its national defense systems, indigenous missiles programs, ballistics, cruise, anti-air, drone technologies and many others. It has also utilized the geographical mountainous terrains to construct missile underground facilities covertly. Similarly, it has developed and progressed its nuclear program, reinforcing its defense networks

with newly acquired Russian S-300 Air defense systems, and constructing layers of geographical defenses regionally through militia systems like Hezbollah in Lebanon, and other militias in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. In addition, Iran geo-strategically has positioned itself on a vital maritime strait; Strait of Hormuz, and disrupted to some extent the strait of Bab el Mandeb through its Yemeni militias, the Houthis. Reluctantly, the international community has only hoped that economic sanctions, negotiations, and incentives could persuade the Iranian regime to abandon such ambitions of building its own indigenous nuclear weapon program. Much like Pakistan, India, and North Korea, it only benefitted Iran to gain precious time and move its nuclear weapon program forward. If such a course of actions fails, it is imminent that Iran will join the nuclear club much like Pakistan, India, and North Korea already did.

Iran's ballistic missile program: more than a reason for nuclear weapons!

In 1986, Iran's regime granted its Revolutionary Guards the authority to create Iran's first indigenous ballistic missile program by reverse engineering the classic soviet ballistic missile, Scud. For example, Iraq and North Korea implemented similar approaches. Iraq had employed it in the past while it was developing its nuclear program. Having been successful, the world would now have to deal with an Iraqi nuclear regime, much like North Korea today. Luckily, Iraq program was terminated before it could develop a nuclear weapon. Heedlessly, the international community has observed such similarity in the case of India and Pakistan, which both have a missile program in conjunction with their nuclear weapon programs.

Limited options, but we must beat the clock

Limited options consist of two approaches: the diplomatic approach towards the Iranian regime with a two stage-policy – confinement and encirclement policies followed with a Truman doctrine-style policy approach. Instead of communism, Iran’s ideological containment concept applied policy through military regional isolation, and Iranian-backed militias’ terminations are an assured policy for an efficacious confinement. Other options are of high stakes: namely the regime change approach, and “*Israeli style strike*” approach with a military intervention, but for a great global cause.

Analysis of the options

Confinement:

Confinement is a policy long used and practiced mainly during the time of cold war. The US adopted such policy to confine the USSR and isolate it through clusters of alliances and military bases in order to suppress the spread of communist ideology as well as through economic incentives. The US has a long experience of implementing such a policy to a certain degree on Iran regime’s ideologically and militarily. Iran keeps spreading its ideology in many areas regionally and increase regional supporters; the Shiite militias; Hezbollah and its derivatives. Thus, Iran expansion regionally can be confronted, and the presence of its militias can be negatively affected. If not, these militias will eventually gain access to nuclear weapons much as they have now with drones and missiles today. Consequently, the world will face greater disturbance to its international law and order through the multiplier factor these militias adhere to.

Encirclement:

However, in military parlance, encirclement is a policy that has seemed effective before with Iraq, Libya, and to some extent with North Korea. It is the next step to follow on if the confinement policy was incapable of deescalating the Iranian progress to develop a nuclear weapon. In order to have strong opposed message to Iran's nuclear weapon program ambitions, the intensification of such policy must be in effect, and if only regional links to Iran's militias have been terminated through Truman doctrine-style policy. Such policy's prerequisite ensures the ultimate effectiveness to prevail the world's peace and international security not to be in jeopardy.

Truman Doctrine-Style policy:

Considered a great pillar of American foreign policy, and the first spark to ignite the formation of the North Atlantic treaty Organization, NATO, the Truman Doctrine is a policy that consists of two goals. The primary goal is to realize the containment of the expansion of the USSR geopolitically at the time of the Cold War. The secondary goal is to stop the spread of communist uprisings through armed minorities, militias, in order to pressure their States to be pro-communism such as in Greece and Turkey. Similarly, Iran's ideological regime and its constitutional concept of "Exporting the Revolution" shares many commonalities with what the Truman doctrine has fought for. Iran's regime spreads such ideology through arming minorities. It is also utilizing an ideological theme of Shi'ism that favors, the Ayatollah, a theocratic form of government, a concept that was founded by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979. It is that all Shiites must adhere, and obey the one Supreme Ayatollah. It is observed by many Shiite minorities nowadays e.g within Shia communities in Lebanon, Hezbollah

rules by the name of Ayatollah. It is also similar in Iraq Shiite militias, Syria, and Yemen, and to some extent in the Kingdom of Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia.

The Truman doctrine can lay a fundamental policy in the case of Iran. If Iran becomes a nuclear power what will keep it from arming its militias with nuclear weapons too? What if in one day the Middle East faces a similar scenario like the Cuban missile crisis? Such questions are not far away from becoming a reality. The region is sensing hostility between Iran and its surroundings. Israel and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are indignant at the existing JCPOA, not to mention the prolonged negotiations that only Iran seems the winner in it. Even further, Turkey to some extent and Egypt especially will not accept the imbalance of power and the disturbance of the geostrategic status quo. It is more of a chain reaction that can reach as far as the Mediterranean basin and threaten NATO borders.

Regime change approach:

Hard as it may sound, but it is one perilous policy to explore. It is to evoke similar uprisings in Iran, much like in Libya, and Syria, thus to destabilize the regime's progression in its nuclear program and to sway Iranian decision makers in revising their policies and abandoning their ambitions of becoming a nuclear power. Any Iranian unrest measured internally can be advantageous to aforementioned policies.

Military intervention:

Military intervention approach has a geo-strategic philosophy. Much like Iraq, but a lot less of Syria, and Libya. Iraq has been

involved in an eight-year war, then economic sanctions, then an invasion/liberation. The difference in Iran case is that it has established regional allies backed by militias in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. Such an arrangement provides layers of security and defense lines geopolitically and militarily. It has also mastered the game of sanctions and created a complex system to deceive them.

What if Iran denotates its first nuclear weapon?

So far, Iran has ticked almost all the boxes. Based on security intelligence reports and state officials from many countries, statements have revealed how close Iran is to building its first nuclear weapon. They are warning the world of a geo-strategic shift in the balance of power if Iran becomes a nuclear power in the Middle East. Ambiguously, the imbalance of power in the Middle East will spark a nuclear arm race. The Saudi crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said, “(...) *But without a doubt, if Iran developed a nuclear bomb, we would follow suit as soon as possible*”. Not only Saudi, but also Turkey and Egypt will surely join the race and all the long invested efforts in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) will be at stake. On the contrary, the State of Israel could be the most affected regionally if Iran becomes a nuclear power.

Israel, for instance, has warned the IAEA that it will use its “rights to self-defense” to stop Iran’s nuclear program. In comparison to the Ukrainian crisis, Russian State’s official, Vyacheslav Volodin, warns Europe would disappear if it gives Ukrainian forces access to their nuclear arsenals. Such response came after an EU Parliament member, Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski, statement that “*the west has the right to give Ukraine nuclear*

warheads to protect its independence". Similarly, the region of the Middle East has a great apprehension caused already by Iran's foreign policy without nuclear weapons.

The reasons behind all of this: the Iranian constitution and the principle of "exporting the revolution"

From an analytical point of view, why would Iran want to possess nuclear weapons? The answer could be in Iran's own constitution. The Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Adel Al-Jubair said that Iran's constitution provides for the export of the Revolution, and asked, "*How can we negotiate with Tehran?*". Iran seeks to acquire nuclear weaponry to protect its ideology, and to ensure its masterplan for expansion. Ironically, the western hemisphere seems to shed an eye since 1979, and to all of the catastrophic events and turmoil the region had gone through until this very day because of such a constitution. It has underestimated the principle of "*exporting the Revolution*", which Saddam Hussein has confronted for eight long years in which the export of the revolution was literally immobilized, but at a high cost. The Iranian regime reluctantly accepted the cease-fire then. Aside from any emotions, Iraq aggression against Iran at least thwarted to export the revolution for eight years. Afterwards, Iran resumed the construction of ideological grounds through organizing Shiites armed groups, ideological Militias, and strengthening them to expand ideologically, geopolitically, and militarily like Hezbollah, and others. With the absence of a strong Iraq, Iran had the audacity to infiltrate and resume the "*export of Revolution*" to its regional surrounding. More evidently, Members of the Iranian Parliament (MP) have explicitly boasted that Iran controls three Arab capitals "in the bag"; Bagdad, Damascus, and Beirut, with Sanaa soon to follow. Describing the fall of Sanaa in Yemen as a "natural

extension” of the Iranian revolution, MP Ali Reza Zakani, hailed for the fall of Yemen into the control of Houthi. That, he added, “the Yemeni revolution will not be confined to Yemen alone, it will extend into Saudi territories” such territories that extend to the Shiite minorities in the Eastern Province where Saudi Arabia’s richest oil deposits lie. In addition, Iran yearns to bring back its lost glory, the Persian Empire. That is why Iran sees Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen as its outer border.

