



GEOSTRATEGIC PULSE

Bilingual-monthly publication of political analysis

Motto: "Opinions are free, but not mandatory" I. L. Caragiale

What will it be?

The Russian Federation and Turkey in the Black Sea-Caucasus region.

Contradictory approaches

Kosovo-Serbia relations in 2018



Daesh: a too hastily announced death

Economic wars and the reconfiguration of world order

Recommended Reading: Once and future partners: the United States, Russia, and nuclear non-proliferation

Geostrategic Pulse Board

(in alphabetical order)



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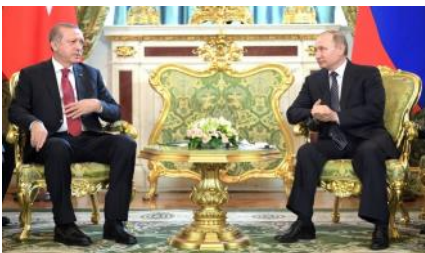
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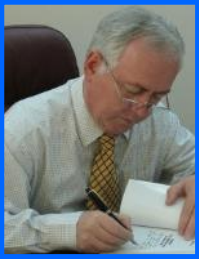
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Motto: "Opinions are free, but not mandatory"—I.L.Caragiale

EDITORIAL

Europe between the Open Society Foundation – George Soros and Steve Bannon’s Movement



Corneliu PIVARIU

The Foundation (of neo-Marxist extraction) of the American billionaire George Soros is well-known in Europe and particularly in Central and Eastern Europe due to the impact this NGO, set up and financed since 1984, had in this area. It is estimated that George Soros spent during the last 30 years \$32 billion for supporting this NGO. He is also known for speculating on British Pound in 1992 when he made a profit of \$1 billion and was nick-named *"the guy who robbed the Bank of England"* (many voices in Great Britain requested that George Soros be declared persona non grata). George Soros's positions and actions are strongly criticized at the government level in Hungary, Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia, Poland and Romania while the Open Society Foundations spokesperson Laura Silber declared that the foundations will not give up its commitment: *"The civil society plays an important role in making the governments more responsible and democracies stronger; we are proud to support organisations working for improving the peoples' lives"*. Very nice words and noble objectives yet we remember the American billionaire's declarations that what interests him is but profit, that he is in favour of abolishing the European Union and supported Brexit and spent as well around \$500 million on the transportation and illegal immigration to Europe of around 6 million Muslims.

As opposed to George Soros (an intimate, among others, of president Obama and Hillary Clinton), the non-profit organisation the Movement was set up by Steve Bannon in order to promote the political influence and right-wing populism in Europe. Steve Bannon (known especially as former Donald Trump's strategist) and Mischael Modrikamen (the leader of the Belgian Popular Party) registered the Movement on January 9th, 2017 in Brussels. The objective of the organisation, as it results from the published articles of association is: *"promoting the respect for the rule of law, free initiative, the efficiency of the national borders, consulting the population, the fight against radical Islam, a scientific and non-dogmatic approach of climate change and the defense of the State of Israel as sovereign state on its historical territory"*. The organisation wants to be a link between the movement initiated by president Donald Trump in the USA, citizens and the active political movements in other countries sharing the same objectives, including Brexit's supporters. As it intends to reunite the nationalistic movements in Europe, the Movement hopes for the creation of a populist *super grup* in the European Parliament to win a third of seats in the 2019 European parliamentary elections. The organisation has already a team of 10 members in Brussels and hopes to increase the group up to 50 people after the May 2019 European parliamentary elections, if successful.

The second half of 2018 was marked by important successes of the organisation as the prime minister of Hungary, Viktor Orban had positive appreciations for the Movement, and Matteo Salvini, vice-prime minister and Federal Secretary of Northern League - Italy became one of the founder members while Giorgio Meloni - the leader of Fratelli d'Italia - registered, too. Geert Wilders - the well-known Dutch Euroskeptic and leader of the Party for Freedom as well as Thierry Baudet - leader of another Dutch opposition party are interested in cooperating/registering in the organisation. Marine le Pen of National Front had successive meetings with Steve Bannon, the last time on October, 10th when she expressed again her interest for the organisation. It is not the case for Alternative for Germany as Alexander Gauland, the co-president, rejected the Movement as being an American concept and criticised its projects. Shortly after this German standoff, the Secretary General of the Austrian Party of Freedom - Harald Vilimsky expressed his refusal of cooperating with Bannon, an attitude shared by Gerard Batten - the UKIP leader - Great Britain.

On the background of the obvious weaknesses witnessed by the European Union concomitantly with the political advances of the nationalist formations and of the Euroskeptics, two powerful currents represented by George Soros's Foundation and Steve Bannon's Movement are seeking to join together the extreme left and the extreme right in Europe in order to achieve specific objectives. The future will prove what influence this political developments will have in Europe.

The Current Geostrategic World-wide Outlook



What will it be?

Paul SĂNDULESCU

The teacher asks: Children, how far is Russia stretching?

Answer: How far it wants.

(Joke from the old socialist camp)

From 11 to 15 September, 2018, Russia held the largest war game in the last 37 years (since 1981). Around 300,000 soldiers, 36,000 tanks, armored personnel carriers and armored infantry vehicles, more than 1,000 aircraft, two naval fleets, all of Russia's airborne units, artillery, etc., took part. The Chinese also were involved, with 3,200 troops, more than 900 pieces of military hardware, and 30 fixed-wing aircrafts and helicopters, as well as Mongolian soldiers. The location of the war game "Vostok - 2018" is important only for the terrain and climatic conditions in which the military were intended to train, but it should not be forgotten that if the war games had unfolded in the West according to its scenario, it should have been taken in consideration a direct threat to Europe, because the game could have developed into a real operation. The war game operations took place in Siberia and the Russian Far East. The Chinese acted in Tsugol, in Trans-Baikal.

The theme of the war game was similar to that of 1981 ("Zapad - 81") - Russia is attacking NATO - but in some respects the magnitude was much higher, as the Russian defense minister, goa. Sergey Shoigu said.

The financial cost was enormous; but, in the view of the Moscow leadership, it is entirely justified, as they are expecting much bigger gains in the future!!!

The Western media, including the renowned media, are fighting to give the most fanciful explanations to the Russian warfare, an effort that in no way serves to clarify and mobilize Western

public opinion. But it is not for the first time that this happens and not just about this subject, the "democratic" mass media being in its quasi-majority subdued to obscure, partisan interests totally parallel to reality and the actual evolution of events. Add to that that the main non-Western actors are directly interested in the waters being very turbid. Talking about social media is absolutely useless.

So, in order to have a clear picture, let's apply the classical and so verified instruments of impartial analysis, and then see to what objective conclusions it leads us. We will not take into consideration the statements, but only the military operations at the geostrategic level, in large temporal stages and exact dates. I am suggesting something simple, but extremely relevant. Let's analyze the interests of the great powers, their way of action over time, see where they intersect in conflicts, and what the affinities are at this moment - for the military alliances have not yet been publicly disclosed. Let's overlap the developments in the recent years, the last ones, and then draw the conclusions. The analysis will allow us to know with great probability what the next developments would be.

Russia, the largest state in the world, has resumed its territorial expansion. As a matter of fact, it has been expanding for centuries, exploding since the fifteenth century, the territory ruled by the Russians rising from 430,000 km² in 1462 to 2.8 million km² in 1533 and to 5.4 million km² in 1584. And it continued in a sustained rhythm until now, mastering the largest territory in the world. At the collapse of the USSR, it stretched over an area of 22,402,200 km² with 294 million inhabitants. Now Russia has 17,098,242 km² and a population of 144 million, but through the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Russians actually master 20,996,932 km² and 277 million people.

The Russian Empire first annexed Poland in

1772. It was only in 1918 that Poland succeeded in regaining its independence, to be attacked and dissolved again by Germany and Russia in 1939, according to the Ribentrop-Molotov Pact (signed between Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany on August 23, 1939). After the end of the Second World War, Russia retained the occupied territories in Poland (ie 179,000 km²). Poland was given a counterpart territory in the West, in the detriment of the defeated Germany, but did not fully compensate the loss, its current territory being 20% (77,500 km²) smaller than before World War II.

In 1809, Russia incorporated Finland. Not until 1917, taking advantage of the political change in Russia and the civil war there, Finland managed to declare its dependence. Under the same Ribentrop-Molotov Pact, Russia / USSR attacked Finland in 1939 and annexed 11% of its territory. The 1947 and 1948 peace treaties have consecrated Russia's 1940 territorial gains: most of the provinces of Karelia, Salla and Petsamo.

Latvia suffered its first territorial loss (the Vidzeme region) to Russia in 1710. In 1772, with the annexation of a part of Poland, Latvia also lost the Inflanty Voivodeship, to be annexed in its entirety in 1795. It gained its independence in 1917, as did Poland, but in 1944, with the occupation of the country by the Soviet troops, it was incorporated into the USSR. It regained its independence in 1990.

In the fourteenth century, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was the largest country in Europe, to voluntary form in 1569 together with the Poles the Polish-Lithuanian Union. Following its successive divisions of 1772, 1792 and 1795 between Russia, Prussia and Austria, most of Lithuania was captured by Russia. In 1917 it declared its independence, but in 1944, with the entry of the Soviet troops, it was reincarnated in the USSR. It regained independence in 1990.

Estonia was fully occupied and annexed by Russia in 1710, following the Great Northern War. It gained its independence in 1918 to lose it in 1944 and regain it in 1990, yet with a loss of 5% of its territory.

The first territorial loss that Romania suffered

to Russia was the result of the Russian-Turkish war from 1806 to 1812, lost by Turkey (which was at that time the suzerain of the Romanian territories Moldavia and Wallachia). In the peace talks, Russia claimed both principalities, but the imminence of Napoleon's attack made it gradually reduce its claims, accepting only the territories between Prut and Dniester up to Hotin. After another Russian-Turkish war (from 1828 to 1829), the southern and eastern territories of the present-day Romania entered under Russian occupation, too, Transylvania being under other occupation, of the Austro-Hungary. In 1853 the Crimean War began, between Russia on the one hand, and the United Kingdom, France, the Kingdom of Sardinia, and the Ottoman Empire on the other, precisely because of the continuous Russian expansion. It ended in 1856 by the defeat of Russia, and as a result it had to withdraw from Moldova and Wallachia, which three years later would unite, forming the United Principalities of Moldova and Wallachia, but without the territories between the Prut and the Dniester, annexed by Russia in 1812, named by the Russians in their entirety Bessarabia. They regained their independence in 1918 and joined the Kingdom of Romania to be lost in 1939 as a result of the Second Vienna Award (known to Romanians as the Second Vienna Dictate). Bessarabia / Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic remained part of the USSR after the Second World War to regain independence in 1990. Which independence is not quite so, Russia holding troops in Transnistria and Bender, and *de facto* ruling it through proxies. And to make things even messy, Stalin transferred territories from the Soviet Moldavia to Soviet Ukraine (the southern Bessarabian regions, with the exit to the Black Sea) and vice versa (the Transnistrian region).

The Turks started the wars with the Russians in the 16th century and since then they have been endless. In the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire was in strong expansion towards Central and Eastern Europe, and within it the Muslims captured the region of Podolia, after which they strove to rule over the Right-bank Ukraine. The Russians repelled the attacks of the Crimean Tartars and established the Russo-Turkish bor-

der by the Dnieper River in 1681. After five years, in 1686, Russia joined the Holy Alliance, the Russian Crimean campaigns of 1687 and 1689 and the Azov campaigns of 1695–96 marking the beginning of the Russo-Turkish Wars.

On November 20, 1710, Turkey / the Ottoman Empire declared war on Russia / the Russian Empire. By the end of the seventeenth century, both Russia and Turkey had conquered large parts of Persia - the current Iran (Russia taking the contemporaries Dagestan, Azerbaijan and the North of Iran, and Turkey the territory of present-day Armenia, parts of eastern Anatolia and Western Iran), conquests sanctioned with The Treaty of Constantinople. But in 1732 and 1735, Russia signed treaties with Persia, returning the conquered territories in exchange for the alliance against Turkey.

The following year, 1736, a new war broke out between the Russians and the Turks due to the raids on Ukraine by the Crimean Tartars and the military campaign of the Crimean khan in the Caucasus. In May, the Russians invaded the Crimean Peninsula, on June 19 seizing the fortress of Azov. In July the next year, the Russians stormed the Ottoman fortress of Ochakov, then, in the same month, they marched into the Crimea and captured Karasubazar. In 1739, the Russians crossed the Dnieper River, defeated the Turks at Stavuchany, and occupied the fortress of Khotin and Iași.

In 1768, Sultan Mustafa III, allied with Poland, again declared war on Russia, while Russia was supported by the United Kingdom. After a series of battles in 1771, 1773 and 1774, Turkey *de facto* lost the Crimea, Russia gaining access to the Black Sea. But in 1787 the Ottoman Empire demanded that Russia vacate the peninsula. As a result, Russia declared war. But Russia was in alliance with Austria, and Turks poorly prepared for fighting, the Muslims were defeated in Moldavia, the Russians capturing Iași, fortress of Khotin, fortress of Izmail and Anapa, and the Austrians Belgrade. By the Treaty of Iași (in 1792), the Turks consented to the occupation of the Crimea and Ochakov by Russia, and the European border to be established on the Dniester,

while the Asian one remained unchanged.

In the 1820s the Greek revolt against the Ottoman Empire began, with the Greeks being instigated and supported by Russia and other great powers of Europe. As a result, the Greeks gained their independence (Greece being the first European country to be emancipated from the Ottoman yoke). When in 1853 Russia destroyed the entire Ottoman fleet at Sinop, Britain and France, fearing the massive Russian territorial expansion and Russian domination in the Mediterranean, decided to take side of the Ottoman Empire. Which led to the Crimean War, ended with the defeat of Russia in 1856, as I said above.

Russia did not stop, aiming to expand through the Balkans, taking advantage of the fact that the peoples there are slaves, and stirring their nationalism. As a consequence movements for independence from the Ottoman Empire began with the revolt of Herzegovina in 1875, which rapidly expanded into Bosnia and Bulgaria, prompting the Serbs to join in immediately. The Turks intervened brutally, massacring at least 19,000 people in April 1876. As a result, a new war broke out between Russia and Turkey. Defeated, Turkey lost Montenegro, Bosnia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Cyprus, much of eastern Rumelia, western Georgia and Armenia. In limiting the Turkish losses during the negotiations, German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck played an important part, forcing many of the major concessions upon Russia, that led to close relations between the Ottoman Empire and the German Empire, and which remained so until both broken.

The last battles between Russia and Turkey / the Ottoman Empire took place during the First World War when the Turks were seeking to occupy Kars. But they were defeated in the Battle of Sarikamish on January 2, 1915.

Russia nevertheless had two "small" syncopes. Both in the twentieth century, in 1917 and in 1990, and both due to the changes in their political system. The transition from tsarism to communism and then from communism to capitalism created small windows of opportunity, used by all the states forced into the Russian Empire,

and then into the Socialist Union, to declare their independence, as I have shown.

In 1918, being weakened by the October Socialist Revolution and confronted with domestic war, Russia was forced through the treaty signed in Brest-Litovsk to recognize the independence of Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and gave up the territories of Belarus, Georgia, Finland, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, Bessarabia, and the cities of Kars, Ardahan and Batum to Turkey.

But in the following years, Ukraine fell under the influence of the Bolsheviks and was reintegrated, this time in the USSR. Poland was not mentioned in the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, because Russian Poland had been a personal possession of the Tsar, not part of the Empire, but as a result of the First World War, it gained independence in 1918, which it had to defend by fighting for it with the Russians (this time the Bolsheviks) from 1919 to 1921. In 1939 Poland was dissolved as a result of the German-Russian attack, re-emerging after the end of the Second World War, but chopped off by the Russians, as I have shown above.

The Finns have gained their independence from the Russians, too, and retained it up today (though they had to fight for it and have lost out some of the territory). The Basarabians were reunited with Romania in 1918 to be re-attached by the Russians in 1940. The Baltic countries gained their independence in 1918 to lose it in 1939, and regain it in 1990. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia gained their independence in 1918, but were reintegrated into the USSR in 1920 (Georgia in 1921). They regained their independence in 1991 to be "willingly" immediately integrated on December 8th the same year, in the Commonwealth of Independent States, which Georgia left in 2008.

In the European countries occupied with troops at the end of the Second World War, according to the Yalta Agreement, Russia imposed the communism, using this leverage to give the impression of independence, but actually reigning with an iron hand. Because Hungary (in 1956) and Czechoslovakia (in 1968) tried to change the re-

gime, Russia / USSR intervened with troops.

Russia had made full use of communism as a political tool of expansion, trying to export it to the whole world. Communist movements have appeared in the Arab world, Central and South America, and even in the US. In addition to Europe, communist regimes have also been established in China, Cuba, North Korea, Mongolia, Vietnam, Laos, Yemen, Somalia, Congo, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Benin, Angola, Madagascar, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Grenada. It seemed that communism couldn't be stopped. And in the middle of this network, like an enormous spider or a secular Vatican, Russia stood.

Eventually, the communist momentum was stopped, and then being out of breath, collapsed. This was Russia's second major rebuff, which took place in 1991. But the problems had begun some years before, in 1986, when in the Baltic and Caucasian regions of the USSR nationalist movements began, aimed at independence. In 1989, the tide of revolutions in the socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe removed the communism and allowed them to emerge from the Moscow tutelage and move towards the West.

I consider that what I have presented so far about Russia is conclusive, the purpose of this article being not to eulogize its impetuous impulse to conquering. I have presented its expansion so far just as an element of analysis, and to recognize a pattern, a *modus operandi*. It is to be noted that Russia's expansion was continuous, with only two small syncopes, but after each Russia recovered what it lost. The general line is that once a territory is conquered it is not given away under any circumstance.

Russia expanded over centuries both in the East and in South, but I will not insist on these areas. Anyway, in the East and South, its advance is stopped because it had reached the Pacific Ocean and beyond the ocean is the US, and in the south, China. It can only expand to the West, in Europe, and to the Southwest, in the Middle East. And is already been performing operations in both theaters.

China emerged in the Yellow River Basin in

the 21st Century BC and has since expanded, fragmented and reunited many times. After the establishment of communism, on October 1, 1949, Chinese territorial claims were constant, but equally constantly underwent changes, being increasingly larger. Official data on China's surface is rarely published, precisely because of the frequent changes to their territorial claims. In 1986 it was about 10.45 million km².

At this moment, although it has borders with "only" 14 countries, China has territorial claims (which exceed its current surface) of 23 countries. Here is their list:

From Afghanistan it claims the province of Badkhash.

From Bhutan, the Bhutanese enclave in Tibet (Cherkip Gompa, Dho, Dungmar, Gesur, Gezon, Itse Gompa, Khochar, Nyanri, Ringung, Sanmar, Tarchen and Zuthulphuk), Kula Kangri and Haa District.

With Brunei, it is disputing the South China Sea, especially the Spratly Islands.

From Burma it claims most of the country.

It claims parts of Cambodia.

From India it claims Aksai Chin (part of Jammu and Kashmir), Demchok, Chumar, Kaurik, Shipki Pass, Jadh, Lapthal Shaksgam Valley, South Tibet (part of India-controlled Arunachal Pradesh) and Trans-Karakoram Valley.

With Indonesia, it is disputing parts of the South China Sea.

With Japan it is disputing parts of the East China Sea, especially the Senkaku / Diaoyudao Islands and the Ryukyu Islands.

From Kazakhstan claims parts of the territory.

From Kyrgyzstan, China claims most of the territory. The same with Laos.

With Malaysia it is disputing parts of the South China Sea.

Mongolia is claimed in its entirety.

It also claims a portion of Nepal (these territories are part of Tibet, therefore part of China).

From North Korea, the Chinese claim Mount Baekdu and Jindao, but on occasion they claimed the entire country.

The entire territory of Pakistan is claimed, too.

With Philipine it is disputing parts of the South China Sea, particularly the Scarborough Shoal and the Spratly Islands.

From Russia, China unilaterally claims 160,000 km², most of Siberia.

With Singapore, it is disputing parts of the South China Sea.

With South Korea, it disputes parts of East China Sea, but on occasion claimed the entire country (the same with North Korea).

Taiwan is considered a rebellious Chinese territory, but until the problem is resolved, the Chinese have intense disputes with the Taiwanese on the MacClesfield Bank, the Paracelsus Islands, the Scarborough Shoal, the Senkaku Islands, parts of the South China and the Spratly Islands.

China claims parts of Tajikistan and large parts of Vietnam, with which it also has disputes over the MacClesfield Bank, the Paracel Islands, parts of the South China and the Spratly Islands.

In a discussion with Hillary Clinton, China claimed territorial rights on Hawaii. The Chinese also affirmed that Chinese sailors have settled in Australia centuries before the Europeans, and a supposed 1418 map "proves" they discovered the Americas.

The **US** are no longer in territorial expansion since the 19th-century, and the **European Union** has so far only expanded as a result of the countries' desire to join in. From a military point of view, it does not count.

These are the actors. From an expansionist point of view it should still be taken into account the Islam, but this is a belief, not a state entity (although it claims to rule the whole world - see the *jihād*), and I will not analyze its expansion in this article.

The Analysis

To believe that the Russians halted in our democratic and extra-liberal years what they did for hundreds of years is a great stupidity. Or more correctly said in English, it is wishful thinking. Regardless of the situation of the balance of forces and the momentary evolutions, they went ahead with the conquests, without any rebuke on their conscience about whom they made understandings with or what means they used. They made a pact of alliance even with the Nazis (the Ribentrop-Molotov Pact, which provided for the division of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Romania, and which the Russians fulfilled). I do not want to think how the world would have been now if Hitler had not attacked Russia and continued the pact with it.

That Russia will try to expand is certain. All its developments over the past three years in Ukraine, Syria and the rest of the Middle East, indicate that. In fact, they are stages of a very well thought-out and prepared process. The war game "Vostok - 2018" is part of it.

Chinese expansionism is direct, not veiled with motivations or distractions.

The Americans do not have territorial claims. They finished with them in the nineteenth century, preferring financial domination. The Europeans are not to be taken into account in terms of armed expansion.

Due to its proximity to China and the US, Russia can only expand towards Europe and the Middle East.

China has claims to all its neighbors, but it will not trigger a war with Russia because of Russian military superiority at this moment.

The European countries cannot stand alone to Russia unless they are helped by the US. And due to the long-standing refusal to allocate enough money for defense, they seem to have already capitulated.

The US cannot simultaneously support a conflict in Europe and / or the Middle East with Russia and one with China in Asia.

At this point, the "affinities" between Russia

and China are clear, while the relations between the European Union and the US are very cold.

From the placement of all the pieces on the board, it results that Russia and China will act together. Russia has open doors towards Europe and the Middle East, so it will act. It is not at all mandatory that the instruments in Europe to be purely military, but they are not excluded at all. Instead, in the Middle East they will be mainly military, but masterfully merged with diplomacy.

China will continue its action in the south-east and west, and possibly in the north, against Mongolia, which in this variant is likely to be divided with Russia, following the model of Poland in 1939.

The Western camp is stuttering

The Russian Federation and Turkey in the Black Sea - Caucasus region. Contradictory approaches

Professor Ph.D. Adrian PÂRLOG

The context of the current relations between the Russian Federation and Turkey

After a period of generalized decline, following the dissolution of the USSR, the Russian Federation - the successor of the former Soviet Union - is trying to regain the status of great military power and major regional player at least in Europe and Asia. In order to achieve this goal it is combining internal political efforts with a multitude of initiatives related to foreign policy. They also include attempts to establish partnerships with countries that want to maximize regional or global relevance. An example of such a state is Turkey, a country with which it has historically alternated situations of rivalry with the pragmatic understanding generated by real geopolitical or geostrategic developments or historical and geographical opportunities.

Which continent do Russia and Turkey belong to? Are Moscow and Ankara the capitals of Asian or European countries?

This status represents an opportunity for Mos-

cow and Ankara, especially when their interests intersect turntable-type regions, such as the Black Sea and Caucasus regions. If these turntables are one next to the other, then the degree of interest or strategic attractiveness increases correspondingly. And if there is a third partner in the region with a political and military potential and with the necessary determination, such as Iran, the chances of success for any possible strategic initiatives in the region increase correspondingly.

