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**RUSSIA:
ARMS CONTROL, DISARMAMENT AND
INTERNATIONAL SECURITY**

IMEMO SUPPLEMENT
TO THE RUSSIAN EDITION
OF THE SIPRI YEARBOOK 2020

Foreword by Alexander Dynkin

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The volume provides IMEMO contributions *to the Russian Edition of the 2020 SIPRI Yearbook: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*. It addresses the China's military-political approach to relations with the US and China's nuclear strategy, the prospects of military integration and "strategic autonomy" of the European Union, security issues in the Indo-Pacific region, the progress of the UN discussions on information security. The book also analyzes developments around the nuclear agreement with Iran under the new US administration, reviews the specifics of Turkey's foreign policy and its involvement in Syrian, Libyan and Armenian-Azerbaijani conflicts, and security problems in the Middle East in the context of the Shiite-Sunni confrontation.

Reviewer: Marina M. Lebedeva, professor, PhD in Political Science

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FOREWORD

For several decades, the IMEMO Special Supplement to the SIPRI Yearbook, authored by the Institute's leading scholars, has been an integral part of the joint project of two of the world's leading think tanks – SIPRI and the Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IMEMO RAN). Thus, due to the greater thematic diversity and multifaceted analysis, the reader receives a more complete and diverse picture of what is happening in the field of international security.

As always, the IMEMO Special supplement contains an analysis of a number of topical international security issues. The authors of this volume consider China's politico-military approaches to relations with the United States (this chapter is prepared by experts from the HSE University), the prospects for European Union's achieving "strategic autonomy", security issues in South Asia, and discussions on information security at the UN.

The section "Expert Insights" analyzes developments around the nuclear agreement with Iran under the new US administration, examines the specifics of Turkey's foreign policy, as well as conflicts within the Muslim world and some security problems in the Middle East.

The last chapter traditionally provides an overview of the main documents of the Russian Federation on national security, defense and arms control (for the period from January to December 2020).

The editing of the SIPRI 2020 Yearbook in Russian and the IMEMO Special Supplement to the Yearbook was led by Alexey Arbatov and Sergey Oznobishchev. Marianna Yevtodyeva and Konstantin Bogdanov were responsible for coordinating the editing and publication of the SIPRI Yearbook and its Special Supplement.

I would like to thank the authors of the IMEMO Special Supplement – Nadezhda Arbatova, Stanislav Ivanov, Vasily Kashin, Alexey Kupriyanov, Alexander Lukin, Victor Mizin, Victor Nadein-Raevskiy, Natalia Romashkina, and Sergey Tselitsky.

I also express gratitude to the Swiss Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport for lasting support of this publication.

Academician Alexander Dynkin
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of World Economy and International Relations
of the Russian Academy of Sciences
July 2021

ACRONYMS

AI	–	artificial intelligence
AKP	–	Justice and Development Party (Turkey)
ASEAN	–	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BMD	–	ballistic missile defense
BRICS	–	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
CARD	–	Coordinated Annual Review of Defense
CDP	–	Capability Development Plan
CDU/CSU	–	Christian Democratic Union of Germany / Christian Social Union in Bavaria
COVID-19	–	Coronavirus disease 2019
CPC	–	Communist Party of China
CPEC	–	China–Pakistan Economic Corridor
CSDP	–	Common Security and Defense Policy
CSTO	–	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EDA	–	European Defense Agency
EDF	–	European Defense Fund
EEAS	–	European External Action Service
EI2	–	European Intervention Initiative
EU	–	European Union
EUMS	–	EU Military Staff
G2	–	‘Group of Two’ (the USA and China)
GCC	–	Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf
GDP	–	gross domestic product
GGE	–	UN Group of Governmental Experts
GNA	–	Government of National Accord (Libya)
IAEA	–	International Atomic Energy Agency

ICBM	–	intercontinental ballistic missile
ICT	–	information and communication technology
IIS	–	international information security
IMF	–	International Monetary Fund
INF Treaty	–	1987 Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles
IR(B)M	–	intermediate-range (ballistic) missile
IRGC	–	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (Iran)
IS (ISIL)	–	Islamic State (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant)
JCPOA	–	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
KSA	–	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
LNA	–	Libyan National Army
MIRV	–	multiple independently targeted re-entry vehicle
MPCC	–	Military Planning and Conduct Capability
NATO	–	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDPP	–	NATO Defense Planning Process
NIP	–	National Implementation Plan
New START	–	2010 Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms
NPC	–	National People's Congress (China)
NPT	–	1968 Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons
OEWG	–	UN Open-Ended Working Group
OIC	–	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
PESCO	–	Permanent Structured Cooperation
PKK	–	Kurdistan Workers' Party (<i>Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê</i>)
PLA	–	People's Liberation Army (China)
PLAN	–	People's Liberation Army Navy (China)

PRC	–	People’s Republic of China
Quad	–	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, an informal dialogue between the USA, India, Japan, and Australia
R & D	–	research & development
SCO	–	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
UAE	–	The United Arab Emirates
UAV	–	unmanned aerial vehicle
UN	–	United Nations
UNCLOS	–	1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNGA	–	United Nations General Assembly
UNIDIR	–	United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research
WMD	–	weapon of mass destruction
YPG	–	Kurdish People’s Defense Units (<i>Yekîneyên Parastina Gel</i> ; Syria)

PART I. ANALYSES, FORECASTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. The China's approach to relations with the United States: the military aspect
2. Strategic autonomy of the EU
3. The Quad as a security factor in the Indo-Pacific
4. International information security in the UN agenda

1. THE CHINA'S APPROACH TO RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES: THE MILITARY ASPECT

*Vasily KASHIN, Alexander LUKIN*¹

China's overall military-political approach to the United States

The Chinese approach to strategic relations with the USA first took on a coherent form probably in 2020 and early 2021, although it has not been made public in its entirety. Unlike the USA, China has not and probably will not publish comprehensive policy documents concerning its plans for these relations.

During the administration of Donald Trump, leading US officials, primarily Vice President Michael Pence and Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, presented their own detailed vision of a new era of rivalry with China. The Cabinet of President Joe Biden, that replaced it, largely shares this approach. At the time of this writing, the USA was preparing its *Strategic Competition Act 2021* that sets out every point of US-Chinese relations, from trade policy and military-political issues to ideology and competition in the Arctic.²

China is more terser in its foreign policy rhetoric. Nevertheless, the altered nature of relations with the USA is reflected in the individual foreign policy sections of the CPC Congress documents and reports of the Premier of the State Council of the PRC to the Sessions of the NPC.

Beijing's overall strategy towards relations with Washington has changed radically several times before. When China was closely allied to the Soviet Union in the 1950s, the two considered the USA

¹ This work was supported by a grant of the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs of the National Research University Higher School of Economics in 2021.

² Strategic Competition Act of 2021, A Bill to Address issues involving the People's Republic of China, DAV21598 9VG, 117th Congress, 1st session, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 2021 <<https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/DAV21598%20-%20Strategic%20Competition%20Act%20of%202021.pdf>>.

an unmitigated enemy, but the situation changed completely after the Soviet-China split in the late 1960s that led to armed clashes at the border. At that point, Beijing pursued close strategic cooperation with the USA, seeking to create a united front against the Soviet Union, which it now saw as the main threat to its security.

This course began changing in the early 1980s, with Beijing taking a more cautious approach within its “independent foreign policy” doctrine. However, before Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, Beijing had largely followed Deng Xiaoping’s strategy of “keeping a low profile and biding your time” (*tao guang yang hui*) – that is, of gathering strength and being careful not to draw attention to its activities.³ In essence, this meant that to secure a place among the world’s powers, that was worthy of its great history, China needed economic assistance of technologically developed Western states, and this required their political support or, at least, friendly neutrality. Therefore, China tried gathering strength while being careful not to irritate the outside world with excessive foreign policy activity.

At the same time, the goal of turning China into a great power under the Communist Party of China (the CPC) rule has never changed. Moreover, the CPC has based the legitimacy of its rule on the claim of being able to achieve this goal despite the fact that several previous generations of Chinese reformers and revolutionaries had failed. Although Chinese leaders never said exactly how long China would attempt to gather strength, it was clear that Deng Xiaoping had undertaken it seriously, and for the long haul.

China’s power grew under Deng’s successors Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, so that discussions arose among the ruling elite as to whether the time had come to enact a more active foreign policy. Chinese journalists and military experts published articles thereby calling for a more resolute protection of national interests and, above all, countering what Beijing perceived as US attempts to curb China’s growth by

³陈文良 [Chen, W.] ‘对“韬光养晦”的哲学审视’ [A Detailed Philosophical Analysis of the “taiguangyanghui” concept], 中国发展 [*China’s Development*], vol. 12, no. 1 (Feb. 2012), pp. 81–83.

encircling it with a network of alliances.⁴ However, at that time fearing the reaction of the West and possible consequences to economic growth, the country's leadership did not include most of these proposals in its official doctrine, but declared them an unofficial part of an open discussion. All of China's official foreign policy concepts during that period ("peaceful rise," "peaceful development," and "harmonious world") were aimed at convincing the outside world that China's rise posed no threat.

Xi Jinping's leadership changed this approach. The ideas that the principle of *tao guang yang hui* was obsolete, that it was time for China to take a more active approach, create military bases abroad, defend its core interests with military force, punish countries pursuing hostile policies with sanctions, etc. became part of official documents.⁵ Under Xi Jinping, China launched such large-scale international programs as *The Belt and Road Initiative (One Belt, One Road)*, *Made in China 2025* and others aimed at achieving technological independence and a major role in the world economy and politics for China.⁶

In terms of strategy, Beijing significantly expanded what it considers its "core interests" – interests that it is ready to protect with all its might and means. Whereas previously, it primarily referred to the issue of sovereignty over Taiwan, that concept now includes

⁴ 宋晓军 [Song, X.], 王小东 [Wang, X.], 黄纪苏 [Huang J.], 宋强 [Song, Q.], 刘仰 [Liu Y.], 中国不高兴: 大时代、大目标及我们的内忧外患 [China Is Displeased. The Great Epoch, Great Goals, and Our Domestic and External Difficulties] (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2009), pp. 80–108; 刘明福 [Liu, M.], 后美国时代的大国思维: 中国梦 [Great-Power Mentality in the Post-American World: The Chinese Dream] (Beijing, Zhongguo youyi chubanshe, 2010; 戴旭 [Dai, X.], *C* 型包围—内忧外患下的中国突围 [C-Shape Encirclement: How China Can Break Encirclement Under Domestic Difficulties and External Pressure] (Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 2010), pp. 3–4.

⁵ Denisov, I. E. 'The Evolution of China's Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping', *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn'*, 2015, no. 5, pp. 40–54 [in Russian]; Kashin, V. B., Pyatachkova A. S., Krashennnikova L. S. 'China's Policy in Using Economic Sanctions: Theory and Practice', *Sravnitel'naya politika*, 2020, vol. 11. no. 2, pp. 123–138 [in Russian].

⁶ A. V. Lukin (ed.), *China's Global Project for Eurasia: A Problem Statement*, (Moscow: Nauchnyy ekspert, 2016) [in Russian].

the issues of Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, all territorial disputes with India and Japan and in the South China Sea, and even China's as-yet-not-clearly defined "development interests."

In making these changes, Beijing had not foreseen that the USA would react as sharply as it did. It assumed that the world was so globalized and the Chinese economy had become so interwoven with the world economy that serious decoupling and conflicts will not arise. Beijing expected that relations with Washington would develop in accordance with "a new type of relationship between major countries in the 21st century" that Xi Jinping proposed during his visit to the USA in 2012,⁷ the main idea of which was that the countries would coordinate their actions in the international arena while pursuing their own interests. The USA, however, did not accept this model. Washington perceived it as a threat to its leading position in the world and switched to a policy of actively containing China.

Although President Barack Obama began implementing the course of containment towards the end of his term, President Donald Trump pursued it far more actively. This development caught China completely by surprise, prompting sharp polemics and open disagreements in Chinese society.⁸

At the early stage of the exacerbation of the US–China relationship in 2018–2019, a number of Chinese observers suggested that individual politicians and their activities were the cause of the crisis in US–China relations and that it was possible to overcome the disagreements. On top of that, many were inclined to blame Xi Jinping personally for the rupture, pointing to his aggressive and overly ambitious foreign policy as well as the braggadocio of his senior officials.

During this period, China's political and intellectual elite engaged in a sharp debate that sometimes spilled over into public view. For example, in August 2018, the world learned of a collective letter from a group of Chinese academics and public figures calling

⁷ Lampton, D. M., 'A New Type of Major-Power Relationship: Seeking a Durable Foundation for US–China Ties', *Asia Policy*, 2013, no. 16, pp. 51–68.

⁸ Lukin, A., 'The US–China Trade War and China's Strategic Future', *Survival*, 2019, vol. 61, no. 1, pp. 23–50.

for the dismissal of Hu Angang, director of the Center for China Study at Tsinghua University. He was accused of “triumphalism” for having claimed that China was close to surpassing the USA and becoming a leading world power.⁹

Similarly, Deng Pufang, the eldest son of the late architect of the Chinese reforms, Deng Xiaoping, and for many years the head of the Chinese Federation of Disabled People, said in a speech that China should not overdo claims of international leadership and that Beijing should “know its place” and make a sober assessment of the real state of affairs.¹⁰

During that period, Chinese officials commented cautiously on the state of relations with the USA, emphasizing their continuing interest in dialogue.

By 2020, the Chinese expert community was in strong agreement that the confrontation with the USA was, in fact, systemic and that Washington would inevitably attempt to contain China's technological development and limit its foreign economic relations. By that time, the Chinese expert community had based its judgment upon the fact that the continuation of the confrontation with the USA was inevitable, regardless of future political changes there.

The US course of technological containment of the PRC was considered to be the only alternative. Beijing assumed that any US administration would try to block Chinese 5G telecommunications equipment and AI products from the world market. As an optimistic scenario, there was a possibility that the new US administration

⁹ Huang, C., ‘China’s social media users call for sacking of ‘triumphalist’ academic, as anti-hype movement grows’, *South China Morning Post*, 3 Aug. 2018 <<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2158054/chinas-social-media-users-call-sacking-triumphalist>>.

¹⁰ Mai, J., ‘Deng Xiaoping’s son urges China to “know its place” and not be “overbearing”’, *South China Morning Post*, 30 Oct. 2018 <<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/2170762/deng-xiaopings-son-uses-unpublicised-speech-urge-china-know-its>>.

would resume cooperation in certain areas of mutual interest within the bilateral relationship and then lift the most senseless and ineffective of the tariff restrictions imposed by the Trump administration.¹¹

Under no circumstances did Beijing expect the United States to abandon its policy of the military deterrence of China. In 2020, on the eve of Joe Biden's election, Beijing expressed the view that, although such a policy would continue, it would probably become more orderly and "cautious". It presumed that the new US administration would try to establish military contacts and put in place procedures that would prevent dangerous incidents from occurring. At the same time, as Deputy Director of China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), Li Yan, noted Washington would continue its military and technical rivalry with China, attempts to achieve a decisive superiority over the country, and deployment of additional troops to the Asia-Pacific region.¹²

These expectations were generally born out in the months since Joe Biden took office. The US military activity in the Western Pacific has continued with little change from the final years of the Trump administration, including the carrying out of major military exercises in areas of the South China Sea that are sensitive for Beijing.¹³

Beijing ultimately decided to prepare for the worst while clearly hoping that D. Trump's policy was an aberration of sorts and that everything would return to normal after his departure. This was seen in China's heightened expectations of the meeting with the Biden administration representatives in Anchorage in March 2021. However, instead of offers of mutual compromise they had expected to receive there, the Chinese delegation faced with an angry rebuke on all

¹¹ 李湛 [Li, Zh.], '谁主沉浮? 美国大选政治观察,' [Who Rules over Man's Destiny? A Political Outlook of the US Elections], 财新网 [Caixin Net], 25 Aug. 2020 <<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1675988966161752896>>.

¹² 李岩 [Li, Y.], 拜登的对华军事政策重在“谨慎遏制” [Biden's Policy towards China is Still Based on 'Cautious Containment'], 中美聚焦王 [Sino-US Focus Net], 30 Dec. 2020 <<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1687467596148077131>>.

¹³ Lindberg, K. S., 'U.S. Aircraft Carriers Conduct Exercises in South China Sea', *Bloomberg*, 9 Feb. 2021 <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-09/u-s-aircraft-carriers-conduct-exercises-in-south-china-sea>>.

the issues that Beijing considers its “core interests”. This experience will probably prompt China to adopt a more or less consistent strategy towards the USA.

China's military strategy towards the USA

China developed its military strategy towards the USA in keeping with its overall approach to that country. Beijing has viewed Washington as the most likely source of a military threat, apparently since sometime between the late 1980s and the mid-1990s. Two political factors during that period prompted changes to China's military planning. They included the normalization of relations with the Soviet Union (with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to the PRC in May 1989 cementing that shift), as well as the sharp chilling of the China-US relations in connection with the events on Tiananmen Square in the same year.

Operation Desert Storm, in which the US and allied troops suffered only minimal losses while quickly defeating the army of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in August 1990 – January 1991, made a strong impression on the Chinese leadership and prompted it to rethink the nature of modern warfare. At that time, the Iraqi army was significantly superior to the People's Liberation Army (the PLA) in terms of both technical equipment and combat experience, yet it was unable to mount effective resistance to the US offensive.

China only partially reveals changes to its military planning in various passages from its doctrinal documents, none of which is ever published in full. The most important of these is the “Military Strategic Guidelines” (*Junshi zhanlue fangzhen*) issued by the Central Military Commission of the CPC.

These documents consist of three components: identification of China's main strategic opponents; determination of the objectives of military operations based on the existing threats; and listing of the main strategies. These are followed by a section designated as “Fundamentals of Preparation for Military Operations” that describes the nature of future

military operations. Finally, the section “Basic Guiding Considerations” provides instructions and recommendations for conducting future PLA military operations.¹⁴

The “Guidelines” are secret documents, although the media makes an announcement each time the Central Military Commission formally adopts a document. Such act signals that the PRC military and political leaders are to reassess the nature of the military threats the country is facing. Only heavily redacted and formulaic fragments are released. The most important “Guidelines” that have subsequently led to fundamental changes in the Chinese military development were issued in 1993. They called for the PLA to prepare for “local warfare with the use of high technologies”. It was obvious that it could only refer to the developed countries of the West as a potential adversary, and primarily to the USA.