Many centuries ago, Thucydides argued that when an overly ambitious rising nation/State threatens the dominance of a more powerful nation/State, the two are likely to go to war. If Iran continues developing its nuclear weapon program, wars in the Middle East will become an unescapable fate. It is less costly to deal with non-nuclear Iran, so engaging now rather than waiting until it becomes nuclear power seems the right thing to do.

Conclusion

Eisenhower’s Atoms for Peace program neglected the dark side of his own words, “...*if a danger exists in the world, it is a danger shared by all....*” in which it backfired in the case of Iran. Iran the Shah is not Iran the Ayatollahs. This is what Eisenhower failed to recognize and wrongfully unleashed clusters of nuclear weapon chasers. Evidently, India and Pakistan through such program diverted the US Program to military uses. Funnily, a naïve Egyptian once said, whoever summons the Genie, must know how to begone it. The US Atoms for peace Program has flaws and it contributed more danger than peace. Leonardo Weiss, a former lead US Senate staffer on the Nuclear Nonproliferation Act of 1978, wrote, “*It is legitimate to ask whether Atoms for Peace accelerated proliferation by helping some nations achieve more advanced*

arsenals than would have otherwise been the case. The jury has been in for some time on this question, and the answer is yes.”

A nuclear program in the hands of the Ayatollah is a recipe for chaos. It is a regime that embraces a destructive ideology of “*Exporting the Revolution*”. Since 1979, it has crept into four regional States; Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen seeding and nourishing armed minorities, militias, with its indigenous arsenal from missiles to drones.

Now or never, the US has a historical responsibility to correct its course of action, and hand in hand with the international community must act fast enough to disintegrate Iran’s nuclear program for the bomb is ticking.

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China's military intimidation of Taiwan: breaking from the geopolitical status quo?

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Reacting to the visit to Taipei of Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the United States Congress (August 2, 2022), China launched the following week major military exercises in six maritime areas surrounding the island of Taiwan. The means used were unprecedented: 15 Chinese ships, 60 fighter planes daily flying through the Taiwan Strait, and 11 Dongfeng-type ballistic missiles fired, some of which flew over Taiwan. While Beijing has always claimed that Taiwan is an integral part of China and that its reunification is inevitable, the Chinese government has repeatedly increased its military intimidation of Taipei. From a Chinese perspective, the exercises also served a political purpose by showing the US that the cost of intervention in Taiwan would be extremely high. Beijing's ultimate goal could be to break the current geopolitical status quo and establish a new strategic reality to undermine US-Taipei's inclination for defense efforts, making a large-scale Chinese invasion attainable. To cope with this challenge, Taiwan is banking on a strengthened coastal defense to establish Anti-Access/Area Denial capabilities (A2/AD) along its coastline. The issue for the United States is the ability to rapidly deploy a sufficient mass of weapons and/or reinforcements. This new crisis will certainly boost the rearmament of Japan, which itself is increasingly concerned about Chinese threats to the Senkaku Islands.

The visit to Taipei on August 2, 2022, by Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the US House of Representatives, has triggered Beijing's ire towards Washington and Taiwan.

A new Taiwan crisis amid renewed military intimidation

The Chinese regime, which had previously threatened to react strongly to any visit to Taiwan of a US political authority¹, first flexed its muscles by deploying 21 combat aircraft in the Taiwanese ADIZ² right when the official US plane was landing in Taipei. The Chinese Ministry of Defense later announced major live-fire military exercises, starting on August 4, 2022, in six maritime areas surrounding Taiwan. The drills aimed to “resolutely defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity and thwart external interference and separatist efforts for Taiwan’s independence”³. The daily Global Times, closely linked to the Chinese government, even indicated that it would serve as a rehearsal for a reunification of the island by force, thus being a de facto simulation of a blockade and invasion of Taiwan.

Given the upcoming 20th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, and Xi Jinping’s wish to see his mandate renewed⁴, a strong Chinese reaction was expected. However, these exercises are the largest since the last major crisis in the Taiwan Strait in 1996. It is clearly a display of force to browbeat the people of Taiwan and to demonstrate to the international community the power of the new Chinese army and its willingness to use all its force to reunify the island with the mainland, should it be necessary.

¹ The last one dates back to 1997 with the visit of Newt Gringrich, then Speaker of the House of Representatives.

² Air Defense Identification Zone.

³ Chinese army spokesperson, *Opex360*, 03/08/2022.

⁴ *Le Figaro*, 03/08/2022.

These drills are indeed unprecedented in terms of the means involved. Both Chinese aircraft carriers, the Liaoning and the Shandong, which left their base ports on July 31, 2022, were involved to demonstrate globally China's mastery of naval aviation capability. They were flanked by a Type 75 amphibious assault ship, at least one Type 55 cruiser and several Type 54 frigates⁵, some of which crossed the median line⁶ with Taiwan on August 5, 2022. About 15 Chinese ships and 60 fighter planes have been operating in the Taiwan Strait every day, deliberately crossing the median line on several occasions. The Chinese have also activated some civilian ferries that could serve as a backup force for an invasion of the island, in addition to an amphibious force deployed off the coast of Fujian⁷, showing that the 160 km of strait may no longer be insurmountable for a Chinese invading force. Most importantly, on August 4, 2022, China fired 11 Dongfeng-type ballistic missiles, some of which flew over the island of Taiwan before crashing into Japan's EEZ⁸ to the east of the island, as a demonstration of China's precision strike and denial of access capabilities. Hypersonic DF-17 ballistic missiles were also allegedly deployed by China on its territory facing Taiwan⁹. Intrusions into Taiwan's ADIZ finally reached all-time highs with 68 Chinese aircraft detected on August 5, of which 49 crossed the median line¹⁰. The six exercise zones set up around Taiwan closed off some access to the island, with some naval maneuvers taking place as close as 20 km from the Taiwanese coast¹¹, and some of the

⁵ *Opex360*, 02/09/2022.

⁶ The median line is the informal demarcation line between the two countries. Beijing, which does not recognize Taiwan's independence, does not acknowledge this line.

⁷ *Naval news*, 04/08/2022.

⁸ Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

⁹ *Defence blog*, 04/08/2022.

¹⁰ *Reuters*, 02/08/2022; The previous 'record' detected of Chinese aircraft entering China's ADIZ occurred in October 2021 with 56 aircraft. *The Aviationist*, 06/08/2022.

¹¹ According to the Taiwanese government, Chinese military vessels had never come so close to the Taiwanese coast.

restricted areas even encroaching on the island's territorial waters¹² or extending into Japan's EEZ, sparking concern in Tokyo¹³. These large-scale exercises raised fears of a mock blockade, forcing Taiwan to interrupt commercial flights and ship traffic to its ports¹⁴. It also raised the possibility of major tensions in the semiconductor market, of which Taiwan is the main global supplier. Alongside this military pressure, Beijing has also publicly announced economic pressure on the island¹⁵ to warn of the high price that will be paid should the islanders remain supportive of independence, ahead of Taiwan's next presidential election in 2024.

China's readiness to gradually break the status quo around Taiwan

China has always asserted that Taiwan is an integral part of one (single) China and that reunification is inevitable. Accordingly, Beijing has long sought to isolate Taiwan diplomatically and neutralize its armed forces, with recurrent illustrations of the increasingly uneven balance of power at Taipei's expense. In recent years, China has upgraded and extended its forces positioned opposite the Taiwan Strait on the mainland. Naval drills have intensified, while the Chinese air force has increasingly carried out long-range raids around the island. China also underlined that the Taiwan Strait was an integral part of China's territorial waters. It

¹² According to the spokesperson of the Taiwanese Ministry of Defence.

¹³ China, in this movement, could seek the neutrality of Japan (which hosts several American bases) in the Taiwanese question... For its part, Tokyo increasingly fears a combined Chinese offensive on Taiwan and the Senkaku Islands should an open war break out.

¹⁴ Taiwan's Maritime and Port Bureau has warned ships passing through the area and several international airlines have indicated that they have changed their flights to avoid the airspace around the island. *Le Figaro*, 05/08/2022.

¹⁵ Ban on the import of Taiwanese food and agricultural products, ban on the export of silicon sand, the key to Taiwan's electronics industry.

has regularly condemned any Western ship passage through the Strait and has permanently deployed ships there. This steady and mounting pressure¹⁶ aimed to demonstrate China's projection capabilities, while the increasingly unfavorable balance of power vis-à-vis Taipei is expected to undermine the robustness of the American-Taiwanese alliance. The latest Chinese military exercises were part of this development. They were intended to demonstrate that a military blockade of the island was achievable by breaking the status quo and consequently invalidate¹⁷ the median line, in a move that would make access to Taiwan potentially harder and riskier for the United States.