In 2010, Prof. Ahmet Davutoglu, Turkey's former Foreign Minister, published the essay entitled *Strategic Depth*, which launched the idea of a foreign policy strategic option of his country called *Zero problems with neighbors problems*. Ironically, in the context of the Arab Spring revolutionary wave, the destabilization of Syria began in 2011, which would turn into a real source

- Can Turkey become a regional university center and a factor of cultural influence of the Islamic world?

- In 2002, Istanbul air hub was linking 75 destinations with the Turkish Airlines. In 2017, the same company and the same hub were linking over 230 destinations. Istanbul annually transits more than 100 million passengers and it will increase its capacity to about 200 million people in 2022. How far will Ankara's air transport get?

- In 2014, Turkish Airlines announced that it prohibit the sale of alcoholic beverages on board of its aircraft. Can one become a world leader in the field by applying the rules of the Muslim civilization? Can this be a recipe for success?

- Will we talk soon about Neo-Ottomans, especially after the reelection of President Erdogan and after the referendum of April 2017,

Country	Ranked	Troops	Number of tanks	Number of aircraft	Number of nuclear strikes	Number of submarines	Budget (\$ billion)
Turkey	1	410000	3600	990	0	14	19,5
Israel	2	176000	3800	680	100	14	15,5
Egypt	3	468000	4700	1100	0	4	4,4
Iran	4	545000	2400	480	0	31	14,3

of regional and global instability, which included Turkey.

Several years later, in 2013, a geopolitical forecast conducted by Goldman Sachs indicated that it was possible for Turkey to become one of the top 10 countries in terms of economy and military power in 2040-2050.

In recent years, the most important economic and social forecasting institutions in the world have raised some rhetorical questions on Turkey, as one of the G20 countries, including:

- Is Turkey becoming Europe's China? It has been assessed as coming immediately after China and India in terms of the pace of economic development.

- Which will be Turkey's relations with its neighbors when (not before long) its population will be comparable to that of the Russian Federation?

when the Turkish President received virtually unlimited power?

- A comparison of the military potential in the Middle East countries indicates that Turkey ranks first. Does this position facilitate a regional association or does it become a separating factor? zone and becomes a factor?

The *Zero problems with neighbors* is a great slogan, worthy of admiration, but can it be true for Turkey in practice? Can there be peace in a region which includes Nagorno-Karabakh, Syria, Hezbollah and other frozen conflicts, considering the intertwined geographical areas inhabited by Christians, Arabs, Sunni and Shia, Druze, Armenians, Circassians etc.?

The developments of the summer of 2008 in Georgia and the state of instability in Ukraine, especially after the developments of 2014 led to a new approach of the security issues in the

Black Sea and South Caucasus. The focus shifted from terrorism and illegal trafficking of any form to a strategic rethinking of the military presence of both the Russian Federation and the North Atlantic Alliance. In 2014, immediately after the annexation of Crimea, Russia began an intense process of militarization in the peninsula, above the level reached during the USSR. NATO naval forces, which in 2013 had made two brief visits to ports in the Black Sea, have stationed, on average, over 200 days in the same sea in 2015 during some complex exercises such as Sea Breeze and Saber, exercises that involved more than 20,000 troops from more than 20 allied and partner countries, including Georgia and Ukraine. Turkey, a country which previously strongly opposed the extension from the Mediterranean into the Black Sea of NATO antiterrorist naval operations such as Active Endeavor, has made public its support for the existence of an allied naval force designed to operate in the region, as a factor joining the allies in the Black Sea. In this way, operations such as Blackseafor and Black Sea Harmony have virtually been forgotten, though they have been set up in order to reduce the risk of confrontation by excluding NATO presence in the Black Sea. By adopting such a conduct, at the time, Ankara has sent the subliminal message that is positioned itself closer to Moscow's concerns rather than NATO's strategic concerns.

The Black Sea-Caucasus region



Perhaps this explains the fact that the Turkish authorities have banned the passage of *Comfort* and *Mercy* American military hospital ships through the Bosphorus. The two ships intended to provide medical support to Georgia after the events of 2008.

In late 2015, in the context of military confrontations in Syria, Turkey and the Russian Federation were close to the collapse of political relations between them after a SU-24 fighter of the Russian Air Force was shot down by the Turkish forces near the Turkish-Syrian border. Immediately after this air incident, Moscow announced retaliatory measures and most countries were preparing for what would be worst in the area near Asia Minor, especially in the context of the deepening conflict in Syria.

The developments in July 2016 – “a turning point” in Turkey’s policy

One of the most surprising security developments in a NATO member state took place on 15 July 2016, namely an attempted coup, allegedly organized by the army with financial support coming from a potent Turkish businessman resident in the US, Fethullah Gulen, a former close political figure to the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. In the context of this development, most of the Turkish military command was dismissed and arrested after having been publicly humiliated, and the single most important ally military facility in Turkey, the Incirlik Air Base was blocked and temporarily transformed into a nonfunctional NATO facility. Thus, one of the most important legal documents based on which NATO forces and means can be deployed on the territory of an allied member, the SOFA Agreement (Status of Force Agreement) was ignored and turned into a rather formal document. In addition, without being confirmed or invalidated, there

has been information in the political and military environments in Ankara and Istanbul that the country that has provided useful information to warn President Erdogan about the imminent danger of the coup was the Russian Federation. Given that the US refused to extradite F. Gulen and considering that there have been discussions on alternatives to relocate the Incirlik air base, while the EU (mainly Germany) pressured intensively Erdogan on the issue of the migrants' management coming from the Middle East, as a precondition to resume negotiations for Turkey's accession to the EU, Ankara started to court Moscow in order to be considered as a possible partner, with equal rights, on strategic regional issues. About two months away from the events of 15 July 2016, during an official visit to Ankara of the Chief of General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, General Valery Gherasimov, he said: "A few years ago, the Russian Black Sea Fleet was contrasting with the Turkish one, when it was told that Turkey was the master of the Black Sea, but now everything is different". This statement, which was not discussed in any form by the local political authorities, has been interpreted as a de facto acceptance of the reality. Considering the real conditions of that late summer, the West has criticized the undemocratic developments in Turkey, which was counterbalanced on several directions by Ankara: the public expression of reserves to the US policy on Turkey, rejecting the manner in which NATO reacted after the Incirlik air base has been blocked and its commander has been arrested, the resumption of the military cooperation with the Russian Federation and Turkey's reconsiderations on its Syrian commitments and the issue of Syrian refugees. In line with the ambivalent conduct towards the Russian Federation, the Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan said, during his visit to Ukraine in October 2017, that his country did not recognize and would not recognize the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and that Turkey would continue to offer concrete material aid to the Tatar minority living in the peninsula, which also consisted of camouflage uniforms used by the Tatars organized in a battalion in the Kerson region, where they contributed to the temporary blockage of the penin-

sula. Moreover, Turkey initially suspended the passenger and trade routes that linked the port of Sevastopol and Kerch to the Turkish port Zonguldak, the air connections with the city of Simferopol, though it later reopened them. While trying simultaneously to achieve assurances for Ukraine, the Turkish President was also looking to purchase from Russia some of the best AA defense systems and nuclear power plants. Despite the increasingly close Turkish-Russian relations, Ankara and Kiev have been developing a special cooperation relationship in the domain of building tank engines, radar systems, military and navigation communication systems, as well as the training of the Ukrainian sailors from the new fleet created after the developments in Crimea. Ankara believes that the relations with Ukraine in the field of military technology can be an alternative to the transfer of American and West European technology, which is often interrupted due to political considerations. In order to ease the flow between Turkey and Ukraine, starting with 2017, border crossing between the two countries was no longer made on passports (as is the case with Georgia), but only based on the common registration documents of the population. The consequences of the events of 2015 in Turkey also showed its strong dependence on the Russian Federation: the Russian tourism on the Turkish coast of the Mediterranean Sea and Black Sea has drastically decreased and Ankara's exports to Russia fell by over 60 percent. In the new situation, generated by the unpredictable behavior of Erdogan, the Russian Federation has raised the economic sanctions implemented after the aircraft incident in 2015, it resumed the coordination of joint efforts to stabilize Syria and revived new giant nuclear energy projects (4 reactors of 1200 KVE at Akkuyu), valued at approximately \$ 20 billion. The possible nuclear energy cooperation between the two countries virtually completes Turkey's energy dependence on Russia and countries that have strategic relations with Moscow.

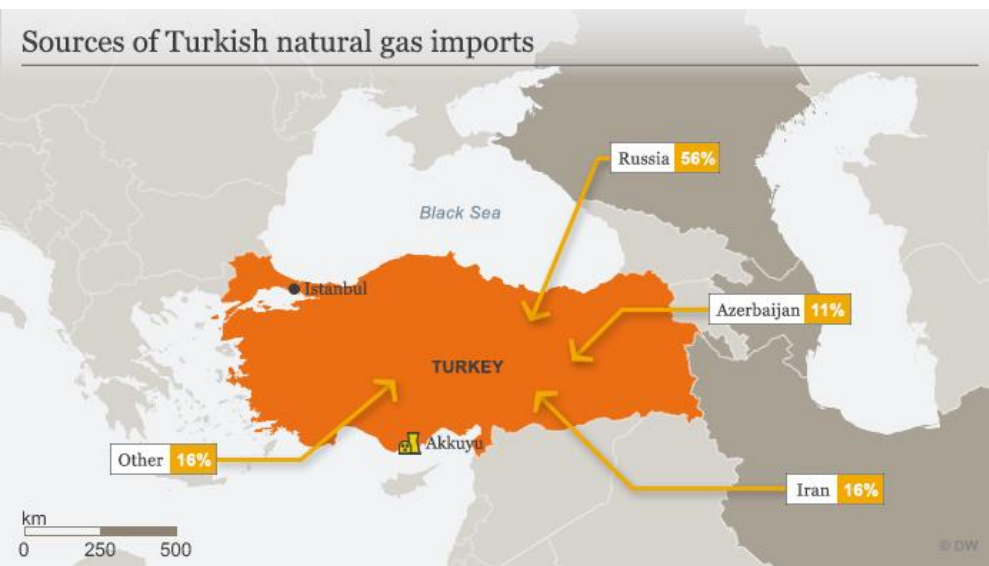
In addition, as difficult as it would be to understand, Moscow has agreed with the sale of S-400 Triumph AA missile systems, a commercial project valued at over 2.1 billion US dollars. This

project resulted in the questioning of the FAM Turkish program on the purchase of F-35 5th generation multi-role aircraft, produced by the US. Could it be only a coincidence that after President Erdogan has apologized to his Russian counterpart for the destruction of the airplane at the end of 2015, the two presidents have met more than 12 times in about three years?

The annexation of Crimea – an element of inflection in Moscow’s foreign policy

It is worth noting that Turkey has not agreed to join the European and NATO projects imposing sanctions on Moscow after the referendum in Crimea, in March 2014, considering that this is

the region. After the dissolution of the USSR, Turkey has tried to increase its influence in the South Caucasus (except Armenia) due to the existence in the region of an important demographic Turkish factor, but also due to its status as a NATO member state and EU partner, with strong chances of accession, especially in the 90s. From a strategic point of view, Ankara has chosen three directions in order to infiltrate in the region: energy, transport infrastructure and security-defense. In this context, the regional projects BSEC (Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation) have been initiated – being focused on developing economic cooperation and TRASEKA, which was intended to support the trade transit corridor between Central



Asia and Europe via the South Caucasus. The first achievements were the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Elzurum gas pipeline, followed by the Trans-Anatolia gas pipeline, inaugurated in 2018. At present, the Trans-Adriatic pipeline is under construction, which will complete the southern corridor of energy supply for the EU from the Caspian Sea and the rail corridor, which will connect

an exclusive problem between Russia and the West.

eastern Turkey (Kars) to Baku, across Georgia, as part of the Silk Road, which will link China to Europe, bypassing Russia.

The Black Sea-South Caucasus region

Thus, two of the most important regions of the Euro-Atlantic area, in terms of the management of the security and trade corridors - the Black Sea and South Caucasus, are being sandwiched between the two big countries. And for the shut-down to be complete, we should also reconsider the hyper-arming of the Crimean Peninsula, on the one hand, and the intensification of relations in many fields in the triangle Russia-Iran-Turkey and their implications on the frozen conflicts in

Projects for the transport of hydrocarbon in the

The Russian Federation will continue to exert political, military and security pressure in the region, especially through Armenia, the third important state in South Caucasus. Given the historical tension alternated with conflicts between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Iran was also included in the regional security equation; a state with an Azeri minority estimated at about 25 to 30 mil-



neously with the opposite reaction of the Russian Federation on disproportionately large military aids that Ankara gives to Azerbaijan.

The Russian Federation, through Sergei Lavrov, has offered its good intentions since 2017 in order to pursue a reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia, in view of Ankara's old charges of genocide.

As a first sign of acceptance, the Turkish national airline – Pegasus – has been allowed to operate since 2017 on a flight

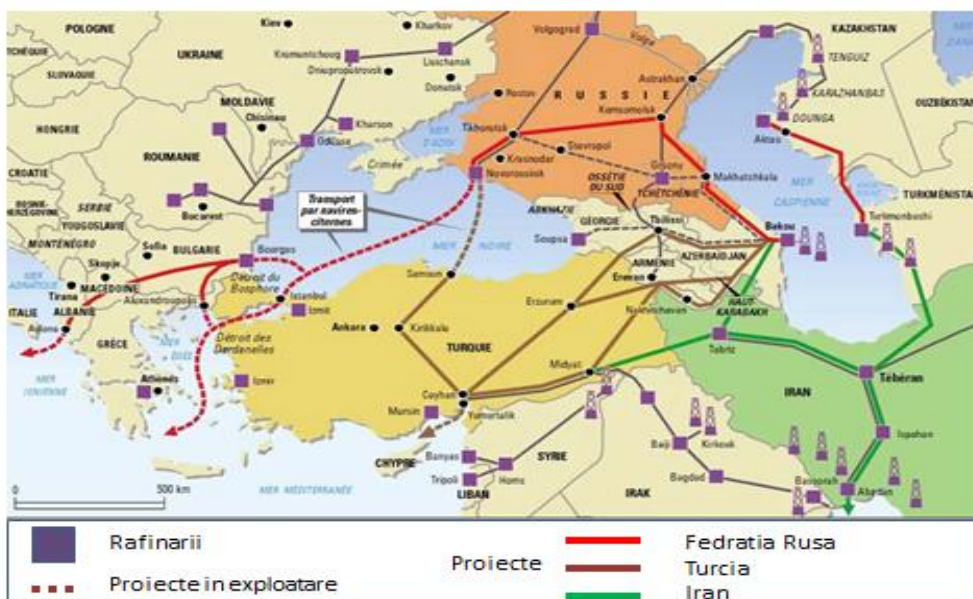
connecting Yerevan to Istanbul, with three flights per week. Simultaneously, Turkey initiated the demining process of part of the common border area with Armenia.

As an expression of some new Russian-Turkish perspectives, there would be new approaches of the issue of the Turk minority living in the North Caucasus (Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Cherkassy, North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Chechnya) and in the region of Volga-Ural, which would exceed the previous tacit arrangements relating to the fact that Turkey will remain neutral about the situation in the North Caucasus and the Russian

Federation will weaken the support traditionally given to PKK. At the end of 1998, Moscow refused to grant political asylum to the Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan, who was later captured by Turkish special forces in Kenya. This was reiterated on several occasions by the authorities in Ankara, including within reciprocal considerations of Moscow, according to which the West should not seriously consider

In this context, Turkey continues to urge Russia to exercise with greater honesty and objectivity its position of co-chair of the Minsk Group, organized under the auspices of the OSCE, concerning the real conduct adopted by Armenia in the process of providing regional security, simulta-

neously with the opposite reaction of the Russian Federation on disproportionately large military aids that Ankara gives to Azerbaijan.



that the post 15 July 2015 Turkey could become a new Pakistan.

Several final remarks

We can say that by March 2014, there has been a bilateral context for the Russia-NATO and Russia-US dialogue. It currently stopped working. In the new paradigm defined by the annexation of Crimea, Russia's strategies can be assessed as being more aggressive and directed against the EU, NATO and the US.

Immediately after March 2014, it was clear that Moscow has reconsidered the South Caucasus-Black Sea region as a zone of major interest for the Kremlin.

In case exceptions would occur, they would be formulated by Turkey, which, under the acceptance of synchronization with the Russian Federation, would come up with a contribution that would protect many of Moscow's regional vulnerabilities. It is the Montreux Agreement which could be further raised with much more determination in the new context, but continuing the recent political and doctrinaire documents of the Russian Federation. Vladimir Putin and his team are trying to find forms of unconventional (hybrid) responses, based on countering any "western forms" of aggression, including by using the active measures of the Russian civilian and military intelligence and counterintelligence services, as well as the energy as a weapon used along with diplomatic and military pressures.

Without an articulated economic vision, but dominated by a monochrome industrial landscape, Russia assert its desire to control the energy resources in Europe and in other countries in the region, thus using the energy dependence as a weapon of political blackmail.

The discourse of Russia's political leaders - influenced by Putin's rhetoric - indirectly presents the refusal to accept the processes of "forced discipline" in the name of respecting principles of democracy imposed by force. The manner in which Moscow chose to respond constantly concerns the international community. They often

incite to reactions of the allied air forces that are carrying out air patrols and of the NATO military ships temporarily stationed in the Black Sea. Another cause of concern is the concept of naval exercises, including in the Sea of Azov.

In a similar logic, President Erdogan is also seeking to explain his country's internal difficulties by indicating the foreign enemies that want to harm the country. The most recent example of this kind are Ankara's accusations on the external attack on the Turkish lira, whose accelerated depreciation has raised many regional concerns.

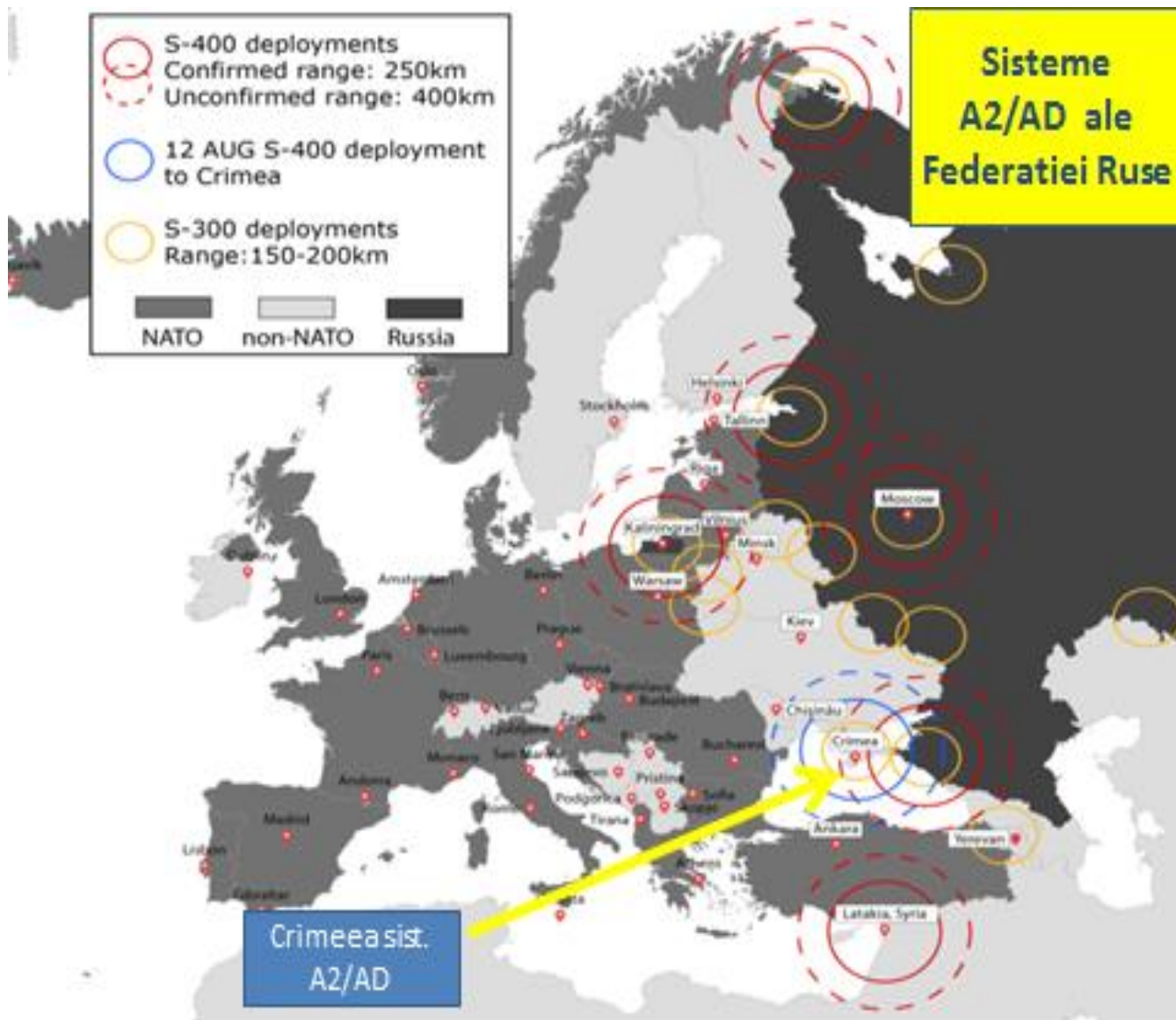
From this perspective, both Russia and Turkey turn to geopolitical games that highlight considerations of power, being unable to come up with consistent arguments in international affairs.

Russia's military involvement in Syria and the Middle East is part of a program to promote its own agenda in the region and raise awareness of its importance in the world of global business. Many of the points of the program in question are consistent with Turkey's expectations, a country that wants to be drawn at least partly in Moscow's sphere of interest. From this point of view, Russia has always shown a strong predictive ability, being in contact with EU countries and with Turkey, but behind the scenes, it was subtly developing its own political influence operations. History shows that this mode of operation is a natural pattern of action for Moscow.

At present, Russia's speculative behavior is exploiting the crisis of the global leadership and the fact that the global relations of power are not very well structured due to the internal political difficulties in both the EU and the US, and because of the frictions between the US and China or the US and the EU.

Another factor exploited by Moscow was the manner in which it practically turned the destructive effects of the economic sanctions that it received after the annexation of Crimea against the initiators of these sanctions.

Russia will probably pursue the old rhetoric trying to demonstrate that it is able to increase its level of aggression if it is not given a form of recognition for its international power. It will



seek to identify European business partners that are influential at the EU level and support it indirectly. The first countries that fall into this category are Italy, Austria, Hungary, Greece and Cyprus. It remains to be seen whether turning Crimea into a heavily militarized area following the model of Kaliningrad would be used as geostrategic capital with possible projections in the western neighborhood and beyond it. Moscow's interests projected west of Crimea include the Balkans, the southern part of Central Europe, Eastern Mediterranean and the Levant.

In this context, more attention must certainly be given to the Russian-Turkish relations which are currently characterized by interrogative assessment such as:

- Are the relations between the Russian Federation and Turkey spiral shaped?
- Is Russia-Turkey today a tactical cooperation in the context of strategic disagreements?
- Is Russia-Turkey a strategic partnership or are they partners connected by momentary tactical options?
- Are there behavioral similarities between presidents Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan?
- How long could the Russian-Turkish synchronization last?
- Etc.



Erdogan scores diplomatic wins in meetings with Putin, Merkel

Cengiz CANDAR

Despite negative portrayals of President Erdogan, he has been successful in his recent diplomatic efforts.

Russian President Vladimir Putin (R) meets with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Sochi, Russia, Sept. 17, 2018.

Let us set the record straight: Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan emerged triumphant from his meeting with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin. The Sept. 17 meeting in Russia's Black Sea city of Sochi was the third time the two leaders met in three weeks.

Erdogan got what he wanted concerning Idlib: no offensive to the province where Turkey's Syrian allies have regrouped alongside Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), formerly known as Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate.

In Sochi, Erdogan almost completely reversed the humiliation he experienced during the Tehran summit the first week of September. During that live, televised meeting with Putin, Erdogan demanded a cease-fire to prevent an imminent Russian-Syrian offensive to retake Idlib for Bashar al-Assad's regime. But Putin sarcastically rebuffed the Turkish leader, and the summit host, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, seemed to side with his Russian counterpart.

Putin and Erdogan displayed an unusual warmth at the end of their two-hour meeting on Sept. 17. The two men smiled, and Erdogan affectionately squeezed Putin's right hand between his own. Following the meeting, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced there would be no new military operation against Idlib by Syrian government forces and their allies.