The explanations and clarifications published later clearly showed that the PLA had to prepare for military operations against the armed forces of developed states that had modern, precision-guided weapons, intelligence, and command and control systems, the potential to wage war in the information space and other capabilities that only the USA had at that time.

According to the information available, the subsequent “Guidelines” issued in 2004 and 2015 probably only refined the provisions contained in the 1993 document. They shifted the focus from “high technologies” to “information technologies.” It being understood that the document of 2004 referred to preparing for “local warfare with the use of information technologies,” while in 2015 it spoke of “informationized local warfare.” Of course, this also referred to the USA and its allies.

Individual fragments of the “Guidelines” appear in the China Defense *White Paper* that Beijing has published every two years on average since 1998. Nevertheless, the *White Papers* serve primarily as propaganda that bypasses the most sensitive aspects of military

¹⁴ Fravel, M. T., ‘China’s New Military Strategy: “Winning Informationized Local Wars”’, *China Brief*, vol. 15, no. 13, 2 July 2015 <<https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-new-military-strategy-winning-informationized-local-wars/>>.

planning, including the issue of possible opponents who, according to the data available, the “Guidelines” of the Central Military Commission should indicate directly.

Not only do the PRC documents make it obvious that China’s military development is oriented towards deterring another superpower with mighty armed forces and advanced technological capabilities (i. e., the United States), but some Chinese military-industrial programs and the course of the military reform itself also indicate a radical shift in military planning that began in the late 1980s.

In terms of China’s military development, these include a shift in focus from ground to naval forces, as well as a significant amount of investment since the late 1980s in the development of land- and sea-based intercontinental ballistic missiles intended primarily for the military deterrence of the United States. China has carried out these reforms since the late 1990s, as its military spending has started growing rapidly. The Chinese military budget grew an average of 15.9% annually in 1998–2007.¹⁵ That spending growth rate subsequently declined, varying from 6% to 10% per year from 2015 onward.¹⁶

China’s military buildup and its strategy towards the USA

When Beijing reoriented towards the USA and its allies as the most likely adversary, it led to a radical change in China’s army. Although Beijing officially declares that it is not participating in the arms race, its military buildup clearly indicates the desire to withstand the USA and its allies in a defensive war which may be waged both on the Chinese territory and in the surrounding seas.

¹⁵ Chen, S., Feffer, J, ‘China’s Military Spending: Soft Rise or Hard Threat?’, *Asian Perspective*, 2009, vol. 33, no. 4 (Special issue on Arms Race in Northeast Asia), pp. 47–67.

¹⁶ Xinhua, ‘China’s Defense Budget Maintains Single-Digit Growth for Six Consecutive Years’, 5 Mar. 2021 <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-03/05/c_139785529.htm>.

The past 30 years of China's military buildup have changed the potential of the Chinese military and military-industrial complexes, as well as the very appearance of the Chinese armed forces. The People's Liberation Army no longer focuses primarily on its land forces that, after numerous waves of reductions, now represent less than one half of all its troops.

The greatest growth has occurred in the PLA Navy that now has the world's largest fleet by the number of warships and the second largest in terms of the main classes of warships – destroyers, frigates, and aircraft carriers.

China has already transformed itself from a hopeless outsider in the field of defense and military technologies into the second military power in the world – with the exception of strategic weapons, in which Russia holds a solid second place.

China is considered to be the main rival of the USA in the field of military technologies.¹⁷ Despite the fact that China still lags behind Russia in such types of military equipment as nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, air defense systems, and aircraft engines, Washington views China as its most dangerous rival in a number of cutting-edge fields of the development of dual-use technologies, including artificial intelligence and quantum technologies.

In military and economic terms, the USA retains significant superiority over the PRC in nominal military budget: with that of the USA totaling \$705 billion and that of China amounting to 1.36 trillion yuan, or \$202 billion at 2021 exchange rates.

However, this superiority loses some significance due to certain economic, military and political factors. First, when recalculated based on purchasing power parity, the Chinese budget increases by more than 150%, to \$320.8 billion.

¹⁷ Xiangning, W., 'Technology, power, and uncontrolled great power strategic competition between China and the United States', *China International Strategy Review*, 2020, vol. 2, pp. 99–119.

It is also important that the two countries structure their budgets differently. Whereas military equipment accounts for only a little more than 20% of the US military budget, and R&D – for another 14–15%,¹⁸ R&D and procurement have represented more than 40% of the Chinese military budget since 2015.¹⁹

At the same time, it is known that China does not include the vast majority of its expenditure on developing weapons and military equipment in its official military budget. Instead, these costs appear in the budget of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and a number of other government bodies. A SIPRI estimate of the hidden Chinese military R&D costs²⁰ suggests that they account for much more than 50% of China's military expenditures.

On closer examination, the US superiority is not so great. Converting the Chinese military budget into dollars while taking into account purchasing power parity and using the IMF's official exchange rate of 4.223 yuan per dollar in 2021, increases it one and a half times to more than 150% to \$320.8 billion.

Thus, US military spending on weapons and R&D is less than twice that of China. What's more, the two countries invest comparable sums in the development of their armed forces, and the spending gap between them is narrowing as the Chinese economy and military budget continue to grow at a more rapid pace. At the same time, China is experiencing much less military stress than the USA. Even taking

¹⁸ Harrison, T., and Daniels, S. P., *Analysis of the FY2021 Defense Budget*, Report of the CSIS Defense Budget Analysis Program, (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, Aug. 2020) <<http://defense360.csis.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Analysis-of-the-FY-2021-Defense-Budget.pdf>>.

¹⁹ Xinhua, 'Full Text: China's National Defense in the New Era', 24 July 2019 <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/24/c_138253389.htm>.

²⁰ Tian, N., Su, F., 'A New Estimate of China's Military Expenditure', SIPRI, Jan. 2021 <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/202101/2101_sipri_report_a_new_estimate_of_chinas_military_expenditure.pdf>.

into account the likely hidden military expenditures, military spending in China represents only 1.9% of GDP as compared to 3.4% of GDP in the USA.²¹

Another important factor affecting the future of the military competition is the deindustrialization of the USA in a number of industries while China maintains strong civilian industrial potential. This concerns primarily the civil shipbuilding industry, in which the USA holds an insignificant share of the world production (the industry is considered to have practically disappeared),²² while China's share is approximately 50%.²³ Given the predominantly naval nature of their military rivalry, the fact that one party has a powerful shipbuilding becomes an important advantage because it lowers the cost of implementing naval programs and provides huge reserves of production capacity. Such close relationship between commercial sea power and naval power is an important principle of maritime strategy.²⁴

As a result, the PLA Navy already equaled the US Navy in size in 2012–2014, and since 2015–2017, it has increased to double its size in terms of tonnage of combat ships commissioned annually.²⁵ The data on the number of combat aircraft produced are more fragmentary, but also suggest that the PLA Air Force has purchased a comparable or larger number of modern combat aircraft than the US Air Force.

At the same time, an important factor affecting the balance of military forces between the PRC and the USA is the distribution of US forces around the world. The USA has approximately 200,000 troops

²¹ SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, SIPRI, <<https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>>.

²² Mall, S., 'Freight Waves Classics: America's Commercial Shipbuilding Industry is Nearly Gone', *Freight Waves*, 22 Jan. 2021 <<https://www.freightwaves.com/news/freightwaves-classics-americas-commercial-shipbuilding-industry-is-nearly-gone>>.

²³ 'China's Shipbuilding Industry Keeps World-Leading Role', *Hellenicshippingnews*, 19 Jan. 2021 <<https://www.hellenicshippingnews.com/chinas-shipbuilding-industry-keeps-world-leading-role/>>.

²⁴ Mahan, A. T., *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783*, 5th ed. (1890; repr. Boston: Little, Brown, 1894), p. 45.

²⁵ Lague, D., Lim, B. K. 'China's Vast Fleet is Tipping The Balance in The Pacific', *Reuters*, 30 Apr. 2019 <<https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/china-army-navy/>>.

stationed abroad, of which only a minority are in the Western Pacific. In addition, a significant number of US troops are involved in operations abroad on a rotational basis, deterring or exerting pressure on countries such as Russia and Iran.

China does not have a well-developed system of bases abroad. So far, it has only one permanent foreign military facility in Djibouti, where up to 2,000 personnel serve. In the event of a conflict in the Pacific Ocean, China will be able to use all or almost all of its forces, while the USA will have to pull them from around the world.

One part of the Chinese strategy for protecting its “core interests” from the USA and its allies is the attempt to consolidate its superiority in the surrounding seas in which there are territorial disputes. So, after several heated arguments with Japan and the collision in 2010 of a Chinese fishing trawler with a Japanese Coast Guard vessel in the disputed Senkaku Archipelago (Diaoyu) in the East China Sea, China announced in 2013 the introduction of its air defense identification zone there, approximately one half of which intersects with the Japanese and a small part – with the South Korean and Taiwanese ones.²⁶

China is working even more openly to counteract the USA by building up its military on the islands and reefs it has occupied in the South China Sea with the goal being to ensure control over a huge maritime territory to which Beijing, according to its statement, claims “historical rights.” This involves measures on an unprecedented scale to construct artificial islands on the reefs that China has occupied and on which it subsequently builds military infrastructure such as docks, lighthouses, and airfields.²⁷ The USA and its allies do not recognize Chinese claims to control these areas of the South China Sea and periodically send warships there to demonstrate their opposition. A number of experts believe that in the medium or long term, Beijing is likely to introduce an air defense identification zone in this region as well, although it is not ready to take this step now due to the vulnerability

²⁶ Hayashi, N., and Kurashige, N., ‘China Overturned Draft Air Defense Zone, Expanded It Toward Japan’, *The Asahi Shimbun*, 12 Jan. 2014 <<https://web.archive.org/web/20140216065721/http://ajw.asahi.com/article/asia/china/AJ201401120021>>.

²⁷ Dikarev, A., and Lukin, A., ‘Russia’s Approach to South China Sea Territorial Dispute: It’s Only Business, Nothing Personal’, *The Pacific Review*, 2021.

of its military facilities and lack of infrastructure.²⁸ Some also argue that Chinese strategists might be drawing on the Soviet experience to counter the US fleet.²⁹

Overall, the PRC is now engaged in an extremely rapid buildup of its military potential in relation to the US armed forces. The year 2035 will probably be a milestone because, according to the program documents currently available, that is when the Chinese armed forces will have achieved complete technical modernization. The army plans to reach an intermediate stage in the increase of its combat capabilities by 2027, the centenary of the founding of the PLA.³⁰

The high level of the US public debt, that prevents a sharp increase in military spending, coupled with the steady growth of the Chinese economy in relation to that of the USA, suggests that by 2035, China may achieve overwhelming superiority over the USA and its allies in the Western Pacific in terms of conventional weapons.

At the same time, the Chinese nuclear arsenal may reach such a size by that time that the threat of an armed conflict escalating into a nuclear exchange would become unacceptable for the USA.

Thus, if events develop favorably for China, a situation may arise by 2035 in which the USA will no longer be able to guarantee the security of its allies in East Asia. This, in turn, will force those countries to seek a compromise with Beijing on favorable terms for the Chinese.

Achieving such an outcome without engaging in a direct military clash with the USA is probably the true goal of China's current military development. Until it accomplishes this goal, the PRC is unlikely to

²⁸ Storey, I., 'As US–China Tensions Rise, What Is The Outlook On The South China Sea Dispute In 2020–21?', *South China Morning Post*, 8 Sep. 2020 <<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/opinion/article/3100563/us-china-tensions-rise-what-outlook-south-china-sea-dispute-2020>>.

²⁹ Goldstein, L. J., 'Russia's Past Can Help Explain China's South China Sea Strategy', *The National Interest*, 16 Jan. 2020 <<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/russias-past-can-help-explain-chinas-south-china-sea-strategy-114141>>.

³⁰ Hart, B., Glaser, B.S., and Funaiolo, M. P., 'China's 2027 Goal Marks the PLA's Centennial, Not an Expedited Military Modernization', *China Brief*, vol. 21, no. 6, 26 Mar. 2021 <<https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-2027-goal-marks-the-plas-centennial-not-an-expedited-military-modernization/>>.

want to participate actively in arms control negotiations or even to ensure effective measures for transparency – that could expose the true intentions of China's military buildup.

China's nuclear strategy and arms control negotiations

Beijing's position on the negotiations on the reduction of nuclear weapons and medium-range missiles provides a vivid illustration of this disinterest. Ever since it built its first nuclear weapons, China's position has been as follows: China pledges not to use nuclear weapons first, but it will not participate in Soviet/Russian–US talks on strategic weapons until these countries reduce their nuclear potential to a “relatively low level.” Until this happens, Beijing will not declare the number of its nuclear warheads or delivery vehicles. This is a convenient position to take because it allows China to build up its nuclear forces to a level of its choosing without divulging this information.

What's more, the US currently estimates that in the recent years China has entered a period of rapid build-up of its nuclear weapons and will have doubled or quadrupled the number of its deployed nuclear warheads by 2030.³¹ According to the existing estimates of the number of the Chinese nuclear weapons, for example the SIPRI estimate that China held 320 warheads in 2020, the PRC's arsenal could reach 1,200–1,300 warheads. This would put China on a par with Russia and the USA, each of which has 1,550 deployed warheads, in accordance with the New START treaty.

These circumstances gave Washington cause for concern, which coincided with the general rise in anti-Chinese elements in the US policy. The US Defense Department's document *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020* names China's development of the DF-26 intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) as a particular threat due to its ability to deliver both

³¹ Richard, C. A., 'Forging 21st-Century Strategic Deterrence', US Naval Institute, Feb. 2021 <<https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2021/february/forging-21st-century-strategic-deterrence>>.

conventional and nuclear strikes on ground or naval targets. It also singles out China's new ICBMs that can be equipped with multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRVs). The document also notes, "The number of warheads on the PRC's land-based ICBMs capable of threatening the United States is expected to grow to roughly 200 in the next five years."³²

Speaking in October of the same year about the Chinese subcritical tests of nuclear weapons in Xinjiang and the substantial program of ballistic missile tests conducted in 2019–2020, US Special Presidential Envoy for Arms Control Marshall Billingslea noted that by not participating in talks for the last three decades, China was able to maintain complete freedom from any restrictions, with the result that it could create from 1,000 to 2,000 IRBMs and 13 different types of cruise missiles.³³

For these reasons, the Trump administration called on China to join possible US-Russian arms control agreements, especially in connection with the discussions over the fate of the New START treaty that expired in 2021. Chinese officials strongly rejected any such possibility, calling it blackmail by Washington aimed at preserving US nuclear superiority.³⁴ Moreover, Beijing actively criticizes the US position and supports Russian proposals. For example, Director-General of the Department of Arms Control of the Foreign Ministry Fu Cong said in July 2020, that "hying up the China factor is nothing but a ploy to divert world attention, and to create a pretext, under which they

³² 'Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020', US Department of Defense, 2020, p. 55 <<https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>>.

³³ 'Virtual Event: Behind the Great Wall of Secrecy: China's Nuclear Buildup', The Heritage Foundation, 13 Oct. 2020 <<https://www.heritage.org/arms-control/event/virtual-event-behind-the-great-wall-secrecy-chinas-nuclear-buildup>>.

³⁴ Dotson, J., 'Beijing Rejects Any Involvement in Nuclear Arms Limitation Talks', The Jamestown Foundation, 30 Oct. 2020 <<https://jamestown.org/program/beijing-rejects-any-involvement-in-nuclear-arms-limitation-talks/>>.

could walk away from the New START". He also called on the USA to agree to the Russian proposal to extend New START and, on that basis, reduce its enormous nuclear arsenal even further.³⁵

Speaking at the Aspen Security Forum in August 2020, China's Ambassador to the United States Cui Tiankai said that it was "not yet the time" for China to participate in arms control talks. He argued that "China has a very small amount of nuclear weapons. It's not at the same level. We are far behind the US and Russia... So they should take the lead in international nuclear disarmament".³⁶ Addressing the UN General Assembly on October 12, 2020, Chinese Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Geng Shuang reiterated the traditional Chinese arguments that Beijing maintains a nuclear force at the minimum required for self-defense and that China would never engage in a nuclear arms race with another country. He said, "Given the huge gap between the nuclear arsenals of China and those of the US and the Russian Federation, it is unfair, unreasonable and infeasible to expect China to join in any trilateral arms control negotiation... This is just a trick to shift the focus of the international community. The US intention is to find an excuse to shirk its own special and primary responsibility for nuclear disarmament and find a pretext for gaining a free hand and obtaining an absolute military advantage... China will never participate in such a negotiation and will never accept any coercion or blackmail".³⁷

³⁵ 'Department of Arms Control and Disarmament Holds Briefing for International Arms Control and Disarmament Issues', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 8 July 2020 <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/jks_665232/jkxw_665234/t1795979.shtml>; Xinhua, 'Expecting China to Join U. S.-Russia Nuclear Arms Talks "Unrealistic": Official' 8 July 2020 <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-07/08/c_139197923.htm>.

³⁶ Xinhua, 'It is Not Right Timing for China to Join U. S.-Russia Arms Control Talks: Chinese Ambassador', 11 Aug. 2020 <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-08/11/c_139282059.htm>.

³⁷ Xinhua, 'Asking China to Participate In "Trilateral Arms Control Negotiation" Infeasible: Chinese Envoy', 13 Oct. 2020 <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-10/13/c_139435411.htm>.

Thus, for several reasons, China is unlikely to participate in arms control negotiations in the coming decade. First, China will hardly agree to participate in the treaty if it concerns medium-range missiles and Beijing will refuse to divulge significant information of such missiles. This is because the PLA has made medium-range ballistic missiles and cruise missiles – mostly conventional – a centerpiece of its military and technical policy since the 1980s, with the result that the PLA's Rocket Force has a significant arsenal of such missiles, according to maximum estimates – up to 2,000 of them, and the country's military industry has made significant progress in perfecting them.³⁸ In particular, in 2019, China became the first country to deploy a medium-range ballistic missile with a gliding hypersonic warhead.