For Beijing, these exercises were therefore politically motivated, aiming to bring the United States out of its strategic ambiguity regarding Taiwan. If Nancy Pelosi's visit was an excuse for such military maneuvers, in line with Beijing's threats, the Ukrainian crisis was a very timely opportunity to test US-Taiwanese reactions, at a time when the American reassurance was again being questioned in Taipei¹⁸. Indeed, China seems to have been monitoring closely the US reaction to the Ukrainian crisis to draw lessons for itself. Washington has avoided frontal intervention against Russia, instead opting for massive support in arms and equipment and attempting to mitigate the risks of escalation and co-belligerency towards Moscow, a situation that bears some similarities to the Taiwanese case. The absence of Western ships in the Black Sea since the beginning of the conflict has been perfectly

¹⁶ For illustration, while 380 incursions of Chinese military aircraft into Taiwan's ADIZ were recorded in 2020, by 2021 there were 950, a figure that is continually rising. *Le Figaro*, 25/08/2022.

¹⁷ This Chinese strategy aims to saturate Taipei's capacities and thus facilitate the exercise of a blockade. *Reuters*, 26/08/2022.

¹⁸ In Taiwan's public opinion, confidence in a US intervention to counter a Chinese invasion stood at 34.5% in March 2022, after the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine, while it was 65% in November 2021. *Areion news*, 11/07/2022.

well understood by Beijing, which wishes to draw upon this experience for the Taiwan Strait.

While the United States is bound to support Taiwan through the Taiwan Relations Act¹⁹ passed by Congress in 1979 following the recognition of the People's Republic of China, the precise details of its implementation have never been specified. China likely intended the summer's military maneuvers to show Washington that the cost of US intervention would be extremely high, thereby rendering the Taiwan Relations Act insignificant. Beijing's pressure on both Taipei and Washington could also be aimed at undermining regional alliances²⁰ under the aegis of the US, build-up to contain China in the Western Pacific, and turn them into an ineffective tool. The expansion of such alliances would therefore be in crisis, as the US Indo-Pacific strategy.

Aware of the escalation and political risks posed by Beijing, the US is still waiting and does not want to change the status quo, even if Nancy Pelosi reiterated that "the United States will not allow China to isolate Taiwan"²¹. Militarily, the American naval force has not been reinforced, with only four American ships deployed in eastern Taiwan on routine operations²², including the aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan and the amphibious ship Tripoli. In 1997, the deployment of two American air groups put an end to China's military pressure on the island, but today Washington does not seem to want to confront the Chinese challenge, which will require greater resources. The US determination to pursue military ship

¹⁹ The Taiwan Relations Act does not guarantee US military intervention on Taiwan's behalf if it is attacked by China, but states that "the United States will make available to Taiwan the necessary defense assets and services to enable it to maintain sufficient self-defense capability. *Le Figaro*, 05/08/2022.

²⁰ AUKUS (Australia UK, USA), Quad (USA, Japan, Australia, India).

²¹ *Les Echos*, 04/08/2022.

²² *Reuters*, 02/08/2022.

transits in the Taiwan Strait was nevertheless recalled²³ and further validates the US strategy of the status quo. Moreover, two American Ticonderoga-class cruisers passed through the Taiwan Strait on August 28, 2022, to signify the US dedication to the freedom of navigation and its doctrine of a “free and open Indo-Pacific”²⁴.

Yet this crisis and the military pressure from Beijing are likely to continue, as the island is vital both for Beijing’s maritime projects²⁵ and for the survival of its One China policy. Moreover, during the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2022, General Wei Fenghe, China’s representative, threatened: “If anyone tries to separate Taiwan from China, the Chinese army will not hesitate to start a war, at any cost”²⁶. China’s Army has already announced that exercises in the Strait will be more regularly conducted. According to some academics close to Chinese military circles, China’s strategy is indeed to nullify the median line and to prevent any foreign intervention through a blockade of the Bashi Strait²⁷, south of Taiwan. Gradually increasing pressures should reach a point where American and Taiwanese wills for defense efforts will simply vanish, allowing for a large-scale offensive²⁸. And indeed, this pressure does not abate, as witnessed by the crossing of the median line by 25 Chinese fighter planes on 18 August 2022, with six Chinese naval vessels still on patrol around the island²⁹, or the violations of the airspace of the Kinmen Islands by Chinese

²³ *Washington Times*, 09/08/2022. US military transits through the Taiwan Strait have been on a monthly average since 2018.

²⁴ *USNI*, 29/08/2022.

²⁵ Taiwan prevents China from having direct access to the Pacific, a vital space both for the deployment of its naval forces and nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (from their base in Hainan) and for access to the world ocean.

²⁶ *Le Figaro*, 05/08/2022.

²⁷ Located between Taiwan and the Philippines, this strait is considered strategic by Beijing because of the access it provides to the Pacific. *Washington Post*, 10/08/2022.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Naval Technology*, 19/08/2022.

drones³⁰. The Taiwanese army is preparing for this scenario and has launched a series of anti-boarding exercises, notably in the extreme south of the island. Those efforts will also be intensified in the coming months³¹. Above all, Taipei decided to increase the Armed forces' budget by nearly 14% for the coming year, with an additional line of credit dedicated to the acquisition of modernized fighter planes³². These new aircraft will allow Taiwanese pilots to better face the repetitive harassment of Chinese aircraft that is now progressively wearing down the capabilities of the Taiwanese air force.

The need to adapt defence capabilities to the new Chinese reality

Facing the increasing possibility of conflict in the Taiwan Strait, the island has been aware for a long time that it needs to modernize its forces to be of greater lethality in the face of a Chinese invasion force. In 2014, Taiwan initiated a naval modernization plan, envisioning the local production of four destroyers, 12 frigates and eight submarines as replacements for its ageing fleet. The navy developed new operational concepts, including the conduct of fast raids on enemy vessels nearby Taiwanese waters. The Taiwanese navy has therefore commissioned the first units of a program of 10 to 12 fast, heavily armed and furtive corvettes (each armed with 16 anti-ship missiles) to be able to engage Chinese amphibious and/or naval air forces. Taiwan is also planning to acquire some 20 mine layers (250 tons) as part of a denial of access strategy.

³⁰ A Chinese drone was even shot down by Taiwanese air defence in late August in this area. *The Independent*, 01/09/2022.

³¹ *Opex 360*, 08/08/2022.

³² *Le Figaro*, 25/08/2022.

Its submarine fleet is in a very critical state. Taiwan announced its intention to build six submarines (Hai Lung II program), to be delivered between 2025 and 2030. The United States has agreed to transfer technology to Taiwan, thus demonstrating its support for the island's autonomous defense, under the Taiwan Relations Act. Taipei has ordered four amphibious ships to ensure that the navy can defend or even recapture threatened Taiwanese islets, both those bordering the South China Sea (Taiping Dao, 1,500 km from the main island) and those closer to the mainland (Kinmen, Matsu, Penghu archipelago). According to the current Taiwanese operational doctrine³³, these naval assets must be capable of inflicting significant damage on any Chinese amphibious operation on the island, thus giving the US Navy time to pool its forces to break the Chinese blockade and re-establish naval air superiority in the area. In this context, the densification of coastal defense, to establish a denial of coastal access, becomes imperative. Since the Chinese exercises in the summer, the Taiwanese air force has increased its training in anti-ship missions.

For the USA, both mass and speed of deployment are becoming paramount in this type of conflict, illustrating the relevance of dual and even tri-carrier operations concepts that will be implemented from eastern Taiwan. In addition, the massive use of submarines in the Taiwan Strait to cause sufficient attrition to the Chinese invasion force will probably be favored. The use of UAV swarms against an invading Chinese force is also being increasingly explored as a means of countering a power balance that is increasingly disadvantageous to the Taiwanese army³⁴. American

³³ Porcupine Strategy or Overall Defense Concept.

³⁴ According to several wargames conducted in the United States, American forces would have only 7 to 10 days to counter a Chinese invasion. After that time, they would be forced to submit to the Chinese fait accompli unless they accepted very significant losses (a naval air group, several hundred aircraft, more than a dozen first rank ships destroyed in the fighting). *Asia Times*, 23/05/2022 and *Military Times*, 12/08/2022.

material support for Taiwanese forces should also increase in the coming months. Moreover, Washington announced on September 2 a new series of arms sales to Taiwan amounting to 1.1 billion dollars, comprising 60 Harpoon anti-ship missiles, 100 air-to-air missiles and the maintenance of the island's radar detection systems³⁵.