Putin told reporters at a joint news conference with Erdogan: "We agreed that by Oct. 15 [we will] create along the contact line between the armed opposition and government troops a de-

militarized zone of a depth of 15-20 kilometers, with the withdrawal from there of radically-minded rebels, including Jabhat al-Nusra."

"By Oct. 10, at the suggestion of the Turkish president, [we agreed] on the withdrawal from that zone of the heavy weapons, tanks, rockets systems and mortars of all opposition groups," Putin said. "The demilitarized zone will be monitored by mobile patrol groups of Turkish units and units of Russian military police."

Neither Putin nor Erdogan explained how they planned to differentiate "radically-minded" rebels from other anti-Assad groups. It was also not immediately clear how much of the city of Idlib fell within the demilitarized zone.

Such uncertainties, however, cannot conceal the fact that Erdogan is now rightly in a position to claim that he achieved an incontrovertible diplomatic success:

1. He stood firmly against a Russian-led offensive on Idlib. Now, after Sochi, such an offensive is off the table.

2. After the trilateral meeting in Tehran, the quasi-consensus among Turkey experts in the West was that the rapprochement between Moscow and Ankara was coming to an end. Erdogan, according to his critics and a flurry of analyses among Turkish dissident circles and in the Western media, was lonelier than ever. Adding to the spats between Turkey and the United States, the differences with Russia were seen as unbridgeable and contributed to the portrayal of the Turkish leader in an unenviable light. Erdogan, however, turned the table on such analysts. Not only did he preserve his partnership with Russia in Syria and on other fronts, he consolidated it with a commitment for joint Turkish-Russian military patrols in a demilitarized zone to be created in Idlib.

3. The Turkish president emphasized that non-terrorist opposition groups had to be distinguished from HTS, which controls a significant

part of the province. Turkey-sponsored opposition groups are positioned mostly to the west of Aleppo and are first in line in a potential confrontation with the Syrian army. If Putin had sidestepped his Turkish partner in Idlib, Erdogan would have lost his credibility and leverage over the Turkish-sponsored Syrian opposition groups. Erdogan averted that danger with his Sochi achievement.

After the Sochi meeting, Erdogan said, "The opposition will continue to remain in the areas where they are. In return, we will ensure that the radical groups, which we will determine with Russia, will not operate in the area under discussion. ... Russia will surely take necessary precautions to ensure the Idlib de-escalation zone is not attacked."

The Sochi deal indicates that Putin considers it a priority to keep Erdogan on board in the Syrian theater. The aim of such a strategy is to invest in the growing tensions between Turkey and the United States over the Kurdish presence to the east of the Euphrates. For Putin, not alienating Erdogan takes priority over launching an offensive to deliver Idlib to Assad.

Erdogan, during the joint press conference in Sochi, as if confirming Putin's implicit game plan, drew attention to the areas east of the Euphrates and said terrorist activity is not confined to Idlib. The biggest threat to Syria's future lies in the nests of terror to the east of the Euphrates, he said, naming the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and the Democratic Union Party (PYD), both US allies in the fight against the Islamic State, as terrorist groups that must be brought down.

Turkey's controversial president is now preparing another diplomatic win. He will visit Germany Sept. 27-29, and German Presi-

dent Frank-Walter Steinmeier will receive him with full honors: a military ceremony and a festive banquet at the official residence of the German president, the Bellevue Palace in Berlin.

For Erdogan to have such an opportunity in Berlin, only a year after he accused German leaders of being Nazis, is astounding. And Turkey might be offering Berlin a big prize: the modernization of Turkey's railroads. The enterprise, worth 35 billion euros, is a replay of the 1898 Berlin-Baghdad railway project, which brought German Emperor Wilhelm II to Turkey and sealed the future alliance between the Ottoman Empire and Germany in World War I. Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II — admired by Erdogan and all the Turkish conservatives — oversaw the deal.

Erdogan, now following in the footsteps of his role model Abdul Hamid II, is expected to discuss the lavish project during his visit to Berlin. It could be an economic boost for both countries. It could also provide a much-needed European cover for Erdogan, who has faced intense criticism for Turkey's poor human rights record and for putting an end to democracy.

German weekly Der Spiegel reported on the railroad modernization project: "A consortium led by Siemens is to build new railway lines, electrify old ones and install modern signaling technology in the country. German national railway Deutsche Bahn is also slated to help with the planning of the megaproject, which will in-



clude new high-speed lines throughout the country, including tunnels, overhead lines and rolling stock."

It continued: "The offer also came attached with the request that Germany help finance the railway construction project. No decision has yet been made on whether Berlin will back the project. ... But in its talks with the Turkish government and Siemens, the German government has expressed its willingness to consider providing financial support. If the project comes to fruition, it would be the most striking evidence yet of the spectacular diplomatic turnaround that German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas tried to push forward during his visit to Turkey last week."

Der Spiegel called the railway "a further indication of the new, deliberate course being pursued by German foreign policy. ... [I]t is seen as a way to slow the Chinese, who have been expanding their global influence for years in the form of billions in investments in Africa. Beijing has recently had its eyes on Turkey. The railway project is exactly the kind of thing Beijing would like to be doing itself. Turkey's rail network is, after all, of strategic importance for the trade route between Europe and Asia — a vital steel link within the New Silk Road."

Germans get nervous when reminded that they are appeasing an autocratic regime in Turkey. When their economic interests dominate, they are ready to ignore the gross violations of human rights and democracy in Turkey. However, it was hard to comprehend why a delegation from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) was deprived of an appointment with Chancellor Angela Merkel and Foreign Minister Maas. The delegation included the HDP chairman, the deputy speaker of the Turkish parliament, and a parliamentarian of Yazidi background who was also a former member of the Bundestag. Despite the delegation's persistent efforts, a meeting was refused. Even a symbolic five-minute audience with high-level German officials could assuage



the worries of the HDP leadership, whose legendary former chairman, Selahattin Demirtas, is in jail, a victim of Erdogan's rage.

For the current German leadership, not attracting Erdogan's rage is the priority. Moreover, it is important to pamper him for the sake of a German geopolitical gambit, which is presented as being on behalf of the Western world, at a time when its leadership has been vacated by Donald Trump. Most important, perhaps, is the 35-billion-euro deal to be reached with Turkey.

For Erdogan, consolidating his partnership with Putin and having Merkel serve as his political and economic savior will be a most welcome development.

For all the international news analyses that lead one to believe Erdogan is in decline, it is time to reconsider.

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Kosovo-Serbia relations in 2018:

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The Vučić-Thaçi agreement for two million new refugees?

In the aftermath of World War II, the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia was declared.

The winning states created the new world order, which was implemented with the establishment of the United Nations (UN). New countries were established and new borders were created. Thus, the external borders of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia were determined on the basis of the outcome of WW2 and the consent given by the great powers. By analogy, internal borders between Yugoslav republics and provinces were drawn and recognised.

A few years later, the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia was renamed into the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). Following the disintegration of SFRY in 1992 its republics soon became independent and sovereign states, while the province of Kosovo proclaimed independence only in 2008. This represented the conclusion of border formation in the former Yugoslav territory and the end of the Yugoslav crisis.

The Arbitration Commission of the Conference on Yugoslavia (commonly known as Badinter Arbitration Committee) expressed the legal opinion that the borders between former federal units (republic and provinces) were regarded as the borders between the newly formed states. Even after four wars (in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo) were fought with the aim to redefine the borders, none of the borders within the territory of the former SFRY were changed by an inch. Surely a few border

disputes have arisen, but they are in the process of resolving, while some of them have already been resolved.

The Kosovo-Serbia dialogue with a clear goal

The proclamation of Kosovo's independence in 2008 intensified the problems between the newly formed Republic of Kosovo and the Republic of Serbia. Therefore, in 2011, the international community launched the dialogue between Belgrade and Priština under the auspices of the European Union. So far the dialogue has shown only modest results due to obstructions caused by the participating parties in their attempts to achieve certain goals. The prolongation of the dialogue has enabled political survival to certain politicians. That is why the deadline has been set to end the dialogue and reach the legally binding agreement between Serbia and Kosovo in the first half of 2019. The problem occurred when the Brussels dialogue provided for the formation of the Community of Serb Municipalities (ZSO) in northern Kosovo which is mostly populated by majority Serbian population. The Kosovo Constitutional Court decided that the proposed Statute on the formation of the Community of Serb Municipalities is contrary to certain provisions of the Kosovo Constitution. Besides the disputable provisions in the Statute there was a very strong political opposition against the formation of ZSO expressed by certain political parties, notably the Self-Determination movement (Lëvizja Vetëvendosje – LVV), which estimated that the formation of ZSO would cause irreparable damage to the statehood of the Republic of Kosovo as it would represent a kind of an entity within the state of Kosovo closely resembling the Republika Srpska entity within Bosnia and Herzegovina. After some other political parties also pointed to that risk, the project of forming ZSO was halted. However, the official Belgrade insists on the formation of ZSO which it believes to be crucial for the preservation of the Serbian community in Kosovo. This is only partly true, since ZSO would include about one third of all Serbs in Kosovo,

while the remaining two thirds would still live in other parts of Kosovo. ZSO would be institutionally connected with the Belgrade authorities. This creates a model of special and parallel connections between ZSO and Serbia, similar to those between Serbia and the Republika Srpska entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the meanwhile, the special war crimes court has started to try crimes allegedly committed by the Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK). Its task is to prosecute some key Albanian politicians in Kosovo, including Kosovo President Hashim Thaci, Kosovo's Parliament Speaker Kadri Veseli, possibly also Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj and many other high officials. The special court represents a kind of a mono-ethnic court since it was established to try only Albanians, which is a legal nonsense. Kosovo political leaders took the initiative to abolish the special court, but it was withdrawn under strong international pressures. It is through the Brussels dialogue that the Kosovo political leaders are actually trying to postpone the operation of the special court.

The ultimate goal of the Brussels dialogue between Belgrade and Priština was to normalise the relations between the two states and reach mutual recognition, which would enable Serbia to accelerate its EU membership process and gain numerous financial benefits, while for Kosovo it would open the door to UN membership. Nevertheless, there are some other obstacles that may be encountered on Kosovo's road to UN membership, such as the veto imposed by UN permanent members – the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. Since Kosovo has still not been recognised by two thirds of UN

member states, it can not gain the support for membership from the UN General Assembly.

Under the present circumstances, Serbia – being a self-proclaimed neutral state – is carrying out intensive armament, while the Kosovo Government only enjoys minority support in the Parliament and Kosovo President Hashim Thaçi lacks public support. Analysts believe that the solution for the present situation would be to carry out an early election in Kosovo, which would show the real relations between political forces in this country.

The Vučić-Thaçi agreement for two million new refugees?

After Aleksandar Vučić and Hashim Thaçi, by arbitrary action, took over the dialogue which should be led by prime ministers of Serbia and Kosovo, they took the initiative to correct and redefine state borders, which in their own language represents the historical borderline between the Serbs and Albanians. Vučić and Thaçi suspended the constitutional role of prime ministers, stole the state institutions and unconstitutionally established the presidential system in their countries. They received support from certain states for their borderline initiative, according to which the two countries would exchange territories and inhabitants so that the northern Kosovo would belong to Serbia (thus it would no longer be necessary to form ZSO), while most of the Preševo valley (Preševo, Medvedja and Bujanovac – regarded as “east Kosovo”) would belong to Kosovo (to which it had actually belonged till 1956). The realisation of such an agreement would lead to massive resettlement of inhabitants and the formation of ethnic borders. According to Vučić and Thaçi this would solve the problem by enabling permanent demarcation of borders between Serbs and Albanians. However, analysts warn that this would not solve the problem but instead cause new conflicts, victims, tragedies and at least two million new refugees. Another figure involved in this initiative is Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama. He is surrounded by advisers from Kosovo who had strong connections with Milošević re-



gime in 1990s – just like Vučić and Dačić, who now symbolise that regime. Kosovo opposition strongly rejects the borderline initiative, demanding President Thaçi to abandon the idea that may have devastating repercussions for Kosovo and calling for an emergency meeting of the Parliament to discuss the issue. Even Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj opposed the initiative, stating that “Any change to the borders and exchange of the territories will trigger new tragedies in the Balkans and may lead to instability and undermine long-term political and security efforts for peace in Kosovo and the region”.

Although all previous wars in the territory of SFRY were fought in order to change the borders, those borders were never changed. The wars only brought new problems. The question is whether this would be the right way to resolve problems for the countries whose ambition is to gain EU membership. The EU is based on diversity, and many EU states are multiethnic, multicultural and multiconfessional, which makes the Vučić-Thaçi initiative anti-civilisational and anti-European. However, the initiative veils Vučić's attempts to save at least some of the failed Greater Serbia project designed by Slobodan Milošević. Aleksandar Vučić and Ivica Dačić actually symbolise Milošević's politics from 1990s, and according to that plan the loss of a part of the territory in Kosovo would be compensated by annexation of a part of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, i.e. Republika Srpska. The Greater Serbia project even includes parts of Montenegro and Croatia. Pro-Serbian political parties in Montenegro which are members of the Democratic Front (DF) opposition have together with the Serbian national council already started to create the atmosphere by launching the activities for gathering the signatures for the petition to annul Montenegro's decision to recognize Kosovo's independence.

The realisation of the Vučić-Thaçi agreement would cause tectonic changes in the region, leading to new conflicts, victims, tragedies and a new wave of at least two million refugees who would have to seek shelter in EU states, notably Germany and Austria. Therefore, those who support

such an agreement will have to take responsibility for its consequences.

Nevertheless, Macedonia is of an even greater importance for Vučić's project at the moment. Since Aleksandar (Vučić) arrived too late to Kosovo¹ to resolve the Kosovo issue, he will have to redirect his activities to Macedonia.

Aleksandar (Vučić) arrived too late also to Macedonia?

Macedonia has always been a part of the Greater Serbia project. It is not surprising that Serbia only recognised Macedonia on 8 April 1996, that is after the wars ended and Milošević's Greater Serbia project collapsed.

Notably, Serbian security and intelligence structures participated in the obstructions carried out during the formation of the new government of the Republic of Macedonia led by Zoran Zaev (SDSM), and the officials of the Serbian Security Information Agency (BIA) were involved in the incident in the Sobranie (Macedonian Parliament) when Zoran Zaev and some of his colleagues were attacked in an assassination attempt. Former security adviser at Serbia's Embassy in Skopje and BIA's deputy director Goran Živaljević was present in the Sobranie during the incident. The regime of Nikola Gruevski and Saša Mijalkov closely cooperated with the Belgrade regime. Moreover, numerous transactions and the pulling of money out of Macedonia were carried out through Serbia and with the assistance of Serbian authorities. Serbia was one of a few countries that did not support the Macedonia-Greece agreement which resolved the decades-long dispute about the constitutional name of Macedonia. The agreement with Greece was even supported by Russia and the controversial Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, while Serbia's Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić announced that Serbia would withdraw its recognition of the Republic of Macedonia under its constitutional name. The meetings between Serbian and Macedonian governments have been called off several times, while bilateral meetings between high officials and ministers are a true rarity. Serbia appointed the controversial diplomat and

former BIA director Rade Bulatović as its new ambassador to Macedonia. At the same time, Serbia has strengthened its (para)intelligence activities in Macedonia. The media controlled by Aleksandar Vučić constantly spread disinformation and lies about Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev and his closest co-workers.

In only one year, the new government of the Republic of Macedonia consolidated the internal situation in the country and achieved significant foreign political results. A significant contribution to this achievements was made by Macedonia's Minister of Interior Oliver Spasovski, who managed to strengthen the country's security-intelligence system and its capacity to resist security-intelligence attacks from abroad. Serbia has increased the presence of its (para)intelligence apparatus in Macedonia in view of the referendum scheduled for 30 September 2018. Once the agreement with Greece is finally approved at the referendum, no one can stop Macedonia on its way to NATO and EU membership. Serbia disapproves Macedonia's accession to NATO, believing it would jeopardise its national interests. On the other hand, it allows open functioning of the Serbian-Russian Humanitarian Centre in Niš, which actually represents the first Russian military base in the territory of Serbia and thus a direct threat to Macedonia and Kosovo.

Nevertheless, the key reason why Serbia has increased the presence of its (para)intelligence apparatus in Macedonia it to prevent the positive outcome of the referendum, since a successful referendum will be followed by the canonical



recognition of Macedonian Orthodox Church. This year, the Archbishopric of Ohrid celebrates the 1000th anniversary of its founding. Since orthodox churches are national churches, Macedonian Orthodox Church will be recognised once the name of the country is confirmed at the referendum. Serbian authorities act in symbiosis with Serbian Orthodox Church, so it is obvious why they are trying to prevent canonical recognition of Macedonian Orthodox Church.

Perfidy of Vučić's politics towards Macedonia

While at first sight it may seem that Vučić's current activities are focused on Kosovo and Republika Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina), he harbours secret ambitions towards Macedonia. On 2 September 2018, Vučić met Macedonian Prime Minister Zaev at the Preševo -Tabanovce border crossing to announce the implementation of joint border management, while at the same time he carries out activities with the goal to disintegrate Macedonia. This clearly shows the perfidy of Vučić's politics towards Macedonia.

Therefore it is of crucial importance to stop the Vučić-Thaçi initiative and their intentions to change the borders. At the special parliamentary session Kosovo Parliament is expected to adopt a *resolution that would ban Kosovo President Hashim Thaci from further negotiating with Belgrade about changing the territory of Kosovo and resettling its inhabitants. The Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo is also expected to consider a motion of impeachment of President Thaçi due to his unconstitutional activities that are undermining Kosovo's territorial integrity. The best answer to Vučić's attempts will be given by Macedonian citizens who will support the referendum and confirm the agreement signed on 18 June 2018 between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Greece. This will accelerate Macedonia's accession to NATO and EU and open the door to canonical recognition of Macedonian Orthodox Church and correction of historical injustice it has suffered. The Republic of Macedonia will thus consolidate its statehood and ensure a better future for all its citizens.*

THE CURRENT INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM IS ANKYLOSED IN THE PAST AND THE EUROPEAN UNION DOESN'T FIND THE BEST SOLUTION TO THE PRESENT SITUATION



**Exclusive interview for
Geostrategic Pulse
with University Prof.
PhD. Vasile PUȘCAȘ,
Jean Monnet Ad Perso-
nam Chair, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-
Napoca, the Faculty of European Studies**

Geostrategic Pulse (P.G.): How do you assess the seriousness of the current stage of the USA-EU confrontation in the field of economic and financial relations as well as their evolution on a short and medium run? In concrete terms, I would ask you to nominate what are, in your vision, the important sectors belonging to the economic field of the two sides which were already vulnerabilized, having in mind the tempered "in the mirror reaction" from the UE for the time being in its relations with the USA?

Univ. Prof. PhD Vasile Pușcaș (V.P.): President Donald Trump imprinted to the United States of America the style of power policy of the second half of the XIXth century. He acknowledges the existence of the actors' plurality, is ready to talk of multilateralism, of the right of each actor to assess their specificity of interests on the international stage yet only up to where he believes that the United States of America's geoeconomic and geopolitical interests as he defines them are violated. He is always appealing to the victim's discourse, saying that his country was and is suffering economic, financial, commercial etc. injustices, a reason for which he wants to reinstate a new planetary balance. He condemns the globalisation yet does everything possible so that as many north-American corporations as possible be rated among the first 100 in the world. I personally believe that Mr Trumps preceeds in such an idiosyncratic way because he met an intensely anarchized international system and his style

Mr Trump proceeds in such an idiosyncratic way because he met an intensely anarchized international system

of interaction enjoys the upper limit of anarchy being willing to open the gate of chaos. After 1989-1990, the states' and international organisations' leaders did not continue the process of changing the international system but very shyly and without a long-standing vision. All that created the conditions for a president such as Donald Trump coming to the White House, yet one should not omit that such leaders took office in other states of the world, too. And now, what the American president does is to move in a planetary environment dominated by uncertainty without taking into consideration that the same international environment could become tomorrow or after tomorrow dangerous even for the United States of America.

As far as the European Union is concerned, it is obvious that the American president does not fully understand what the Union is (he is not the only leader in the White House having such limitations!). Currently, the European Union is for Mr Trump but a commercial and investment actor obstinate about acting intensely on the north-American market and on the global market generating thus for the American president false concerns of interpretation of the dynamics of the American-European financial and commercial relations. The American president overlooks as well the fact that a genuine Euro-Atlantic market emerged since five decades whereby the spatial dimension was accompanied by jointly agreed upon regulations having in mind the mutual benefits on this market and on the global market. Or, fracturing the Euro-Atlantic market would bring losers on both sides of the Atlantic and would speed up the ascension of other emerging actors designing their global aspirations. And in what NATO is concerned, besides the member states' financial contributions to support the Alliance, he succeeded in giving a significant impulse to rediscussing the European defense and security

strategy which will certainly have reverberations, too, in the field of the European industrial and commercial policies. The troublesome side is that the European leadership, who does not excel in quality, does not perform to the level required by the new circumstances. Yet maybe the shake-ups created by Mr Trump's actions will wake up all European leaders from lethargy and irresponsibility!

Trump's effect will be felt in all economic, financial, industries, services, trade, agriculture, research, banking, investment etc. sectors yet it will resonate in the political and even in the social systems. The last economic and financial crisis obliged the companies to restructure in order to survive and continue to operate on the market when the governments did not have any longer the necessary authority for adequate regulations. Now, under pressures from certain Trump Administration's impulsive regulations, not only the companies are searching for the appropriate way of restructuring but also the regional and international organisations directly connected to the global economic, financial and commercial life. In my opinion, the European Union adopted in a proper way a crisis strategy in its relations with the United States and is being careful in what concern president Trump's actions and reacts defensively. At the same time, the European Union tries to halt breaking the Euro-Atlantic bridges as that would affect it enormously and rebuilding them would be extremely costly. Unfortunately the efficiency of this rational European orientation does not rise to the expected levels due to the Union's weakness, to the behavior of some member states' leaders and due to Washington's insistent inter-state and even ideological approach towards the members of the European Union.

To conclude the answer (which I admit it is rather extended) to this question I underline the fact that president Trump is emerging as an initiator of change of the international system and is willing to assume a global change even if he has not a dedicated vision. The European Union

would have the chance of massively contributing to the reconfiguration of the international system if it could convince the American partner that only an integration of the Euro-Atlantic market will make America great.

P.G.: *How could be sanitized nationally the consequences of such a crisis by the EU smaller members countries and if these consequences are going to get worse in time could represent the prerequisites of a radical change in what concern the option for the European and Euro-Atlantic values?*

V.P.: The European Union's small countries could deal with the current crisis and the future ones if they have the capacity to contribute to the Union's strengthening and, at the same time, to position themselves better in the European decision-making process. The geopolitical circumstantial fluctuations and running after mercantile, short-term accumulations only, both justified rather than otherwise by

The inter-war experience of some states of Central, Southern and Eastern Europe must be useful for those searching for umbrellas when it rains only and do not want to build edifices with solid roofs

electoral interests of the leaders of some countries will diminish the acting capacity towards development and European Union's efficient global strategies. The inter-war experience of some states of Central, Southern and Eastern Europe must be useful for those searching for umbrellas when it rains only and do not want to build edifices with solid roofs. The changes of options you mentioned are possible as they are the result of the presence of some unsubstantial political leaders. And, after all, we will have to accept that probably some state leaders sustained the demarches of joining/integrating into the Euro-Atlantic structures only due to circumstantial motivation as they seemed to them, at a certain moment, of being the most important and useful to their purposes as they did not propose to themselves to be participants to a long-standing European project. Brexit is an example of such a distortion of the European project and it would be unrealistic to believe that such occurrences could not take place in the European

Union.

P.G.: *The bilateral strategic partnerships of some EU members countries concluded with the USA can prevail in front of the commitments undertaken within the European community without affecting the Union's cohesion? Can such partnerships bring about sanctions from the EU's informal leaders?*

V.P.: I remind you that that the relations among the member states of the European Union are partnerships which are codified by Treaties. So one cannot conceive that a member state of the European Union conclude strategic partnerships with other actors, including the United States of America, with prejudice to the Union's Treaties. You would imagine what other strategic partners believe of a state which does not observe its partnership commitments? Certainly it would be considered just a transient client-base state with which they relate for a limited purpose only. And taking it out informally from the international chessboard and eliminating it from other regional and/or global strategic games could be more serious than a formal sanction.