The medium- and shorter-range missiles in the PLA arsenal are intended to compensate for shortcomings that China still has in its combat aviation and naval forces in relation to the USA. Having such an arsenal gives the PRC a huge advantage by enabling it to destroy most of the military infrastructure of a potential enemy in the Western Pacific in the early stage of a war. The overwhelming majority, probably more than 90%, of China's missiles of this type carry conventional warheads. At the same time, the same formations of the PLA Rocket Force (Chinese missile bases) have both nuclear and non-nuclear missiles, with the result that any negotiations aimed at establishing limits on the number of medium-range missiles will eventually have to turn into talks on the balance of conventional arms in the region as a whole. Moreover, from the Chinese point of view, such talks will have to include other countries in the region as well.

Of the countries and territories adjacent to the PRC, India, North and South Korea, Taiwan, and Pakistan currently have medium-range land-based missiles. Japan has officially announced that it is working on hypersonic missiles with a range of up to 500 km, but their

³⁸ 'Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2018', US Department of Defense, 2018 <<https://media.defense.gov/2018/Aug/16/2001955282/-1/-1/1/2018-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT.PDF>>.

actual characteristics are not known. In practice, there is little chance, however, that the multilateral arms reduction talks necessitated by this situation will take place.

Neither will China agree at present to limit nuclear weapons alone. China is unwilling to consider an agreement in which it must adhere to a lower cap on the number of warheads than the USA or Russia, since in this case it will be an unequal agreement. Negotiations can only proceed if, as the Chinese Foreign Ministry has said, the USA reduces its arsenal to the Chinese level – an unlikely event, the Ministry also noted.³⁹

The PRC has invested a great deal in developing its strategic nuclear forces over the past three decades. Although the exact figure is unknown, China is known to have carried out work simultaneously on three types of ICBMs, new submarines and missiles for them, as well as on a new type of strategic bomber. It also built a large number of expensive infrastructure facilities for these forces. According to known US estimates,⁴⁰ China has a good chance to, if not achieve parity, then to close the gap with the world's nuclear superpowers significantly. Thus, for China to conclude a nuclear agreement now would amount to a unilateral Chinese concession to the USA.

Based on satellite images, American experts announced in July 2021 that China is building at once two new silo fields to deploy ICBMs – near the city of Yumen in Gansu province (119 silos) and not far from the city of Hami in Eastern Xinjiang (presumably, 110 silos). According to researchers from the Federation of American Scientists, this suggests that a total of about 250 silos are currently being built in China, which exceeds the number of all Russian silo-based ICBMs and accounts for more than half of all US ICBMs. The construction program itself is the largest since the Cold War. “If they are all loaded with single-warhead missiles, then the number of warheads on Chinese ICBMs could potentially increase from about 185 warheads today to as

³⁹ RIA Novosti, ‘China Explained the Necessity of Increasing Military Capacity’, 8 July 2020 [in Russian].

⁴⁰ Richard, C. A., ‘Forging 21st-Century Strategic Deterrence’, US Naval Institute, Feb. 2021 <<https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2021/february/forging-21st-century-strategic-deterrence>>.

many as 415 warheads. If the new silos are loaded with the new MIRVed DF-41 ICBMs, then Chinese ICBMs could potentially carry more than 875 warheads (assuming 3 warheads per missile) when the Yumen and Hami missile silo fields are completed,” write the authors of this analysis.

Of course, the construction of silos, itself, does not mean that all of them will be loaded with ICBMs. The Chinese practice of deploying ICBM silo complexes is characterized by constructing a very large number of empty decoys at the same time with real launchers. About half of the PLA Rocket Force is military engineering units, and this is about 50–60 thousand people who are constantly busy building, firstly, underground facilities, and, secondly, all kinds of decoy targets used to conceal real weapons. China is enjoying its advantage as a country with the world’s most powerful construction complex, which produces a huge amount of building materials. The increase in the number of Chinese missile facilities is indeed proceeding at a rapid pace, but the construction of hundreds of silos for the actual deployment of ICBMs in one area is unlikely. There is high likelihood of most of these silos being decoys which will hide a much smaller number of real ballistic missiles. Such decoy silos are not to be loaded, but they will look the same as real ones from space. Nevertheless, the adoption of even 20 *Dong Feng-41* missiles into service will be a very serious step as in any case we are talking about many dozens, and maybe hundreds of additional Chinese nuclear warheads that will be able to reach US territory. In addition, nothing can prevent Beijing from making a political decision to load more silos.

Russia is located close to China, thus missiles of this range are not needed to defeat Russian targets, but are obviously intended for a guaranteed retaliatory strike against the United States. If so, it will mean a radical change in the Chinese nuclear doctrine. In addition, it should be borne in mind that in the event of a Sino-American conflict, ICBMs located in this region will pass over Russian territory, which should make Moscow think about it.

In any case, according to well-known American estimates, the PRC has real chances if not to reach parity, but to sharply reduce the gap with the nuclear superpowers. To conclude a nuclear agreement in such conditions would be a unilateral Chinese concession to the United States.

China will probably be ready to enter into negotiations once it reaches approximate parity with the superpowers, but even then, those talks will be greatly complicated by the asymmetry among the triad of leading players – Russia, China, and the USA. Any attempts to bring China into such talks prematurely are probably doomed to failure. The most that can be achieved is to include China as an observer in negotiations on strategic stability and predictability to build mutual trust. The Chinese authorities might agree to this as a way of obtaining information as well as clarifying their ideas about the forces and concepts of Russia and the USA.

2. STRATEGIC AUTONOMY OF THE EU

Nadezhda ARBATOVA

The concept of strategic autonomy has two dimensions, the strategic and the applied/instrumental. Strategically, it means the European Union (EU) turning into a full-grown power center comparable with the USA and China. The EU leadership identify several areas of integration, the key one being the creation of an autonomous defence potential, i.e. strategic autonomy proper.

From the applied point of view strategic autonomy in the security sphere means the European Union's ability to independently set priorities and take decisions on foreign policy and security matters as well as the existence of institutional, political and material possibilities for implementing them both in collaboration with third parties and, if necessary, single-handedly.

Content of the concept and evolution of approaches to “strategic autonomy”

The idea of Pan-Europe as “the fifth great power” on a par with the British Commonwealth, Pan-America and the Soviet Union is almost 100 years old. It was put forward by the Austrian diplomat Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi, a prominent ideologist of Pan-Europeanism.¹ However, not only in the 1920s, but even much later no one, in their boldest conjectures, could imagine the path European integration would traverse from the European Economic Community formed in 1957 to the unique integration association that is the European Union.

In spite of its achievements, the European Union has been stuck with the reputation of “an economic giant and a political dwarf” which carries no weight in world politics. One explanation of this state

¹ Coudenhove-Kalergi, R.N., *Pan-Europe*, Moscow, Vita Planetare, 2006 [in Russian].

of affairs is that the EU was created as an antipode of the policy of force² because in the period of East-West confrontation the guarantor of Europe's security was the USA/NATO. The end of the East-West confrontation, which eliminated the threat of a global conflict, brought a dramatic change to the system of international relations that had existed throughout the second half of the 20th century. These shifts led to a crisis of the traditional Euro-Atlantic partnership, manifested in the growing gap between the USA and the EU in the sphere of security, the rise of a new China with global ambitions, the strengthening of an assertive post-Soviet Russia seeking to restore the former grandeur of the USSR, and the emergence of numerous regional players such as India, Japan, Turkey, Iran, Brazil and others.

However, if you single out one main cause of Europe's movement towards strategic autonomy, it has to be the crisis of the Euro-Atlantic partnership that put into question the USA's commitment to defending European interests in the post-bipolar world. The end of bipolar confrontation set apart the interests of the USA and Europe which was dropped from the list of Washington's security priorities. These changes, coupled with the new security challenges to Europe ranging from the migration crisis to regional conflicts, faced the EU leadership with the task of acquiring strategic independence, i. e. the role of a fully-fledged power center in international relations.

Strictly speaking, today the only such power center is the USA whose economic and military potential guarantees its political influence in world affairs. China is approaching these standards although the coronavirus pandemic has dealt a heavy blow to the country's prestige, a blow from which it will be hard to recover. As for the European Union and Russia, they represent two opposite models. The EU is a center of economic power and Russia is a center of military might.

The relations between these unequal centers play an important role in the modern poly-centric world which experiences the impact of the constantly shifting balance between two opposite trends, the trend

² Zaki, L., 'Can Europe learn to play power politics?', Center for European Reform, Nov. 2019 <<https://www.cer.eu/publications/archive/essay/2019/can-europe-learn-play-power-politics>>.

toward multilateral cooperation in addressing global problems (the fight against the pandemic, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, international terrorism, climate change) and the trend toward a new bipolarity often referred to as *G2*. This latent bipolarity can be defined as a growing rift between liberal and authoritarian varieties of capitalism. The former is represented above all by the USA, the European Union and their allies and the latter by China, Russia and those who follow their example. At the same time one has to admit that the new bipolarity provides only the general background to the relations between the key players in the international arena which is blurred by internal disagreements within each group and the emergence of new regional hegemonistic leaders claiming their share of influence in global affairs.

In the opinion of the EU foreign affairs and security policy chief Josep Borrell, when the world order is moving from multilateral cooperation to power politics organized around the confrontation between Washington and Beijing, the European Union should also learn the language of power to be able to have its own voice and not to be squeezed between the two titans. In a world marked by increasingly evident hostility and open differences on key problems the EU should rethink its global role and not become involved on any side, especially when the USA under Donald Trump has ceased to be a fully reliable partner, he noted.³

Joe Biden's victory over Donald Trump has not filled the crack in Euro-Atlantic relations. It would be no exaggeration to say that Biden owes his victory to COVID-19. That in itself leaves the Europeans, like the liberals in the USA, with a bitter aftertaste: what would have happened if there were no pandemic? Can one trust a country where Trumpism is still a major political force? The victory of the Democrat Biden gave Europe hope for four calm years in the Euro-Atlantic relations and the restoration of what had been destroyed by Trump, above all for the rebirth of "the united front of democratic states" in the face of external challenges. Biden will of course change the tone of America's

³ Morillas, P., Quero, J., 'The US, China, and the EU in a New Global Order: A World of Two or Three?', *TEPSA*, Jan. 2020 <<http://www.tepsa.eu/the-us-china-and-the-eu-in-a-new-global-order-a-world-of-two-or-three-pol-morillas-and-jordi-quero-cidob-spain/>>.

foreign policy, and in diplomacy form really matters. The Europeans will find it easier and more pleasant to talk with Biden who is likely to replace Trump's policy of walking away from international agreements with the America-is-back strategy. Yet even in the best-case scenario of Euro-Atlantic relations Washington will still see Europe as an instrument of promoting its own interests.

Now Europe is well aware of this and has no excessive hopes for cardinal shifts in the relations between the EU and the USA, and equally it does not expect a return to *status quo ante*. This is impossible not only because Biden will be too busy dealing with the Trump legacy at home, but also because the changes in Euro-Atlantic relations have deeper roots than Trump's anti-European stance. Even Barack Obama, the most pro-European US president since Bill Clinton, failed to restore the transatlantic relationship to its original state because *status quo ante* refers to the Cold War era when Western Europe's security depended entirely on the American ally. One can rekindle the Cold War in the relations between Russia and the West, but the former international relations of the time of Soviet–US bipolarity cannot be brought back. In other words, neither Biden, nor anybody else, can change the EU's aspiration for strategic autonomy.

In September of 2020 Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, presenting the Strategic Foresight Report devoted to sustained development of the European Union in four interconnected areas – socio-economic, geopolitical, green and digital – stressed that strategic forecasting could help determine the possible scenarios and strategic possibilities for openly strengthening the EU's strategic autonomy.⁴ However, the concept of strategic autonomy was not Ursula von der Leyen's invention. It grew out of the Gaullist dream of a powerful united Europe that would exist between the Soviet threat and the American might. This was the message of the early European summits in Paris and Bonn in 1961. Jean-Claude Juncker stressed this in 2017 when he spoke about two different but equally important tasks for the EU: on the one hand, to use the still significant size of its internal

⁴ Strategic Foresight Report: Charting the Course Towards a More Resilient Europe, 22 Sept. 2020 <<https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/russia/85559>>.

market of 450 million people to change the world; and on the other hand, to have the potential to defend this market from bad-faith competition and to strengthen the EU's stability.⁵ In other words, creation of an autonomous Europe means not only a more effective defence of Europe, but also a projection of a positive agenda on the world arena in accordance with the European interests and values.

“Strengthening the EU’s security and defence policy is not a luxury; it is a necessity because the challenges we face can only be addressed by providing a collective European answer. This means that Europe needs to enhance its ability to act – autonomously when necessary. In other words, we need to increase our strategic autonomy. For that, we need to increase our operational effectiveness, our resilience and our civilian and military capabilities,” Josep Borrell said.⁶

Towards military autonomy of the EU

The creation of an independent defence capability of the EU began with the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) aimed at phased formation of a joint EU defence policy, enlarging its civilian and military capabilities in the sphere of crisis management and conflict prevention. Since 2008 the European Defence Agency (EDA) has been working on the Capability Development Plan (CDP) to solve long-term security and defence problems. CDP is a comprehensive planning method which provides a picture of the European defence potential over time. It considers future security scenarios and provides recommendations on the capabilities of the European armed forces required to react to various

⁵ King, J., ‘EU Strategic Autonomy: what is it, and why should we care?’, *Flint-Global.com*, 12 Feb. 2021 <<https://flint-global.com/blog/eu-strategic-autonomy-what-is-it-and-why-should-we-care/>>.

⁶ TASS, ‘Borrell: EU Should Promote Strategic Autonomy and Strengthen Defence Capabilities’, 4 Dec. 2020 <<https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/10170677>>.

potential events. It is particularly important for the expert community for defence planning of EU member states in determining cooperation priorities and possibilities.

The main milestone in the history of the creation of an independent defence potential was the Treaty of Lisbon on Amending the Treaty of the European Union which came into force on 1 December 2009. Reflecting the ideological and regional differences of the member states' approach to European security, the Treaty of Lisbon sealed the intergovernmental character of CSDP while envisaging the possibility of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) among individual EU member states in the military sphere. The adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon ushered in a veritable renaissance of bilateral and multilateral defence initiatives of EU countries.⁷

The Ghent meeting of European Union defence ministers held in 2010 concluded that in the context of universal defence budget cuts caused by the economic crisis all the member countries need to launch cooperation in strengthening the defence potential, especially in the spheres of concentration of military resources and their joint use. Almost immediately after the Ghent summit the question arose of creating a permanent structure, the Conference on EU Military Capability Improvement. This was followed by other proposals which explicitly called for establishing a Permanent European Council for Defence Affairs⁸ or even a Defence Union.

The year 2016 was a milestone in the development of European defence. The adoption of the Global Security Strategy in 2016 gave a boost to the development of EU defence. To implement the Strategy a package of measures was adopted consisting of three main elements. First, new political goals and tasks for the Europeans envisaging greater responsibility of the EU for its own security and defence. Second, new financial instruments of assistance to the member states and European defence industries in strengthening defence capabilities (European Defence Action Plan). Third, a series of concrete measures as a follow-up

⁷ Arbatova, N., 'Strategic Autonomy of the European Union: Reality or Wishful Thinking?', *Polis. Politicheskiye issledovaniya*, 2019, no. 6, pp. 36–52.

⁸ *Ibid.*

to the Joint EU–NATO Declaration identifying areas of cooperation. The three elements together constitute a comprehensive package of measures aimed at enhancing the security of the Union and its citizens.

At the EU summit in Bratislava on September 16, 2016 the French and German defence ministers presented a joint draft of proposals to enhance European defence policy. The document envisaged the creation of a European defence control centre, a joint satellite surveillance system and sharing of logistical and military medical resources. The Franco-German plan proceeds from de facto EU-led integration of defence structures and assets, including the call to create permanent CSDP headquarters for joint use of military means. It proposes giving a new lease of life to the idea of European battle groups, reactivating several articles of the Treaty of Lisbon and using EU funds to finance military research.⁹

On November 30, 2016 the European Commission approved the European Defence Action Plan which would create a European Defence Fund (EDF) and a number of measures aimed at promoting defence research, better use of common defence funding, and the creation of a competitive and innovative defence industry base.

On Jun 8, 2017 the EU Council passed a decision on establishing a Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) as part of EU military staff (EUMS). The decisions to set up the MPCC meant the creation of a permanent headquarters for the conduct of EU overseas missions in accordance with the Franco-German initiative.

On December 8, 2017 the relaunch of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) took place. That initiative consists of two parts, commitments and projects. PESCO membership is voluntary: of the 28 EU member states 25 have joined it (with Denmark, Malta staying out while the UK announced its exit from the EU). The member states assumed 20 commitments, including participation in joint projects which constitute the practical part of PESCO. Each of the projects is

⁹ ‘Bratislava: Security and Defence Cooperation in Europe and the Franco-German Plan’, *DefenceMatters.org*, 16 Sept. 2016 <<http://defencematters.org/ru/uncategorized/bratislava-sotrudnichestvo-v-oblasti-bezopasnosti-i-oborony-v-evrope-i-plan-frantsii-i-germanii/173/>>.

conducted by one country, with any of the other 25 states taking part if they are willing. But if a country joins the project it will have to deliver on its obligations and invest in it.

In the thinking of the project's architects, the activation of PESCO enables the participating member states to strengthen cooperation on concrete defence and security projects, in particular, to reduce the number of different weapon systems in Europe and contribute to regional military integration as well as joint training of the officer corps. The project also sought to diminish the scattering of European military spending among a large number of joint projects to reduce duplicate or excessive defence spending.

Permanent Structured Cooperation essentially provides a framework within which 25 participating EU states voluntarily assume legal commitments to jointly develop the defence potential and invest in joint projects or create multinational entities. As distinct from the Common Security and Defence Policy, it provides a legally binding basis for the fulfilment of commitments by the participants, and mechanisms for compliance assessment and vertical coordination of projects.

PESCO, along with Coordinated Annual Review of Defence, and the European Defence Fund is seen in the EU as a comprehensive military package offering additional and mutually reinforcing instruments for assisting member states in civilian missions and military operations, joint development of the defence capabilities and deepening of the EU defence industry.¹⁰

In November 2020 the European Council approved the first PESCO Strategic Review, and the assessment of the first initial phase (2018–2020) of Structured Cooperation and guidelines for its second initial phase (2021–2025). It got under way in December 2019 and continued during 2020 at the PESCO Secretariat level.¹¹ The first

¹⁰ Twort, L., 'EU 'Strategic Autonomy' and the Ambition of PESCO', *The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) website*, 4 Jul. 2018 <<https://rusi.org/commentary/eu-strategic-autonomy-and-ambition-pesco>>.