As for Japan, it has decided to increase its counter-attack capabilities by seeking to extend the range of some of its anti-ship missiles³⁶ to 1,000 km or even 1,500 km off the Chinese coast. This new decision is part of Japan's extensive naval rearmament drive. Indeed, Japan has also noted an intensification of Chinese and Russian military activity in its vicinity in recent years³⁷, Tokyo has undertaken since 2016 a vast effort to modernize its forces with a program to build 19 long-ranged attack submarines, 22 modern multifunctional frigates and the purchase of 138 F-35 type aircraft. In addition, a special effort has been made in the field of anti-ship warfare³⁸. This rearmament, like the transformation of the Izumo aircraft carriers into ships capable of carrying F-35 aircraft, is likely to accelerate following this new Taiwanese crisis. Moreover, the ruling party would like to double the Japanese defense budget from 1 to 2% of GDP in the coming years, which will confirm Tokyo's position as an unfailing and stalwart ally of Washington and the other Quad countries. The Chinese threat in the West Pacific, instead of weakening existing alliances, may instead lead to their

³⁵ *Le Figaro*, 02/09/2022.

³⁶ Type 12 missiles, which came into service in 2015, are used for coastal defense, especially in southern Japan. Eventually, Japanese naval vessels and F-15J aircraft could also use them. *Opex 360*, 21/08/2022.

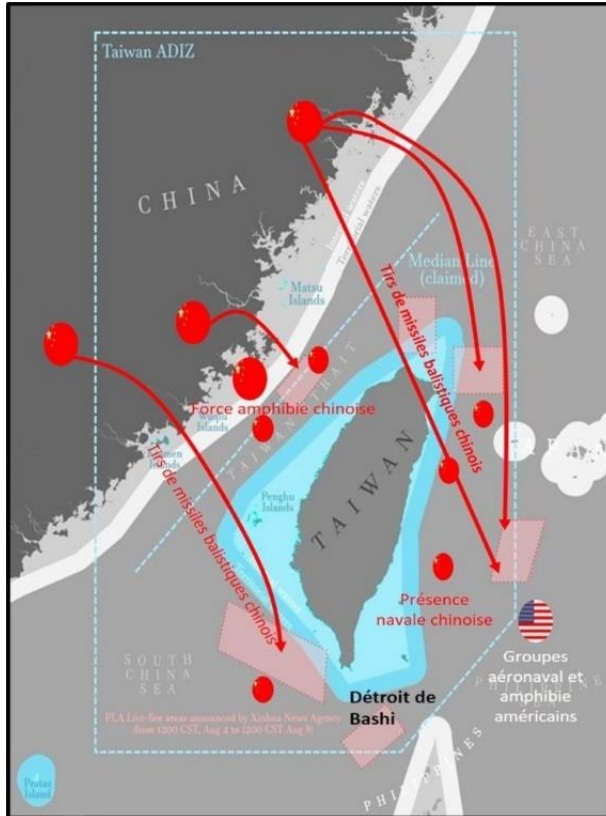
³⁷ In June 2022, several Chinese and Russian ships were detected around the archipelago, while Chinese and Russian long-range flights are increasing in the area.

³⁸ Japanese willingness to procure LRASM (Long Range Anti Ship Missile) missiles from Washington in order to be able to strike and stand off any Chinese invasion force towards the Senkaku Islands. *Ibid*.

consolidation, as is the case in Europe with the renewed vitality of NATO following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

The strategy tested by China against Taiwan in the summer of 2022 could quickly impose the scenario of a *fait accompli* that would be difficult to reverse internationally should an open conflict erupt. The necessary responses rely on rapid reaction, which must necessarily be massive, on coastal anti-ship missile batteries and on drones, used both for targeting and for the saturation of adversary defenses. This crisis in the Pacific will contribute to the accelerating rearmament efforts among the countries of the region and will certainly amplify the demands of American military personnel for an even more substantial increase in their assets in the Indo-Pacific, most probably at the expense of the European theatre, whose defense of contested areas will have to rely more on European capabilities in the future.

MAP: China's military intimidation of Taiwan (summer 2022)



by CIGeography / Louis Martin-Vézian 2022; additions by Arnaud Peyronnet

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After the Russian invasion of Ukraine: France and Italy face rupture in the East, but also in the South.

By Admiral (ret) Pascal AUSSEUR, Director General of FMES

The major changes that are disrupting their strategic environment require Italy and France to overcome their differences in terms of visibility in the Mediterranean, their relationship with the southern shore, their perception of the terrorist threat and their analysis of geopolitical risks. Drawing on their experience, their positioning and their mutual complementarity, the two countries can help the European Union to develop a strategy that will enable it to survive. For Europe is in danger and the threats are accumulating, not just in the east but also in the south.

An end to pretence

The Russian invasion of Ukraine marks a break. We are definitively leaving a period of “strategic weightlessness” which for 30 years allowed European countries, and in particular France and Italy, to behave as if tensions, power relations and war had disappeared from our reality. Since the unbridled expansion of economic liberalism and globalisation at the beginning of the 1980s, and even more so since the fall of the Soviet Union ten years later, Europeans considered themselves to be at the ‘end of history’ and to have entered a new world, governed by norms and the law of the market, all of which was supposed to make the use of force obsolete. War was definitely behind us and global consumption, pacifying society and regulated by international law, was our horizon.

However, for all those who had military responsibilities in relation to geopolitics, the return of history and the balance of power were already apparent by the end of the 1990s. From the Kosovo war in 1999 onwards, we witnessed and participated in renewed competition between global and regional powers, each defending

its own model and zone of influence: the United States, China and Russia, but also including France, Italy, Turkey and Iran... We have witnessed (and sometimes participated in) the proliferation of challenges to international law and the use of uninhibited power relations, whether in Iraq by the Americans, in the China Sea by the Chinese, in Georgia and Ukraine by the Russians, in Libya by the French and the British, in the Caucasus by Azerbaijan or in the Eastern Mediterranean by the Turks. This rise in tensions was accompanied by a general increase in arms spending, which ran counter to the massive disarmament of European countries, beset by their irenic vision.

Faced with this reality, which did not correspond to their expectations, Europeans preferred to hide war behind pretences: military interventions were claimed to be ‘maintaining order’, with or without UN legitimacy (the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, or the Sahel), or to support a party considered legitimate during a local conflict (Syria, Nagorno-Karabakh, or Libya), or were discreet, below the threshold of open conflict and therefore acceptable (Georgia and Crimea). These hypocrisies, tributes of the vice of power to the virtue of multilateralism, allowed us to believe that international law remained an objective – at least in principle.

The war that started on 24 February 2022 is not a pretence: it is explicitly about Russia subjugating by force a state that it considers illegitimate. Because of the historical importance of the event, the geopolitical weight of Russia – a permanent member of the Security Council – and the geographical proximity of the conflict, this war is a wake-up call that forces Europeans to look at the world as it is and not as they had hoped it would become. Yet there is a risk of denial: Europeans could try to cling to their irenic vision by focusing only on “the Putin problem”. This would be a mistake, because not only is the war Russia has unleashed a source of instability as such in Eastern Europe, but it adds to a structural instability of our strategic environment, especially on our southern flank, an instability we can no longer ignore.

In the South, tension is added to tension

The first effect of the war in Ukraine has been to add tension to a region that is already structurally under tension. As a border zone between two worlds that are drifting apart, the Mediterranean is – to use a physicist’s comparison – a kind of dielectric between two plates of a capacitor with diverging potentials, far from the objectives that the Europeans had set thirty years ago. Once again, we had bet on overcoming rivalries between peoples through economic and social development, which would automatically lead to virtuous governance, societal homogenisation and, ultimately, democratisation. This convergence through the economy was considered ineluctable. Its principle underpinned all the agreements signed at the time – the EU’s Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), the OSCE’s Mediterranean Partnership for Cooperation (MPC), NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) and the Oslo Israeli-Palestinian agreements – and anticipated the quasi-automatic pacification of this region, which was to be progressively integrated into a form of European melting pot. Contrary to these expectations, socio-economic development, cultural and societal evolutions, modes of governance and demography have followed different routes on the two shores of the Mediterranean, which has reinforced misunderstandings, resentments and resentment towards Europe from the countries on the southern shore.