P.G.: *Yet if, the isolationist policy Trump promotes would bring tangible benefits to an important part of the American economy and would strengthen his overall vision on the world geopolitics securing him the second mandate, as well as on the background of the precarious situation Europe goes through today, we could expect, on the one hand, a significant erosion of the economic, political and military alliances, up to their disappearance and, on the other hand, to imposing bilateral strategic partnerships with the USA as a viable instrument for guaranteeing the national security of the small states?*

V.P.: As far as I remember, the United States of America proposed formulas of strategic partnership since the end of the 1980s. Since then the meanings of the strategic partnerships

evolved a lot. And the classical type alliances do not work any longer but in a specific context adapting to the need of dealing with global complex interdependencies. The international system itself will be deeply restructured as we mentioned before. As such, you witness frequent discussions about refounding the European Union, rethinking the North Atlantic Alliance, reforming the UN, IMF, the World Bank etc. All of them will have to face ample transformations processes yet firstly it would be necessary to change the states' functions and modus operandi in order to make them able too act as it should in the domestic and international policies. I don't

We find out that London continues to float in inaccuracy while the European Union, thanks to Michel Barnier's abilities, outlined well the objectives

know whether Mr Trump will have another mandate at the White House. Yet I am convinced that carrying out a strategic partnership

with him is and will be very difficult. What we are witnessing now is the fact that he generated already an impetus in the direction of change and what he undertook so far only will request decades of constructive activity. It would be important that those political leaders and those international actors emerge for undertaking such a work. We all know that destructuring takes place easier and more rapidly than achieving positive society projects functioning on a medium and long run.

P.G.: *What is your opinion about the end of London-Brussels negotiations taking into account Theresa May's vision of the current proposals for Brexit?*

V.P.: Unfortunately, Great Britain jumped into Brexit venture without having the knowledge and a clear strategy on the negotiations for exiting from the European Union. Equally true, neither the European Union had a substantial scenario concerning a member state's possible leaving the organisation although the gesture of leaving the Union was introduced in the Treaty of Lisbon. Now we find out that London continues to float in inaccuracy while the European Union, thanks to Michel Barnier's abilities, outlined well the objectives. I

stand by my assertion made some years ago that Brexit negotiations will have losers in all camps and that both Brussel and London have to prepare a crisis management for diminishing as much as possible the damages. I further believe that Great Britain had to think a phased way of the operation and in a first stage to accept of operating in the European Economic Space. And that because the Britons were already involved in the complex process of European integration from which a mechanical break free cannot take place. I found out as well that the political leaders who promoted Brexit had no knowledge of the integrationist process Great Britain was a part of, and their way of thinking did not overpass the free exchange consecrated by the Britons in the modernity of the last centuries.

not only there, benefitted from the wrong strategy of the same traditional parties, too, by believing that if they take over the main radical slogans they will diminish the intensity of the actions of the extremist formations. Or, in such a way, the electorate found out that the big parties themselves, yet with diminished credibility, proved the point of the radical discourse. A context in which the voters warned again the important parties that they have not any longer credibility and that they have to self-reform. It's unfortunate the fact that such parties and political institutions in the West which stimulated for decades on end their partners of the Central, Southern and Eastern Europe to self reform for meeting the European standards remained closed off and maladjusted to how time evolves.

P.G.: *I kindly ask you to comment on the major tensions in Germany when the extreme right exerts pressures on Chancellor Angela Merkel, especially on the migration issue.*

If the Germany's parties as well as the parties of the other member state do not find the modality of addressing the new realities, we will have an extended European crisis

P.G.: *There are centrifugal tendencies in the EU which might influence its cohesion and the solidarity spirit of its members?*

V.P.: I think that Ms Chancellor Angela Merkel and the main political parties in Germany were exceeded by the speed of the European and international developments. Engaged in managing the domestic economic and social issues, the German leaders were getting let down the European Union, neglected the management of the multiple European interdependencies and especially the connectivity between the social and economics and politics and others as well. And their messages, including the electoral ones, proved to be out of sync of the new methods and concepts which the technology and social media facilitated. If the Christian-Democrats and the Social-Democrats in Germany do not find the modality of addressing the new realities (the issue of migration is rather than otherwise the expression of the political crisis than a social issue), as well as the parties of the other member states we will have an extended European crisis which effects we will detect including in the manner the European institutions work. The advance of the political radicalism in Germany, and

V.P.: Today's cohesion of the European Union is supported rather than otherwise by the fear of unpredictable (after the lessons of the economic and financial crisis and Brexit) and the complexities of the interdependencies of the Single Market. And the European leaders' hypocrisy after 2004, coupled with the mercantile cynicism of the leaders of some member states made that the term solidarity have circumstantial connotations only. Lack of a clear vision of refounding the European Union as well as the Europeans leaders' lack of will of moving forward the process of the European integration generated major oscillations and disturbances in the Union's functioning even if the citizens' support for the growth of the European project holds on. We could say that a leaders' uncoupling from the will of the European citizens and that should stop the the initiative of strengthening of the European path of evolution be resumed.

P.G.: *How do you see the EU after the May 2019 European elections?*

V.P.: I think that the European leaders will be severely penalised in the May 2019 parliamentary elections and if the politicization of the European institutions continues in the so far formula, I'm afraid we will be confronted with new difficulties and problems. It could be that the European decision-making process become more cumbersome and contested at the level of the member states and that should lead towards speeding up the process of reforming and refounding the European Union. It could not rule out that the negative integration intensify and to opt more clearly for a strategy of differentiations in what concern the implementation of the European development policies. On the other hand, the international context could be a piecing together and stimulating factor especially for the member states placed in a more advanced process of integration. And that would allow speeding up the reform of the European policies, too. Yet all these will depend on the quality of the European leadership and of the members state's indeed, of their will to do more and better for the European Union and their citizens. And let us not forget that the European Union ironed out the best mechanisms for managing the interdependencies and the integration and that it was well equipped for facing the globalisation phenomenon. Or, all these are assets for the Europeans which their leaders should harness in the future expression of globalisation.

P.G.: *How feasible could be a global restructuring with hypothetical alternatives of regionali-*

It could not ruled out that the negative integration intensify and to opt more clearly for a strategy of differentiations in what concern the implementations of the European development policies

sation which started to be discussed by some analysts in Romania, too, according to whom in a certain circumstances, east of our country new geostrategic alliances could be set up having at their base a triangle outlined by the Black Sea – the Caspian Sea – the Mediterranean?

V.P.: The so-called “new regionalism” of globalisation introduced already in the debates numerous formulas of regional arrangements. There exist east of the European Union the project of the Eurasian Union which, beyond its structural component, proposes to manage the vicinities. The Balkan, the Middle East and the Caucasus areas receive already important geostrategic and geoeconomic recognition with the “strategic regions” in a “new regionalisation” of the contemporary globalisation. One notices a more and more intense activity of the initiators of this “new regionalisation” especially in the economic and military field, in the areas of the seas you mentioned. Such an approach brings to mind the intentionality of supporting such disturbances allowing the control of the new regional or sub-regional arrangements in the respective areas, resembling a lot with the older competition for spheres of influence. It is obvious that on the way of the action of restructuring the international system, several rearrangements and games of the powers in the reconfiguration will take place where states, regional and international organisations, multinational corporations and other global actors will be involved. A reason for which, I believe that Romania, too, should be an active actor and its operational capacity in the regional and international environment could increase only through participating to strengthening the Euro-Atlantic structures it is part to.

ment could increase only through participating to strengthening the Euro-Atlantic structures it is part to.

Title and subtitles are Geostrategic Pulse's.

Interview done by Corneliu Pivariu.





The EU needs a global leader, not a Spitzenkandidat

Giles Merritt is Founder and Chairman of Friends of Europe;

Shada Islam is Director of Europe & Geopolitics at Friends of Europe

In years past, when the EU's future leadership was under discussion, the search was at least aimed at finding someone who could win worldwide recognition and respect. That's not the case today, even though the need for a commanding European figure is greater than ever. With the likes of Donald Trump strutting the global stage, a tough and no-nonsense figure who will speak out for Europe is crucially important.

But one wouldn't think so when the *Spitzenkandidat* process is the focus of earnest debate. Europe's penchant for navel-gazing never ceases to amaze, and it is being brought into embarrassingly sharp relief by the media focus on the likely candidates to succeed Jean-Claude Juncker as European Commission president.

Two, possibly three, largely unknown politicians have so far put their names forward: the EPP's German leader Manfred Weber, Slovakia's current EU Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič to represent the Socialist Group, and maybe Austria's former socialist chancellor Christian Kern. None are names that ring bells in Washington and Beijing, or indeed anywhere else.

The EU is in any case looking down the wrong end of the telescope

Name-recognition around the world is important, but it's not the only criterion. There's the charisma needed to connect with Europe's disaffected, and also the new thinking and vot-

er-appeal that a woman could bring. Denmark's EU commissioner Margrethe Vestager is challenging the *Spitzenkandidat* system and seems intent on throwing her hat in the ring. If so, she will doubtless liven things up.

Will any of them succeed? The centre-right EPP group and the socialists both risk being dislodged from their dominance of the European Parliament by next year's elections. The two blocs won't be wiped out, but Eurosceptic populists from across Europe are predicted to oust many candidates of the traditional mainstream parties.

The EU is in any case looking down the wrong end of the telescope. It's a serious mistake to think that the European Parliament's two largest political groupings should 'democratically' select the front-runners for the top EU job.

Juncker himself secured the commission presidency thanks to the *Spitzenkandidat* system when it was introduced five years ago as a power-play by MEPs flexing their inter-institutional muscles. It seemed better than the secretive behind-closed-doors selection of the Commission's chief by EU heads of government, but it was never hailed as the answer to Europe's 'democratic deficit'.

What matters more is the international stature and reputation of would-be Commission presidents, not their party affiliation. Donald Trump has described Juncker as a "tough, tough cookie", and it's clear that chemistry between leaders plays an important part. Juncker has also built up good working and personal relationships with the leaders of Japan, China and India who



seem to be spending more time together in different world fora.

The EU is arguably doing better than expected on the world stage, thanks in part to US President Trump's erratic policies and to the effects of Brexit. Credit is also due to the EU's redoubled efforts to assert its global credentials.

Two, possibly three, largely unknown politicians have so far put their names forward

But that isn't not enough. Asians are still confused over the powers of all the EU "presidents" who show up at international events. They also contrast the EU's seemingly humdrum summits with the pomp when their own leaders meet the likes of Germany's Angela Merkel, France's Emmanuel Macron and Britain's Theresa May.

To be taken more seriously in Asia, Africa and

Latin America, Europe has to step up its game. As well as better policies, this requires a more forceful, quotable, identifiable and larger-than-life personality at the helm.

Nobody can yet tell how Juncker's successor will be chosen. What we do know, though, is that the current line-up along with other names being mentioned don't set anyone's pulses racing in Europe or beyond.

If Europe is to matter on the global stage, the next Commission president must be able to convince world opinion that he or she is not just up to the job of representing Europe but also of making the EU exciting, interesting and worth listening to. Little-known politicians, however promising they may be, just won't do.



CONSIDERATION**Iran and its expansion in the Middle East*****Corneliu PIVARIU***

After the end of the Iraqi-Iranian war (1980-1988) and especially after Iraq's invasion by the USA-led coalition, Iran undertook a series of complex strategic actions for strengthening and expanding its influence not only in the Gulf region but also in the entire Middle East. The so-called Arab spring and the world geopolitical developments provided Iran with new possibilities of achieving its strategic plans which were so far harnessed with maximum competence.

In recent years, the tensions in the Middle East came forward in the form of different crises which became entwined, from the Syrian civil war to the war in Yemen, the Qatari crisis or the termination of the nuclear agreement with Iran, and all that had as a common denominator: Tehran's direct or indirect involvement.

Although Iran's bilateral relations with Arab countries of the Middle East are, as a whole, inferior to the integrated Iranian foreign policy in the area and Tehran succeeded in being very penetrating in countries such as Syria (by harnessing the relations during the war with Iraq and the preservation of the Alawis in power in Damascus), Iraq (where the existence of the Shia majority and the consequences of Saddam Hussein's removal from power were cleverly turned to better use), Lebanon (Hezbollah's support is a constant of the Iranian policy ever since the 1980s) and Yemen, benefitted from the Qatari crisis to improve its relations with Doha.

Tehran's relations with Saudi Arabia witnessed an increased deterioration in spite of a short period of improvement. Riyadh considered always Iran as the main regional threat and cooperated with the USA in order to exert pressure on Tehran. Instead, Iran did not consider Saudi Arabia as a too dangerous regional threat. Only after the economic sanctions imposed by the USA begun to be implemented and Washington's cooperation with the Saudi regime increased, Tehran begun to feel the destabilizing effect of the tensions with Riyadh and that determined Rohani's administration to look for a dialogue between the two sides. The September 22nd attack on the military Iranian parade in Ahvaz contributed to the increase of tension in the Gulf especially since countries such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates kept silent and did not condemn the attack while Tehran interpreted the silence as a tacit acceptance and blamed Great Britain, Holland and Denmark of giving shelter to members of the group who claimed the attack and to offer them media platforms.

The conflict in Yemen contributes fully to increasing the tensions in the Middle East as Saudi and American officials declare that Tehran plays an important role in supporting the Houthi rebels especially by supplying equipment for the missiles, including technology transfer for the UAVs and trainers, mainly by means of the Lebanese Hezbollah.

Iran has a valuable diplomatic staff able to cover the main fields of the Iranian foreign policy, has an army and especially a Revolutionary Guard Corps (Pasdaran) well trained and relatively well equipped, trained in real conditions especially in the Syrian civil war and harness promptly all the rifts in the Arab world, including those between Turkey and Saudi Arabia. The last development is linked to the disappearance of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul (according to last data, Riyadh is prepared to acknowledge his death *during an investigation which went wrong*).

Under the circumstances and taking into account the prospects of the developments in the Middle East, we appreciate that on a short and medium run the Iranian position in the region will not undergo important changes. Its eventual de-escalation imposes all sides, including the extra regional actors' in the main security issues' achieving compromises for securing a stability on a long term. Or, on a short term at least, such compromises are not being contemplated.

The Main Factors of the Middle East Situation



SYRIA: THE IRANIANS LEAVE YET IRAN STAYS

Dumitru CHICAN

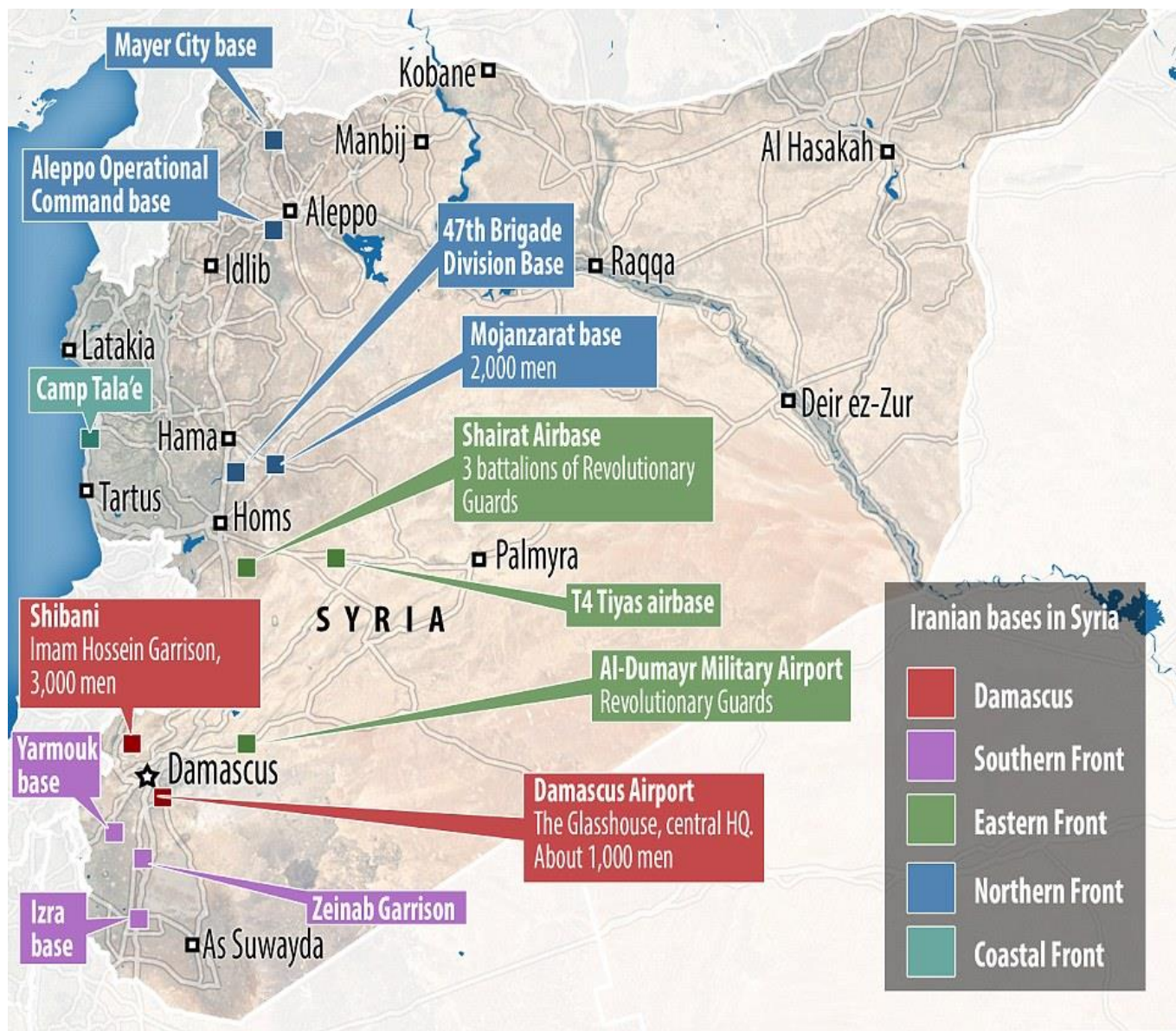
In the framework of the debates, initiatives, negotiations and demarches focused on the end of the civil war in Syria and, in perspective, the reconstruction of this country and the return to their homes of millions of Syrians who took refuge abroad or were displaced in their own country, a no less "hot" and controversial issue is that of demilitarizing the Syrian front in the post-conflict period which, especially in Donald Trump Administration's interpretation and of the Israeli government of prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, means first and foremost the termination of the Iranian presence on the Syrian chessboard with all its multiple components – from the military formations, to the war logistics and to the economic, social and cultural structures Iran infiltrated in the deepest fabric of the Syrian state and society. A number of around 20,000 people is permanently active in the Iranian bases and locations in Syria who is made up of soldiers of the Iranian army, Bassij elite forces, the Revolutionary Guards and of a mosaic of militias organized, financed and armed by Iran.

On this background, on August 26th-27th, mass-media reported the two-day visit the Iranian minister of Defense Brig. Gen. Amir Khatami and a delegation of high Iranian military officials paid to Damascus where he was received by president Bashar Al-Assad and had talks with his Syrian counterpart Gen. Ali Ayub, with whom he signed an Agreement on military cooperation on a medium and long term with applications aimed especially at bilateral cooperation for the restoration of the Syrian national army and the development of a military research and manufacturing industry in Syria as well as Iran's involvement in the process of post-war reconstruction of the Syrian economy particularly in the fields of economic and social infrastructure, real

estate development and dynamizing the Syrian energy, oil and gas sectors.

The regional media commentators appreciated unanimously that the conclusion of the said document in a context whereby the evolutions and the contradictions related to the situation in Syria are manifest must be interpreted as a signal as far as the determination of the Islamist regime in Tehran is concerned to continue in adapted forms the political agenda regarding the regional climate in general and the perpetuation of its presence and settlement in Syria in particular in spite of the external pressures coming especially from the United States and Israel which do not cease to reassess their definite opposition to any option of solving the Syrian conflict that would include any continuation of the Iranian influence in Syria. Having in mind Damascus's constant reiteration of the fact that "Iran came to Syria upon the Syrian government request", the conclusion of the document may be perceived as well as a Tehran's tactical attempt to provide an institutionalized form to its presence on the Syrian chessboard, a presence which, according to certain sources in Damascus, increased during the last weeks of this year's summer.

Seen from Tehran, the domestic conflict in Syria exceeds the significance of the regional strategic games and acquires the dimension of an existential issue which upholds the idea that in a way or another, Iran must maintain its multidimensional presence on the Syrian chessboard despite all the pressures the United States exerts against this alternative and irrespective of the strikes the Israeli army carries out against the Iranian military infrastructure in Syria. Acknowledged publicly or not, these strikes (more than 200 during the last two years, according to some Israeli military sources) are for the time being meant to reaffirm the Israeli slogan concerning the Iranian issue: "no foot of Syrian soil for any form of Iranian military presence". The Iranian fighting units achieved remarkable successes on the front of the Syrian war in defending Bashar Al-



Iranian military bases and locations in Syria

Assad’s regime and, implicitly, Tehran’s regional interests. Yet the Syrian war did not end and one cannot speak of a definite and general putting out of the flames of the conflict except from a more or less remote perspective, but anyway a vague and difficult to predict one.

On the other hand, the majority of the aerial strikes carried out by the Israeli airforce in the Syrian airspace affected only, one may say, but the visible side of the iceberg while the invisible one and the most substantial of the Iranian presence does not belong to the conventional military field. More than in case of other conflicts Iran is involved in, the military and political

planners in Tehran proved a surprising capacity of adaptability and flexibility of their presence by combining, in accordance with the developments on the front, their own forces, on the one hand, with the existing capacities on the battlefield and it is about in particular of the Lebanese Hezbollah militias, of the Iraqi Shia “special forces” dislodged by the pro-Iranian group “Badr” as well as of organisations and groups of smaller dimensions yet with an increased mobility such as “Asa’ib AlHaqq” groups (armed and equipped by Hezbollah), or of units of mercenaries coming from Central Asia areas (“Al-Fadl Al-Abbas Brigades”), formations that were ideologically trained and reshaped in the spirit of total and un-

conditional submission to the "supreme guide" and to the principle "velayet – e- faqih", and each of them became thus a clone of a reduced dimension of Hezbollah. Such a nondescript mosaic in terms of provenance yet equalised doctrinary and ideologically, constitutes a sufficient enough force for securing a de facto Iranian presence without that Iran apparently being directly and visibly involved in the evolutions in Syria.

In the same vein, mention should be made that the Iranian military vision of involvement into regional conflicts was programmatically and permanently accompanied by a social and economic dimension in the sense that all the pro-Iranian militias are spreading, with Iranian financing, a vast network of social activities including for instance equipping clinics and hospital units, charity foundations helping the population in different segments of the services field etc. Thus, the charity foundation "Jihad wa Bina" (Jihad and construction) which supervised the reconstruction of Beirut's southern part after the 2006 war between the Israeli army and the Lebanese Hezbollah, is presently engaged in building schools and in rehabilitating the road network in Aleppo region and in other districts under the control of the Syrian loyalist army. At the beginning of the year, Bashar Al-Assad approved the opening in Damascus of a subsidiary of the Iranian "Azad" Islamic University. The education sector, the cultural foundations, the charities and the works of civil contractors secure thus a corridor with a social and political appearance yet meant to assure the political access in Syria in extreme conditions when this access is confronted with obstacles. To an equal extent, one may say that this "social network" is, in last analysis, a honourable "cover" for carrying out military activities and influence of the Iranian presence in the Syrian space.

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All these aspects underline Iran's adherence to the strategic idea of turning Syria into another "Iranian province" yet they have important repercussions. So, focussing the attention on securing this Syrian link of the "front of resistance

and refusal" had as a paradoxical consequence that of imposing to the theocratic regime to move on the sideline or even give up two fundamental ideological principles found at the very foundation of Khomeyni's revolutionary doctrine, namely fighting the Jewish state and "the defense of the oppressed ones" in the Muslim area. In Syria, Iran's war effort is in its essence devoted to crushing the "Sunni rebellion" but after Islamic State suffered defeats, the argument of "fighting the jihadist-terrorist phenomenon" is more and more difficult to uphold as it is the case as well as of the theory supported by the Syrian ideologues according to which all those opposing Bashar Al-Assad's regime are terrorists. Whether during the seven years of war Iran succeeded in apparently saving the "Shiite arch" Damascus-Baghdad- Tehran, as a resistance "front" against the Zionist enemy", Iran lost in exchange the expected attractiveness of the slogan concerning the "protection of the oppressed ones and disinherited" and, moreover, by constituting in Syria what is perceived as a multinational Shiite occupation army, Iran contributed largely to turning an internal upheaval into a sectarian war at least to the extent that out of the total of foreign fighters fighting under Tehran's orders, more than half of them are Afghan and Pakistani Shia Muslims.