¹¹ European External Action Service (EEAS), including the EU Military Staff (EUMS), and the European Defence Agency together perform the functions of PESCO secretariat.

wave of 17 projects was launched in December 2017, the second wave (a further 17 projects) in November 2018, and the third wave (13 projects) in November 2019. Forty-seven projects currently afoot are divided into seven blocks: exercises and infrastructure, land units and systems, marine projects, air systems, logistics and communications, cyber-security and space.

France is the absolute leader in terms of PESCO projects participation. It takes part in 32 of the 47 projects ahead of Italy and Spain (25 each), Germany (17) and other countries. France also coordinates 10 projects (one in every three), which is also more than any other country. Some of the projects are militarily significant, for example, the development of land-based missile systems, modernization of Tiger strike helicopters, joint use of military bases, and energy supply for combat operations.¹²

Development of conceptual support is an important part of creating EU military autonomy. Some analysts, based on past experience,¹³ propose periodic reappraisals of European global strategy to adapt it to changes in global and regional security. Besides, some European experts have been pushing for a new document on military autonomy development strategy. In the opinion of Sven Biscop, in addition to the Global Strategy, Europe today needs a Strategic Compass, or a concrete military-political strategy.¹⁴

The development of the EU Strategic Compass was first officially confirmed on 20 November 2020 by Josep Borrell. The aim of the document, already dubbed the first EU military concept, is to determine the general vision of external threats to the EU's security,

¹² About PESCO, <<https://pesco.europa.eu/>>.

¹³ It is worth recalling that the first EU security strategy, *Secure Europe in a Better World*, was adopted in 2003. All attempts to bring it up to date boiled down to the adoption of the European security strategy implementation report in December 2008, although Europe by that time had already gone through the Caucasus crisis of 2008.

¹⁴ Biscop, S., 'From Global Strategy to Strategic Compass: Where Is the EU Heading', Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations, Security Policy Brief, no. 121, Dec. 2019, p. 4 <http://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2019/12/SPB121_FINAL.pdf?type=pdf>.

methods of countering them and planning of joint projects to develop new types of weapons. The EU Strategic Compass is called upon to broaden the EU's capability, if necessary, to carry out military operations without the USA and NATO.¹⁵ On 10 May 2021 the EU Foreign Ministers' Council instructed Borrell to prepare the document by November 2021.

The difficulties and stumbling blocks on the way to EU military integration

Although the Permanent Structured Cooperation project is arguably not just another step, but a breakthrough towards EU strategic autonomy, the consensus in the European strategic community is that this mechanism has yet to come into its own. One fundamental reason for this is the complex interconnection between the Common Security and Defence Policy, the now all but forgotten 1999 Headline Goal of creating a military capability by 2003, the Capability Development Plan and the legally binding PESCO mechanism. The EU's official document About PESCO stressed the interconnection between PESCO and CSDP: PESCO projects reflect both support of capability development and substantial support of the Common Security and Defence Policy operations and missions.¹⁶

At the same time the member states determined an excessively broad area of activity for PESCO. It covers all the armed forces of the member states and not only the capabilities that can theoretically be used in the Common Security and Defence Policy. Thus, for example, PESCO projects of military mobility for large-scale troop movements on EU territory as well as on artillery and missiles are not the type of capabilities that have hitherto been necessary in the framework of CSDP operations.

¹⁵ Borrell: EU should promote strategic autonomy...

¹⁶ About PESCO...

The 1999 Headline Goal thus set the quantitative level of “CSDP ambitions”: the capability to deploy a 60,000-strong army corps plus naval and air forces to conduct expeditionary operations during two months and support them for not less than a year. This goal became outdated over time, such that the 2016 EU Headline Goal added to the CSDP tasks related to crisis response the tasks of territorial defence of Europe. The paradox is, however, that the outdated Headline Goal has not been canceled and the EU Military Staff (EUMS), in revising it, has to stay within its framework.

Officially, the Headline Goal is the basis of most of the EU’s efforts to develop capabilities. EUMS adjusts it by developing illustrative scenarios of capability requirements whereupon the EDA determines the priority areas of military capability development. That, in turn, must be taken into account in the Capability Development Plan. At the same time, as distinct from PESCO, the Capability Development Plan is not legally binding as it does not set specific goals for member states, but only the general goals of the EU as a whole. Its main goal is cooperation in general and not specific requirements to EU member states.¹⁷ Thus, the Capability Development Plan is not in way connected with national defence planning in EU countries, whereas EU members that are also NATO members have individual tasks as part of the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP). This relegates Common Security and Defence Policy to a secondary role.

PESCO is obligated to present an annual National Implementation Plan (NIP) to stimulate the EU states to demonstrate their contribution. The Coordinated Annual Review of Defence (CARD) also plays a useful role because its main task is to assess the degree of multinational cooperation. “Yet ultimately there is a profound mismatch between all of these instruments (PESCO, CARD, NIP) and the fact that the core

¹⁷ Witney, N., ‘Building Europeans’ Capacity to Defend Themselves’, European Council for Foreign Relations (Ecfre.eu), Policy Brief, 25 Jun. 2019, p. 5 <https://ecfr.eu/publication/building_europeans_capacity_to_defend_themselves/>.

of the CSDP is a non-binding, collective CDP aiming to achieve but at the same time circumventing a forgotten Headline Goal.” This was how Sven Biscop explained the connection between these documents.¹⁸

Speaking about the tasks of Permanent Structured Partnership, its projects have yet to form themselves into a single whole because there is a huge distance between cooperation and integration. Indeed, many of the projects are rather ideas than real projects with a concrete budget.¹⁹ But even real projects do not solve the overriding problems of deficit in the European armed forces because the main aim of PESCO participants is often to solve the problem of their national deficits in the military sphere.²⁰ In other words, current projects are not an answer to the issue of underfunding of priority areas. PESCO commitment to the main goal – strategic capacity to project force – implies that the member states should create “package” groups of multinational forces.²¹

Obviously, the intricate relationships between elements and instruments of developing military autonomy reflect the complexities and inconsistencies of this process which can be compared with a landscape an artist paints constantly changing the angle. This cumbersome and in many ways contradictory structure undoubtedly bears the imprint of different approaches of EU member states to ensuring Europe’s security. Internal contradictions in the sphere of security and defence are primarily rooted in the role of national sovereignty of EU member states in the most sensitive sphere of European integration and their fears associated with the prospect of severing the strategic ties with the USA.

¹⁸ Biscop, S., ‘European Defence and PESCO: Don’t Waste the Chance’, *EU IDEA. eu*, 5 May 2020 <<https://euidea.eu/2020/05/05/european-defence-and-pesco-dont-waste-the-chance/>>.

¹⁹ Biscop, S., ‘Strategic Choices for the 2020s’, Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations, Security Policy Brief, no. 122, Feb. 2020, p. 3. <<http://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2020/02/SPB122.pdf?type=pdf>>.

²⁰ Twort L. EU Strategic Autonomy...

²¹ Council of the European Union (2017), Council Decision (CFSP) 2017/2315 of 11 December 2017 Establishing Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and Determining the List of Participating Member States <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32017D2315>>.

Hence the widespread feeling that the European Union is not in a position to pursue a policy of force because its member states are deeply divided on many issues, above all, the very issue of the policy of force. Indeed, if the European Union is to achieve “the full spectrum of the force package” and not only joint arms purchases, there needs to be solidarity of EU member states, without which integration of armed forces cannot be effective.

Solidarity within the Union is also necessary for the introduction of new institutions and new mechanisms ever more vocally advocated by political leaders and experts alike, in particular the need to create a European Union Security Council and introduce voting by a qualified majority on a number of foreign policy issues. The areas of intergovernmental policy of the EU, i.e. diplomacy and defence, are in sharp contrast with the areas of supra-national jurisdiction of the EU. In the former case the member states have to vote unanimously with no legal responsibility for fulfilling their obligations. In the latter case binding decisions are taken by qualified majority, with the defaulting member states liable to face the European Court. Solidarity is also needed to create a powerful industrial base without which the EU’s political autonomy would be robbed of its meaning, and an European army capable of projecting power.²²

It has to be admitted that in spite of the disagreements and different security priorities of individual countries the EU leadership has achieved some concrete results as actually witnessed by the launching of Permanent Structured Cooperation. There is a consensus in the European Union countries on the common transnational threats (illegal migration, international terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, etc.) which can be the basis for building a common strategic culture. At the same time the national security agendas of different EU member states reveal ideological and regional specificities.

One instance of Franco-German differences is the adoption of the European Intervention Initiative (EI2). In September 2017, two months before the relaunch of PESCO, the French President Emmanuel Macron, speaking at the Sorbonne, proposed to create a European rapid

²² Zaki L. Can Europe learn to play power politics...

deployment force. France saw this as part of the PESCO agreements. However, Macron's idea that the EI2 should include not all, but only a select group of European Union states, met with opposition from Germany which wants to see all the EU countries as its members. This of course stymied timely adoption of decisions. In the end it was decided that the European Intervention Initiative would develop outside PESCO, the EU or NATO, which would enable Britain, which was on the way out of the EU, to preserve its military ties with it. As of today, the EI2 includes 14 European countries,²³ two of which – Great Britain and Norway – are not EU members. Some analysts take the view that this format signals a weakening of PESCO's initial ambitions in the context of broader EU initiatives.

Another delicate issue in promoting EU military autonomy is the relations between the EU and NATO. It stems from the lack of clarity in the mutual complementarity thesis. In spite of the adopted documents, the Joint EU–NATO Declaration of 2016 and the common list of proposals on cooperation, the European Union and NATO still do not quite see eye-to-eye on the essence and degree of the EU's military autonomy. In the opinion of EU leaders, the proclaimed mutual complementarity of the EU and NATO need not be an obstacle to the EU strategic autonomy. Meanwhile NATO leaders argue that the EU in its defence policy should not seek to compete with NATO and duplicate its functions because NATO is still the foundation of the EU security.²⁴

In upholding EU military autonomy, the European strategic community stresses that an independent European capability meets NATO's interests since PESCO is the only way for NATO to significantly increase its European capability in key areas. This capability would serve both the European Union and NATO. In other words, as the advocates of EU military autonomy see it, a more independent and influential EU would help the United States to avoid foreign policy

²³ These are Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Great Britain, Sweden, Italy and Romania.

²⁴ TASS, 'Stoltenberg says EU should not compete with NATO and duplicate its functions', 20 Nov. 2018 <<https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/5812490>>.

mistakes which in the final count are harmful for everyone. The most vivid illustration is the USA's counterproductive decision to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

Another uncertainty has to do with the possible impact of the pandemic on the EU's military. Some analysts predict that security and defence will lose some of their priority status and will get less funds. The crisis has revealed serious gaps in national health systems, such that EU governments will concentrate efforts on strengthening their medical and preventative potential and on the recovery of devastated economies. Patrick Bellouard, President of EuroDéfense association, has noted that the head of the European Commission, speaking about the consequences of the pandemic, never mentioned the defence sector. Obviously, this was not a priority item in the compromise budget for 2021–2027 adopted by the European Council. “The European Defence Fund (EDF) budget has been halved compared to the initial proposal of the Commission, the European Peace Facility has been also significantly reduced, to a level which will not incentivise member states to improve their participation in EU military operations. The European space budget (with civilian and military applications) has also been reduced.”²⁵ This has led the advocates of intensified integration in the military sphere to stress that coronavirus should not be a justification for further EDF cuts. On the contrary, it should be used more actively to speed up defence integration and prevent unnecessary budget spending on duplication by PESCO member states.

An important step in the development of Permanent Structured Cooperation was Brussels' May 2021 decision to invite Canada and Norway to take part in the US strategic mobility project to become the first non-member PESCO participants. The participation of these states in the EU military autonomy project would solve three tasks at once: to fill the vacuum formed by Brexit, to tap the experience, military-technical and financial resources of these countries and to strengthen links with NATO.

²⁵ Bellouard, P., ‘The impact of Covid-19 on European defence’, *The European Security and Defence Union*, 31 Dec. 2020 <<https://magazine-the-european.com/2020/12/31/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-european-defence/>>.

The pandemic has exacerbated the tensions and polarisation in international relations, which served as a catalyst of the strategic autonomy process. The pandemic increased tensions in the areas where the radical right seeks to provoke political confrontation, drawing people's attention to the threat of uncontrolled migration, and where the people oppose the elites which use lockdown to limit their freedom. Economic and social crises multiply, the effort to present the coronavirus as a common enemy has not worked and indeed has further increased tensions between the great powers. This means that the world, which was far from perfect before the pandemic, will be still more troubled and unstable in the post-COVID period.

All these factors make strategic autonomy of the European Union even more imperative. Its aim is to make the EU independent in all areas (on military and security issues, as well as on energy, digitization and the economy) so that it could act strategically and single-handedly if necessary. Brussels faces the challenge not only of creating the material and technical base of strategic autonomy – about 50 PESCO projects – and the decision-making mechanism, but also of changing the political culture of the European Union which was created as an antipode big stick policy being the opposite of *Realpolitik* from the inception.

Undoubtedly, the building of strategic autonomy would demand an unprecedented level of solidarity from the EU member states. Military autonomy is a special sphere in terms of the readiness of the EU member states to entrust their territorial defence to supra-national structures. Yet it is precisely in the areas where the EU is facing the most serious problems and where it needs to find common solutions, that there are reserves that will make the Europeans feel more secure and restore their confidence in the European Union. The crisis also gives Brussels a chance to take a long hard look at the European defence strategy and its priorities. In other words, the EU's movement towards strategic autonomy is irreversible if the European Union survives as a unique integration association.

3. THE QUAD AS A SECURITY FACTOR IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

Alexey KUPRIYANOV

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad) is an informal structure that includes the United States of America, India, Japan, and Australia. It has emerged relatively recently, but has already gone through collapse and revival. Now the Quad is expanding and institutionalizing, but it is still unclear how far these processes will go and in which direction they will move further. Some experts believe that the Quad will not be transformed in the foreseeable future into an organization with guaranteed obligations, retaining a loose structure without specific content. Other experts perceive it as the embryo of a future military bloc designed to restrain China's expansion in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, implying that the level of military cooperation within the Quad will constantly grow.

The idea of the Quad could hardly have appeared without the concept of "the Indo-Pacific" being formed. This dialogue is based on the provision that the regions of the Indian and Pacific Oceans are a single security space allowing the creation of a security system aimed at coordinating countermeasures against a supposed revisionist power challenging the interests of all participants.

The Indo-Pacific as a Strategic Space

Strategically, the Indo-Pacific, in a broad sense, is a mega-region that includes the waters, islands and coasts of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The northern sea border of the Indo-Pacific runs across the waters of the Bering Strait; eastern – across the Panama Canal and the Cape Horn area. The southern one is difficult to define – conventionally, it is drawn, as a rule, along the border of the Southern Ocean, although a number of researchers include in the Indo-Pacific that part of the Southern Ocean, which borders the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Finally, the western border

runs along the waters off the Cape of Good Hope and across the Suez Canal. Strategically, a number of territories and water areas are significant in any major conflict on the scale of the entire Indo-Pacific as a whole or in its Western or Eastern part – for example, the Malay Peninsula, the islands and straits of the Malay Barrier, primarily the Straits of Malacca and Sunda, and the seas surrounding them, the Philippines, New Guinea, Guam, and Fiji, the islands of the Bismarck Barrier – that is, the territory of the Coral Triangle will gain strategic importance if a conflict unfolds in the Western Pacific and the Bab al-Mandeb and the Strait of Hormuz if it unfolds in the Western Indian Ocean. A number of territories and water areas acquire strategic importance only when it comes to a conflict with certain nations participating (the Japanese archipelago, the small islands of the Indian Ocean or Micronesia).

The Indo-Pacific includes a number of great powers (the United States of America, China, India, Russia) and about a dozen middle powers claiming the role of a regional sub-hegemon (Japan, Indonesia, Australia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Vietnam, Canada, Pakistan). In addition, a number of powers that are not geographically part of the Indo-Pacific have their own interests in the region (France, the United Kingdom, Germany). The specificity of the region, built around the seas and oceans, allows them, if necessary, to project power in any of the Indo-Pacific sub-regions. Such projection is constrained by the considerations of political expediency. Since the main task of the Quad is to contain China, the geography of the region will be further considered through this lens.

China has a long coastline with a number of well-equipped ports that are centres of economic life (Shanghai, Shenzhen, Ningbo, Qingdao, Guangzhou, Tianjin, Dalian, etc.). One of the main trade arteries of China is the route passing through the South China Sea, the Strait of Malacca, the Indian Ocean and the Suez Canal. Along this route, goods produced in China go to the West, while oil and gas from the fields in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula flow to the East. The safety of this route depends primarily on the countries that have uneasy relations with China: a U.S. military base is located in the Strait of Malacca, and the entire water area of the Indian Ocean is controlled by the United States and Indian Navies.

At the moment, the PLA Navy (PLAN), having nominally the strongest fleet in the region, is limited in manoeuvre by the so-called “island chains,” which, in case of a conflict, prevent the fleet from reaching operational space. The first “island chain” includes Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines; the second one stretches from Japan through Guam to New Guinea; finally, the third – runs from New Zealand through Fiji to Hawaii and further to the Aleutians. In some way, this system of chains repeats the system of island barriers that the US Navy had to overcome during World War II, with the important difference that these barriers are pushed close to the Chinese coast, which makes it impossible for the covert deployment of Chinese Navy squadrons in case of a conflict. In order to gain access to operational space in case of a major conflict, Chinese fleet needs to break through these “chains.”¹ As the most likely scenario for the start of such a conflict, the US experts consider the annexation of Taiwan, which will allow the PLAN to break through the first “island chain,” in which case Guam will be under attack as the main link in the second “chain.”

China’s Intentions as Viewed by Indo-Pacific Countries

The United States and most of its allies and strategic partners in the region see China as a revisionist power seeking to question the US global dominance and the liberal world order. As a result, any Chinese military, political, and economic actions are seen as part of a single strategy designed to gain world hegemony.