This disappointment generates tensions of all kinds: firstly, within the societies of the South themselves, frustrated by the disappointed hopes of economic and social improvement and fractured by contradictory influences (Western, anti-Western, nationalist or Islamist). Secondly, between the countries of the southern shore and Europe, the latter being perceived both as a rejection zone and as a fortress indifferent to the fate of its deprived neighbours. Finally, between the countries of the southern shore, which have never overcome their rivalries and are often in opposition. The antagonism between Morocco and Algeria is the most obvious example. Anti-Westernism, nationalism and

Islamism form both the receptacle and the ideological supports of these tensions which continue to spread.

This regional climate, which is structurally hardening, has three main consequences.

The first is a political hardening that aims to overcome the instability within the societies of the southern shore, instability that has not stopped growing since the Arab revolutions of 2011. Abdelmadjid Tebboune's takeover after the 2019 Hirak in Algeria, the concentration of power under Kais Saïd in Tunisia and the authoritarian excesses of Marshal Sissi in Egypt and Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey all aim to keep a frustrated population under control, populations with no prospects and affected by the forces of fragmentation, particularly Islamist ones, which weaken nation states. The image of chaos projected by countries with weak or failed governments, such as Lebanon, Libya and Iraq, only strengthens the autocratic resolve of these heads of state.

These countries also tend, and this is the second consequence, to play power relations with European countries in order to obtain advantages and unite their populations around anti-European sentiment. Morocco challenging Spain with migrants, Algeria raising the spectre of France as the "traditional and eternal enemy" and Turkey threatening the European Union over maritime rights and its claims on Cyprus, are all examples of this.

Finally, these states are reinforcing their military capabilities to deal with the growing risks of regional conflict. Unsurprisingly, military expenditure is increasing, particularly in the South. By way of illustration, the increase in the tonnage of navies (the preferred tool of state power) between 2008 and 2030 is reckoned at 52% for Morocco, 120% for Algeria and 170% for Egypt.

It is on these already glowing embers that the war in Ukraine is pouring fuel of all kinds, the first of which is economic. By generating a surge in the price of wheat and hydrocarbons in a

region that is a major importer, the war will weaken societies already shaken by the Covid-19 crisis, the global economic recession, the decline in tourism and high inflation. Thus Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, the Palestinian Territories, Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco, all of them emerging or middle-income countries, are penalised by the drop in Russian and Ukrainian tourism (which represented a quarter of visits to Turkey and almost a third to Egypt), by their dependence on wheat imports (Turkey 25% and Egypt 23% are, along with China, the countries whose cereal supply depends most on Russia and the Ukraine) and fertilisers, by the increase in the price of hydrocarbons and foodstuffs and by the drop in investor confidence and world demand. This negative impact will be accompanied by an increase in the disparity between countries, that will relate not only to their dependence on Russia and raw materials, but especially to their status as oil and gas exporters. Thus, Algeria and Libya, producers of oil and gas, are expected to fare well as increases in energy revenues should compensate for these difficulties. These differences in the impact of the crisis could increase tensions between neighbours.

Most countries in the South will therefore experience increasing social tensions in the coming months, which could lead to a political hardening of the powers in place to avoid a resurgence of revolutionary movements. The situation will be favourable to targeting Westerners as scapegoats, a Pavlovian reflex fuelled by well-tested Russian propaganda.

The South: a new Russian front line?

In the field of information warfare in the southern Mediterranean, Russia's action is decisive because it has proven know-how and growing geopolitical weight. Taking advantage of the American disengagement initiated by Barak Obama from 2012 and of the European disinterest in this region considered by Europe as intractable, Vladimir Putin has gradually established himself over the past ten years as a key player in the Mediterranean basin.

This Russian involvement in the Mediterranean is not at all unusual. The Mediterranean, with its permanent access to the warm seas represents Moscow's natural area of expansion and the historical obsession of Russian power ever since it wished to have a say in world affairs. This access is not straightforward for the Russian Navy: it requires control of the Black Sea – which explains the Russian strategy towards Ukraine; easy access through the Turkish straits – which sheds light on the complicit relationship between Presidents Putin and Erdogan; and support points all along the deployment zones – which has led to the continuation of the bases of Tartus and Hmeimim in Syria. The Russian strategy in the Mediterranean is therefore both classic and logical in principle. It poses problems for Europeans only because it is part of a global strategy of revenge against the West, now explicitly characterised as an enemy, and of destabilisation of the European Union, which is perceived as prey. Russia's political and military deployment on the southern shore, which a few years ago could be seen as the expression of a classic strategy of influence, now has the characteristics of a threat to the countries of Europe.

Moscow's presence in the area, either through its own resources or through military cooperation, has enabled it to become a key player on the southern flank. Russia has a permanent military presence in the eastern and central Mediterranean which allows it to support its operations in the region, gives it the capacity to influence the restructuring of the gas industry in the area – a sector that is essential for its economy – and to support its regional diplomacy, which is a mixture of military interventionism, political influence and arms sales. Russia has thus become a reliable ally of authoritarian regimes (Syria, Egypt, and Algeria), the arbiter of peace in Syria even if this role is regularly contested by Iran and Turkey, the adjudicator of regional powers (Syria, Iran, Turkey, Israel, Armenia, and Azerbaijan), and an effective disrupter capable of weakening Europe on the southern shore (Libya and Mali). The now explicit opposition between Europe and Russia means the latter now has freer reign, limited for the time being to the media and political spheres. If the engagement in Ukraine

restricts Moscow's military deployment in the area, it should not reduce its activism because the strategic interest of engagement in southern Europe is growing. The tensions at work in Eastern Europe are indeed being extended to the Mediterranean, which is becoming an indirect frontline against the Europeans.

Europe, and in particular France which is in the front line through its involvement in Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean, will have to be particularly vigilant to counter this growing antagonism. The fact that all the North African states, with the exception of the Libyan government in Tripoli, refused to vote for Russia's suspension from the Human Rights Council is a significant political signal. This policy of anti-European influence extends to the entire African continent and is in tandem with Turkey's activism and China's growing presence in Africa. These three revisionist countries have launched a long-term war of communication promoting a very negative image of European countries that is spreading among the populations. The consequences could be disastrous given the growing political, economic and especially demographic links between Europe and its South.

Russian military action in the Mediterranean?

But Moscow's war on Europe may not remain limited to the realms of political influence. From its bases in Tartus and Hmeimim in Syria and its deployments in Libya and Mali, Russia is once again carrying military influence and creating a much more threatening environment for European forces deploying in the area, whether in the Sahel, Libya or the eastern Mediterranean. Some 13,000 troops, of which 40% are mercenaries, 40 fighter-bombers, some 20 helicopters, 4 frigates and 2 submarines are deployed in the area. This set-up, combined with the numerous anti-aircraft (S400 and S300), anti-ship (Kalibr, Bastion and Zircon) and anti-land strike (Kalibr and Iskander) missile sites deployed in the region, aims to be able to deny Western forces access to the area.

If Russian forces do not win sufficiently in Ukraine, it is not impossible that the Kremlin will use its damaging capabilities all around the Mediterranean basin to create a diversion. Several scenarios are conceivable: disrupting NATO and EU operations aimed at restricting arms trafficking and migration off the coast of Libya, facilitating migratory movements by operating with Malian and Libyan networks in conjunction with the Wagner group, or promoting destabilising actions in the Sahel and West Africa.

The possibility of a direct military threat to European military assets from the sea or from friendly countries cannot be excluded in view of the escalation in Ukraine. In this area, particular attention should be paid to European surface ships and submarines. The neutralisation of the cruiser Moskva in the Black Sea showed that such an attack has a strong political impact while not being considered as an aggression on national territory. President Putin might be tempted to use this same lever to force European countries into a controlled escalation, without the risk of collateral damage.

France, which is particularly active in the region and has complex relations with its former colonies, is a priority target in this strategy. Its ousting from the Central African Republic and Mali demonstrates Russia's ability to act effectively in the political, military and informational fields to achieve its ends. Algeria's close relations with Russia, particularly in the field of armaments, open up worrying possibilities in this area. Algeria has powerful attack capabilities (modernised Kilo submarines capable of firing cruise missiles, Kalibr and RBS 15 missiles, MU90 torpedoes) that can pose a threat in the western Mediterranean and along the coast.

France and Italy must rise to the challenge of the denial of reality

Finally, the last impact concerns Europe's strategic posture. Until now, Europe has been doubly short-sighted with regard to the geopolitical challenges of the Mediterranean. On the one hand,

trapped in an irenic conception of history that had excluded the dynamics of power and war, it refused to see the growing threats that enveloped it. On the other hand, it reserved its last military efforts for the Russian threat, under the insistence of Great Britain and the countries of Eastern Europe. The EU was thus powerless to understand and respond to the structural security challenges of its south. Will the war in Ukraine be an opportunity for it to abandon its strategic posture and wake up? Nothing seems certain.