To a certain extent, the dilemma surrounding the Iranian-Syrian question arises not from the degree Tehran will succeed in staying in Syria but especially from its impossibility of leaving Syria.

And, under such circumstances, it cannot be ruled out that Israel's maximalist claim expressed by the slogan "not a foot of Syria's land for an Iranian presence" generates the same maximalism from the theocratic government expressed by the possible phrase "to the end" or "all or nothing".

These two phrases, which are ultimately synonymous in their significance, mean the same overbidding the chances related to "all or nothing" which remains a space where certainly the surprises will come.

LEBANON - BETWEEN DOMESTIC UNCERTAINTIES AND THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

Lamia FOUAD, Beirut

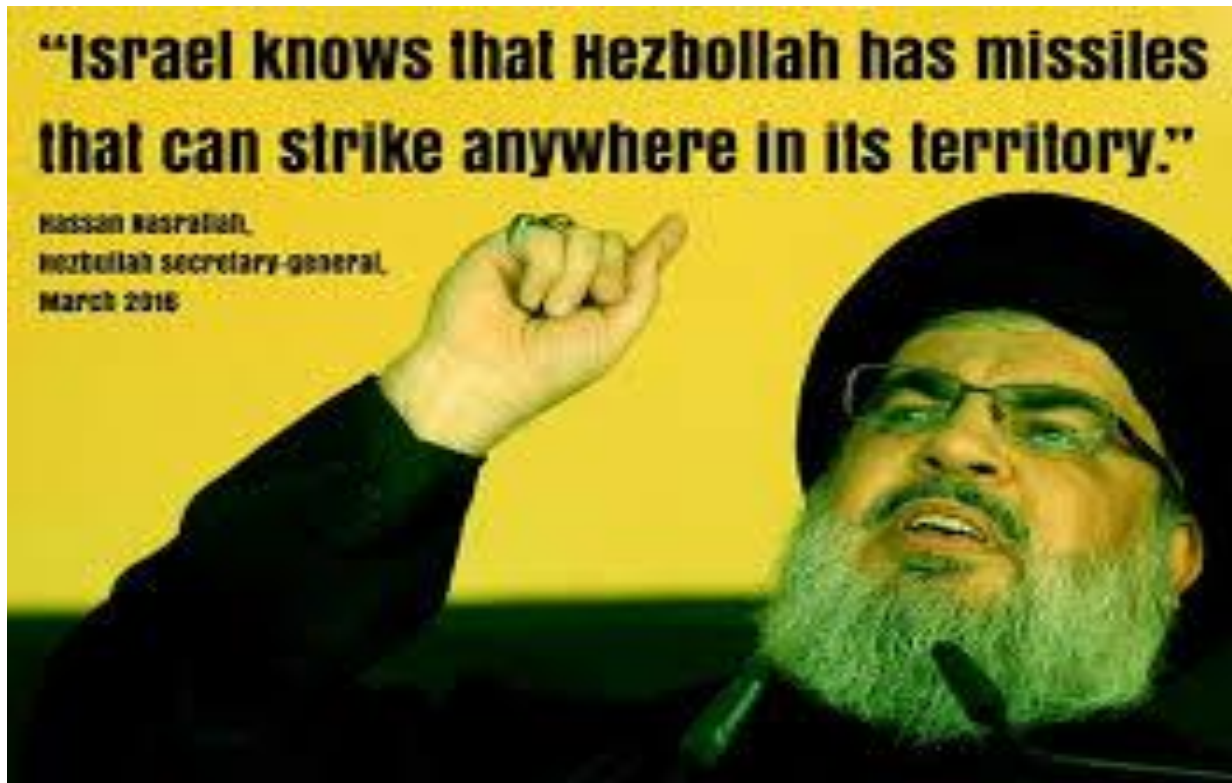
After the May 6th general elections – the first in the last ten years – Lebanon, which did not succeed until this fall to form its new government, lives in a state of unprecedented uncertainty and instability which origins are to be found not only domestically but also in the challenges and threats surrounding its more or less close regional geography. And the first tension factor related to the surrounding geopolitical environment stem from the increased deterioration of the relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran, on the one hand, and the so-called Sunni coalition made up of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and, to a lesser extent, Egypt, to which the tandem the United States-Israel is to be added, on the other hand. On this background, other no less important factors contribute to Lebanon's security awareness and vulnerability. It is, first of all, about this country geographic position between two irreconcilable enemies and neighbours at the same time, namely the Israeli state and Syria and, second of all, about the fact that Lebanon is the residing country of the pro-Iranian Shiite formation Hezbollah – which is considered to be one of the political and military actors on the chessboard of the geostrategic conflicts and contests of the Arab world and of the Middle East. This "Party of God" is, on the one hand, involved in a belicose state with Israel and, at the same time, an active actor as well on the Syrian civil war front alongside Bashar Al-Assad's loyalist army and the militias of the Iranian Guards of the Islamic Revolution.

For Iran's adversaries, Hezbollah's power and influence which were manifestly strengthened following this spring general elections, represents an active threatening hotbed due to several reasons. Through its massive involvement and presence on the battlefield of the Syrian civil war, the Lebanese Shiite formation offers Iran a valuable foothold and political, military and

operational outpost thanks to which Iran can affirm that Tehran's influence expanded to Israel's immediate proximity and that adds a new flare to the file of the regional conflict and to the peace and stability at the level of the Middle East. On this background, the regime in Tehran used its connections with Hezbollah in order to place in the formation's silos a powerful ballistic missiles arsenal which number is estimated at more than 150,000 and that turns the Lebanese territory into a genuine launching pad of such weapons against certain targets within the territory of the Jewish state. At the same time, the Iranian military presence in Lebanon (through Hezbollah) and in Syria too (in the locations directly administered by the Iranian militias) represents both a deterrence factor of an Israeli aggression but also the spark that may trigger at any time a large scale conflict given Israel's position affirmed by several military and political officials of Netanyahu's government according to which "Israel will never accept an Iranian military presence at its northern and north-eastern borders and it is decided to do everything possible to prevent and wipe out this presence".

Hezbollah's potential is nevertheless not only due to the material, military, logistical and financial support offered by Tehran. In Lebanon's sectarian society, there are whole segments – others than the Shiite Muslim ones – supporting this formation due to nationalistic considerations making Hassan Nassrallah's militiamen be perceived as a Lebanon's defensive shield against the Jewish state's regional projects (Israel is, since more than 20 years, occupying some Lebanese territories and is moreover perceived as aggressor which during the years caused Lebanon and the Lebanese society destructions, victims and difficult to assess damages.

At the same time, one should not ignore the support Hezbollah enjoys within the Lebanese political class and, especially from the political formations of the Christian denomination, among which the "Free Patriots Movement", created by the current head of state, Gen. Michel Aoun, and headed by his son in law, Jebrane Basil, holder of the Foreign Affairs portfolio in the transitional government in Beirut, is, by far, the



most prominent. Then, it is about of its more or less ephemeral allies which are determined by personal or group interests such as securing good relations with Syria in the perspective of ending the war in that country and of investing in the post-conflict reconstruction projects or interested in securing a presence bringing them benefits on the electoral and political and economic chessboard.

One should not forget as well that the sequels and the aftermath of the 1975-1990 Lebanese civil war are still vivid in the collective memory of the political forces and the sectarian blocks making up Lebanon's society in which configuration the Christians make up around 40% of the total population, while the Sunni and Shia Muslims are estimated to make up, each of them, 27% of the total. Or, for many Lebanese, the political and sectarian division into factions is perceived as an expression of democratic pluralism and represents a necessity and a prerequisite for the internal peace and stability even if, under the Lebanese paradigm of democracy, this multitude of tendencies, ideas, ideologies, alliances and interests is the main source of maintaining the disunion and of permanently undermining the slogan "Lebanon for all the Lebanese".

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The new Lebanese government which will take office in the *Serai*, will have to go down even from its first day, in the fighting arena whereby the Moloch of the national economy is waiting for and which, according to the estimations of the World Bank, is on a stagnating position on a medium term, whereby the macro-economic risks are at the highest levels. As compared to a yearly economic growth of 4-6% registered until the outbreak, in 2011, of the Syrian upheavals, this indicator remains with difficulties at 2%.

The economic and social impact of the Syrian crisis represents another challenging factor for the general domestic situation in Lebanon which, with a total population of 6.3 million inhabitants, shelters 1.5 million Syrian refugees whose presence represents a difficult burden for the Lebanese economy, a reason for which the authorities in Beirut are supporting any initiative, from the Russian Federation included, aimed at a progressive process of repatriation of the Syrian citizens taking into account the fact that the conditions of their relocation to their origin country are practically inexistent or, in the best

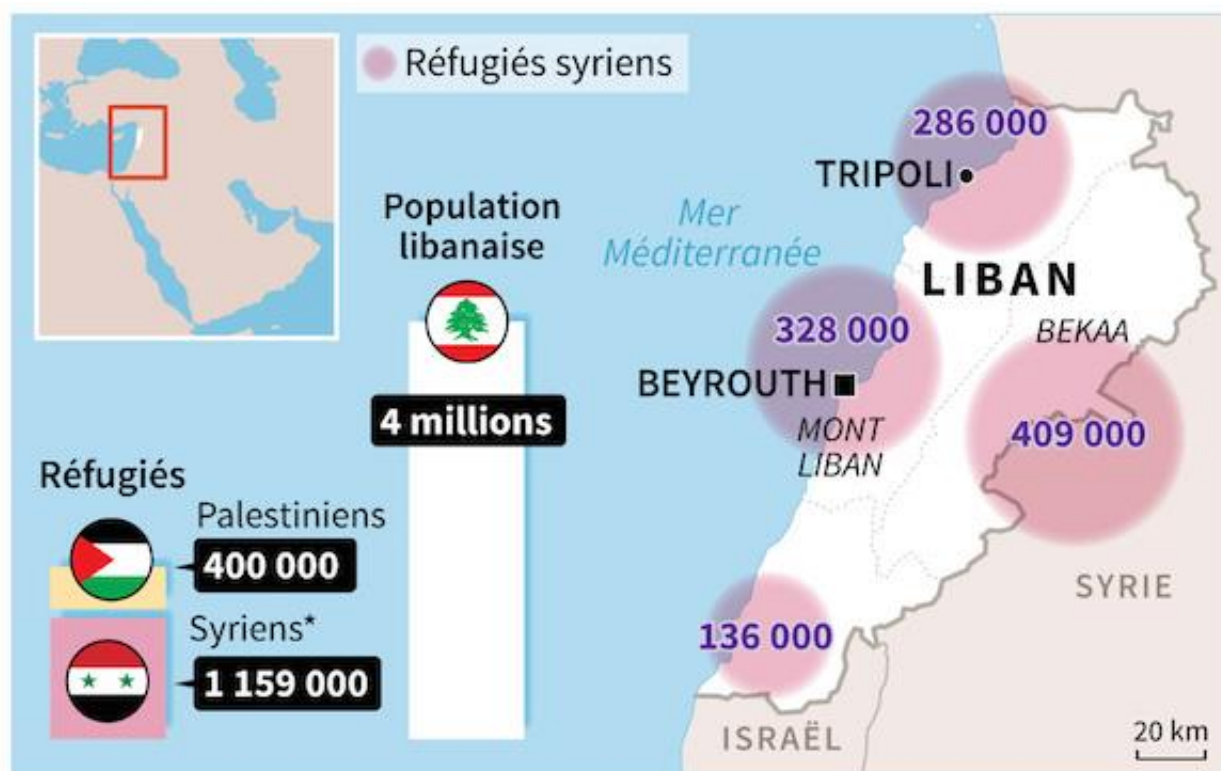
case, insufficient and precarious. The indirect consequences of the hostility between Saudi Arabia and Iran should be added to the abovementioned instability elements as Lebanon is in a position of being under continuous pressures from each of the two regional powers for adopting a clear position of siding with one camp or another, respectively for opting either for the Saudi block, backed by the United States and Israel, or for the so-called Iranian-led "front of resistance and refusal". All these make the ghost of a new conflagration in the Levant region haunt on the domestic chessboard of this country for which peace or the reignition of the regional climate depends to a great extent on the negotiations between the Russian Federation, the United States and Israel for finding a solution to avoid that the Iranian presence in Syria do not constitute any longer a reason of concern for the Jewish state and that includes as well the availa-

bility of Bashar Al-Assad's regime to deploy its own armed forces (the military police) in the Golan Heights for replacing the Russian troops of military police and to cooperate for completely resuming the missions of the UN troops (UNDOF) for monitoring the ceasefire on the Syrian-Israeli demarcation line in the Golan Heights.

The Lebanese are living the paradox of the capacity of looking to the future through the lenses turned towards the past. "The Cedars Land", "Switzerland of the Oriente", "The Lebanese Genius", poverty, the garbage suffocating the beautiful Mediterranean litoral, death on the staircases of the hospitals with no places to treat the patients, "Lebanon - the pearl of the Arab world"... All these phrases where the nostalgia for the lost greatness intercuts the hope and, to an equal extent, the "equidistant" carelessness.

Crise humanitaire au Liban

Les réfugiés représentent plus du tiers de la population totale



Source : UNHCR

*Y compris ceux en attente d'inscription

AFP

Numerical presence of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Source: AFP

REMEMBER THE NEW MIDDLE EAST

Dinu COSTESCU

At its beginnings, rather recent in the modernity of history, the phrase "The New Middle East" had an as punctual as possible significance and translatable by that a great regional or global power acted or had in mind to act for reconfiguring, in accordance with its own interests and projects, the political geography and the geostrategic coordinates of this sensitive and unstable region of the world the Anglo-Saxon military and political lexicon termed as "Middle East" and which, in the French speaking discourse, we find "Moyen Orient" or "Proche Orient". The memory of history kept for one century the completely unhappy remembrance of the Sykes-Picot agreements when, at the end of WWI, the British and French colonial powers partitioned among them the tutelage and control of the Middle East which was just separated from the former empire of the Ottoman sultans.

The publication in 1993 of the book "The New Middle East" by the former Israeli president and prime minister Shimon Perez occasioned the setting into motion in the Arab world of the idea that the respective moment marked symbolically the beginning of the "Israeli era" in the Middle East region. Later on, when the phrase "The Greater Middle East" entered the glossary of terms of the Department of State, it was translated in the Arabic rhetorics as denominating the United States of America's area of influence in the Middle East province with its Arab and non-Arab components. It was the turning point between two millennia, marked by the end of the Cold War and by the conviction, with a very comprehensive feature, that the hour has come for the end of the bipolar world order which was to definitely withdraw from history for leaving in its place a monopolarism doomed to last forever.

Except for the fact that, in the meantime, the world changed and, together with it, the region of the "new" Middle East changed, too. Today,

America is no longer the sole power pole and the unique factor of influencing the directions of the evolution of the global community. On the chessboard of power poles, the emergence of the Russian Federation, of China and of other actors with an ascendant role in economic and military terms can no longer be ignored. For the purpose of this article, it is not the configuration of the power pluralism that matters but the fact that Donald Trump's coming to the White House marked crossing the line towards a new manner of approaching the manifestation of the American nationalism characterized by a radical turning to the self and the deviation of the interest from what is going on with the rest of the world, the traditional friends and allies of the American model included, or with the state of the pluriform relations between the two sides of the Atlantic. And that marks a new impetus towards a better clarified multipolarism with the capacity of influencing in a way or another the geopolitics of the different regions of the global geography, too.

A closer look at the European space will enable the fact-finding of a package of non-negligible transformations and upheavals. From this point of view, the European Union is no longer an ap-



pendix or an extension of the North Atlantic Alliance, while Brexit process has significances and consequences which are not yet sufficiently foreseeable, while the shifts we are witnessing in countries such as Poland or Hungary and, more recently, Italy, are but signs of the new orientations looming for the European continent and which will naturally leave their footprints on a diversity of segments of the global world order in a not too remote perspective.

From the emergence and the development of BRICS group to the new "love story" between the North and the South of the Korean Peninsula, another archetypal history of the process of changes which is taking place under our own eyes at the level of regions and which is fragmenting today's world political geography and is directly reflected in what can be called materializing a new paradigm of thinking and a useless complication of the world order.

Upon the end of the Cold War, the liberal democracy gained the statute of modern world's new religion. Currently, after three decades from the abovementioned historical moment, both liberalism and democracy are placed under the eyepiece of microscope and within the target range of the insightful questions as far as the credibility and infallibility of these two concepts and sociological, philosophical and political patterns are concerned. In other words, it is about the fact that one may speak less of the existence of a political and economic religion with a cure-all universal statute valid and applicable without distinction to the ample and various wide range of nations, peoples and stages of development and prosperity.

The Middle East was not bypassed by the changes which took place globally and this reality assessed itself especially after the tempests of the "Arab spring" which, far from bringing fundamental changes to the mentalities and to the approaches, made that the most affected Arab states by the "springtime phenomenon" become pray to the most radical and absolutist currents. And, for the other states which managed to avoid sliding into the vortex of these transformations, the "Arab spring" allowed the materialization

of a precious lesson, namely that one of the fundamental conditions for survival is the defense and the preservation of the state unity and sovereignty. And a second lesson, no less valuable, was the one referring to the imperative necessity of the reform in all fields: political, economic, social and cultural, with all prerequisites of the reform for the continuity and the resistance to shocks that might push the state, institutional and social unity toward the precipice of bankruptcy, on condition that such changes are not achieved through the instruments of the "constructive anarchy" and through the national obedience vis-a-vis extra-national interests, interests that include allogeneous groups acting on behalf of the false slogan of globalisation. These two experiments – of state unity and reform – could have been detected in case of certain Arab states such as the monarchies in the Arabic-Persian Gulf, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, while the dark side of this process manifested ill-timed and brutally in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya in the extreme form of intra-state wars which turned a spring of hopes into a long and freezing winter.

Looked at from a wider, regional perspective, one of the manifestations of the "new" Middle East was to be found in the rethinking, be it a fragmented one, of the role the state has to have as a component link of the regional entity, a cohesion which, at least in what concern the states which survived the harmful effects of the "Arab spring", contributed by this very continuity to uprooting the cancer called "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria". And that resulted in downsizing and the contraction of the terrorist Islamist phenomenon on large and important areas of the Middle East and, closely connected to that, in the rest of the world's states which have fallen pray to the jihadist Salafist octopus. 2014 was the culmination of the years of irrational terrorism which witnessed at least 17,000 major terrorist attacks with about 45,000 casualties. As compared to this record, 2017 registered "only" 10,900 terrorist attacks with 26,400 casualties, meaning a decrease by 35% of the terrorist attacks and by 41% of the casualties. Mention should be made that, at the level of the Middle East, the

number of the terrorist attacks carried out represented one third of the 2017 total terrorist dynamics.

How new is today this "new" Middle East?

For the time being, the only realistic remark that could be made is that this region, as part of the process of evolution of the global world, is developing or reshaping concomitantly with the global transformations and in their framework. The Middle East remains a conflicted region. In all likelihood, in order to renew itself, the world of this geopolitical area must be renewed by itself without waiting for others to "renew it. And probably a condition of self-renewal must be the necessity of identifying a new Arabhood. Yet this is another long and sinuous story.

25 OF "OSLO": AN ILLUSION FALLEN APART?

Ambassador prof. Dumitru CHICAN

25 years have passed since September 13th, 1993 when, on the White House lawn, under president Bill Clinton's smiling looks and with the attendance of the United States foreign minister Warren Christopher, Russia's foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev, of the president of the Palestinian

Liberation Organisation, Yasser Arafat and of the prime minister of the State of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin, who were greeting each other for two crucial moments crowning the long and sinuous history of the Palestinian-Israeli dif-

ferend: the official consecration of Israel's and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation's mutual recognition by the conclusion of the historical "Declaration of Principles concerning the Interim Arrangements on Self-Government" known in the current discourse as "Declaration of Principles" or as "Oslo Accords".

In their essence, the Accords had as fundamental objective the setting up of an official framework for the future relating between the Palestinians and the Israelis and provided for establishing a Palestinian National Authority with administrative attributions in the territory under its control and for the Israeli army's withdrawal from certain parts of the West Bank and of Gaza Strip. It was established, as well, a transition period of 5 years at the end of which a permanent agreement was to be reached on the other controversial issues existing between the the contracting parties (the statute of Jerusalem, finding a solution to the Palestinian refugees), and the process was to be concluded by the creation of a Palestinian state within borders agreed upon during negotiations.

A quarter of a century after September 1993, the great majority of the Palestinians – common citizens or politicians, especially those belonging to the young generation – believe that the spirit and the letter of Oslo Accords are either in clinical death or in a regime of intensive care in or-



der to keep and reignite the hope in a peace threatened by the greyish perspective of the definite extinction. The results of an opinion poll carried out in the West Bank and Gaza by the Palestinian Center for Studies and Research are telling in this respect. In this context, 73% of the respondents consider that, 25 years since signing the Oslo Accords, the general situation in the Palestinian territories has seriously deteriorated as compared to the situation before 1993 while only 13% consider that one can speak of a relative improvement in what concern the Palestinians' conditions and rights.

To the question concerning the causes that lead to the failures of "Oslo process", the respondents (36% of them) referred to Israel's refusal to end the occupation and the embargo on the Palestinian territories in parallel with the continuation of Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories while other causes mentioned are related to the international and Arab community refusal and indifference concerning the legitimate cause of the Palestinian people (35%), the frailty of the Palestinian authorities themselves who proved unable to build institutions seriously involved in fighting corruption and imposing the rule of law in the public life, the conflict of interests and programs between the National Palestinian Authority, on the one hand, and the other political and military Palestinian entities such as Hamas Islamist Movement and the other detachments of the Palestinian movement, especially the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, their inability of bringing the deep political and mercantile division among the representatives and decision-makers of the Palestinian political class to an end, a fact that made that the Palestinian side, in general, prevent the materialization of an unitary and realistic program for the peace negotiations with the Jewish state, etc.

A no less important question referred to the preferences and the assessments of the Palestinian electorate when within the political and diplomatic circles theories undermining the "two-state" idea are intensely circulated in favour of other formulas such as a confederation with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan or a coming back to Gaza Strip being taken over under Egyptian

administration associated alternatively with the solution of a sole state covering the Palestinian territories and Israel or the creation of a Palestinian state in Gaza Strip only. 72% of the respondents supported the possibility of the two state despite the more and more frequent affirmations of late according to which the "two-state" theory lost some of its timeliness and feasibility.

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Without a doubt, the memorable handshake of Yasser Arafat and Yitzak Rabin a quarter of a century ago as well as the mutual recognition between the State of Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, consecrated by the conclusion of Oslo Accords, have a significance and dimensions which cannot be underestimated. And that recognition proved a special remanence capacity as it was not withdrawn or suspended in spite of all attempts – painful and bloody it was subject by further developments, the two Palestinian intifadas included or by the armed conflicts that dotted, after the year 2000, the evolution of the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

The Oslo Accords had as stated objective achieving a Palestinian autonomy as a transitional stage towards the creation of a Palestinian state. The retrospective and unbiased analysis only allows today the assessment that if the "Oslo process" has the merit of having demolished the barriers of fear and no-confidence, it was undermined from the very beginning by a remarkable inflow of enthusiasm especially when the objective of achieving, in a time period of five years only, of the Palestinian state has been proposed and initialled, a state which, during half a century, represented the stake of the Palestinian-Israeli contentious. And, in this particular case, the first to react were the exponents of the Israeli fanaticism who sentenced Yitzak Rabin to death as did the fanatics of the Islamic radicalism before to Anwar El-Sadat for having signed with the Jews the Camp David peace.

Such an enthusiasm born out of unconfessed hopes animated Rabin and Simon Perez, too, who was speaking ardently of a "New Middle

East" covered with never fading gardens, with highways and railroads crossing the Middle East from Israel to Gaza, Egypt, Syria, Jordan and onwards. Except that the geography thought by the former head of the Israeli diplomacy and of the Israeli state avoided any reference to the possibility that a Palestinian state emerges and lasts in this area.