There are two possible directions of China’s expansion: to the South Pacific and to the Indian Ocean region. In the South Pacific, the Chinese growing economic presence in Australia, New Zealand, and Oceania, mainly in Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Fiji, and Vanuatu, is perceived as an alarming signal. The greatest concern is caused by the desire of Chinese companies to lease ports in the countries of the region, including Australia, where the Chinese have leased part

¹ Yoshihara, T., ‘China’s Vision of Its Seascape: The First Island Chain and Chinese Seapower’, *Asian Politics & Policy*, 2012, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 293–314.

of the Port Darwin for 99 years. Anti-Chinese politicians note that these ports can be bases for the spread of Chinese “soft power,” and in the event of a conflict, turn into PLAN naval bases.²

There are similar fears with regard to Chinese expansion in the Indian Ocean region; they are most common in India, whose political and military elites are strongly anti-Chinese, viewing China as a potential aggressor. An important role in this is played by the memory of the 1962 Sino-Indian War which is firmly embedded in the national myth; the Chinese are perceived as “traitors” who broke the friendly relations between New Delhi and Beijing, and “stabbed” the India in the back.

In the Indian Ocean, Chinese business is actively developing infrastructure in key ports, notably Chittagong in Bangladesh, Kyaukphyu and Sittwe in Myanmar. Chinese companies have leased the commercial port of Gwadar in Pakistan, which is the end point of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and the commercial port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka. Djibouti also houses the Chinese logistics centre that allows refuelling and minor repairs of frigates and destroyers of escort groups; a longer pier was recently built there, to which large ships (up to 320 m long) can moor. In the Indian experts and politicians’ view, these ports form the so-called “String of Pearls,” a chain of key points designed to stifle Indian maritime trade during a possible conflict.³

These suspicions do not seem quite reasonable. The PLAN has not yet exceeded the limits of defence sufficiency, and China’s naval strategy is still considering the Navy as a means of protecting the coast, rather than a strategic tool that makes it possible to constantly project

² Scott J., Heath M. ‘Australia’s probe of Chinese firm’s port in Darwin signals trouble for Beijing’, *The Japan Times*, 4 May 2021 <<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/05/04/asia-pacific/australia-port-china-trouble/>>.

³ Dabas, M., ‘Here Is All You Should Know About “String of Pearls,” China’s Policy To Encircle India’, *Indian Times*, 23 June 2017 <<https://www.indiatimes.com/news/india/here-is-all-you-should-know-about-string-of-pearls-china-s-policy-to-encircle-india-324315.html>>.

force in distant seas.⁴ It is significant that the Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean region and the South Pacific has been so far limited to escort groups and demonstration of “soft power” through visits made by the hospital ship *Peace Ark* to the ports of coastal states. Chinese companies’ business interests are often exaggerated (for example, in Tonga, Chinese businessmen partially control only retail and the island itself serves as a springboard for further migration to Australia). The ports that can allegedly be used for military purposes are poorly equipped, and most of them, for technical reasons, cannot receive large warships. Sinophobic sentiments are fuelled by unverified news about China’s plans to establish naval bases on the islands of Oceania, the Cocos Islands, where the Chinese tracking post is located, or in the Maldives, where a submarine base is allegedly under construction. Nevertheless, these topics are actively exploited in the Indian and Australian media and are fuelled by comments by Western experts and think tanks that shape the perception of an aggressive China planning expansion for decades to come.

Creating the Quad as a Response to the “Chinese Challenge”

This strategic situation in the Indo-Pacific and perceptions of China’s aggressive intentions became the basis for the formation of the Quad in 2007. It was initiated by the Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe: Japan, which has territorial disputes with China, is the main link of the first and second “island chains” and the main anti-Chinese bulwark of the United States.

The Quad’s predecessor was the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue of the United States, Japan, and Australia, launched in 2002. In 2005, the level of its meetings was raised to ministerial. Initially, the Dialogue did not have an obvious anti-Chinese orientation: while Tokyo and Canberra hoped to ensure, with its help, the implementation

⁴ See Hailong Ju, *China’s Maritime Power and Strategy: History, National Security and Geopolitics* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2012); Coyle, B. D., *The Great Wall at Sea: China’s navy in the Twenty-First Century*. 2nd ed. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2010).

of the strategic security guarantees given by Washington, the United States hoped, within the framework of the Dialogue, to induce Japan and Australia to expand their participation in the anti-terrorist coalition.

However, by 2007 the situation had changed. The actions of the PRC in the South China Sea were regarded by the neighbouring countries as ever more threatening, and there was a need for a format that would ensure the unity of the Asian countries worried about the growing power of China and an ideological justification for the existence of such a format. Initially, Shinzo Abe, seeking to consolidate the Japanese ideological leadership in the region, proposed the concept of the so-called “Asian Arc of Democracy,” which was supposed to isolate China and would include all the maritime powers of East and Southeast Asia, as well as Mongolia and the countries of Central Asia. The idea failed, because the countries of Central Asia and Mongolia refused to participate in the “Arc,” and the Southeast Asian states did not want to oppose themselves to China.⁵ However, Australia as well as India have shown interest in Shinzo Abe’s concepts. In August 2007 the Japanese Prime Minister delivered his famous speech on the “Confluence of the Two Seas” in the Indian Parliament.

The Quad-1 Configuration

The interest in containing China provided the foundation for the Quad. While its main ideologist was Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the idea of forming an informal security dialogue was supported by US Vice President Dick Cheney, Australian Prime Minister John Howard, and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Each party pursued his own interests.

India, led by Manmohan Singh, enjoyed a period of rapid economic growth, with the GDP reaching nearly 10% a year. There was an illusion that this growth would continue and India would sooner or

⁵ Bhattacharya, P., ‘Has Abe’s Arc of Democracy Arrived in Asia?’, *The Daily Star*, 24 Sep. 2020 <<https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/news/has-abes-arc-democracy-arrived-asia-1966353>>.

later overtake China. This has fuelled the development of the idea of regional hegemony among the traditionally Sinophobic Indian elites, and increased fears of a China that could challenge this hegemony. It is no coincidence that the Indo-Pacific concept was put forward in the same year, designed to justify this hegemony: India thereby directly demonstrated that it was not satisfied with its role in the outskirts of the Asia-Pacific and intends to become one of the leaders along with China and ASEAN. According to Manmohan Singh, India's status upgrade could only be achieved in partnership with the United States. As a result, Singh's government pursued a pro-American policy, which caused discontent even in the ranks of the Indian National Congress. Australian Prime Minister John Howard pursued a consistent anti-Chinese and pro-American policy, viewing the growth of Chinese influence in the region as a direct threat to Australian interests. The Howard Doctrine required Australia strengthen its "special relationship" with the United States; special attention was paid to the activities within the framework of ANZUS,⁶ where Canberra was to assume the role of the "deputy" to Washington, D.C. in the South Pacific.⁷ Japan tried to preserve the leading role in the Asia-Pacific and make sure the US would comply with security guarantees. Finally, after the attempt to persuade China to create G 2 had failed, in the United States the dissatisfaction with the policy of appeasing China grew. The political elites gradually came to the idea of containment, and a bipartisan consensus was formed on this issue. This consensus was embodied in Barack Obama's election speech in 2008, in which he declared the need to create a "concert of democracies" in order to confront Russia and China. A number of

⁶ ANZUS is a political-military bloc of Australia, New Zealand and the United States created in 1952.

⁷ Leaver, R., 'The meanings, origins and implications of "the Howard Doctrine"', *The Pacific Review*, 2001, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 15–34.

American politicians went even further: for example, Rudolph Giuliani called for expanding NATO in the Pacific and including all the Asian allies of the United States in it.⁸

The informal bloc turned out to be very successful in its configuration, uniting key players in the mega-region fearing Chinese expansion: Australia as the leader of the South Pacific, India as a state claiming control over the Indian Ocean region, Japan as the main link of the alliance and the key country of the “island chains,” and the United States as a power interested in containing China in order to maintain its hegemony. In addition, the Quad became an ideological construct supposed to demonstrate unity of the largest democracies, intending to contain an authoritarian and expansionist China. The symbol of this unity was the unprecedented scale of the ninth naval exercise *Malabar 2007*, in which the Singapore Navy took part in addition to the fleets of the Quad countries. The formalization of the new informal alliance provoked a tough reaction from China: in response, the PRC held a protest and also strengthened cooperation in the field of defence with Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.

The following year, the Quad broke up. Kevin Rudd, the new Australian Prime Minister, was friendlier towards China and convinced of the need to cooperate with Beijing in order to strengthen regional security and develop the Australian economy.⁹ In Japan, the Shinzo Abe government resigned due to a corruption scandal, and Yasuo Fukuda, also friendlier towards China, became Prime Minister and leader of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. Finally, in India, Manmohan

⁸ Denmark, A., and Patel, N. (eds.), *China's Arrival: A Strategic Framework for a Global Relationship*. Center for a New American Security. Sep. 2009 <https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/CNAS+China's+Arrival_Final+Report-3-min.pdf>.

⁹ Jennings, P., ‘Time to end China’s lease on the Port of Darwin’, *The Strategist, ASPI*, 4 May 2021 <<https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/time-to-end-chinas-lease-on-the-port-of-darwin/>>.

Singh's pro-American course was increasingly criticized.¹⁰ As a result, when visiting China in January 2008, Manmohan Singh declared that relations with Beijing were a priority for New Delhi.

The collapse of the Quad did not mean, however, a cut-off of bilateral cooperation among its former members. While building ties with China, Kevin Rudd and his successor, Julia Gillard, at the same time stepped up military relations with the United States. The rapprochement between New Delhi and Washington, D.C. continued; Japan remained a key US ally in East Asia. In the absence of a quadripartite format, the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue continued to function, consisting of the United States, Japan, and Australia, although the absence of an anti-Chinese orientation in its activities was emphasized.¹¹

Quad-2 and the Quad Plus

In 2017 the Quad was revived due to both – China becoming more active in the international arena having launched the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013 and major internal political changes in all the participating states. In the United States, Donald Trump won the election and immediately set out to resolutely contain China. Barack Obama's relatively soft policy, which avoided statements of direct confrontation, was replaced by harsh rhetoric and a desire to maximize the use of force to contain Chinese expansion. The process of withdrawing American business from China was accelerated, rise of the naval power and support for anti-Chinese forces in the region were announced. In Japan, Shinzo Abe, the creator of the first Quad and an ardent supporter of the Indo-Pacific, who sees the Quad as an effective means of containing the PRC, returned to power. An increase in the number of border incidents around the Senkaku Islands since 2013, incursions of Chinese ships and aircraft into the space Japan considers to be its own, contributed to returning to the current foreign policy agenda of the idea of an informal alliance,

¹⁰ Kaura, V., 'Quad's Malabar Moment', *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*, 2020, vol. 33, no. 1/2, p. 2.

¹¹ Medcalf, R., Tow, W.T., Simon, S.W. et al. *Assessing the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue*. NBR Special Report no. 16, 1 Dec. 2008.

which did not involve a rejection in society. In Australia, Malcolm Turnbull, having repeatedly criticized Beijing's foreign policy, became Prime Minister. Finally, in India, Narendra Modi replaced Manmohan Singh in 2014. As a strong leader, enjoying the support of the majority of voters, in the first year of his premiership, Narendra Modi tried to pursue a fairly calm and restrained policy, improving relations with India's traditional neighbours, including China. However, soon enough, India's foreign policy returned to its usual course, and the relations with Pakistan and its ally China began to deteriorate.

As a result, at the ASEAN summit in Manila in 2017, M. Turnbull, S. Abe, N. Modi and D. Trump agreed to recreate the Quad, dubbed the "reformed Quad" or the "Quad 2.0." It should be noted that joining this format did not mean, in the eyes of its participants, a break in relations with China: for example, in 2018 Malcolm Turnbull announced the beginning of a "reset" in relations between Australia and the PRC, which should be based on mutual respect and understanding.¹² In 2019 Narendra Modi visited Wuhan and had a meeting with Xi Jinping, proclaiming the beginning of the "Wuhan spirit" in bilateral relations, which was consolidated during Xi Jinping's visit to India in 2020.

These visits temporarily halted the institutionalization of the Quad. For example, the naval exercises *Malabar* were conducted until 2020 in the trilateral format: India, Japan, and the United States, with no invitation to Australia to take part. However, the border confrontation between India and China in the spring and summer of 2020 led New Delhi, as well as Canberra, to a more active cooperation within the Quad. In 2020 the Australian Navy took part in the *Malabar* exercises for the first time since 2007, which again turned them into Quad manoeuvres.

The COVID-19 pandemic that began at the end of 2019 played a certain role in the further institutionalization of the Quad. At the Quad meeting in March 2020, one of the issues on the agenda was coordinating

¹² Hood, L., 'Turnbull pushes the "reset" button with China, but will it be enough?', *The Conversation*, 13 Aug. 2018 <<https://theconversation.com/turnbull-pushes-the-reset-button-with-china-but-will-it-be-enough-101383>>.

efforts to counter the pandemic, in particular, providing assistance to the Dialogue member countries and allied powers which would help to improve the Quad's image in the eyes of the population and elites of the region with the help of "soft power."¹³

Apparently, the prospect of expanding the scope of the Quad's activities and the activation of new formats of interaction prompted the United States to put forward a proposal to expand the format of the Quad itself. In May 2020, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the launch of a new initiative, dubbed the Quad Plus, which, in addition to the existing four member states, should include New Zealand, South Korea, and Vietnam.¹⁴ The choice of partner countries could be considered a landmark – although they all had certain concerns about the growth of China's power and the expansion of its sphere of influence, they took a noticeably softer position with respect to China than the Quad members (in particular, New Zealand recently criticized the harsh anti-Chinese measures of Australia). At this stage, it is unacceptable for them to participate in a format of forceful containment of China, however, the Quad members hope, they will be able to interact with the Quad on non-military issues and change their position in the future.

Israel and Brazil are also named as potential participants in the Quad Plus format. If they join, the format will drastically expand beyond the region's borders, it will cease to be Indo-Pacific and partially lose its anti-Chinese orientation. But, apparently, this proposal was caused by Donald Trump's personal sympathies for Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and is unlikely to be implemented.

Now the Biden administration is faced with the problem of the Quad future. On the one hand, its gradual expansion and transition from direct to indirect containment with the help of allied or sympathetic

¹³ Sharma, M. S., 'The Quad might have finally found a mission amid Covid-19 pandemic', *Business Standard*, 19 Mar. 2021 <https://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/the-quad-might-have-finally-found-a-mission-amid-covid-19-pandemic-121031901342_1.html>.

¹⁴ Panda, J., *India and the "Quad Plus" Dialogue*, RUSI, 12 June 2020 <<https://rusi.org/commentary/india-strategic-quad>>.

countries is quite consistent with the Quad-1 strategy as it was conceived by Shinzo Abe and the Barack Obama administration. On the other hand, small and medium-sized countries in the region still do not seek confrontation with China, preferring to manoeuvre between the PRC and its rivals and take advantage of neutrality.

Quad Prospects

At the moment, the Quad's prospects look rather hazy. In general, five possible scenarios for its evolution can be considered; which of them will be implemented depends on the development of relations between China and the members of the Quad and other countries of the region, including Russia.

Scenario One: Asian NATO

The term "Asian NATO" itself appeared relatively recently. It was coined by Indian and U.S. journalists, who used the loud name to designate a new stage of rapprochement between the countries of the Quad, whose naval forces took part in the *Malabar 2020* exercise.¹⁵ The speech by Mike Pompeo during the Quad meeting following the exercise, when he put forward an initiative on further rapprochement of the Quad based on common goals in the field of geopolitics and security, added fuel to the fire, and the term "Asian NATO" quickly came into wide use.

Mike Pompeo's speech sparked protests from China, whose diplomats described Mike Pompeo's words as a manifestation of the "Cold War mentality" and an attempt, through the creation of a "mini-NATO"¹⁶ to "heat up confrontation between various groups and blocs,

¹⁵ Gill, P., 'Malabar Exercise kicks off today with the QUAD countries reuniting after over a decade', *Business Insider India*, 3 Nov. 2020 <<https://www.businessinsider.in/defense/news/malabar-exercise-kicks-off-today-with-the-quad-countries-reuniting-after-over-a-decade/articleshow/79018677.cms>>.

¹⁶ Gale, A., Roy, R., 'U.S., Japan, India and Australia Strengthen Ties to Counter China', *The Wall Street Journal*, 6 Oct. 2020 <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-japan-india-and-australia-strengthen-ties-to-counter-china-11601986397>>.

provoking geopolitical rivalry” in order to help maintain the hegemony of the United States. It is significant that the Chinese media quickly took up the term proposed by their Indian and US colleagues and regularly use it in relation to the Quad, trying to demonstrate the aggressiveness of this organization and the leading role played by the United States there.

On the whole, this initiative is perceived with a certain fear by the small and medium-sized countries of the Indo-Pacific, striving to avoid the formation of military blocs in the region and the beginning of confrontation between them,¹⁷ and positively by Japan and the current Australian leadership, which are building up military ties with the United States and with each other. The main obstacle to the formation of an “Asian NATO” remains India, which is vehemently against taking on commitments that bind its freedom of action in external policy affairs and that could hinder the realization of its long-term interests, including the normalization of relations with China.

There are speculations about the possibility of forming an “Asian NATO” with the participation of European states that are part of the real NATO, primarily with the United Kingdom participating. The intensification of French and German presence in the region (the latter announced a plan to conduct joint patrols with the Australian Navy¹⁸) and the growing interest of such other members of the Alliance in the Indo-Pacific as the Netherlands, Denmark, and Italy, may in the future lead to the formation of a united contour of containment China “from Europe to Japan”, but the formalization of this contour will inevitably face opposition from India and the possible desire of European players to maintain independence. In any case, the “Asian

¹⁷ Mitra, D., ‘Sri Lanka Worried About Indian Ocean’s Securitisation, Impact of Quad Military Alliance’, *The Wire*, 20 Oct. 2020 <<https://thewire.in/diplomacy/sri-lanka-worried-about-indian-oceans-securitisation-impact-of-quad-military-alliance/>>.