The EU could in fact be comforted by denial, and reinforce its rejection of a world that is decidedly far removed from the model that has shaped the generation of men and women now at the helm, one oriented towards the quest for individual well-being and a consumer-oriented societal harmony. The European countries could then seek the protection of the United States to curb the Russian threat, and that of legal and maritime barriers to limit its interactions with the southern shore. Security through withdrawal and isolation, so to speak. This option would perhaps gain a few years of tranquillity, but it would not allow us to overcome the structural challenges we face and from which we cannot escape: on the one hand, the Americans' long-term priority is in Asia and it is unlikely that they will take European interests into account beyond what is necessary to defend their own. The interests of Europeans, as Russia's neighbours, differ from those of their allies across the Atlantic. On the other hand, the Mediterranean and Africa will remain on our doorstep, with their major demographic, economic and societal imbalances, and only a strong proactive involvement will make it possible to create a new and more stable balance, enabling the emergence of a harmonious coexistence that is essential to Europe's future. The "Fortress" or "seive" options are not viable solutions because they both lead to the submerging of Europe.

This war in Ukraine, by its brutality and proximity, offers the possibility of an "electroshock of reality" which might allow Europeans to understand that the survival of their model is no longer a given. Confronted on its own continent with an attempt at

military annexation of a country that identifies with it and calls for help, Europe can respond as it has begun to do, with intelligence and courage, thus indicating to the world that it has left behind the wait-and-see attitude and the moralising posture that have made it a spectator of its own history.

It is certain that if the Europeans, first and foremost the French, Germans and Italians, show the world that they are determined not to be subject to the decisions of others, but rather to take the lead in the difficulties and opposition they face, the view of their neighbours to the east and south will change. This new posture involves taking on the balance of power, accepting the risks involved, taking on the effort and even the suffering inherent in dealing with a history that is once again unfolding in tragedy. But it will allow Europeans to take the initiative again and to take advantage of the new respect that it may generate, to propose new balances based on clear thinking and courage – but also on generosity – because no one can think that the status quo, which would maintain an enormous developmental imbalance on our doorstep, can continue.

The European countries must therefore vigorously and robustly strengthen their military capabilities (2% of GDP is probably not enough). They must have the courage to clearly identify their strategic interests and the efforts they are prepared to make to defend them, a prerequisite for regaining the respect they have lost. They must identify and name their adversaries and allies. They must counter the information war being waged against them in Africa and the Middle East, as well as on their own territory. They must put in place a real policy of development and economic cooperation with those countries of the South that share the same interests (the 300 billion € in public and private investment planned by the EU between now and 2027 is also probably insufficient). Our societies need to redefine a real societal project, capable of uniting and responding to the challenges of the 21st century, far removed from the image of satiated, idle, fearful and selfish populations portrayed by our opponents.

France and Italy, by virtue of their influence in Europe and their location on the Mediterranean, have a particular role to play in this volte face. It requires them to leave behind the sterile competition that too often marks the Mediterranean diplomacy of the two Latin sisters. On the one hand, Paris must stop neglecting the expertise and strategic interests of its neighbour – the intervention in Libya in 2011 being a textbook case in this point, one with particularly painful consequences. On the other hand, Rome must accept its responsibilities and move away from a policy of ambiguity, which by trying to accommodate everyone renders it impotent and ultimately obliges it to submit to Washington's decisions. Italian policy towards Turkey's policy in the Mediterranean is an example of this. If Rome and Paris manage to elaborate a common strategy to respond to the new challenges of the southern flank, including those in the eastern Mediterranean, they will have the credibility and the influence to guide their partners in this existential struggle for the European Union.

For let us make no mistake. The way Europe responds in the long-term to Russian aggression and North-South imbalances will position it in the new geostrategic playing field. Will it confine itself to moralising postures? Will it enter the dialectic of the balance of power and accept the risks that go with it? Will it accept the efforts inherent in this tug of war? Will it succeed in articulating a policy that addresses its challenges both in the East and in the South? Will it stop sacrificing its future in favour of its immediate welfare? The whole world is watching us and our neighbours, whether friends or rivals, will draw their own conclusions about our ability to defend our interests, our values, our allies and our destiny in the face of adversity. Our ability to organise our long-term coexistence with our strategic environment, both to the east and to the south, will therefore depend on our intelligence and our courage.

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Where is Jordan headed?

By Marion SORANT, FMES associate member of the Strategic Monitoring Centre for the Mediterranean and the Middle East (OS2MO)

Jordan, which hosted the second regional annual Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership on 20 December 2022 and has distinguished itself in the region by its opposition to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, is strategically positioned as a stable and reliable ally of the West in the midst of the tumultuous Arab world. However, the recent outbreak of anger in the south of the country against the rise in fuel prices highlights fragilities that are often overlooked. These internal challenges show a regime, certainly skilful and endowed with a strong political sense, but where socio-economic issues and internal wars lie below the surface and question the stability of a monarchy that is perceived as reformist. Far from the passivity that is often attributed to it, the country is trying to seize the opportunity of regional reconfigurations to start a real energy revolution in order to increase its independence from the Gulf, while maintaining a strategic position acceptable to both the United States and the European Union (EU).



Source: Pascal Orcier, FMES, 2022.

If the image of a Jordan ‘on the brink’ applies to the kingdom, the fall of an ‘imported’ monarchy has not actually taken place despite the many oracles of doom. Challenged for at least three decades, the government has responded with an authoritarian reinforcement of its powers: restriction of public freedoms (undermining the idea of a moderate monarchy), organised attacks by loyalists on opposition demonstrations, an increase in royal powers, and the co-opting of family members to strategic

positions¹. This was accompanied by the resumption of control over the intelligence services, as well as increased control over the clergy. King Abdullah II managed to maintain the system thanks to a particularly finely managed mix (repression aside) of crony capitalism and rare social and political reforms, extensions of the embryonic social security system, targeted economic aid, gifts of state land to certain clans, decentralisation reforms used to control the opposition and the redistribution of state revenues within restricted circles. There is a convergence of interest between a part of the country's elites, those integrated into the state apparatus, referred to as 'Transjordanians' who see themselves as the 'Praetorian Guard' of the state, and the frequently Jordanian-Palestinian bourgeoisie in favour of the status quo. Real reforms would undermine their privileges. Domestically, despite an undeniable loss of legitimacy, there is much evidence to suggest that Jordan's authoritarian regime is resilient in the short to medium term. That said, how is Abdullah II trying to position himself externally amidst a changing regional game? Is the kingdom able to reassure its partners, and what about the energy revolution?

A regime facing multiple challenges

Internal stability still fragile

Since 1989 (the first IMF plan), and even more so since the accession to the throne of King Abdullah II in 1999, Jordan has been plagued by regular protests that have been defused by promises of reforms and major national campaigns promising liberalisation and political participation. However, senators and

¹ 29 June 2022, appointment of Faisal bin el Hussein, younger brother of King Abdullah II, as viceroy; his half-brother, Ali bin al Hussein, chairs the new National Security Council.

governors are still appointed by the king. Economic liberalisation, pushed by international organisations and the business elite, is testing the tacit social contract, especially due to poor prospects for public employment. In this context the security services have become the guarantors of the Hashemite regime's survival, and the prime ministers the vehicles for adjustment. Thus, in 2011, the king dismissed his prime ministers in quick succession in the face of opposition: no less than 5 governments in less than two years.

Since Black September in 1970 (the Jordanian Civil War), the prevailing views have been those of the Palestinian threat, a marginalised and discriminated population, and of the unwavering support of the tribes – described as the real backbone of the regime, when their relationship is in fact marked by ambivalence. This opposition between Jordanians and Palestinians, manipulated by the monarchy, remains prominent within the security services. Moreover, if some clans do indeed have significant local power, the monarchy first of all relied on families of Syrian and especially Circassian origin, before gradually co-opting a few families, clans or sheikhs among some of the tribes: the legal discrimination against the Bedouins only ended in 1976. In fact, the tribes do not constitute a unique and monolithic body; their unity of support for the regime is a myth, their opposition is repressed and not widely reported in the media, and in fact many clans have been spearheading protests for several decades.

A shrinking economy

Even if the per capita standard of living continues to rise and inequalities are significantly lower than in the rest of the region, the socio-economic situation does not invite optimism. A decade after the 2011 uprisings the situation is going from bad to worse: unemployment was 12.3% in 2011; it has officially peaked at 23% since 2020 and has reached 50% among young people. Industry is

almost non-existent, and most workers are in the service sector. In the region, the kingdom ranks behind even Syria, Libya, Yemen and Sudan according to the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). By 2050, the population could reach 15 million inhabitants (against 10 million today, 7 in 2011). Employment thus appears to be one of the main challenges in the years to come, even as 45% of young people are considering emigrating.