The issue of the territorial aspects further remains a controversial point on any agenda of any negotiations and debates. Yet other subjects that were never profoundly approached remain thorny enough. The problem of refugees, the future status of Jerusalem threatened by Donald Trump's decision of recognizing the city as Israel's eternal capital and thereafter the Administration in Washington's decisive alignment alongside Israel remains, too, as many conflicted problems which should not block indefinitely the path of dialogue which begun at Oslo and which, we must not forget, was possible due to the mutual recognition of the existence and the ideals of the two enemies. Unfortunately, their rhetorics remains strongly marked by the sequels of the past. We cannot agree with certain Palestinian opinion polls – other than the one mentioned above – supporting the idea that today the Palestinians are doing better than during Yasser Arafat terms of office. Fair comparisons are to be made between equal terms, between historical stages and not between history and the figures who went through it.

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Since May, 14th, 2018, the embassy of the United States to Israel moved to Jerusalem. One does not need to repeat that the decision made by Donald Trump was and continues to be extremely controversial. Yet contrary to the prognoses circulated, the protests of the international community had primarily a rhetoric character. We did not witness a third Intifada (if we consider that an "Intifada" was the "March of return", too, organized on the demarcation line between Gaza and Israel and which was met by the Israeli army with countermeasures labeled cautiously by many commentators and interna-

tional fora as abusive). Neither the streets of the Israeli witnessed exhilarated demonstrations which could have not, anyway, equal prime minister Bibi Netanyahu's euphoria.

It would be, we believe, unwise to affirm that an attitude or another, a debatable decision or another, no matter in what foreign chancellery it was indited and launched is liable to put an irreversible end to the Palestinian problem and especially to the hopes livening the young generation of the descendants of the "Stones Intifada". It would be equally illusive and counterproductive that the Palestinian file will be phased out by deflecting the attention towards other conflicts troubling the the Arab world and the Middle East region – civil wars in some countries of the "Arab spring" or the irrational conflict splitting the Arab Muslim community in sectarian wars between the Sunni and Shia or the schism dividing the identity of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the list may go on.

Yet on the other hand, could someone imagine the existence of a parallel and cooperative image of two states – Israeli and Palestinian – when Benjamin Netanyahu's Israel continues the settlements policy of the Arab Palestinian territories and when the Palestinian politicians' positions, including Mahmoud Abbas's, suggest inflexibility and misdirection?

Today, to a question such as "at what point is today the Palestinian-Israeli peace process", the answer is simple: it is in a deadlock. Europe has its own problems which could be labeled as "existential". The Arab world reverberates to the echo of the affirmations of the future Saudi monarch Mohamed Ben Salman, according to who "Palestinians should not complain any longer and come to the negotiations table"...

Yet in the Oriental politics, any change of weather vane is possible at any time and without previous preparations. And, even as such, overcoming the stalemate would not be possible except when both belligerent camps accept that each of them has the right to sovereignty and dignity.

Oslo and thereafter

A short chronology 1993 – 2018

1993, September 13th: Conclusion of the Oslo Accords. PLO and Israel mutually recognize each other

1994 : Agreement concerning Israel's commitment to free 70% of Gaza territory

2000: A new round of negotiations are taking place at Camp David that failed due to the sides' disagreement on the statute of Jerusalem and of the Palestinian refugees problem

2003: The "road map" of the International quartet (the US, Russia, the European Union, the UN) was adopted. The document provides for ending the Palestinian revolts, freezing the program of Jewish settlements and the creation of a Palestinian state within the next two years

2007: New Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations are taking place in Annapolis, the USA

2008: Israeli army's offensive in Gaza in response to the anti-Israeli attacks carried out by Hamas Movement. The Palestinian National Authority withdraws from the Annapolis negotiations process

2010: Direct negotiations between prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and president Mahmoud Abbas are taking place in Washington

2013: The Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, disrupted following the reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas movements, resumes under American auspices in Washington

2016 : The UN condemns, for the first time, by resolution, without the USA using its veto right, the Jewish settlements in the West Bank

2018: The new headquarters of the USA's embassy to Israel was inaugurated. The Palestinian side declares cutting any dialogue with the USA and the decredibilisation of the Administration as mediator in the peace process with Israel.

THE SYRIAN REFUGEES CRISIS AND THE PAINFUL ROAD OF RETURNING HOME

Maher NABOULSI, Syria

"Where to return when we are lost as our homeland is lost too?"

(Syrian refugee, Belgium)

Context

Since the end of 2015, when the Russian Federation became an actor directly involved militarily in the Syrian domestic conflict for saving the regime in Damascus, Bashar Al-Assad's loyalist army managed to continuously advance and secure the control over large portions of the national territory starting with the strategic city and district of Aleppo up to the towns in the central parts of the country, including the capital Damascus, and to the south and south-west of the country including the Syrian side of the Golan Heights which were occupied by Israel following the 1967 war. During this series of offensive actions carried out between 2015 and 2017, the war had burdensome results which groundbreaking marks cannot be assessed in value terms and statistically save with a wide margin of approximation: the country lies in ruins, which removal followed by reconstruction implies, in a first, emergency stage only, a financial effort of more than \$400 billion; around 350,000 dead and mentioned should be made that this figure is far from realistically reflecting the huge dimensions of the carnage resulted after seven years of conflict and, not the least of which, a huge "inheritance" of emigrants and displaced



people within the national territory and their repatriation or return to their homes, how many serviceable or with the possibility of being recognized are left, becomes an ever pressing issue first of all not only for the exiled and displaced, but also, to an equal extent and due to various considerations we will refer to later, for the main regional and international actors, be they the neighbouring recipient states and hosts of the migrants or the powers directly involved in the war developments and in carrying out the political and diplomatic process meant to end the conflict and to secure the transition and peace in Syria.

As of 2017, with the triple guarantee of the Russian Federation, Turkey and Iran and with the United States' agreement, the so-called "deescalation zones" have been established and became active, namely for the cessation and avoidance, wherever possible, of military confrontations in several of the most active hotbeds of conflict on the Syrian territory.

This summer witnessed an obvious increase of

the initiatives, contacts and discussions on the subject of the Syrian refugees' repatriation, which is to be carried out in stages, and, in a first phase of this process, it is foreseen that around 1.7 million refugees on the territories of the countries in Syria's geographical proximity return home. Mention should be made that, according to data supplied by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a number of 45 states host refugees of Syrian origin and, numerically, first of them are Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.

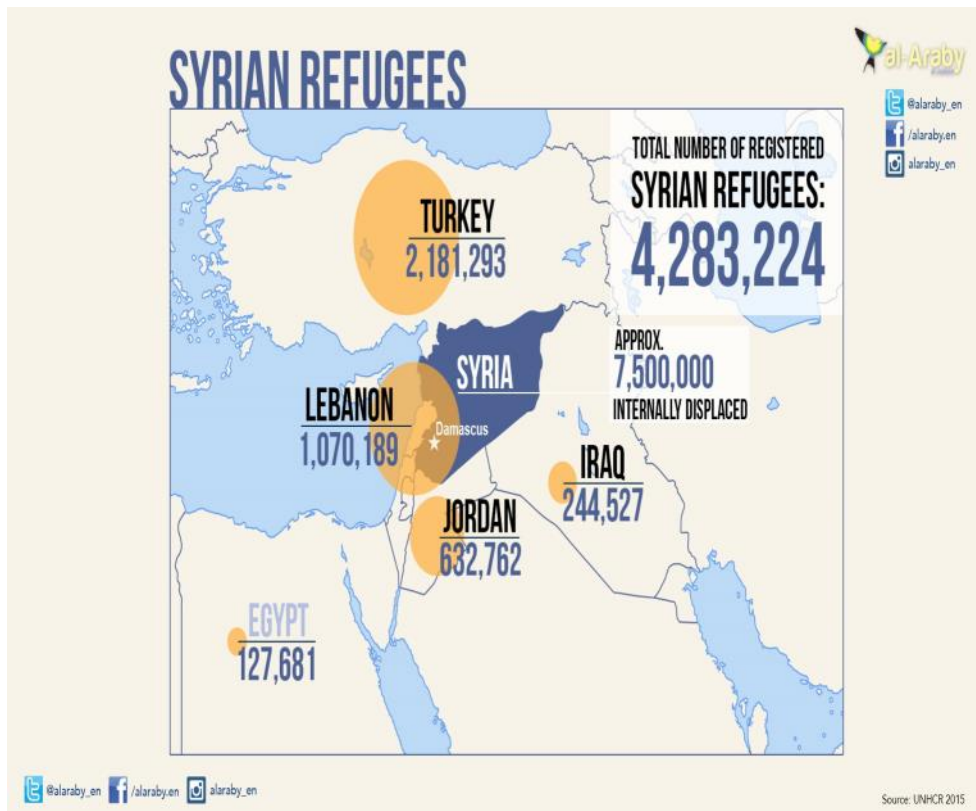
Statistics language

Although statistical information used in this article were supplied either by UNHCR or by specialised government agencies in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan as well as by the Defense Ministry of the Russian Federation, their accuracy is relative and the discrepancy of figures according to sources is due to either the fact that the UN agency takes into consideration only the persons mentioned as refugees in the UN register or

to inconsistencies between the reality checked on the ground and what the statistics registered or, in the end, the time gap between the date the statistics were drawn up and their official publication.

Thus, mass media are accrediting the figure of 4,283,224 Syrians with the statute of emigrants in the neighbouring regional states, while the Russian Ministry of Defense is advancing the figure of 6.9 million persons and the number of the displaced citizens within the national frontiers is 7.5 million and that means that approximately a

third of the 21 million in-



The regional numerical repartition of the Syrian refugees. Source: UNHCR

(The figures refer only to the refugees registered by the UN Agency)

habitants recorded in 2011 were forced to leave their homes and localities either as emigrants or as displaced persons. Similarly, UNHCR accredits for Turkey the figure of 2,181,293 Syrian refugees while, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), their real number is of 3.7 million people. It is important to mention that neither the Russian initiatives, nor other discursive initiatives related to this file take into account the more than 1 million Syrians who found a refuge in the European Union states.

The realities on the ground are underlining, on the other hand, that numerous zones of the Syrian demographic geography were partially or totally destroyed and depopulated while presently, other regions under the regime's control are overpopulated with persons displaced from their usual residence places where they cannot return any longer. There are registered, as well, several regions where entire localities (villages and towns) freed from the control of the opposition and Islamist forces were repopulated with citizens of Iranian nationality of Twelver Shia denomination and that generated already important changes in Syria's ethnical, cultural and sectarian structure with a certain negative impact on the refugees' reinsertion and on the peace and harmony in the Syrian society.

The same imprecision arises when it is about the geography of the presence of the Syrians exiled in the space of the recipient neighbouring countries as their numbers varies around more than one million in Lebanon, around 610,000 in Jordan, approximately 2,800,000 in Turkey and around 128,000 in Egypt.

The issue of repatriating the Syrians exiled is today discussed especially as a result of the changes occurred on the front in the sense of the expansion of the geographical area reconquered by the regime in Damascus and its allies, the creation of some enclaves for reducing and terminating the military confrontations, enclaves considered in general as meeting the security and stability requirements necessary for a phased receiving of the refugees wishing to be repatriated. This fragmented tranquility determined,

at the same time, the governments of the host states which are under the more and more difficult to bear economic, social and infrastructure pressures due to the masses of expatriates to harden the restrictions for receiving new waves of refugees in order to diminish the economic, social assistance, sanitary and educational efforts while the humanitarian assistance granted by the international community either at the state level or through UNHCR diminished constantly. As early as October 2017, the Lebanese president Michel Aoun declared that "the return to their homes of the Syrians exiled became a stringent necessity to which an adequate answer should be given, beyond any politicisation" and, in this case the "depoliticisation" the Lebanese head of state was speaking about meant removing any link and condition which could be made between the return of the exiled and Syria's normalisation political process, which would consequently presume giving up any allegation concerning the removal from power of Bashar Al-Assad's Baathist regime. A similar declaration made, at approximately the same time, Hassan Nasrallah, Secretary General of the Lebanese Hezbollah party who, otherwise, offered to support the repatriation operations by opening offices for receiving and processing the repatriation applications made by the Syrian refugees hosted by Lebanon.

Where will the repatriated go? Fears and guarantees.

To declare that in Syria the conditions for receiving in "a dignified and secure" manner the citizens wishing to return "home" means deliberately this country's realities where the armed confrontations continue and where the zones declared today as being secure have the prospects of becoming again, at any time, military confrontations zones. On the other hand, the refugees do not want to return to the "deescalation zones" but "home"- a "home" which, for the great majority of those who left due to war, does not exist any longer. The properties which were not torn out by military operations – dwellings, workshops, small stores,



The Syrian refugees camp in Zahle, Lebanon, January 2018

arable lands – were confiscated by the government and redistributed to those “good citizens” who remained loyal to Bashar Al-Assad’s regime. And, for the younger ones, who did not render their compulsory military service, they are confronted with the perspective of being fined some thousands US dollars, a penalty of \$200 for each year they were not in the country and, finally, they will be enlisted into the loyast army and sent to the front. And, the few thousands exiled who returned willingly to Syria during the last two years, were confronted with the vendetta of the authorities meaning onerous fines, incarcerations, beatings and, not a few times, death.

In contradiction with the statements of the government officials of the recipient countries or of the Russian Federation, a real and normal repatriation of the Syrians exiled could not be achieved before agreeing a political peace in the country. And, for the refugees, political peace means security and protection against any possible vexations, including for the youth who refused to be enlisted into the army and into a war they did not ask for and means, too, to an equal extent, the guarantee of reconstructing the country and a perspective of life at least at the level existing before the breaking out of the “revolution”, seven years ago. Or, despite all the initiatives and negotiations taking place outside Syria, by non-Syrian actors and in the absence of Syrian representatives, all the promises the smaller or bigger politicians make remain a sim-

ple rhetorics to the extent which the issue of the country’s reconstruction is a matter of discord within the international community while in the framework of the pertinent programs of the Syrian government the issue of the refugees, of their returning to the country and their social insertion do not exist.

President Vladimir Putin, a zealous supporter of the repatriation of migrants, and, moreover, of the imperative that the entire international community finance

the projects of reconstructing what the war turned into a pile of ash and ruins is accused, by UNHCR included, of willing to make out of the repatriation file and of Syria’s reconstruction just a bargaining chip in the negotiations and haggling on the sideline of other issues of discord and conflict with the Western community.

The way of the Syrian refugees to their homes remains long, thorny and an equally painful one.

THE USA-IRAN RELATIONS: A REAL PROBLEM OR A HISTORY OF WOUNDED PRIDE?

Reza SHAHRESTANI

Donald Trump’s unilateral termination of the agreement titled formally “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action”- JCPOA – and known in plain language as The Nuclear Agreement 5+1 brought back to the eruption stage the chronical tensions which ruled, during the last four decades, the relations between the United States, in collusion with Israel, on the one hand, and the Islamic Republic of Iran, on the other hand. The effervescence close to boiling point this hostility is manifest ascendantly raises not only questions concerning the possible end of this ascension but also an interrogation no less important of other nature: are we really in front of a real and irreversible problem or it is about the effect of a long period of accumulation of persistent con-

flicts and waterproof approaches of the idea of compromise between two states and two mentalities which, untreated in due time, slipped towards the vortex of a rhetorics from which the exit seems less feasible and desired?

A short recourse to history is helpful for formulating an answer.

It is known that the relations between the United States and the former Persia date back to XIXth century and the historians stress that from the very beginning, the United States' position in its relations with the present Iran was an ambivalent one built on a mixture of humanism, ethnocentrism, paternalism, superiority and proselytizing. If the first Americans who set foot on Persian land, in 1830, had among their priorities the exploration of the possibility of evangelizing local populations – a failed mission despite their insistence – it is no less true that in the same period of "missionary work" the Americans spared no financial effort for developing extremely important sectors such as health and education yet that did not mean at the same time their's understanding and accepting Iran and its historical, cultural, customs and confessional identity. That might explain the fact that, until WWII, the bilateral official relations were kept at a minimum and an ascending path was registered only after the end of the war, including by cultivating and supporting the development projects initiated by the Iranian sovereign Mohammed Reza Shah, so that throughout the Cold War, Iran would become one of America's

most important Oriental allies.

In 1953, prime minister Mohammed Mosadegh's leftist, socialist government was overturned following a coup orchestrated by the American and British secret services. That moment encouraged sovereign Reza Pahlavi's position and autocratic policy yet at the same time had, at the level of the Iranian society, very severe consequences which meant practically that the sympathy capital the United States and the West enjoyed until then in Iran faded away. This state of affairs worsened after the Shah Reza Pahlavi granted the American citizens the extra-territoriality right and jurisdiction immunity while the American presidents Lyndon Johnson și Nixon promoted policies of openly supporting the monarchy, including its authoritarian, repressive and police state domestic policies of the Pahlavi monarch.

The year 1979 brought with it the Islamic revolution inspired by ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeyni and the end of the monarchic era of the Iranian history. The extreme anti-Americanism of the Muslim revolutionaries as well as the accusation brought against the United States of siding with the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein during the war against Iran (1980 – 1988) removed the last stones of the foundation of the Iranian-American relations and, starting with 1993, Washington inaugurated the so-called policy of "double containment" against Iran (and Iraq, as well) having as objective the isolation and weakening the two regimes and blocking their regional expansion ambitions.

In this context, the disclosure, in 2002, of the fact that Iran was carrying out a nuclear program with military finalities marked the definite passage of the relations between the two states to the logic of conflict and non-communication.

It would be superficial to conclude that the Iranian nuclear program in itself is the cause of causes for the accented



hostile position of the United States. Before the Iranians, the Indians and the Pakistanis, to say nothing of the Israelis, acquired nuclear arsenals without stirring the American hostility. One may rather believe that in Iran's case, what irritated particularly was the secret character of its nuclear preoccupations, which were never acknowledged by the country, as well as the contempt the American side felt against its hegemony in one of the most important geostrategic regions at the global level.

A retrospective of the Iranian policy of the administrations in the White House after the Khomeynist revolution emphasizes an alternance which became tradition: the Republicans sided constantly with the Iranian monarchy while the approaches of the Democrats were rather critical. This sinusoid ceased to function in 1979 and the American-Iranian relations turned into an acerbic confrontation between the "axis of evil" embodied by the theocratic regime in Tehran and the "Great Satan" as Iranian ephigy for America. During Barack Obama's two mandates only one spoke sporadically of a possible relaxation of the relations between Washington and Tehran, a tendency which otherwise encouraged the achievement of the collective treaty among the five permanent members of the Security Council and Germany, on the one hand, and the "nuclear" Iran, on the other hand.

Today, the situation witnesses a radical change when the American foreign policy bears the deep footprint of the new president Donald Trump's personality, an adept of an offensive and unlikely sort of political "virility" and of the appeal to heavy hand as persuasion and submission instrument of the others – be them enemies or allies and friends.

Out of conviction or due to calculations concerning him personally, president Trump does not see in Iran a reliable partner but the leading representative of the same "axis of evil" against which the president implements the promises made with a high voice during the electoral campaign.

The American-Iranian dispute can be solved and not necessarily by force. There is a barrier in

front of this alternative both sides cling to, to an equal extent, which is the vainglorious complex of both Donald Trump and ayatollah Khamenei who believe that making concessions, no matter how petty and gradual they are, would mean either a defeat of the will concentrated in the concept of "America first" or a sign of weakness of the Persian and Shia Muslim greatness in front of this "Great Satan reloaded" who is Donald Trump.

And the situation is unfolding loudly, seen and heard by the entire community of the global world.

THE CRISIS OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE USA AND TURKEY: BEYOND PASTOR BRUNSON AND IMAM GULLEN

Reza SHAHRESTANI

The current tensions between the Administration in Washington and the regime in Ankara lead by recently reelected super-president Recep Tayyip Erdogan, acquired already the dimensions of a crises which, for the time being, has no perspective of being overcome in a too near future.

The diplomatic strains accompanied by a virulent rhetorics of threats and economic and commercial sanctions obfuscated not only once the climate of the relations between the White House and the White Palace. Yet as it was the case during 1964-1975, when the tensions were overcome first of all because at that time Turkey was an America's and NATO's faithful ally in the campaign of containing the expansionism of the Soviet Communism, today things undergo a fundamental change towards the adversity openly stated with virulence. The Soviet block no longer exists and Erdogan's Turkey and its model of democracy opted for the neighbouring Oriente to the detriment of the European and American West while the egos of the two leaders in Washington and Ankara have the toughness of a difficult to crack nut. According to Turkish statistics, around 75% of the Turks express, in the opinion polls, anti-American feelings. Turkey and the United States are formally old allies both on the bilateral segment and in NATO's context

and, more recently, in connection with the civil war in Syria yet nevertheless the Turkish-American relations could be labelled in any way except partnership, strategic and alliance relations. One did not arrive at such a situation overnight and neither due to the two clerics claimed by the Americans and Turks to an equal extent, namely the evangelist pastor Andrew Bronson, arrested and prosecuted in Turkey of being in collusion with the imam Fethullah Gullen, accused by Erdogan of having been the mastermind of the 2016 failed coup. The beginnings of the tensions are to be found since 1960-1974, when Turkey occupied the northern third of Cyprus and drew severe criticism from the Administration, led at the time by Lyndon Johnson. In 1975, as a result of Turkey's irreducible refusal to the repeated requests of the Administration that the Turkish armed forces withdraw from the island, the United States resorted for the first time to imposing a severe embargo on the military deliveries to Turkey. 43 years later, the American Congress prohibited the delivery to Turkey of F-35 Stealth jets. Nowadays, the landscape of the bilateral American-Turkish relations seems to turn back to the shades they had at the beginning of the VIth decade of the last century. So, if the inventory of the leverages America uses for bringing back Recep Teyyip Erdogan to more pliable feelings (sanctions for Turkish army's contracting Russian manufactured soil-air missiles system S-400) or, in other words, if the series of tensions of the last century had at their origins punctual incidents and causes, we are now witnessing a crisis with multidimensional causes among which one could mention:

- The fact that, repeatedly, during Barack Obama's two mandates, one of the accusations brought constantly by the Turks to Washington was that the United States armed and encouraged the "Kurdish separatists' terrorism". An accuse which acquired bigger dimensions on the background of the Syrian civil war, a context in which the advance of the Kurdish militias in the areas adjacent to Syria's northern frontier brought about two interventions of the Turkish army (Operations code-named the "Euphrates

Shield" and the "Olive Branch") for preventing the setting up of a Kurdish state entity considered by the regime in Ankara as a direct threat to Turkish territorial unity and sovereignty;

- President Erdogan's unmet insistences for the extradition by the Administration of the Turkish cleric Fethullah Gullen, residing on the USA's territory and accused of having masterminded the 2016 summer putsch against the regime in Ankara;

- On the same background of the Syrian domestic conflict, the new policy of regional alliances promoted by Recep Teyyip Erdogan irritated Washington, which remarked the deterioration of the relations between Turkey and the State of Israel, on the one hand, and Ankara's visible coming closer to Moscow and Iran, including in what concern the political process of a negotiated solution for the Syrian crisis and opening the perspectives for the deliveries of Russian sophisticated arms to the Turkish military institution or the coordination between Turkey and the Russian Federation for carrying out ample projects in the field of transiting the conventional energy from Russia to the European and Asian consumers, on the other hand.

All these had as a result the escalation of tension between Washington and Ankara, materialized in the mutual application of commercial and financial sanctions and in the hardening of the verbal dialogue between vainglory and hostility. "Those who believe that through establishing ridiculous sanctions in order to determine Turkey to take a step back do not know Turkey and this country's nation", Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared and underlined that the "Turks never bowed and will never bow their heads to whatever pressures".

In a more and more tensioned world and in an ever threatened region and, to an equal extent, threatening region for the global peace and stability, Donald Trump and Recep Teyyip Erdogan have the duty of not adding new hotbeds of uncertainties to those already existing, but finding instead the elements that bring closer and promote the dialogue and lucidity. Will they do it?

DAESH:

A TOO HASTILY ANNOUNCED DEATH

Ambassador prof. Dumitru CHICAN

There are less than two months left until the one year anniversary of the "final victory" over the jihadist organization "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria" that was announced from the highest political and military levels and after long years of anti-terrorist and anti-Islamist war, followed by the cessation of the military operations as a preamble to entering the intense demarches for the transition towards a political solution in the states particularly affected by this scourge, namely Syria and Iraq.