¹⁸ Kobierski, L., *Malabar Exercise, “Asian NATO” and Beijing’s Response*, Warsaw Institute, 6 Nov. 2020 <<https://warsawinstitute.org/malabar-exercise-asian-nato-beijings-response/>>.

NATO” format, with or without European powers participating, is unlikely to be received with enthusiasm by Asian countries, including India, one of the pillars of the Quad.

Scenario Two: Dialogue without Commitments

This format implies the termination of further institutionalization in the direction of cooperation in the field of security and freezing it in its current state. This option is suggested by the dynamics of the behaviour of the Indian political elites using India’s membership in the Quad in order to influence the PRC’s policy towards India. For example, when relations between New Delhi and Beijing began to improve in 2008, India actually blocked the further institutionalization of the Quad, and after the border conflict in May–June 2020, accelerated it. In general, the format of the informal dialogue is perceived by the Indians as rather comfortable; they avoid taking on additional obligations, preferring non-binding agreements.

Scenario Three: Expanding the Format

According to this scenario, the interaction in the field of security between the member states will remain at the same level or even decrease, while the interaction in other areas will expand – cooperation in combating the pandemic, preventing and eliminating the consequences of natural disasters, and providing humanitarian assistance, if necessary. In the future, it is even possible to transform the Quad into a non-military alliance, entirely focused on humanitarian actions. This format, in principle, suits all participants, although it is most preferable for India, Australia, Japan, and prospective members of the Quad Plus. For the United States, it is more of a palliative, because it does not contribute to the solution of the main task – the involvement of the countries of the region in countering China.

Scenario Four: The Formation of a Unified Regional Security System

This option is purely speculative at this moment. The formation of an effective security system in the Indo-Pacific based on the Quad is only possible with the participation of all interested players, including China and Russia. This will lead to a complete reformatting of the Quad, which is hardly possible in the near future.

Scenario Five: the Quad Collapse

An option that Beijing sees as inevitable: the collapse of the Quad under the weight of the contradictions between the participating states. Each of the dialogue participants pursues its own goals. While the United States is seeking to turn the Quad into a permanent instrument of containing the PRC and Japan is following this policy, India is trying to maintain independence within this format, considering an agreement with China on the division of spheres of influence as a possible option. Australia's foreign policy is too dependent on internal political processes and the state of the country's economy. This scenario also seems to be quite probable, especially since there is already an example of the collapse of Quad-1; but the same example demonstrates that, if necessary, the dialogue can be quickly recreated in the same format, turning into Quad-3.

* * *

Summing up, it can be said that the future of the regional security structure in a broad sense directly depends on how the Quad will develop. This, in turn, depends on both the actions of China (a tougher course and an increase in pressure on India, Japan, and Australia are more likely to lead to a movement towards "Asian NATO," an improvement in the relations can slow down the formalization of the Dialogue or contribute to its transformation into a fully humanitarian structure) and on internal political processes in the Quad member states and possible Quad Plus states. In general, the prerequisites for the Quad's existence

are China's active foreign policy in the region and its military build-up, which frightens major regional players, and the United States' willingness to support these players in their confrontation with China. As long as both of these conditions persist, the Quad will continue; if one of them disappears (the settlement of the Sino-Indian and Sino-Australian disputes, guarantees of the absence of Chinese expansion into the Indian Ocean and South Pacific, or the conclusion of a US – China agreement like G 2), Quad will also disappear.

The current situation opens a window of opportunity for Russia. The Quad, as a structure, is not spearheaded against Russia, and a wider range of reactions is possible for Moscow than for Beijing, up to the prospects of cooperation with the Quad countries in terms of humanitarian actions. The member of the Quad and the member of Quad Plus (India and Vietnam, respectively) are strategic partners of Russia, which gives it additional leverage to influence the activities of the Dialogue. At the same time, Moscow traditionally opposes any regional military blocs and maintains good relations with China. This allows it, while remaining committed to the declared principles, to act as a leader in the formation of a region-wide inclusive security system, thereby strengthening its position in the Indo-Pacific, or, at least, to contribute to the transformation of the Quad from an anti-Chinese format into a general humanitarian one.

4. INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION SECURITY IN THE UN AGENDA

Natalia ROMASHKINA

In recent decades, information and communication technologies (ICT)¹ have become a catalyst in all spheres of human life. The all-encompassing importance of new technologies in the modern world was most acutely outlined by the 2019–2021 coronavirus pandemic, when entire industries, economics, science and education switched to online work. For the first time in a new environment, sessions and intersessional consultations at the United Nations were held in a virtual format.

All states recognize the unprecedented benefits of ICT, but the avalanche-like growth of threats in this area has led to a deep awareness of the fact that unregulated use of ICT can pose a serious threat to international security, peace and stability. The problems of international information security (IIS)² and cybersecurity became an integral part of global international security, and information and communication technologies began to have a significant impact on it. Debates on these topics were held in all international security organizations, in national and interstate institutions, at meetings of state leaders in recent years. An effective regulatory system in the digital environment is needed to coordinate actions of leading actors together with international and domestic mechanisms, including the UN as the main one.

¹ Information and communication technologies (ICT) are all processes of interaction with information carried out by various computer and communication means.

² International information security (IIS) is the state of the global information space which excludes the possibility of violating the rights of the individual, society, and the state in the information sphere, as well as destructive and illegal impact on the elements of national critical information infrastructure.

The reports adopted by consensus that sum up the results of two years of work became important results in the process of providing IIS under hard pandemic circumstances. They included the report from March 12, 2021,³ of the UN Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) initiated by Russia, on developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security, and the report from May 28, 2021,⁴ of UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) initiated by the US, in the field of ICT.

The report of the OEWG can be considered as the success of the work of the Group, which has opened a new format for negotiations on the security in the digital space that was initiated by Russia in 2018. The activities of the second convocation of OEWG on security issues related to the ICTs and their use will continue in 2021–2025. The demand for the Russian idea of consolidation of such a mechanism in the UN structure in the long term was confirmed by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 75/240, adopted on December 31, 2020.⁵

In the GGE Report, which was the result of a compromise, the Russian delegation managed to achieve a reflection of the provisions fundamental for Russia, including the most critical problems such as attribution of incidents in the ICT space, international legal regulation of this area, the necessity of further work on the rules of the responsible behavior of states with the UN assistance, and the possibility of developing legally binding norms.

Thus, the discussion of the ICT development problems within the framework of the UNGA First Committee work continues and develops, and the issues of international information security have

³ UN General Assembly, ‘Open-ended working group on developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security’, Final Substantive Report, A/AC.290/2021/CRP.2, 10 Mar. 2021 <<https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Final-report-A-AC.290-2021-CRP.2.pdf>>.

⁴ ‘Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Advancing responsible State behavior in cyberspace in the context of international security’, 28 May 2021 <<https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/final-report-2019-2021-gge-1-advance-copy.pdf>>.

⁵ UN General Assembly Resolution 75/240, ‘Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security’, A/75/240, 4 Jan. 2021 <<https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/75/240>>.

become a constant topic of its agenda. At the same time, various UN bodies examine other issues related to the security and regulation of information and communication technologies, such as digital cooperation, Internet governance, sustainable development and human rights in relation to the development of ICT (including the protection of commercial and personal data, freedom of opinion and information), as well as cybercrime and cyberterrorism.

There are many reasons why it is important to achieve positive results from this discussion.

First, the analysis and forecast of threats from the harmful use of ICT by both states and non-state actors proves the possibility of the influence of the latest technologies on the likelihood of real armed conflicts, their escalation, and consequently a large-scale war.

Therefore it is necessary to search for additional mechanisms of global governance in this area. In the absence of agreement between states, the number and scale of such threats will increase. At the same time, the discussion within the framework of the UNGA First Committee allows to develop trust-building measures along with principles and norms of responsible state behavior in the digital space that can reduce the risk of conflicts and their escalation. Such activities enable focusing on the coordination and support of ICT security capacity building and avoiding superiority of one or several states over most others in the ICT space (the “digital gap”).

Second, the analysis of incidents of ICT attacks on critical public infrastructure proves that their number is growing exponentially from year to year. Cyberattacks on resources and objects critical for country’s vital activity can lead to a negative and even catastrophic impact on security systems, health care, public administration, the military sector and the economic potential of the state that underlines necessity for the discussion of the responsible state behavior in the information sphere within UNGA First Committee.

Third, despite the development of national and regional instruments for regulation of ICT space activities, not a single country in the world, up to date, is able to ensure its full protection against ICT threats with no state borders and can solve the related problems alone. Therefore, discussion at the UN level is of vital importance.

The emphasis on coordination between states and various stakeholders, which is now covered in many national and regional cyber and information security strategies, is also reflected in the processes happening within the framework of the UNGA First Committee. At the same time, the results of the work at the global level influence national and regional norms and principles, which can also contribute to the promotion of peace and stability.

To the Origins of the Problem of Ensuring International Information Security at the UN

International information security has been discussed at the UN for over 20 years. Russia became the initiator of this process. In 1998, with the long-term goal of building an international legal regime for the prohibition of information weapons, Russia invited the United States to sign a statement at the presidential level calling for the UN agreement of the global community on the ICT military use, the need to achieve a common understanding of “information weapon” and “information war” as well as the study of digital technologies applications for the development of new types of weapons. The proposal was not accepted entirely, but at the first time, the IIS problem was identified at a high international level.⁶

On September 23, 1998, Russia sent a special message on the problem of international information security to the UN Secretary General. The document contained proposals for all UN member states to inform the Secretary General about their position on the problems of IIS, as well as on the meaningfulness of creating an international legal regime to prohibit the development of dangerous types of information weapons. Later, in December 1998, the UN General Assembly adopted the Resolution 53/70 “Developments in the field of information and

⁶ ‘Joint Statement on common security challenges at the turn of the 21st century’, 2 Sep 1998 <http://www.businesspravo.ru/Docum/DocumShow_DocumID_62942.html>.

telecommunications in the context of international security.”⁷ However, it did not mention several important issues proposed by Russia in the draft previously sent to the UN Secretary General. Specifically, there was no indication of the danger of ICT use for military-political purposes along with the need to prohibit such means. There were no definitions of the “information weapon” and “information war”, instead it was proposed to define the concepts of “unauthorized interference” and “misuse of information and telecommunication systems and information resources”. Finally, there comparability of the weapon of mass destruction (WMD) and information weapon was not emphasized, although the experience of the development of WMD control policy could become a basis for the development of the similar regime for the information weapon.

The greatest criticism of the initial resolution draft, proposed by Russia, was expressed by representatives of the United States and Great Britain that ultimately led to the adoption of the document with significant amendments. Nevertheless, since 1999 the UN Secretary General has been presenting a report with the positions of states on this issue to the UN General Assembly on a regular basis.

Thus, Resolution 53/70 initiated by Russia played a fundamental role in the beginning of development of new international regime, including rules, norms and procedures, ensuring the security of the global information environment, ICTs and their use. Up to date one cannot claim that such a regime has already been created. Rather, it is only the first stage of a long process.

Since 1998 Russia has been annually submitting for consideration to the UN General Assembly resolutions entitled “Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security,” which are co-authored with the growing number of states. These resolutions were largely adopted by the UN General Assembly by consensus. However, between 2005 and 2008 the United States voted against them. This could be explained by significant

⁷ UN General Assembly Resolution 53/70, ‘Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security’, A/RES/53/70, 4 Jan. 1999 <https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/53/70&Lang=E>.

Table 1. Resolutions of the UN General Assembly «Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security», contributed by Russia in 1998–2020

Document Number	Date	Voting results
A/RES/53/70	04.12.1998	Adopted without vote
A/RES/54/49	01.12.1999	
A/RES/55/28	20.11.2000	
A/RES/56/19	29.11.2001	
A/RES/57/53	22.11.2002	
A/RES/58/32	08.12.2003	
A/RES/59/61	03.12.2004	
A/RES/60/45	08.12.2005	For – 177, against – 1 (USA), abstained – 0
A/RES/61/54	06.12.2006	For – 176, against – 1 (USA), abstained – 0
A/RES/62/17	05.12.2007	For – 179, against – 1 (USA), abstained – 0
A/RES/63/37	02.12.2008	For – 178, against – 1 (USA), abstained – 0
A/RES/64/25	02.12.2009	Adopted without vote
A/RES/65/41	08.12.2010	
A/RES/66/24	02.12.2011	
A/RES/67/27	03.12.2012	
A/RES/68/243	27.12.2013	
A/RES/69/28	02.12.2014	
A/RES/70/237	23.12.2015	
A/RES/71/28	05.12.2016	For – 181, against – 0, abstained – 1 (Ukraine)
A/RES/73/27	05.12.2018	For – 119, against – 45 (Australia, Austria, Albania, Andorra, Belgium, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Hungary, Germany, Greece, Georgia, Denmark, Israel, Ireland, Iceland, Spain, Italy, Canada, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Great Britain, USA, Ukraine, Finland, France, Croatia, Montenegro, Czech Republic, Sweden, Estonia, Japan), abstained – 14
A/RES/74/29	12.12.2019	For – 129, against – 6 (Georgia, Israel, Canada, UK, USA, Ukraine), abstained – 45
A/RES/75/240	31.12.2020	

Source: 53rd – 74th session of the UN General Assembly. Resolutions. First Committee. Disarmament and international security issues <<https://www.un.org/ru/ga/>>.

disagreements between the US and Russia about issues related to the conceptual apparatus and the need to discuss the use of ICT for military-political purposes in the UNGA First Committee (which Russia insisted on). In 2016, the only country that insisted on voting on this resolution was Ukraine which finally did not vote “against,” but “abstained” instead. The voting in 2018–2019, when 45 and 6 US allies and partners, respectively, voted against the proposed draft resolutions, were the result of a new so-called “post-crisis stage” in the discussion of the IIS in the UN⁸ (see Table 1).

Parallel Format of International Information Security Discussion at the UN

The tasks that Russia set back in 1998 remain not fully resolved and become more and more acute every year. The search for the corresponding solutions resulted in the formation of the first UN Group of Governmental ICT Experts (GGE) in 2004, which included representatives of fifteen countries.⁹ Russia, carrying out work in this group, proposed to assign responsibility to states for any activities carried out by them or from territories under their jurisdiction in the ICT space. Due to contradictions between the supporters of the positions of Russia and the United States, the draft report, which was prepared after three meetings of the GGE, was not adopted. The first conflict issue was related to threats from the ICT use for military-political purposes. The importance of the need to account for them and develop an appropriate international document within the framework of the UNGA First Committee was pointed out by Belarus, Brazil, China, Malaysia, Russia, South Africa, and South Korea. At the same time, Great Britain, Germany, the United States and France argued that only the criminal and terrorist components of

⁸ UN General Assembly Resolution 73/505, ‘Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security’, A/RES/73/505, 19 Nov. 2018 <<https://undocs.org/ru/A/73/505>>.

⁹ UN General Assembly Resolution 58/32, ‘Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security’, A/RES/58/32, 8 Dec. 2003 <<https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/58/32>>.

the IIS should be discussed in the UN. The second controversial issue was about the need to study the problems of information content in the GGE. The United States, in contrast to Russia, argued that it was enough to take into account only technical issues, i.e. cybersecurity. A compromise on these two issues has not yet been reached.

The work of the second GGE, chaired by Russia, resulted in consensus. The United States recognized the need to develop international norms and mechanisms for control over ICT, which was associated with a change of the US position after the election of a new President Barack Obama. In 2010, the Group issued a report that acknowledged the existence of a serious new threat associated with the deliberate development of ICTs for intelligence and political-military confrontation by states, with the complexity of attribution of the source of influence, as well as the risk of misperception of the response.¹⁰ The position of the US government, which was presented in the report of the UN Secretary General in 2011 and indicated new problems associated with the transition of various forms of state conflicts into cyberspace, became an additional important result of the GGE work.¹¹ Because of the achieved consensus, Russia was able to consolidate the most significant aspects of IIS within the framework of UN resolutions.

The report of the third convocation of GGE, adopted by consensus in 2013,¹² consolidated the principle of responsibility of states for malicious activities in the digital space carried out from their territory, which was initially proposed by Russia back in 2003. The report

¹⁰ UN General Assembly, 'Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security', Note by the Secretary-General, A/65/201, 30 July 2010 <https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/65/201&Lang=E>.

¹¹ UN General Assembly, 'Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security', Report of the Secretary-General, A/66/152, 15 July 2011 <https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/66/152&Lang=E>.

¹² UN General Assembly, 'Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security', Note by the Secretary-General, A/68/98*, 24 June 2013 <https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/98&Lang=E>.

advised countries to accept voluntary measures of transparency and trust building, and to expand cooperation not only with developed, but with developing countries. However, all the recommendations applied only to the resolution of the IIS problem within existing norms of international law. At that time, it was not possible to reach a compromise on the issue raised by Russia on the need for additional legal norms related to the ICT space.

The fourth convocation of GGE began to work in 2014¹³ and included representatives from 20 countries. Its Final Report was revolutionary in many ways.¹⁴ For the first time, the document noted an increase in the likelihood of the ICT use in future interstate conflicts and indicated incidents related to real ICT attacks on critical public infrastructure. The latter statement was probably the result of a discussion of multipurpose cyberattacks on Iran's nuclear facilities in 2010–2012, which, according to IT specialists from many developed countries, were most likely supported by government agencies. The most important provision on the need not to legalize and regulate conflicts in the ICT space, as suggested by the United States and its partners, but to prevent such conflicts, proposed by Russia, was supported by the positions of 20 countries. One of the crucial results achieved in this direction is the position of the report, which proposes to take into account the 13-point Code of Conduct in the Process of Ensuring IIS, developed by the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) member states back in 2011 and improved in 2015.¹⁵ This "Code of Conduct" can actually be considered as the first practical step towards creating a control regime over information attacks and information weapons.

¹³ UN General Assembly Resolution 68/243, 'Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security', A/RES/68/243, 9 Jan. 2014 <<https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/68/243>>.

¹⁴ UN General Assembly, 'Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security', Note by the Secretary-General, A/70/174, 22 July 2015 <https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/174&Lang=E>.

¹⁵ UN General Assembly, 'Letter dated 9 January 2015 from the Permanent Representatives of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General', A/69/723, 13 Jan. 2015 <<https://undocs.org/en/A/69/723>>.