While unlike many of its neighbours, the country is not directly impacted by the war in Ukraine as 90% of its wheat comes from Romania, it is suffering from rising fuel prices. In August the government increased the price of fuel for the fifth time this year under pressure from the IMF; this in a country with a stagnant economy, already weakened by the hosting of 1.4 million Syrian refugees over the past ten years. The country is also vulnerable to its dependence on basic foodstuffs, and thus to a global food crisis.

Global warming: a time bomb?

Climate change is threatening the resources and social balance of the Hashemite kingdom. The country has some of the lowest water reserves in the world. Ninety percent of the country is desert and by the end of the century, according to the most pessimistic projections, there could be a 70% drop in surface water. By 2050, the reduction in rainfall and the increase in droughts, coupled with the rise in population (+5 million inhabitants in 2050, excluding refugees), have a significant potential to cause water shortages. For example, the exploitation of the Disi aquifer in the south of the country, which was to supply Amman with water, could end in less than 30 years, and still only covers 20% of needs. After having abandoned the project of a Red Sea-Dead Sea canal the choice of a desalination plant in Aqaba seems to be the prevailing preference, along with a reorganisation of supplies coming from Israel. The water problem is also political: the risk for the regime is that the

rural exodus will weaken the informal social contract between the rural areas – overrepresented in the institutions – and the monarchy. The academic Hussam Hussein rightly underlines the politicisation of water in Jordan, between a government putting forward exogenous factors – and therefore solutions for importing water, via international agreements – and international institutions insisting on governance and its difficulties in the face of the deep state. In fact, large consumers of water are often members of the political-economic elite, landowners who have the cheapest water in the country and are accused of many privileges, including tolerance of illegal wells which have become a real environmental scourge. At present, the pressure to reduce consumption is almost exclusively on domestic use. In the medium-term Jordanian agriculture needs to be rethought, which cannot be done without regional food security and an acceptance of reforms by the monarchy.

Despite all its domestic challenges, the monarchy retains a real political sense and knows how to maintain itself by ‘renewing’ its authoritarian model. Above all, it knows how to use its foreign policy as a primary tool to create distractions, and also to attract foreign support.

What foreign policy?

A security dilemma for the Damascus regime

Jordan and Syria have a complex relationship. As the bridgehead of US policy in the Syrian conflict from 2012, Jordan hosted the Military Operation Commands (MOC) whose command centre, based in Amman, became the primary operational platform for Western and Arab forces to finance, equip and train moderate Syrian opposition groups. However, Amman and Damascus never

broke off their relations despite the temporary dismissal of the Syrian ambassador, making Amman a virtual exception in the region. In fact, support for the opposition was very localised: it was above all a question of maintaining trade routes and avoiding the implantation of radical groups in Southern Syria. This is how agreements and a form of cooperation were reached between Jordan, the Syrian regime and the opposition until 2015². As Russian intervention restored the Syrian regime's control over the turn of events in Syria, the Western-Arab consensus around the opposition then began to fray. Riyadh's policy was less and less aligned with that of the West, which viewed with disfavour Saudi Arabia's protection of groups considered too extremist. In the light of the strategic turnaround in the Syrian ground campaign and the the cooling of relations with the United States under the Trump mandate, Amman favoured political realism, gradually accepting the new Syrian realities. From 2016 onwards there began a resumption of official contacts carried out by the Jordanian chief of staff, General Mahmoud Freihath, with Maher al-Assad and Ali Mamlouk, and then by the head of the GID (General Intelligence Directorate), Ahmed Husni, from May 2019. Within this context King Abdullah II sided with Mohammad Ben Zayed (President of the United Arab Emirates), promoting the idea of a normalisation with the regime of Bashar Al Assad and the reintegration of Syria into the Arab League. The meeting in September 2021 of the Syrian Minister of Defence and the Jordanian Chief of Staff in Amman, followed by a telephone conversation between the two leaders, helped normalise relations between Jordan and Syria. Less visible than the Emirates' diplomacy on the issue, Jordan managed to partially impose its interests on Washington, obtaining an unofficial agreement of non-application of Caesar Act sanctions for

² Roussel, Cyril. 'Comment gérer le conflit syrien depuis la Jordanie ? ', *Outre-Terre*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2015, pp. 226-236.

Jordanian companies that were either involved in Syria, or wished to be.

Today, the issue at stake for Amman remains above all drug trafficking, a consequence of the transformation of Syria into a quasi-narco-state during the war. While local dynamics have reduced Russian influence in South-East Syria (well before the Ukrainian conflict) the Shiite militias close to Iran and Hezbollah are trying to establish themselves in the long term (especially in Bosra el Shams and around Deraa). The Syrian regime and its supporters are at the heart of the traffic in Captagon, the consumption of which is soaring in the Middle East. On the one hand, Amman denounces the involvement of the Syrian regime – the military and especially the President’s brother – and its Hezbollah support for various trafficking; on the other hand, it favours the revival of economic exchanges. In the medium term, only a return of Damascus to the regional stage would be able to replenish the regime’s coffers, thus limiting resorting to drug trafficking.

At present, the deal made by Amman of increased security on its border in exchange for a rehabilitation of relations with Damascus does not yet seem to have borne fruit. And this is all the more so as Daesh, taking advantage of the low density of security forces, is making a strong comeback, especially in the town of Al Jassim, about 50 km from the border, and more generally in the South and the central Syrian desert. It is in this city that the ‘caliph’ of the organisation, Abu Hasan al-Hashimi al-Qurashi, was killed in late November 2022.

Towards a new regional posture?

Fearing the volatility of American support and that of the Gulf monarchies, Jordan is trying to fit into a new regional system by

multiplying its partners, while maintaining its historical supporters to maximise its revenues. To do this, and despite its strategic vulnerability, it has more room for manoeuvre than is generally believed.

Despite American and Israeli efforts, the idea of a vast anti-Iranian front has not succeeded for the moment. Jordan's public stance has long been vehement with regards to Tehran: at the origination of the expression 'Shiite crescent' in 2004, King Abdullah II made a series of declarations against the Islamic Republic, and recently even called for the formation of an Arab 'Nato'. By taking the lead in the regional denunciation of Iran in 2004, Jordan ensured Saudi and Israeli support and re-legitimised the need for Western support to Amman. However, within the Jordanian government there have been calls to accept Iranian offers, such as an official visit of the king to Tehran, the organisation of pilgrimages to Shiite holy places in Jordan, and the opening of air routes between Tehran and Jordan. In the summer of 2022, the Jordanian stance officially went against the perspective of American diplomacy. Amman now advocates 'friendly' relations with Tehran. This change of direction comes after a visit by Mohamed Ben Salman to Jordan in June 2022, when the Gulf monarchies were in the midst of a rapprochement with Tehran. In this respect, the Jordanian posture testifies to the autonomy now asserted by the states of the region with regard to the United States. This more conciliatory Jordanian posture is essential for the project of a 'new Levant' uniting Egypt, Jordan and Iraq. This rapprochement, which has been in the making since the Trump presidency³ and which now has American support, aims to increase the autonomy of these

³ According to the Lebanese newspaper Al Akhbar, which has close links with Hezbollah, the day before the arrival of the new American ambassador in Amman, Henry T. Wooster, the Jordanian prime minister went to Cairo to meet his Egyptian and Iraqi counterparts and start discussions.

three Arab states in the face of non-Arab regional actors (Turkey, Israel and Iran).

This desire for autonomy in the Gulf is accompanied by a reconciliation with Saudi Arabia, widely reported in the regional media, whereas relations had deteriorated after the accession of the Saudi crown prince to power in 2015. He was suspected by the Jordanians of being involved in the attempted coup of April 2021. The announcement of the engagement of the Jordanian crown prince, Hussein ben Abdallah, to the Saudi Rajwa Al Saif, a young woman from a large Nedj family (from the Subai tribe), was a media sensation. The young woman is related to the Saudi royal family through her mother, Azza Al Sudairi, and her father, the managing director of the El-Saif Group, is an influential businessman in Saudi Arabia. Queen Rania is said to have pushed for this marriage in order to obtain Saudi support for the succession. For Amman, the challenge is to keep Saudi Arabia at a distance from internal affairs, to obtain an increased diplomatic margin, outlined during the Gulf crisis of 2017, while maintaining crucial financing for its economy (8% of Jordan's GDP according to the World Bank), particularly in the banking, mining and energy sectors, and potential contracts for the futuristic Saudi city of NEOM.