On December 4th, 2017, the staff of the Russian Federation army announced through Ria Novosti news outlet the "liberation of all territories under the occupation of the temporary "neo-Muslim caliphate" and the Russian Federation army's cessation of all military operations against that terrorist Islamic entity on the Syrian territory".

One week only after this announcement, on December 11th, 2017, president Vladimir Putin himself paid a surprise visit to the Syrian military joint base of Hmeimim in Lattakia area, on the Mediterranean Sea, which became, in the meantime, an exclusively Russian operational territory, and announced in his turn the "beginning of the phased withdrawal of the Russian echelons engaged, since September 30th, 2015, on the "anti-terrorist front" of this country as a result of the "end of war against the most harmful international terrorist organization – Islamic State".

In Iraq, prime minister Heydar Abbadi announced "the liberation of the last areas of the territory under the control of the jihadist group and the end of the offensive carried out by the Iraqi army against it". In the capital and the main Iraqi towns, the announcement was received with ample demonstrations of joy and festive discourses about the transition to the recon-



struction and Iraq's peaceful reconstruction.

It was not the same position that the main foreign actors involved in the international coalition for fighting the jihadist Islamist phenomenon led by the United States of America adopted and who expressed doubts concerning the seriousness of the declarations concerning the "final victory" against Daesh. There were mutual accusations concerning the hurry in which the Russian Federation (alongside the government in Damascus, the Iranian regime and the Lebanese political and military group Hezbollah) as well as the Iraqi authorities announced a victory contradicted by realities. From the perspective of the western and especially the American analysts, Moscow's decision was determined by the hurry of the Russian Federation in general and Vladimir Putin's, in particular, of being relieved from the military effort for being able to devote themselves to monopolizing the political and diplomatic segment of ending the civil war in the conditions imposed by the Russian Federation, on the one hand, and from Vladimir Putin's desire of adding popularity for the presidential elections which secured him a fourth mandate as head of state, on the other hand. In its turn, the Russian and allied propaganda criticized the position adopted by Donald Trump's Administration who was accused, in this context, of procrastinating the offensive actions against Islamic State group as a reason for a sine die perpetuation of the American military presence in Mesopotamia and Levant. Beyond the usual rhetorics in the Russian-American interlinking, the reality remains that from the point of view of the terri-



Remember: the Syrian town of Rakka is occupied by Daesh group, June 2014

thousands of them are of non-Arab nationalities and of non-Muslim confession. Around 3,000-4,000 jihadist fighters acting in Libya are to be added while 3,500-4,500 jihadist fighters are active on the Afghanistan territory. A limited number of jihadists of former Islamic State (around 500) took refuge in Yemen. The UN report mentions on the other

torial control, the former "Islamic caliphate" of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdady lost its de facto existence

One finds a similar geographic situation in Iraq where the presence of Islamic State narrowed down to the north-west of the country and where it was at the end of 2017 removed and numerous jihadist fighters took refuge in other states or found shelter alongside the Bedouin tribes in the arid areas of the Iraqi desert.

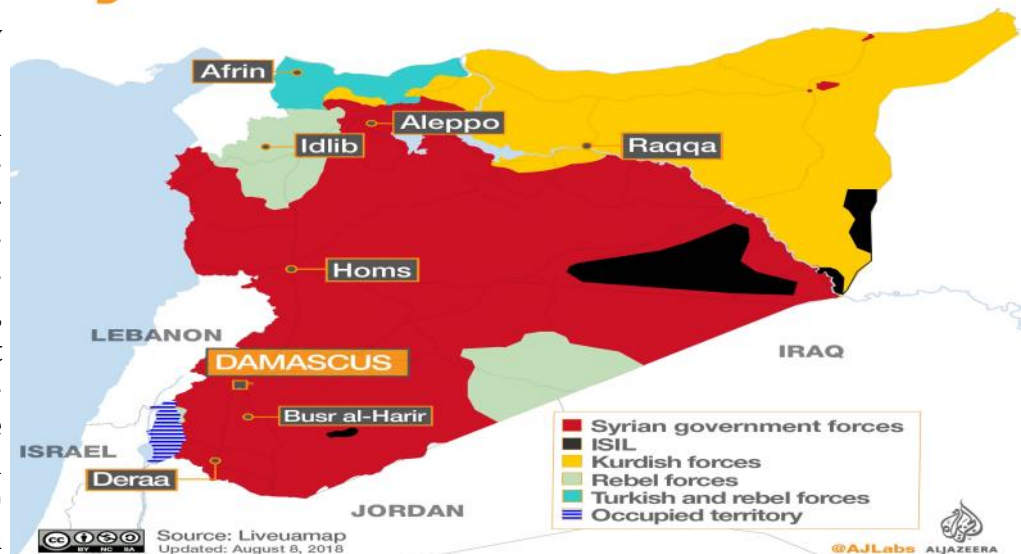
Yet it is less and sporadically acknowledged the fact that Islamic State's loss of the geographic dimension did not mean at the same time either the disappearance of the Salafist-jihadist ideology or the capacity of resilience and adaptation of this entity to the new conditions imposed by the evolution of war.

The data contained in the 2018 yearly UN report concerning the evolution of the global terrorist phenomenon published on August 13th, this year are significant in this respect. According to the report, there are presently between 20,000 and 30,000 Daesh fighters in Syria and Iraq and some

hand the important fact that the migration flow of the foreign citizens applying for jihad under Islam's banners stopped yet in spite of the impact on the human fighting capacity of the group did not lead to diminishing the terrorist jihadist activism which, on the contrary, witnesses a relocation to other geographical coordinates and maintained a rather high pace of terrorist attempts.

Mention should be made in this respect that according to data we managed to synthesize, in the first half of 2018 only (January 1st - August 15th) Daesh carried out or claimed 41 attempts in 22 states which resulted in 630 people killed

Syria: Who controls what?



ISIS active presence in Syria - August 2018. Source: Al-Jazeera

in individual, suicide attempts using car-bombs etc. The geographical dissemination and the identity of the perpetrators indicates that Daesh activism was intensely directed towards using those local jihadist formations which joined Islamic State and which have the majority of terrorist acts carried out while the recourse to the so-called "lone wolves", including foreigners from western states sympathizers of terrorist Islam, witnessed a significant contraction.

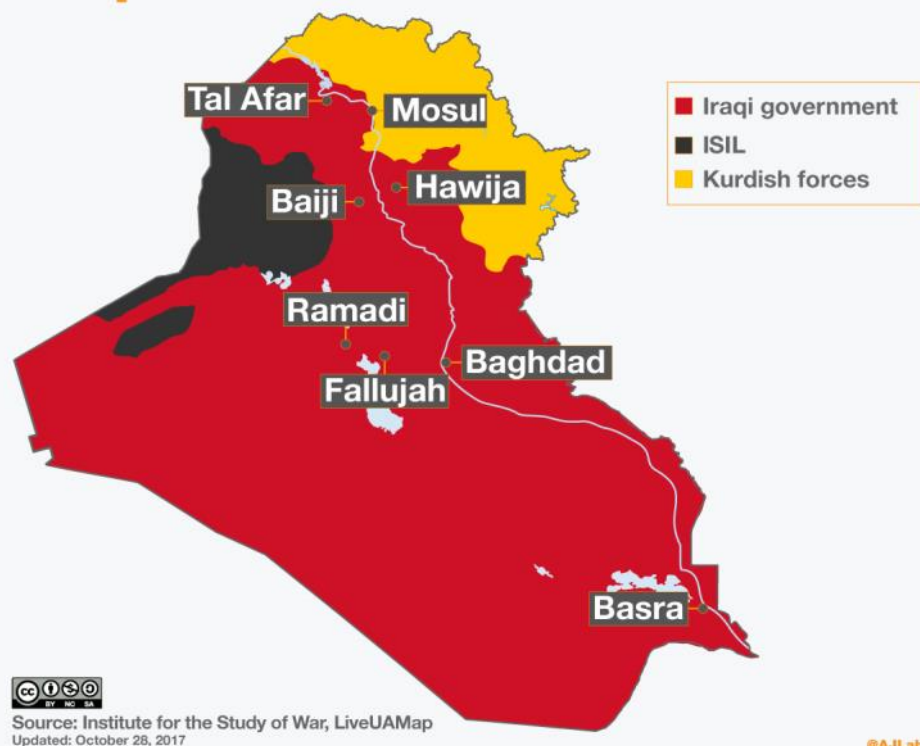
It is indisputable that the ample multi-state campaign of uprooting the jihadist phenomenon as well as the preventive measures adopted individually by the authorities of the states that witnessed on their territories the manifestations of the Islamic religious extremism meant as much progress in the mobilization against the extremist radicalism. Nonetheless, it would be an illusion to believe that the phenomenon disappeared and that time has come for festive manifestations for celebrating the "death of Islamist terrorism". The latter is undergoing a feverish process of "reform" and of adapting its fighting tactics and forms.

NOTE: On August 22nd, on the online page of Daesh group "Al-Furqan", a new 55 minutes audio message of the "caliph" Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi was broadcasted, an appeal to whom he called the "savagely lions" and "soldiers of the caliphate" asking them to continue fighting by all individual possible



means and in all Western states. It is the first public message of the jihadist leader almost a year after the last similar appeal registered in September 2017. The American specialists at CENTO headquarters in Qatar could not confirm the authenticity of the message. Yet true or "fake", it certainly reached the ears of the recipients.

Iraq: Who controls what



Islamic State active presence in Iraq at the beginning of 2018. Source:Al-Jazeera

SYRIA: ARE IN IDLIB

THE OLIVE TREES BEING HARVESTED?

Dinu COSTESCU

On September 7th, a "historical" trilateral summit bringing together the Russian leader, Vladimir Putin, Turkey's president, Recep Teyyip Erdogan and the president of the Iranian Republic, Hassan Rohani, took place in Tehran with an as sensitive as important stake for the denouement of the eight years of civil war in Syria. It was about agreeing upon a solution for the Gordian knot of the north-western Syrian province of Idlib considered currently the last resistance position of the Syrian opposition and of the fighting Islamism represented in their greatest majority by the jihadist of *Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham* (the Body for Liberating Syria)- the new first name of the Syrian connection of Al-Qaida network. Yet for Vladimir Putin and Bashar Al-Assad, supported by the Iranian regime, Idlib is the "last stronghold of terrorism" considering by that indiscriminately everything representing, no matter in which manner, the political and military opposition formations fighting the Baathist regime in Damascus. A label president Erdogan doesn't agree with due primarily to the important fact that in Idlib area there are rebel groups, too, supported in material terms and militarily by Ankara, including the so-called Free Syrian Army and a series of "moderate" islamist entities. The trilateral in Tehran was a failure acknowledged, before anyone else, by the three participants to the summit themselves. Since, while Vladimir Putin did not hide his decision to resort to the option of a "decisive" military offensive which could have had disastrous consequences, according to Turkish and international assessments, as there are around 3 million inhabitants in Idlib whose possible exodus would generate a wave of refugees neither Erdogan nor the European community are ready to receive. The Turkish lea-

der insisted for a compromise formula, a ceasefire allowing Turkey to negotiate an evacuation of the fighters, the rebels' putting down their weapons and the evacuation of the civilians and the fighters whose fate was to be decided through later agreements. A solution Vladimir Putin accepted in principle. As far as Hassan Rohani was concerned, he oscillated vaguely between supporting the liquidation of "all terrorists" and the protection of the population from the ghost of a new "bloodbath" and a new humanitarian drama. Under the circumstances, the only thing agreed upon was the the three actors on the Syrian front could not agree and upon the Iranian president's proposal, a new trilateral meeting was to be held in Moscow at an indefinite date.

And as he is familiarized with the practice of launching surprises, the Russian president accustomed in many cases the observers, the commentators and the consumers of daily information, exactly ten days after the "Iranian summit", on September 17th, the national, regional and international media outlets announced that a new meeting on the Syrian file took place in Sochi yet this time between Vladimir Putin and Recep Teyyip Erdogan only.

Mention should be made that even before the meeting in Tehran, during the meeting and up to the new bilateral summit in Sochi, the Syrian and Russian aviation carried out numerous daily bombardment raids on "terrorist" locations in Idlib and its rural area and, on September 10th, the UN reports noted already the exodus of around 30,000 civilians who took refuge from the area. Under the circumstances, president Erdogan hardened the tone of his discourse and



stated that any new Russian attack in Idlib area would be considered an aggression act against Turkey itself.

In this tense climate, a new surprise was revealed in Sochi: on the Black Sea shore, Vladimir Putin and Recep Teyyip Erdogan reached an agreement on the "Idlib question". Here there are the facsimile of the memorandum and its translation:

Memorandum

On Stabilization of the Situation in the Idlib De-escalation Area

The Republic of Turkey and the Russian Federation, as guarantors of the observance of the ceasefire regime in the Syrian Arab Republic,

Guided by memorandum on creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic as of May 4, 2017 and arrangements achieved in the Astana process,

In order to stabilize the situation in the Idlib de-escalation area as soon as possible,

Have agreed on the following:

1. The Idlib de-escalation area will be preserved and Turkish observation posts will be fortified and continue to function

2. The Russian Federation will take all necessary measures to ensure that the military operations and attacks on Idlib will be avoided and the existing status quo will be maintained

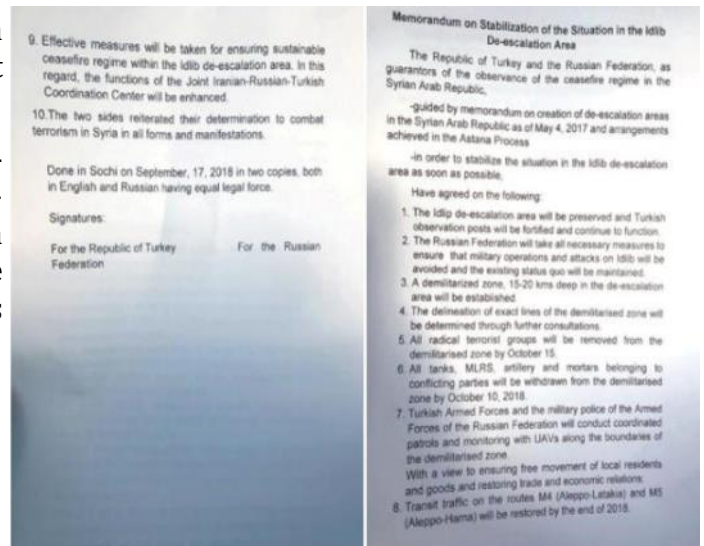
3. A demilitarized zone, 15-20 km deep in the de-escalation area will be established

4. The delineation of exact lines of the demilitarized zone will be determined through further consultation

5. All radical terrorist groups will be removed from the demilitarized zone by October 15

6. All tanks, MLRS, artillery and mortar belonging to conflicting parties will be withdrawn from the demilitarized zone by October 10, 2018

7. Turkish Armed Forces and the military police of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation will



conduct coordinated patrols and monitoring with UAVs along the boundaries of the demilitarized zone

With a view to ensuring free movement of local residents and goods and restoring trade and economic relations:

8. Transit traffic on the routes M4 (Aleppo-Latakia) and M5 (Aleppo-Hama) will be restored by the end of 2018

9. Effective measures will be taken for ensuring sustainable ceasefire within the Idlib de-escalation area. In this regard, the function of the Joint Iranian-Russia-Turkish Coordination Center will be enhanced

10. The two sides reiterated their determination to combat terrorism in Syria in all forms and manifestations.

Done in Sochi, on September 17, 2018 in two copies both in English and Russian having equal legal force.

Signatures:

For the Republic of Turkey

For the Russian Federation

A simple reading of the document reveals that this "surprise agreement" does not set up a comprehensive and permanent solution for the "Idlib file" and, let alone for the thorny issue of the armed fighters, in general, and of the jihadists of Al-Qaeda and of its appendix self-titled the "Islamic Army of Turkestan" in spite of the fact

that, geographically and tactically, they are placed in the vise of the Turkish Army and the Russian military police. Where will all these expelled and where will be the foreign jihadist elements including westerners (around 3,000 people according to some estimates?) "exported"?

On the other hand, the weapon-free area agreed upon through Sochi memorandum is 15-20 km wide and that means each of the belligerent sides (the Syrian army, the Russian troops and the Iranian and pro-Iranian forces as well as the secular or Islamist) will have to withdraw half of this distance. If, in what concern the troops of the Syrian-Russian-Iranian alliance they will withdraw until the administrative limit of the Idlib district, in case of the rebel groups their withdrawal towards the north and north-west of the district will depend on Turkey's real capacity of observing its commitment of convincing the rebel groups of either accepting this withdrawal, or to lay down their arms and to submit to the regime in order to be integrated in its military structures or in the civil society. Whether these alternatives could be accepted by the indigenous rebels, it is hard to suppose that the jihadist formations and, to an equal extent, the tandem Putin-Bashar al Assad would accept such a solution. And, in this case one could speak of resuming the Idlib offensive for liquidating *manu militari* the rebels.

From this perspective, the statement made by Vladimir Putin on the margin of the tripartite summit in Tehran whereby he stressed the decision that, together with Recep Teyyip Erdogan, continue the Astana process as well as the efforts of identifying political solutions under the UN auspices, in the framework of the "Geneva process", including by setting up a joint committee for drawing up Syria's new constitution and preparing the transition stage in which, together with the European Union, open the doors for launching Syria's reconstruction process and of the return of the Syrian refugees to their homes and their properties seemed precipitous.

The situation in the Syrian north-west is far from coming closer to a lasting solution and the developments of the last quarter are open to any surprise. Media and diplomatic Arab commentators advance at least three scenarios for the future developments:

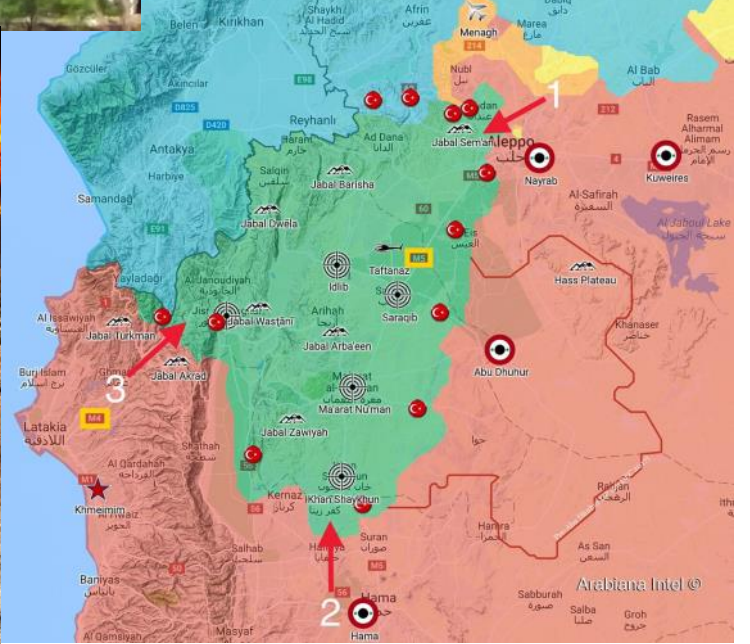
- A Recep Teyyip Erdogan's success in determining the Syrian opposition to give up fighting or, at least, to distance themselves from the radical-extremist groups;
- The Syrian regime 's and their allies' launching low intensity, punctual attacks, meant either to exert pressures on the moderate opposition and to attract response actions from the radical-jihadist groups which would justify the expansion of the Russian-Syrian offensive on Idlib;
- The emergence of new unpredictable elements determining Vladimir Putin to launch a massive military campaign to "liberate" Idlib district according to the precedents in Aleppo, Hama, the Damascene Ghouta and the south-western Syrian territory.

The autumn came to Syria, too, yet it remains to be seen how ample or how scarce the harvests of the olive trees on the war and peace front in this country.

Syria: Who controls what?



Idlib front, September 6th, 2018. Source: Al-Jazeera





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ECONOMIC WARS AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF WORLD ORDER

Ambassador prof. Dumitru CHICAN

If the historical and political discourse will acquire in its lexical baggage in a quite close perspective the term of "trumpism", it will be used not for identifying a Donald Trump's ideological and philosophical construction but mostly as denomination for the complex of behavioral attitudes which impose more and more the leader in the White House as a promoter and practitioner of economic war waged simultaneously on several fronts whereby one may find indiscriminately both allies and friends and also the opponents of an America that the leader wishes to be not only an "America great again" but also, to the same extent, an "America first". It is true that the modern and contemporary history witnessed such terms suggesting the impetus and action towards leadership, either as "Deutschland über alles", or as "Rossia - mirova zvezda" (Russia - a universal power) used today in Vladimir Putin's rhetorics yet it is true as well that in such cases it was about the idea of using all political, military, ideological and propagandistic means likely to turn the respective states if not into an absolute leader at the planetary level, then at least to project them to the multipolar club of the few



and powerful but also conflicted and competitive in what concern expanding their sphere of power and influence to the detriment of the other poles of power existing at a certain moment. In case of "trumpism" we are talking about, things differ sensibly to the extent that in order to secure America's exclusivist superiority, Donald Trump has not in mind the traditional panoply of brute force, but

the economic conflict waged with obstination to the planned finality, namely until "America first and forever". Irrespective of what happens to the other members of the world family.

The current economic and commercial conflicts raise a series of questions to which it is difficult to answer in an acceptable manner now. Are we really witnessing the beginning of a new stage of world's geopolitical evolution whereby the economic element will replace the political one in defining the conflicts between states in general and between great powers in particular? Are these economic disagreements and confrontations the expression of a new form of "clash" of economic and commercial interests or are we going through a new historical stage whereby power and economic strength become the main criterion and measurement unit of the place, power and influence of a state in the concert of the world's states? And up to what limit will the relations among great powers evolve in a global context characterized by changes and tendencies of reconfiguration of the balances of power and of the cartographic configuration of this balance? Beyond the discernible level of interrogations there remains a reality which should be investigated and understood, namely the United States' new foreign policy under Donald Trump Administration. And the investigative approach of this reality emphasizes without doubt that, since his taking office in the Oval Office, the main supporting pillar on which Donald Trump built his strat-



egy and vision of political interlinking with the international community was the one called plain and simple the "critical and conflict approach" of this interlinking and the range of targets aimed at is wide, beginning with interstate bilateral relations up to the international organisations and their agencies and to the treaties and multilateral agreements concluded prior to Trump's Administration, documents the new vision of the White House leader labels indiscriminately as being in blatant and detrimental contradiction with the national interests of the "America first" concept. Yet it is not about the objections and criticism addressed indiscriminately only, but especially of their reforming at any cost, a "reform" consisting of, at least until now, denouncing the respective international documents and unilateral withdrawal and under pressure of threats with retaliatory measures and penalties in case the Administration's nationalistic and protectionist will is not fulfilled to the letter. Thus, a denial of commitments with strong strategic content undertaken by the United States is taking place, be it about alliances such as NAFTA, the European Union, NATO, of the "5+1 Nuclear Agreement" with Iran and the examples may continue.

The analysts' and commentators' assessments according to which in his position of president, Donald Trump is not a mirror beaming to the world an ideatic construction but rather than otherwise a mixture where one finds a criss-cross of his own vision imbued by the businessman's spirit, the doctrine of the party he belongs to and, implicitly, the ideological current of the society's segment this vision represents are not exaggerated. From this perspective, one may say that "trumpism", considered as Administration, executive, state institutions and political and ideological Republicanism are to be found, all, at the origin of the fundamental shifts the American foreign policy under the leadership of the 45th president of the United States is witnessing. As such, the constant consumer of news is entitled to wonder what is the typology of the new world which all the aforementioned entities led by the the president's person and institution as-



pire to edify? And, not the least, what new prototype of alliances and international relations will be born out of these genuine economic and commercial wars we are currently witnessing among the great powers and groups of powers of today's and tomorrow's world?

It would be unrealistic to substantiate that such economic and commercial conflicts emerged overnight by Donald Trump's mere taking office in the White House, as it would be equally exaggerated to pretend that the American president himself is a kind of an "arsonist fireman" who deliberately and willingly ignites conflicts in order to put them out only when the latter endanger America's sovereign primacy on the global chessboard. In order to understand the intimate drives of Donald Trump's thinking, one may apprehend that it is about a complex according to which, after WWII, America was a kind of cornucopia thanks to which Europe could have achieved its today prosperity while China exploited the flexibility of America's investment system in order to "steal" or copy the technological know-how and to undermine America's prominent place in the field of the cutting-edge technology and NATO's member states benefitted from the security umbrella extended by the USA without involving themselves too much in the security supply-side. Such a manner of thinking has been clearly discerned during 2017 G-20 Summit, then during May 2018 NATO Summit in Brussels and during the last G-7 Summit. All these collective actions clearly emphasized the deep dissensions existing among the world's great powers, in general, and between America and the European Union, in particular, dissensions that manifest on two



major orientations: on the one hand, an Administration's isolationist and protectionist tendency circumscribed to "American first" objective, by protecting and defending American economic and political policies; on the other hand, the current inspired and led by the duo Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron, as defenders of the free world trade, contradicting Donald Trump's views.