The fifth convocation of information security GGE, which began its work in 2016, included representatives of 25 countries. Russia and its partners planned that the “Code of Rules” would be included in the next UN General Assembly Resolution on IIS, and therefore would be integrated into international soft law. The hope to discuss IIS issues during the meeting of the Presidents of Russia and the United States in 2017 and to approve the “Rules of Conduct” appeared after Donald Trump became a president of the United States. The representatives of the countries even considered the possibility of signing a bilateral agreement to prevent incidents in the information space similar to the corresponding policies on incidents at sea and in the air. However, after Russia was accused of cyberinterference in the US presidential elections these expectations were not met.

2017 became a crisis year in the work of the UN Group of Governmental Experts on international information security. It was assumed that the final report would be adopted at the last meeting of the fifth convocation of GGE, but for the first time since 2004 this did not happen. Representatives of Russia, other BRICS countries, the CIS, and a number of developing countries did not support the draft report. One of the main reasons for this failure was the significant contradictions between Russia and the United States on the issue of the self-defense right in response to cyberattacks. Thus, NATO decided to apply Article 5 of its Charter, being the right to respond with all available means, including military ones, after a cyberattack on one of the members of the Alliance.¹⁶ In addition, in May 2019, the US partner Israel launched an air strike on the building in the Gaza Strip from which, according to the Israeli armed forces, a cyberattack was carried out to damage the quality of life of its citizens.¹⁷ Thus, not a hypothetical but real use of military force not even in response, but in order to prevent cyberattacks is already at stake.

¹⁶ ‘The North Atlantic Treaty’, Washington, D.C., 4 Apr. 1949 <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm>.

¹⁷ Doffman, Z., ‘Israel Responds to Cyber Attack with Air Strike on Cyber Attackers in World First’, *Forbes*, 6 May 2019 <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/zakdoffman/2019/05/06/israeli-military-strikes-and-destroys-hamas-cyber-hq-in-world-first/#34426905afb5>>.

Russia believes that the force use is not a legitimate response to cyberattacks without the approval of the UN Security Council and argues that the sources of cyberthreats should not be declared by states without proof. Some countries, such as Cuba, believe that a cyberattack is not equivalent to an armed attack, and therefore the right to self-defend should not be applied in such cases. The self-defense right against non-state actors is another gray zone of this discussion.

At the end of 2018, the UNGA First Committee established two parallel discussions on international information security processes, held within the UN Open-ended Working Group (OEWG),¹⁸ and in UN GGE.¹⁹

Taking into account the principles of equitable geographical distribution, regional diversity and participation in the previous GGE, the 6th convocation group, formed at the suggestion of the United States, included 25 countries. GGE meetings are held in a closed format and do not involve any other government or non-government observers.

The resolution on the OEWG, which was prepared on the Russian initiative and invited all countries to work on, allowed to make changes and add new paragraphs to the existing “Rules of Conduct,” to organize regular discussions with experts from various fields as well as consider the problems of malicious information content. With the mandate to prepare a consensus report at the end of 2020 at the 75th UNGA based on the results of four sessions and two intersessional consultations, the OEWG was uniquely positioned to find common ground.²⁰ In the Preliminary Draft Report of the OEWG, released in March 2020, it was noted that the IIS problem covers many areas and disciplines, and

¹⁸ UN General Assembly Resolution, ‘Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security’, A/RES/73/27, 11 Dec. 2018 <https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/73/27&Lang=E>.

¹⁹ UN General Assembly Resolution, ‘Advancing responsible State behavior in cyberspace in the context of international security’, A/RES/73/266, 2 Jan. 2019 <https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/73/266&Lang=E>.

²⁰ UN Office for Disarmament, ‘Initial “Pre-draft” of the Report of the OEWG on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security’, March 2020 <<https://unoda-web.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/200311-Pre-Draft-OEWG-ICT.pdf>>.

therefore one should use the results of the discussion with representatives of intergovernmental and regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, business and science. Based on the analysis of ICT-related threats to international security and stability, the OEWG confirmed the growing trends of the ICT use for military-political purposes, which may impede the benefits of new technologies. In addition, the group recognized the individual and common responsibility of states in the digital sphere, the need to reduce inequalities in countries' access to ICTs, and emphasized the importance of reducing the "gender digital gap" in IIS decision-making processes.

Both groups, recognizing the importance of the participation of business and scientific community and NGOs, discussed the state code of conduct, international mechanisms for combating ICT threats and the application of international law to the digital environment. Although even during the first meeting of the OEWG on June 3–4, 2019, a commitment was made to provide such discussions that would complement the discussions in the GGE (this was reflected in the positions of the chairs of both processes, Brazil (GGE) and Switzerland (OEWG) with Switzerland also being a member of the GGE), at the beginning of the functioning of new format for discussing IIS problems within the two groups there were fears that it might turn out to be even more complicated than before. This was due to the significant contradictions between Russia and the US. In particular, Russia proposed to develop and adopt legally binding rules of conduct for states, thus including them in international law, while United States considered the existing law already effective and sufficient for ICT regulation.

However, this new format provided an effective mutually supportive deliberation process. The states that did not support the creation of the OEWG in 2018 joined its work and did not interfere with the adoption of the final document. During two years of the work, 91 states have spoken at the meetings of the OEWG, being almost half of the UN members. Remarkably, one third of them are not participants of the GGE.

Global Cyberdiplomacy Results

On March 12, 2021, despite of many difficulties and the postponement of the OEWG report release, which was scheduled for the summer of 2020, all 193 UN states supported by consensus the adoption of the report summarizing the two-year work of the first OEWG on IIS. It secured the basic approaches proposed by Russia and its partners, including prevention of conflicts in the information space, prevention of its militarization, and the requirement to use ICTs exclusively for the peaceful purposes. The report contains agreed assessments of the current situation in the ICT space. At the same time, the OEWG participants agree that the use of ICT in conflicts between states becomes more likely and consider an increase in number of cases of malicious use of such opportunities by both states and non-state actors as an alarming trend. The report notes the potentially devastating impact of attacks on critical information infrastructure, the protection of which requires interaction between states and between the state and the private sector. The importance of infrastructure protection in the healthcare sector, which has been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, is also noted.

The OEWG recommendations also include an initiative by a group of more than 40 countries, led by France and Egypt, to develop a Program of Action to promote responsible behavior of states in cyberspace, and more specifically, a unified and unlimited negotiation process on cybersecurity, which is assumed to replace OEWG and GGE in the future. The presence of this important task in the document will become the basis for discussion of this issue in the new convocation group.

The GGE report from May 2021 also suggests that it is important to continue the global discussion on IIS in the OEWG format. The adoption of the GGE report itself is an example of a successful compromise, demonstrating that given enough political will, can conduct not a politicized, but a pragmatic dialogue in order to achieve a common result, despite of sharp contradictions on many issues. This position was also shared by the Russian expert in the GGE, which was noticed by the majority of the Group members.

In May 2021, an organizational session of another mechanism proposed by Russia was held, being a special open-ended intergovernmental committee of experts aimed to develop a comprehensive international convention on combating the use of ICT for criminal purposes, which was established by the UN General Assembly at the end of 2019. This format allows to unite the efforts of the world community in order to tackle the increasingly dangerous cybercrime problem.

On June 1–2, 2021, an organizational session of the new OEWG (mandated for 2021–2025) on the security in field of ICTs and their use was held in New York. It was formed on the Russian initiative in accordance with the UN General Assembly Resolution 75/240.²¹

The Group's mandate implies further development of norms, rules and principles of responsible behavior of states in the information space and ways to implement them as well as amend and expand the rules of conduct, if necessary. It also proposes to examine state initiatives aimed at ensuring security related to the ICT use and organize a regular institutional dialogue with a wide range of participating states, under the auspices of the UN. Thus, further discussion of this topic within the UN framework will contribute to the development and improvement of the principles and norms of international law, including international humanitarian law, in relation to ICT. Subsequently, it may result in the conditions convenient for adoption of a convention on securing IIS at the UN level. The group also plans to work on a common understanding of existing and potential information security threats, including data security.

During the organizational meeting, the main goals of the new OEWG activity as well as agenda and rules of procedure, including the decision-making process, were approved by consensus. The Permanent Representative of Singapore to the UN in New York Burhan Ghafoor, elected as The Chairman of the Group, is going to agree on other organizational issues in the framework of broad consultations

²¹ UN General Assembly Resolution 75/240, 'Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security', A/RES/75/240, 4 Jan. 2021 <https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/75/240&Lang=E>.

with the UN member states and approve them at the first substantive session of the Group, which is scheduled in New York for December 13–17, 2021.

According to the Russian Foreign Ministry, this “event took place in a constructive atmosphere and continued the effective work of global cyber diplomacy, including the adoption of the final reports of the first UN OEWG on International Information Security (IIS) and the relevant Group of Governmental Experts, as well as the launching of the special committee to develop a universal international convention on countering the use of ICT for criminal purposes under the auspices of the UN.”²²

Future of International Information Security Problem

The positive results of the work of the UN GGE and the OEWG may have a significant impact on trends and policies in the field of information security on a global scale. However, the problems and contradictions in the process of providing IIS have not disappeared and continue to grow.

One of the main remaining problems is the lack of a unified international legal regime regulating the ICT space, since today only some generally accepted norms of international law and various domestic legislation are applied. It should be noted that there are contradictions in these documents that can be used by various actors in their own interests. In this regard, three areas of work on IIS remain basic in both groups, being applicability and sufficiency of international law; the currently non-binding codes of conduct for countries (the so-called “Code of Conduct”, or the “Code of Conduct in the Digital World”); and trust-building measures between states in the ICT environment.

²² Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘Interview with A. V. Krutskikh “Global Cyber Agenda: Diplomatic Victory” for International Affairs magazine, June 7, 2021’, 8 June 2021 <https://www.mid.ru/mezdunarodnaa-informacionnaa-bezopasnost/-/asset_publisher/UsCUTiw2pO53/content/id/4778945>.

An important new trend is probably going to be the initiative to create and analyze common data repositories with the positions of states on the application of international law to the use of ICT in the context of international security, as well as on the practice of such application. This information is requested to be submitted on a voluntary basis to the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) Cyber Policy Portal. The approach should not cause serious disagreement between countries, since it is aimed to reach a common understanding of the applicability of already agreed norms, to assess the need to develop new ones and to motivate countries to participate in this process. However, its success will depend on the quantity and quality of the information collected. In this context, one may face another challenge associated with the insufficient efficiency of methods for analyzing textual information in comparison with the processing of structured numerical information. The type and structure of the data provided at the UNIDIR Cyber Policy Portal, therefore, should be unified and deeply thought through. Moreover, these data themselves should exclude the politic interpretation of the process as much as possible, which can be hardly achieved completely.

Overall, the ability to extract useful information from the provided unstructured text will be a key challenge in this new UN process. An additional tool for text analysis may be provided by scientific analysis and comparison of the data provided to UNIDIR with the information on the cases of legal norms application to the ICT space, which are discussed at international and domestic conferences, institutional and organizational events.

Disagreement over legal mechanisms related to the military-political component of digital security still has a negative impact on reaching a compromise between UN states. Considering this issue irrelevant at this stage, the United States believes that it is necessary to accumulate sufficient practical experience to manage such incidents first. On the other hand, Russia is convinced that the main goal should be to prevent the harmful use of ICT for military-political purposes, instead of legalizing and regulating such conflicts.

Serious diplomatic efforts within the work of both groups will be required to solve the following issues:

- Applicability of international law to ICT attacks in peacetime;
- Control over the spread of information weapons;
- Control over dual-use ICT;
- Applicability of the UN Charter to cyberspace and, in particular, the right of self-defense;
- Preventive measures to prevent ICT attacks and, in particular, the notification prior to the use of countermeasures;
- Attribution of ICT attacks;
- The use of ICT to violate sovereignty and interfere in the internal affairs of states;
- Obligation of states to prevent the use of their territory for the commission of ICT attacks by state or non-state actors against other states;
- Instruments for coordination of state responsible behavior in the ICT space;
- Obligatory execution of the “Rules of Conduct” and the possibility of their expansion;
- The role of the UN in the development of trust-building measures;
- Basic human rights in the process of application of new norms and rules of behavior in the ICT space;
- Information security capacity building;
- Development of a unified conceptual framework for IIS;
- Assessment of the equal applicability of the “Rules of Conduct” in wartime and peacetime;
- Functions and coordination of the GGE and OEWS operations.

During analysis and forecasting of the prospects for international information security, it is necessary to take into account the most important political characteristics of the current stage, which do not contribute to the effectiveness of the process. They are associated with insufficient cooperation of great powers in this area and with a lack of transparency in relationship between states, which makes it difficult to assess the adherence of countries to the norms and principles of behavior in the digital space.

PART II. EXPERT INSIGHTS

5. Prospects for the JCPOA under the new US administration
6. Turkish foreign policy: ideology and practice
7. Conflicts within the Muslim world as a threat to stability and security in the Middle East

5. PROSPECTS FOR THE JCPOA UNDER THE NEW US ADMINISTRATION

Victor MIZIN

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), an agreement on the Iranian nuclear program, has inadvertently become one of the most intricate and multifaceted international and diplomatic conundrums.

Conclusion of the JCPOA and the US Withdrawal From It: Does History Teach Nothing?

Iran's nuclear strive has a long and warped history.¹ After the 1979 Revolution, Iran decided to terminate most of the deposed Shah's ambitious nuclear and military projects, retaining only the Tehran Research Reactor that the United States helped to build in 1967 and the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, which had been 90% completed by Germany.² Iran contracted with France to enrich uranium to fuel the Bushehr reactor, thereby making a national enrichment facility unnecessary to be set up. Angered by the hostage crisis in 1979, however, the United States pressed France and Germany to break their promise on their contracts with Iran, having violated thereby the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which guarantees its members access to peaceful nuclear technology. After 15 years of failed nuclear talks with France and Germany, in 1995 Iran decided to produce its own nuclear fuel.

¹ 'Timeline of Nuclear Diplomacy With Iran', U.S. Arms Control Association <[https:// www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Timeline-of-Nuclear-Diplomacy-With-Iran](https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Timeline-of-Nuclear-Diplomacy-With-Iran)>".

² Mousavian, S. H., 'Why a quick return to the Iran nuclear deal is needed to avoid a real nuclear crisis', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 11 Apr. 2021 <[https:// thebulletin.org/2021/04/why-a-quick-return-to-the-iran-nuclear-deal-is-needed-to-avoid-a-real-nuclear-crisis/](https://thebulletin.org/2021/04/why-a-quick-return-to-the-iran-nuclear-deal-is-needed-to-avoid-a-real-nuclear-crisis/)>; Mousavian, S. H., *The Iranian Nuclear Crisis: A Memoir* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012).

In 2003, it was discovered that Iran was building a uranium enrichment plant. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) launched an investigation after an Iranian dissident group had revealed undeclared nuclear activities carried out by Iran. In 2006, because of Iran's noncompliance with its NPT obligations, the United Nations Security Council demanded that Iran suspend its enrichment program.³ The US responded by shifting from a no-nuclear-technology policy to a focus on a no-enrichment policy for Iran. France, Germany, and the UK began nuclear talks with Iran in September 2003, but the talks failed as the US insisted that Iran must not have uranium enrichment facilities on its own soil in any circumstances, and the European countries finally gave in to the pressure.⁴

Between 2003 and 2013, the United States promoted six UN Security Council resolutions imposing tough international sanctions on Iran. Former Secretary of State John Kerry recounted that, *"in 2013, I sat down with Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran's foreign minister, for the first meeting between our countries' top diplomats since the 1979 revolution and hostage crisis. Iran at the time had enough enriched material for eight to 10 nuclear bombs and was two to three months from being able to build one."*⁵ Before the nuclear deal, in 2013, Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium was already more than 7,000 kilograms (7.72 tons) with higher enrichment, but Tehran promised not to build a bomb.

³ 'Section 1: Background and Status of Iran's Nuclear Program', U.S. Arms Control Association <<https://www.armscontrol.org/2015-08/section-1-background-status-iran%E2%80%99s-nuclear-program>>.

⁴ For details on the nuclear negotiations that led to the JCPOA, see 'The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) at a Glance. Fact Sheets & Briefs', U.S. Arms Control Association <<https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/JCPOA-at-a-glance>>; Malus, K., *From "Atoms for Peace" to "JCPOA": History of Iranian Nuclear Development*, Columbia K-1 Project, Center for Nuclear Studies, 9 Sep. 2018 <<https://k1project.columbia.edu/content/atoms-peacejcpoa-history-iranian-nuclear-development>>.

⁵ Lakshmanan, I. A. R., 'If you can't do this deal... go back to Tehran', POLITICO, 26 Sep. 2015 <<https://www.politico.eu/article/if-you-cant-do-this-deal-go-back-to-tehran-iran-us-nuclear-deal/>>.

The JCPOA was signed in July 2015 after prolonged and painstaking negotiations. Under the JCPOA Iran agreed to eliminate its stockpile of medium-enriched uranium, to cut its stockpile of low-enriched uranium by 98%, and reduce the number of its gas centrifuges by about two-thirds over a period of 13 years. For the next 15 years, Iran was entitled to enrich uranium only up to 3.67% U-235. Iran also agreed not to build any new heavy water production facilities for the same period of time. The uranium-enrichment activities were limited for 10 years to a single facility using first-generation. Other facilities were to be refurbished to avoid proliferation risks. To monitor and verify Iran's compliance with the agreement, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has gained regular access to all the Iranian nuclear facilities.⁶ The agreement also provided that in return for verifiably abiding by its commitments, the US, European Union, and United Nations Security Council will lift nuclear-related sanctions against Iran.⁷

Former US President D. Trump's decision of May 8, 2018 to walk out of the JCPOA and subsequently re-impose all the US sanctions on Iran, lifted by this accord (despite Iran's compliance with the deal, as verified by the IAEA), produced understandable concern and consternation among its participants and the US allies in Europe. They perceived this as D. Trump's another foreign policy blunder or deceitful ploy, because it was fraught with many dire consequences for WMD non-proliferation in general, as well as for stability in the Middle East. Partly, the reason for this unfortunate move was the intention to kill all the initiatives of the Barack Obama team. D. Trump cited the deal's "sunset provisions" (which allows restrictions on Iran's nuclear enrichment program to be lifted after 2025, according to the USA, that will let Iran resume its military nuclear weapons programs then) and its failure to account for Iran's ballistic missile program (not covered by the nuclear-centered JCPOA), among other things, as a pretext for withdrawal from the accord. It is clear that it was not possible to reach an

⁶ 'Timeline of Nuclear Diplomacy...'