Maintaining American support, diversifying partners

The kingdom demonstrates its desire to maintain its special ties with the United Kingdom and the United States, especially in the military field. King Abdullah, the first Arab leader to be received by Joe Biden, is aware of America's irreplaceable military aid (425 million dollars, 20% of Jordan's annual defence budget) and has granted – without a vote in parliament – a particularly favourable legal status to the American forces stationed in the country. Jordan has also acquired eight F-16 Viper aircraft. The government has

been more supportive of the Ukrainian cause than other Arab leaders – a line already taken in 2014 – and was thanked for this by Antony J. Blinken. The new Memorandum of Understanding on U.S. foreign assistance to Jordan, signed on 16 September 2022, provides for 1.45 billion in annual aid from the State Department for 2023-2029, the second largest amount after that given to Israel⁴. In addition to this aid, the country has received loan guarantees, numerous funds from USAID (United States Agency for International Development), and remittances (\$845 million in 2022). American budgetary support (excluding military aid) to Jordan thus represents 6% of the kingdom's annual budget.

In terms of military cooperation, the links with the United Kingdom post-Brexit remain significant, particularly in terms of training. Similarly, although cooperation with France was long-standing, the crisis in Syria was an opportunity to strengthen it: financing of a logistical hub for the protection of the Syrian border, development of interoperability through joint exercises (especially of special forces), stopovers in Aqaba, and an official visit by the king to Paris on 15 September 2022. France also has a deployable air base (BAP) within the framework of Operation Inherent Resolve, where four Rafales and nearly 400 personnel, including intelligence specialists, are stationed. The king also supports the project of a bilateral base for French and American special forces (COS and USSOCOM). For France, a base in Jordan would be a potential alternative to Djibouti.

The crisis in Syria has also led the country to develop new partnerships and strengthen its ties with Russia. With 19 official visits in 22 years of reign, the king is the most invited Arab head of state to the Kremlin. The rapprochement with Russia could be a

⁴ This budget is increasing (\$1.275 billion annually between 2018-2022).

means of leverage on Israel, where the idea of a Palestinian state in Jordan periodically resurfaces⁵. However, it has no tangible political consequences for the moment. Similarly, China has become the country's third largest trading partner, behind Saudi Arabia and the US. In 2016, China gained a foothold in the Jordanian energy market with the purchase of 45% of the Attarat project by Guangdong Energy Group, a Chinese state-owned company. However, this economic influence does not seem to have any political or military impact for the moment.

A future regional energy hub?

Abdullah II's ambition is to transform the country into a proper energy hub: the transit of Egyptian gas and electricity to Lebanon and Syria, as well as to Iraq, Iraqi oil (Basra-Aqaba pipeline) and the production of exportable renewable energies⁶ (the al Risha solar power plant project to Iraq, the 'water for solar electricity' deal with the Emirates and Israel), the doubling of supplies to Palestine, and the project for an electricity connection with Saudi Arabia (Amman – Al-Qurayya line). Jordan would thus be linked with all its neighbours. This alliance would pave the way for the Hashemite kingdom to have an infrastructure for regional dialogue, which would strengthen its strategic autonomy should it work. Since 2015, the country has also been committed to energy production⁷. Amman is banking on solar and renewable energy: 19% of the electricity produced currently comes from renewable

⁵ Negotiations had already taken place between Arafat and Hussein. In Israel, the idea is supported by right-wing parties (the annexation and transformation of Jordan into a Palestinian state) and more left-wing parties, which are in favour of a confederation. The 'Jordan Is Palestine' Idea Resurfaces Again & Why Jordan rejects a confederation with Palestine.

⁶ Renewable energy has grown strongly in recent years, and now accounts for 26% of electricity consumption, up from 1% in 2014.

⁷ The country has set itself the target of producing 48.5% of its electricity consumption by 2030.

sources, compared to 1% in 2012. This energy strategy is a way for the monarchy to reduce its dependence on Israel with which a 15-year gas agreement was signed in 2016, and more broadly, its energy dependence (96% in 2011), which weighs heavily on its debt (around 8% of GDP). In addition to the development of its modest gas resources (the exploitation of gas from al Risha produces 10% of Jordan's electricity consumption), the country is banking on oil shale of which it has the eighth largest reserves in the world. Thanks to Chinese investments (a loan of 1.6 billion dollars), the Attarat-Um Ghudran electricity plant should supply 15% of the country's electricity needs⁸. The civil nuclear projects (four power plants, in cooperation with the Russians and initially planned for 2030, should provide 30% of electricity production), although delayed, continue under the supervision of the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency).

Persistent sources of tension

The regular demonstrations in the country rally the "Transjordanian" populations that are broadly presented as the social base of the regime. New large-scale protests cannot be ruled out. It is difficult to evaluate their chances of success. The success of the opposition will depend on its ability to mobilise over time and to unite; however the example of the Jordanian veterans is revelatory of the divisions and difficulties that limit the impact of these movements. Occasional socio-economic demonstrations could also play a destabilising role. Jordan has been used to labour protests for more than ten years; they have allowed the emergence of dissident trade unions that have reversed the balance of power locally. These social movements could play a key role in turning a social movement into a real political movement.

⁸ This is the largest Chinese private investment by the BRI outside China.

The hypothesis of Abdullah II's removal by a coup d'état seemed fanciful until the attempt of April 2021. This was probably the result of a desire by foreign powers (possibly Tel Aviv and Riyadh), supported by part of the US administration close to former President Trump, to force Jordan's hand on the Palestinian issue. Despite its loss of centrality in regional issues, the Palestinian question remains a domestic issue in Jordan. As such, the victory of the ultra-religious Zionist hard right in Israel (November 2022) is of particular concern to Amman. Some observers have pointed out the likely involvement in this coup attempt of certain factions within the security forces just a few months after the ruler's attempt to reduce the power of these services. The possibility of a new conspiracy by the military, allied or not with certain political and economic elites, cannot be totally ruled out. Could such an event occur with the premature death of the king, whose fragile health is widely rumoured? It seems that the king is taking this threat seriously, as the crown prince is now routinely put in the forefront during trips abroad as well as on Jordanian soil, testifying to a power struggle within the regime. A significant part of the state apparatus is said to be opposed to the liberalisation guidelines set by the king. Throughout the kingdom's history the security services have expanded their authority and role in political crises. The discovery of a new plot, even a fabricated one, could hinder the king's reforms and maintain the security services as an essential pillar of the monarchy. In this context, can demonstrations be used as a means of pressure by the king within the state apparatus to demand its modernisation? This idea of a renewal of elites within the state seems to have been adopted by Abdullah II. His continued rule may thus depend on the success of the restructuring of power.

Furthermore, the very recent challenge to a law on the protection of children (August 2022), led by the Salafist Iyad Al Qunaibi in the name of the fight against a Western norm deemed to be contrary

to local values, shows the capacity of these actors to mobilise well beyond their traditional audience on social networks, and revives the fear of protests led in the name of political Islam. Jordan is home to a significant jihadist and Salafist movement. Numerous Jordanians have distinguished themselves in the jihadist galaxy: Omar Mahmud Abû ‘Umar, better known as Abû Qatâda al-Filastînî, but also Abû Muhammad al-Maqdisi or Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. In addition to these figures of the global jihad, there are a myriad of local sheikhs. The various Salafist-jihadist currents are said to group together 6,000 to 8,000 individuals, mainly established in Zarqa, al-Rusayfa, Maan, al-Salt, Irbid, Ain al-Basha, and al-Baq’a, where most of the Jordanians who have left to fight in Syria come from. These different currents have never succeeded in uniting because their ideological divisions are so deep, all against a background of successful manipulation by the intelligence services. The quietist or reformist currents have a larger audience (15,000 people). Officially recognised, their institutions are subsidised by the monarchy in an effort to control them. The Muslim Brotherhood, although organised, has a popular support that is probably overestimated and in any case less than in Syria, despite a strong social and charitable presence. In addition, their party, one of the few that is organised and can mobilise in the country, was divided in 2015 between those in favour of a national refocusing following the king’s will, and those in favour of maintaining a transnational orientation. Their arrival in power seems extremely unlikely at the moment. It could only happen with a reform of the electoral law and the tacit agreement of the deep state, which might want to play the Muslim Brotherhood card against the king, a hypothesis whose probability seems low given that the Palestinians constitute today the social base of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, which was previously largely established in the Jordanian middle class.

In conclusion, if the Jordanian monarchy has been able to survive and manage the opposition so far, it seems likely that it will have to deepen its reforms if it is to remain in power, while still maintaining the appearance of continuity. Identifying these changes, which are often detectable at a very local level, will be crucial to avoid repeating the misjudgements from which French policy in the region has suffered greatly post-2011.

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