*

There are many analysts who, trying to discern an image of the perspective, are advancing the assessment according to which the relations between the United States and the "traditional allies" on the European continent are on the brink of deep transformations to the extent that Washington seems decided not only to distance itself and withdraw within its own American borders, but also of giving up its political and contractual commitments it is party to together with the Europeans. In the same vein, an evolution (or, rather an involution) is forecasted in what concern the relations between America and the North Atlantic Alliance which is considered by Donald Trump himself, in a rather thinly veiled manner, as a more and more inconvenient burden for the foreign policy visions of his Administration. These are elements to be found in the European reactions both at the security level, whereby Angela Merkel speaks of the necessity that the Union takes in its hands its own security and defense issues and also at the economic and commercial level which determined the conclusion, on July 17th, between the European Union and Japan, of an ambitious treaty in the field of free

trade in which some observers have seen an explicit reaction of the European community towards the protectionism imposed by Trump Administration.

As far as China is concerned – placed second globally as economic weight and exports in the global trade – it is regarded in Washington as the main and most threatening defiance with regard to the projects of American leadership backed by Donald Trump.

On the other hand, the Russian Federation seems to be for Donald Trump not much of an enemy, which must be defeated, but rather a competitor with which a modus vivendi can be built. Such an approach may explain the American attempts of achieving a consensus not only on the great files of the political and military and strategic life of the contemporary world but also on the future configuration of the global economic map.

What has been mentioned above allows for a possible conclusion: the affirmation that the contemporary world is going through a process of passage towards a new international order which is different from the polarism that existed in the XXth century in general, with the exception of its last two decades when the United States tried to secure the absolute unipolar monopoly on the world chessboard. A perspective which, although remote, could bring in a repetition of the Anglo-French consensus which, at the end of WWI, partitioned the Middle East. A possible new Sykes-Picot whereby this time the stake has a planetary dimension and the protagonists' names are the United States and the Russian Federation.



THE ARMED GROUPS AND THE "POSTMODERN" WARS

Dinu COSTESCU

The last decades of the contemporary history were marked by at least three crucial moments which left a deep footprint on the global geostrategic dimension and, implicitly, on the traditional paradigm of the "classical" war. First of all, it is about the end of the Cold War with the known shifts in the field of the power and influence balances at the level of the new world order. Second of all, it is about the September 11 attacks which are until today considered of having drawn a demarcation line between "the world before" and "the world that will never be what it was like before". Third of all, and as a direct consequence of this new reality, we are speaking of the overflowing turnaround of the terrorist phenomenon inspired ideologically by the Islamic religion associated with the reaction it triggered globally against this new "actor" that emerged on the global political geography, a reaction which rallied practically the entire international community. We are speaking, as well, of the ample phenomenon of upheavals which, under the allusive name of "Arab spring", was witnessed by the strategic region of the Middle East and which, from the status of "regional conflict", acquired abruptly an international dimension. Whether, from a causal perspective, all these developments did not do away with the old typology of armed conflicts, they marked the passage from the "classical" wars, as confrontations between state belligerents, to what some scholars identify by "postmodernism wars", defined synthetically as asymmetrical wars, predominantly intra-state or "wars by proxies" when the conflict presumes a bi-state meddling yet achieved through armed "francises" most of the time called "militias" or "armed groups".

Today, with the likely prospect that the Islamist-jihadist groups evolve on a descending trajectory towards downsizing their attractiveness

and dynamism and even towards their disappearance as an active factor on the regional and transnational conflicted front, the new tendency looming is the emergence of a new generation of such guerilla groups for a punctual cause which is not necessarily supported by an ideological, philosophical or doctrinary groundwork and they would manifest rather than otherwise as entities harnessing favourable conjectures – state and state institutions erosion, the resilience of underdevelopment and of corruption, of the organized crime for instance – in order to join martial adventures with more or less mercantile purposes yet nevertheless no less virulent.

What kind of wars are looming?

If it is true that war is not necessarily – as it was believed even from the preceding period of the first universal conflagration – a motive for social, national and moral transformation and reform, yet nobody can deny another truth, namely that the evolution and change within societies is a driving factor that brings with it fundamental changes of the way of approaching war and its relations with its other side which is peace.

There are many and significant historical precedents confirming that each faultline occurring in the social evolution, each major unrest no matter the political, economic, philosophical, cultural or industrial etc. field that happened and was registered by historiography had its share of more or less substantial contribution to the shifts occurred in the very nature of the armed conflict, in the relations between the military determinants and the political sphere or in the physiognomy and role of the directly involved actors.

On this background, one may find that the geostrategic faultline which emerged in the last dec-

ade of the last century has as defining characteristic the fact that the violence of the conflict is less manifest in the form of the classical paradigm of the inter-state war and more, if not almost exclusively, in the form of intra-state armed conflicts whereby the armed groups or the militias organized on contract work (mercenaries) or on the adherence to a certain pivotal idea serving as doctrinary foundation. The process of erosion of the traditional values of the nation-state has tendencies of continuity and deepening on an indefinite term and with sequels difficult to identify on a short or medium term. The notion of "failed state" or that of "collapsed state" and of its morphological institutions and structures are imposing themselves more and more on the background of contemporary geopolitical realities with dramatic effects not only within the nation-state but also on the regional level and, by extension, on the global one. State failures that occurred after 2011 in the Arab world of the Middle East are telling from this point of view, as far as the domino of the collapse of the regional states is concerned as well as and, to the same extent, of their turning into fertile grounds for the emergence and the dissemination of armed groups that are imposing themselves as main actors of "postmodern war", which differs from the traditional paradigm not only by the dimension of the concept of violence but mostly by the nature and the very means it is practiced with. From the military technique of WWI one moved to the technology of WWII, with its paroxistic stage of using the atomic energy and to speak today of the space technologies serving violence and destruction.

The "new wars" the specialized literature speaks about are, without a doubt, a consequence of all factors that are manifest in the framework of the globalisation process yet, at the same time, they are due to the lack of governance and security system guaranteeing stability, peace and nations' just development on a global scale. And history's lessons show that, lacking such a system and the mechanisms guaranteeing just peace, the local conflicts – active or with threatening potential – we are witnessing in this contemporaneity have the energy of a

skyrocketing expansion, of regionalization and internationalization in a difficult to foresee pace and with equally unpredictable consequences in what their dramatism is concerned. And the complexity and the interdependence of the constituting factors of the conflicted status, their multitude, diversity and potential make more and more difficult identifying and defining the very typologies of wars, questioning even the sense and real dimensions of the "atypical war" concept or "the war of postmodernism".

The Middle East's "spring"

By a surprise coincidence of the dynamics of global geopolitics, in 2011, when two decades from the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War have passed, the Arab world of the Middle East offered its own groundbreaking surprise by the unexpected outburst of the so-called "Arab spring" which, in an extremely fast pace, was to wipe out from the history stage several ruling regimes considered by a commonplace inertia as indispensable and, moreover, eternal or, at least with solid enough power structures for making difficult to imagine their uprooting through society's protest and claiming actions. The early euphoria of the upheavals made less discernible the rapid emergence and expansion on the chessboard of changes of a wide kaleidoscope of militant armed groups either under the declarative urge of "democracy" and "dignity", or under the green banner of "reformatory" Islam in the jihadist-Salafist acception or determined by the logic of the tribal belonging and identity or, finally, as ideological descendants of the doctrine inaugurated and practiced by the universalist Islamic religiosity of the symbolic embodied by an Osama Bin Laden. In addition to the motivations and rhetorics, all these entities had a common denominator as far as the finality of "their revolution" is concerned, namely exclusively seizing the state's power and the society. The civil war in Syria turned this country into a new Mecca of terrorist jihadism and into an incontrollable chessboard of the manifestations of the military and paramilitary formations as main actors

within the framework of the new way the wars of the future are waged. More than 500 such groups with fighters coming from more than 70 countries of the regional and Western world offered a record example in what concern the evolution of today's intra-state conflicts and, in all likelihood, of future wars.

With a few exceptions, such as those represented by the South-American cartels which, in their great majorities, are following objectives related to organized crime, the great majority of the contemporary armed groups are motivated, first of all, by political purposes whereby sliding towards criminal activities is determined by the need to access financing and arming resources. At the same time, whether the geopolitical and geostrategic modern evolutions have as effect a speedy emergence and disappearance of armed non-state and crossborder groups yet they do not prevent the further existence of other residual groups which remain active even if the initial motivations do no longer exist or became obsolete as a result of the general changes of ideologies and the political, military and social contexts. An example to that sense is, nevertheless, offered by the Colombian groups FARC which fight for obsolete and anachronical causes yet they are fighting with means adapted to the modern contextual evolutions.

To an equal extent, in the post-"Arab spring" Middle East, the armed groups of the Palestinian resistance witnessed, in accordance with the historical conjectures, important transformations especially in what concern the ideological and doctrinary bases whereby the radical Islamism replaced to a great extent the secular ideologies and became the main intellectual and philosophical support and reference point for the political legitimization of the respective movements and groups.

One may find out that, after the 2011 outbreak of the Arab popular revolts, a cartographic image shows that the presence of these entities – closely linked to intra-state wars and conflicts – is predominantly circumscribed to zones belonging to the Asian and African continents.

The Islamic radicalism: challenges and threats

The jihadism codified in the ideology and doctrine of Al-Qaida type drawn up by Ossama Bin Laden and his successor Ayman Al-Zawahiri, as well as by the lineage of this doctrine, embodied by the Salafism of Islamic State of the "new caliph" Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi continues to maintain a certain degree of militancy dynamics without being able through that to generate notorious shifts in the contemporary geopolitical status-quo. The Al-Qaida's and Islamic State-Daesh's theorists, ideologues and fighters never succeeded in any place to generate an ample mass movement and it is doubtful they will ever succeed in achieving this objective. The failure of the "global jihadism against the Crusaders and Zionism" preached by Ossama Bin Laden, as well as the de facto collapse within four years only of the "caliphate" proclaimed by Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi are but undeniable confirmations in that sense. So that we may believe that today's world is far from and will remain far from the much-preached "clash of civilizations" on cultural and sectarian grounds. It is, indeed, a discernible reality that many active conflicts in regions such as south of the Arabic Peninsula, the Middle East's Maghreb, the Asian Caucasus or the West African Sahel are provoked and maintained by armed groups and militias. Yet to what extent is religion a doctrine referential center for these movements? The sectarian factor is indeed present in the arguments of the Salafist-jihadist entities but, in this case, the religious element has a role that does not differ substantially from the one which during the greatest part of the XXth century the Marxist-Leninist ideology had for the "national liberation movements". As it was the case with the latter, the radical-extremist Islamism – be it Sunni or Shia – claims a universal vocation joining thus, at least in theory, the framework of an offensive going beyond the borders of the nation-state. For, in reality, the fighting jihadist movements are seeking a political finality, namely either seizing the power, be it at a state level or at the level of a geographical area more or less outlined as such in terms of geography and culture.

Even if this political aspiration did not succeed in instituting a social and institutional order of ample dimension, it is no less provoking and threatening for both the presence area of the respective entities and also for the close or more distant geographical environment, so much as under the circumstances whereby this proximity is affected by the remanence of some deeply rooted conflicts (ethnic, sectarian, tribal etc.) or by the failure of state institutions or by phenomena generating instability such as chronic corruption, organized crime, the illicit traffic with goods, persons or drugs etc. And, from this point of view, one may assess that the dynamics of the armed militias and of the combat formations of the guerilla type will continue to manifest themselves, to increase and to amplify as long as the political, social, economic, cultural or state environment will be fragile enough for allowing the germination and the evolution of these actors of the contemporary's asymmetrical conflicts.

A number of conclusions

After the last years witnessed the rise and frantic manifestation of the radical Islamist groups and tiny groups which distinguished themselves by the unlimited and continuous recourse to the terrorism mechanisms as main combat weapon, it is supposed that in the field of activism in the organizational form of non-state actors, a coming back to the classical forms of guerilla combats or of "resistance" financially and logistically assisted by state actors in the so-called "wars by proxies" which continue and will continue to occur especially in the tense regions of the Middle East, Africa and regions of the Asian continent. And such a perspective obliges the political and military planners and decision-makers to a prospective approach of the evolution of the already existing strain-

ing germs and which, in a favourable context, might evolve towards conflagrations of great amplitude.

To the historical causes at the origins of some devastating conflicts, new determining factors should be added which are not limited or have no direct causal effect to conflicts breakout (such as territorial conquests, competitions for power and influence, the great ideological and political faultlines etc.) or others evolving from the perpetuation of underdevelopment, of social injustices, from independentist and separatist tendencies of ethnic minorities, nationalist turn-arounds etc. If Europe which, for centuries on end, represented a lasting hotbed of conflicts of interstate, continental or global conflicts, seems now entitled to speak of entering the post-war era of eternal peace, that does not mean, at the same time, that one may speak of a future of a planet cured entirely from the scourge of war. And, as it is the case in all historical stages of the conflicts, there where hotbeds of armed conflicts, various forms of justifying paradigms appeared and the military groups, too. And, under such circumstances, their dynamics, irrespective of the denomination and the slogans defining them is and will remain underpinned by the idea of the bet on the relation between the vanquished and winners. A bet which primal victim remains inevitably the same: human community's civilization and progress.







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Designed in accordance with NATO STANAG 4671 UAV system airworthiness requirements and the UK Def Stan 00-970 design and airworthiness standards, the new SkyGuardian variant can operate within civilian airspace.

It can carry out missions such as intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), maritime patrol, border surveillance and disaster relief. The maritime patrol variant, designated as SeaGuardian, is intended to conduct surveillance and patrol missions in open-sea and littoral environments.

Development of the Certifiable Predator B (CPB) variant began in 2012. An armed variant of SkyGuardian aircraft was selected by the UK Ministry of Defence for the Royal Air Force's Protector programme in July 2016. The aircraft performed its maiden flight in November 2016 and achieved a 48-hour endurance flight in May 2017. It was named as SkyGuardian in January 2017. The RPA completed a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)-approved flight in August

2017. The first production aircraft conducted the first ever transatlantic flight from Grand Forks, North Dakota, US to the Royal Air Force (RAF) Fairford station in Gloucestershire, UK, in July 2018. GA-ASI partnered with CAE Canada, MDA, and L3 Wescam to offer the SkyGuardian aircraft for Canada's RPAS project in May 2018.

The SkyGuardian variant comes with improved damage tolerant airframe and has a fixed-wing design with V-type tail configuration.

The length and wing spans are 11.7m and 24m respectively, while the maximum gross take-off weight is 5,670kg and fuel capacity is 2,721kg.

The aircraft can carry 363kg of payloads in the fuselage and 1,814kg of payloads externally.

Featuring a tri-cycle type undercarriage, it can perform automatic take-off and landing operations under all weather conditions.

The remotely piloted aircraft is fitted with a total of nine hardpoints, four under each wing and one at centreline, to carry weapons weighing up to 2,177kg.

The armament options include precision-guided munitions, Paveway IV laser-guided bomb, and Brimstone 2 air-to-surface missiles.

A de-ice / anti-ice system is installed to minimise ice accumulation on the aircraft.

The drone also features a detect and avoid (DAA) system and has the ability to withstand bird and lightning strikes.

The SkyGuardian aircraft's improved flight control software and avionics provide independent operation, including autonomous take-off and landing, using waypoint navigation.

Presented by Cornel Vaida

Kalashnikov Assault Rifle (Russia)



The **AK-47**, **AK**, also known as the **Kalashnikov**, is a gas-operated, 7.62×39mm assault rifle, developed in the Soviet Union by Mikhail Kalashnikov. It is the originating firearm of the Kalashnikov rifle (or "AK") family.

Design work on the AK-47 began in 1945. In 1946, the AK-47 was presented for official military trials, and in 1948, the fixed-stock version was introduced into active service with selected units of the Soviet Army. An early development of the design was the *AKS*, which was equipped with an underfolding metal shoulder stock. In early 1949, the AK-47 was officially accepted by the Soviet Armed Forces and used by the majority of the member states of the Warsaw Pact.

Even after almost seven decades, the model and its variants remain the most popular and widely used assault rifles in the world because of their substantial reliability under harsh conditions, low production costs compared to contemporary Western weapons, availability in virtually every geographic region and ease of use. The AK-47 has been manufactured in many countries and



has seen service with armed forces as well

as irregular forces and insurgencies worldwide, and was the basis for developing many other types of individual, crew-served and specialised firearms. As of 2004, "Of the estimated 500 million firearms worldwide, approximately 100 million belong to the Kalashnikov family, three-quarters of which are AK-47s".

Accessories supplied with the rifle include a 387 mm (15.2 in) long 6H3 bayonet featuring a 200 mm (7.9 in) long spear point blade. The AK-47 bayonet is installed by slipping the 17.7 mm (0.70 in) diameter muzzle ring around the muzzle and latching the handle down on the bayonet lug un-



der the front sight base.

All current model AKM rifles can mount under-barrel 40 mm grenade launchers such as the GP-25 and its variants, which can fire up to 20 rounds per minute and have an effective range of up to 400 metres.

The AK-47 can also mount a (rarely used) cup-type grenade launcher, the Kalashnikov grenade launcher that fires standard RGD-5 Soviet hand-grenades. The maximum effective range is approximately 150 meters. This launcher can also be used to launch tear-gas and riot control grenades.

All current AKs (100 series) and some older models, have side rails for mounting a variety of scopes and sighting devices, such as the PSO-1 Optical Sniper Sight. The side rails allow for the removal and remounting of optical accessories without interfering with the zeroing of the optic. However, the 100 series side folding stocks cannot be folded with the optics mounted.

Presented by Cornel VAIDA

Leading Articles, Studies and New Analyses

**The Penguin History of Modern China:
The Fall and the Rise of a Great Power, 1850-
2008**

Author: Jonatahan FENBY

Publisher: Humanitas, Bucharest, 2018

Jonathan Fenby (b. 1942) is a British author and journalist who worked as a columnist for the Observer and South China Morning Post, then for Reuters World Service as well. He had important positions at the Economist, The Independent and The Guardian. He is currently the CEO and director for China at the Trusted Source think-tank.

In 1850, China was the "sick man of Asia." Now it is set to become the most powerful nation on earth. *The Penguin History of Modern China* shows how turbulent that journey has been. For 150 years China has endured as victim of oppression, war, and famine. This makes its current position as arguably the most important global superpower all the more extraordinary. Jonathan Fenby's comprehensive account is the definitive guide to this remarkable transformation.

No country on earth has suffered a more bitter history in modern times than China. In the second half of the nineteenth century, it was viewed as doomed to extinction. Its imperial rulers, heading an anachronistic regime, were brought low by enormous revolts, shifting social power patterns, republican revolutionaries, Western incursions to "split the Chinese melon" and a disastrous defeat by Japan.

The presence of predatory foreigners has often been blamed for China's troubles, but the much greater cause came from within China itself. In the early twentieth century, the empire was succeeded by warlordism on a massive scale, internal divisions, incompetent rule, savage fighting between the govern-

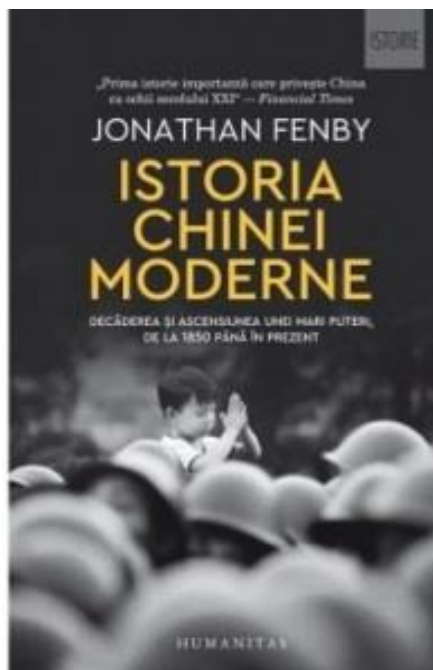
ment and the Communists, and a fourteen-year invasion from Japan. Four years of civil war after 1945 led to the Maoist era, with its purges and repression; the disastrous Great Leap Forward; a famine that killed tens of millions; and the Cultural Revolution.

Yet from this long trauma, China has emerged amazingly in the last three decades as an economic powerhouse set to play a major global political role, its future posing one of the great questions for the twenty-first century as it grapples with enormous internal challenges. Understanding how that transformation came about and what China constitutes today means understanding its epic journey since 1850 and recognizing how the past influences the present.

Jonathan Fenby tells this turbulent story with brilliance and insight, spanning a unique historical panorama, with an extraordinary cast of characters and a succession of huge events. As Confucius said, To see the future, one must grasp the past.

What kind of China does Fenby's account paint? In some ways, the picture is depressing, with a constant recourse to violence by successive regimes. Yet it is also a story of genuine modernisation and unprecedented economic and social progress. The book also follows Chinese custom by "using the past to illuminate the present". A century ago, it suggests, China was opening up to the outside world, torn between willingness to participate in the international system, and fear that greater openness would undermine the regime. That century-old dilemma of how to create a strong China in a world buffeted by global forces is painfully relevant today. Jonathan Fenby's account of how China has coped with that dilemma makes his illuminating book the first major history that looks at the country with the eyes of the 21st century rather than the 20th.

Presented by Cornel VAIDA



Once and Future Partners: The United States, Russia, and Nuclear Non-proliferation

Authors: William C. POTTER and Sarah BIDGOOD

Publisher: IISS

The book examines the history of U.S. and Soviet/Russian cooperation on nuclear nonproliferation matters, which persisted even at the height of the Cold War. "Leaders in Washington and Moscow recognized that nuclear proliferation would serve neither country's interests even when they did not see eye-to-eye in many other areas. They likewise understood why collaboration in mitigating this nuclear danger would serve both their own interests and those of the international community," write Potter and Bidgood.

William C. Potter is the founding director of CNS, as well as the Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar Professor of Nonproliferation Studies at the Institute. Sarah Bidgood is a senior research associate with CNS and 2016 graduate of the Institute's Nonproliferation and Terrorism Studies program.

Despite their Cold War rivalry, the United States and the Soviet Union frequently engaged in joint efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. Leaders in Washington and Moscow recognized that nuclear proliferation would serve neither country's interests even when they did not see eye-to-eye in many other areas. They likewise understood why collaboration in mitigating this nuclear danger would serve both their own interests and those of the international community.

This volume examines seven little known examples of US-Soviet cooperation for non-proliferation, including preventing South Africa from conducting a nuclear test, develop-

ing international safeguards and export control guidelines, and negotiating a draft convention banning radiological weapons. It uses declassified and recently-digitized archival material to explore in-depth the motivations for and modalities for cooperation under often adverse political circumstances.

Given the current disintegration of Russian and US relations, including in the nuclear sphere, this history is especially worthy of review. Accordingly, the volume's final chapter is devoted to discussing how non-proliferation lessons from the past can be applied today in areas most in need of US-Russian cooperation.

'Superb. A must-read for all interested in US-Russia relations and the history of nuclear cooperation. The lessons of close cooperation on nuclear non-proliferation – even during the darkest days of the Cold War – can teach us how to "go back to basics" to rejuvenate such cooperation in the future.'

Siegfried S. Hecker, Senior Fellow Emeritus, Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University and former director, Los Alamos National Laboratory

'Even during the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union worked together to limit nuclear arms and build the global regime to stem the spread of nuclear weapons. Today, Washington and Moscow seem to have forgotten these habits of cooperation, and partly as a result, the architecture of nuclear order is in crisis. This critically important book details how the superpowers succeeded in the past – including the central role of personal relationships between experts on each side in finding creative solutions – and offers urgent ideas for rebuilding cooperation to take on today's challenges.'

Professor Matthew Bunn, Harvard University

Presented by Cornel VAIDA



ONCE AND FUTURE PARTNERS

THE UNITED STATES, RUSSIA
AND NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION
Edited by William C. Potter and Sarah Bidgood





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