⁷ Robinson, K., *What is the Iran Nuclear Deal?* Backgrounder, Council on Foreign Relations, 25 Feb. 2021 <<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-iran-nuclear-deal>>.

agreement on missiles issue back in 2015, but a *tug-of-war* on this could squander the entire deal. The Trump administration also terminated all of the waivers for cooperative nuclear projects, except for operation of the Bushehr power plant.⁸

In response, and quite predictably, Iran began to gradually violate the agreement since May 2019. Tehran tied its decision to the JCPOA failure to deliver sanctions relief envisioned by the accord and the US withdrawal from the deal. However, what is important is that, Iran, in effect, still remains a JCPOA participant and pledges to resume full compliance with the accord if its demands on sanctions relief are met. Meanwhile, simultaneously, Tehran, as it seems, intends, in a negative scenario, to play for aggravation, upping the ante, gradually shirking its obligations on the nuclear program.

Chronology of its creeping breaches is telling. Thus, on May 8, 2019 Iran announced it would no longer be bound by limits on heavy water and enriched uranium stockpiles. On July 7, 2019 Iran announced it would exceed the 3.67% uranium-235 enrichment limit introduced by the JCPOA. On July 8, 2019, Iran reported it had begun enriching uranium to 4.5% uranium-235. Iran's breach of the 3.67% limit was verified by the IAEA on July 8, 2019. The IAEA verified that Iran breached the uranium stockpile limit on July 1, 2019, and the heavy water limit – on November 17, 2019.⁹ Since that time, Iran continues to produce uranium in excess of the stockpile limit, but its heavy water stockpile has fluctuated and, at times, returned to below the 130-ton limit. On September 7, 2019, the IAEA verified that Iran had begun to install advanced centrifuges in excess of the amount permitted by the JCPOA. On September 25, 2019, the IAEA reported that Iran had begun to accumulate enriched uranium using these advanced machines. On November 5, 2019 Iran announced that technicians would begin enriching uranium up to 4.5% uranium-235 at the Fordow enrichment

⁸ Ross, D., 'There's a Deal to Be Had Between the U.S. and Iran. For now, though, both sides seem to prefer escalating pressure', *The Atlantic*, 10 July 2019 <<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/07/us-and-iran-shape-new-deal/593590/>>.

⁹ The JCPOA prohibits Iran's stockpile from exceeding 130 metric tons of heavy water and 300 kilograms of uranium hexafluoride gas UF₆ enriched to 3.67% uranium-235.

facility.¹⁰ The IAEA verified on November 6, 2019 the transfer of uranium gas from the Natanz facility to Fordow and confirmed the resumption of uranium enrichment at Fordow on November 9, 2019.

On January 5, 2020 Iran announced that it would no longer be bound by any operational limitations of the JCPOA, but that it would maintain compliance with its safeguards obligations under the deal. Since then, Iran has not taken any additional observed steps in violation of the deal, according to IAEA reports. An immediate increase in Iran's monthly uranium output and enrichment capacity is at least by 500 kilograms.¹¹ Iran stated if sanctions relief is not delivered, within two months' time it will suspend implementation of the Additional Protocol to Iran's Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement and halt compliance with the additional monitoring mechanisms mandated by the JCPOA.¹²

The US Conundrum of the JCPOA: US and Iranian Policy after 2019

Joe Biden's pledge during his presidential campaign to return to the JCPOA under certain conditions and his expressed willingness to discuss this with Iran through diplomatic channels has nurtured cautioned optimism among observers.¹³ The nomination of Wendy

¹⁰ Under JCPOA, Iran is prohibited from enriching uranium at Fordow for 15 years.

¹¹ Davenport, K., Masterson, J., 'Iran's Accumulation of Enriched Uranium Slows', U.S. Arms Control Association, 13 Nov. 2020 <<https://www.armscontrol.org/blog/2020-11-13/irans-accumulation-enriched-uranium-slows>>.

¹² The Additional protocol and other monitoring mechanisms allow the IAEA to carry out inspections at non-declared nuclear sites in Iran on short notice to verify the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program.

¹³ Erlanger, S., 'Biden Wants to Rejoin Iran Nuclear Deal, but It Won't Be Easy', *The New York Times*, 17 Nov. 2020 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/17/world/middleeast/iran-biden-trump-nuclear-sanctions.html>>.

Sherman, one of the principal authors of this document, for the post of Under Secretary of State, also served as an additional sign of hope.¹⁴

Subsequently, however, the American officials in Joe Biden's team cautioned that that it was impossible to return to the starting position because the world had changed in the six years since the deal was first signed in 2015.¹⁵ As a caveat, they insisted that Iran must resume full compliance, as before 2018. Tehran, for its part, stated that it will not return to compliance with the deal until the US lifts its unilateral sanctions.¹⁶

For the United States to return to the JCPOA as it was, the Biden administration will have to engage in painstaking work, lifting about 1,600 sanctions and punitive designations that the Trump administration imposed on Iran after 2018. The Biden administration has already warned that it will not lift every single economic sanction that former President Donald Trump imposed.¹⁷

J. Biden's desire to return to the deal already met expected criticism from conservative circles in the USA and Israel.¹⁸ 'Hawks' railed when the administration offered to talk to Iran even before Tehran returned to compliance with the deal. Thus, the administration remains torn between its promises and the strong objections of Capitol Hill that may cancel out the entire process. President Biden has thus adopted a wait-and-see approach toward negotiations that resembles Iran's

¹⁴ Lazaroff, T., Nahmias, O., 'Sherman: Biden interested in rejoining Iran nuclear agreement', *The Jerusalem Post*, 3 Mar. 2021 <<https://www.jpost.com/american-politics/biden-administration-interested-in-rejoining-nuclear-agreement-with-iran-660867>>.

¹⁵ Turak, N., 'Biden team takes a major step in offering to start talks with Iran as Tehran's sanctions deadline approaches', CNBC, 19 Feb. 2021 <<https://www.cnbc.com/2021/02/19/jcpoa-bidens-return-to-the-iran-nuclear-deal-is-getting-harder.html>>.

¹⁶ BBC, 'Iran nuclear deal: Tehran rules out informal talks on reviving accord', 28 Feb. 2021 <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-56234015>>.

¹⁷ Mousavian, 2021, op. cit.

¹⁸ Singh, M., *Biden's Iran Dilemma*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Feb. 2021 <<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/bidens-iran-dilemma>>.

own reluctance to unequivocally bend to the United States.¹⁹ Besides, the powerful pro-Israel lobby and Israel itself have joined efforts in pressing the Biden administration not to return to the JCPOA.

The demands for a broader accord to address other Iranian threats mirror the Trump administration's goals of a pressure strategy against Tehran. As the Congressional Democrats are also divided, Joe Biden's procrastination on the issue of the deal is intended to appease some critics of the 2015 accord, for example, such as Bob Menendez, Democrat, the senior United States Senator from New Jersey, and Chairman of the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, who oversees the State Department and the approval process for presidential nominees to work there. In two separate letters to Secretary of State A. Blinken, bipartisan groups of about 160 members of the House of Representatives have called for continued pressure on Iran.

Theoretically, if Iran takes out of the country its excess of enriched uranium or heavy water, Washington could partially unfreeze the Iranian assets, for example in South Korea's bank, or prompt the International Monetary Fund or other funding bodies to provide humanitarian aid. The United States has already lifted travel restrictions on Iranian officials visiting the United Nations headquarters in New York, and dropped its demand that the United Nations Security Council enforce international sanctions against Iran.

A paradoxical situation has been developing around the Iranian nuclear program. On the one hand, the United States and Iran (including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei) expressed their readiness to return to the JCPOA on the terms on which it was agreed in 2015. But instead of simply returning to the deal, or at least agreeing on what terms to begin fulfilling their obligations, Tehran and Washington are engaged in a kind of peculiar *tug-of-war*.

The Biden administration has pledged to consult with Israel and the Gulf States on this matter, as a prospective nuclear-armed Iran is an existential threat to the this group of states (or as the Saudis said,

¹⁹ Perkovich, G., Dubois, M., *Can Biden Revive the Iran Nuclear Deal?* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 27 Apr. 2021 <<https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/04/27/can-biden-reviveiran-nuclear-deal-pub-84380>>.

even Iran with a full-fledged nuclear enrichment program). Historically, however, the US bullying tactics have backfired, pushing Iran ever closer to noncompliance. Similarly, certain “pipe dreams” to overhaul the JCPOA “making it longer and stronger” (meaning the inclusion of such thorny issues as its missile program, support for terrorism, and violation of human rights), thus strangely reminding President Trump’s argumentation, might undermine all efforts to recuperate the deal.

In September 2020, J. Biden himself wrote, “Trump recklessly tossed away a policy that was working to keep America safe.”²⁰ Some officials in the Biden administration “seem to have bought the argument that the Trump sanctions give us leverage that we can use to get concessions from the Iranians,” as said by the prominent American nonproliferation expert Joe Cirincione.²¹

An additional negative factor is that there was a shared belief inside the US nonproliferation experts’ community that Iran was secretly violating the agreement. For example, one of the Iranian secret facilities was found after 2015.²² The US insistently demands that Iran should first fulfill all its obligations as before 2018. Only afterward could the US consider the withdrawal of the unilateral sanctions imposed on Iran.

Iran announced the termination of the implementation of voluntary obligations, including under the Additional Protocol, from February 23, 2021, in accordance with the provisions of the law adopted by the Iranian Majles in December 2020. This law obliges the government to restore parts of the country’s nuclear program that had been halted under the terms of the JCPOA.²³

²⁰ Biden, J., ‘Joe Biden: There’s a smarter way to be tough on Iran’, CNN, 13 Sep. 2020 <<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/09/13/opinions/smarter-way-to-be-tough-on-iran-joe-biden/index.html>>.

²¹ Tharoor, I., ‘Biden’s window with Iran is starting to close’, *The Washington Post*, 19 Mar. 2021 <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/03/19/biden-iran-deal-stalemate/>>.

²² Robinson, 2021, op. cit.

²³ In implementing this law, the Iranian authorities have already installed improved centrifuges at Natanz and Fordow, resuming uranium enrichment to 20% levels, and started producing uranium metal.

Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has frequently reiterated that producing and stockpiling nuclear weapons is absolutely forbidden in Iran according to the rules of Islam.²⁴ But he has also stated many times that Iran will never yield to the US pressure over its nuclear activities and might enrich uranium up to 60 percent.²⁵

Iran has suspended some IAEA inspections, as well as the transfer of recordings from the video cameras installed at the nuclear facilities to the Agency. In January 2021, J. Biden's nominee for Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, said the "breakout time" in which Iran could produce enough highly enriched uranium for a bomb "has gone from beyond a year (under the deal) to about three or four months."²⁶

Thus, the US administration is bogged down in perilous procrastination that demotivates Tehran stimulating so far its further noncompliance.

Can the European Union, China, and Russia Help?

Although it was largely initiated by the Obama Administration, the European JCPOA members always considered it an important breakthrough and one of their major political and diplomatic achievements.

In January 2021, weeks after the US President Joe Biden's inauguration, British, French, and German diplomats approached the new administration with a plan to restore the JCPOA. The Biden administration, nevertheless, in its first weeks in office rejected those European proposals to lift some of the sanctions. J. Biden's National Security Adviser Jacob Sullivan and the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken have been concerned about alienating key figures on Capitol

²⁴ Reuters, 'Iran's Khamenei says building, using nuclear bomb is forbidden under its religion: TV', 9 Oct. 2019 <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-khamenei-idUSKBN1WO15H>>.

²⁵ This last level appears to be explained by Iran's previously expressed interest in developing a nuclear reactor similar to U.S. naval reactors that powering ships and subs.

²⁶ Mousavian, 2021, op. cit.

Hill and miring the administration's other priorities, particularly passing a huge relief package for COVID-19. Iran, in its turn, in the end of February 2021 rejected the possibility of holding an informal meeting with the EU (the United Kingdom, France, and Germany), and the US to discuss ways to reactivate the nuclear deal while insisting that the US must first lift all its unilateral sanctions.²⁷

The European members of the JCPOA have expressed serious concerns about the implications that Iran's new law on nuclear issues may have for negotiating a return to the deal.²⁸ The EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell called then for a concerted effort by all state-parties to the JCPOA to revitalize the agreement.²⁹ As if responding, the White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki stated that the US is "disappointed" by Iran's decision not to participate in the said talks. "While we are disappointed with Iran's response, we remain ready to re-engage in meaningful diplomacy to achieve a joint return to JCPOA commitments' fulfillment", the spokeswoman said.³⁰

Like the United States, the EU3 ('Eurotroika') has repeatedly condemned Iran's violation of the JCPOA provisions. In particular, the Europeans were concerned about the lack of explanations for the traces of uranium found by the IAEA in February 2019 at the facilities inspected by the Agency. In its statement to the Board of Governors, the 'Eurotroika' pointed out that for 18 months Iran has not provided any proper explanations for the traces of uranium found, which may indicate

²⁷ Hafezi, P., 'Iran dismisses idea of talks with EU and U.S. to revive 2015 nuclear deal', Reuters, 28 Feb. 2021 <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-usa-idUSKCN2AS0M2>>.

²⁸ Eshraghi, A. R., 'Fool me once: How Tehran views the Iran nuclear deal', European Council on Foreign Relations, 25 Feb. 2021 <<https://ecfr.eu/article/fool-me-once-how-tehran-views-the-iran-nuclear-deal/>>.

²⁹ Luxner, L., 'Josep Borrell outlines the EU's priorities in a multipolar world', Atlantic Council, 24 Feb. 2021 <<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/josep-borrell-outlines-the-eus-priorities-in-a-multipolar-world/>>.

³⁰ Jakes, L., 'Impasse Over Iran Nuclear Talks Sets Off International Scramble to Save Accord', *The New York Times*, 11 Mar. 2021 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/11/us/politics/united-statesiran-nuclear-talks.html>>.

a violation of the JCPOA and the Additional Protocol by the country.³¹ The draft resolution proposed by the European Commission, strongly condemned Iran's violations of the JCPOA and strongly called for the country's full cooperation with the IAEA – as the UK, Germany, and France would like to censure Iran for reducing its cooperation with the Agency. As the European powers said in a statement, “it will significantly constrain the IAEA's access to sites and to safeguards-relevant information.”³²

Iran has repeatedly stated that this resolution will clearly negate the monitoring agreements reached in February 2021. For its part, Tehran put forward a number of caveats that predicted long and hard negotiations.³³ In addition, the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran has repeatedly raised the issue of \$1 trillion compensation for the damage inflicted on the country's economy by the Western sanctions. According to him, this problem will need to be solved even if these sanctions were lifted. He also said that Iran would not allow changes to the JCPOA. In response to the promoted draft European resolution, Iran threatened to review the agreements with the IAEA, as stated by the official representative of the Iranian government.³⁴

Diplomats from the UK, France, and Germany have since urged Iran to accept a joint European-American invitation of February 18 to begin informal negotiations. Officials from China and Russia have taken a more considerate approach in asking Tehran in recent days to return

³¹ France 24, ‘European powers, US warn Iran against “dangerous” inspections limit’, 18 Feb. 2021 <<https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20210218-europe-holds-talks-with-us-as-deadline-looms-to-save-2015-iran-nuclear-deal>>.

³² Haghiri, M., ‘With Iran, nuclear diplomacy comes first’, Atlantic Council, 25 Feb. 2021 <<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/with-iran-nuclear-diplomacy-comes-first/>>.

³³ Shine, S., Shavit, E., ‘A Return to the Nuclear Deal: Washington and Tehran Sharpen Positions’, The Institute for National Security Studies, 1 Feb. 2021 <<https://www.inss.org.il/publication/biden-iran-jcpoa/>>.

³⁴ Motamedi, M., ‘US sanctions inflicted \$1 trillion damage on Iran's economy: FM’, 21 Feb. 2021 <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/21/us-sanctions-inflicted-1-trillion-damage-on-irans-economy-fm>>.

to talks.³⁵ According to the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the IAEA, Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia has made every effort to “avoid an artificial escalation and rely on diplomacy.” The position of Russia and China as its ally, made it possible to prevent the adoption of the resolution proposed by the Europeans that condemns the violation of the JCPOA, which Russia described as “an extremely risky political experiment.”³⁶

Russia has supported Iran in the controversy over its nuclear program since May 2018 when the Trump administration announced its withdrawal from the nuclear deal. Russia has repeatedly criticized the Trump administration’s “maximum pressure” campaign on Tehran as illegal and wrong, and has called on other 5 + 1 participants to help Iran continue to benefit economically from participating in the nuclear deal. However, all this does not contradict the fact that Moscow has always insisted that Iran only has the right to a nuclear program if the IAEA control guarantees its peaceful character. Russia stands for the closest possible cooperation of all parties to the deal to restore the JCPOA in full and offered to organize informal negotiations between the JCPOA participants and the United States. In general, China has taken a similar position.

Russian support for Iran is far from unconditional. Way back in 2003, Russia repeatedly called on the Iranian leadership to sign the Additional Protocol, and two years later harshly criticized Tehran when it suspended its voluntary implementation. In early 2006, Moscow even supported the decision of the IAEA Board of Governors to refer the Iranian dossier to the UN Security Council for discussion. In 2009 and 2010, Russia approved the introduction of UN Security Council sanctions against Iran when it was revealed that the Islamic Republic of Iran had concealed the construction of the then secret Fordow facility. When Iran has again tightened its rhetoric and has increasingly

³⁵ Hibbs, M., ‘Is Iran’s Nuclear Future in the Hands of Russia and China?’, Carnegie Europe, 7 Apr. 2020 <<https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/81484>>.

³⁶ MFA of Russia, “Permanent Representative of Russia to International Organisations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov’s interview with the newspaper Kommersant, published on April 28, 2020”, <https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4108718>.

declared that it will act contrary to the provisions of UN Security Council Resolution 2231, Moscow has returned to a more critical position towards Tehran. In November 2020, Russia said that Tehran's withdrawal from the Additional Protocol would significantly worsen the situation, and warned that Iran's plans to install three more cascades of advanced IR-2 centrifuges in Natanz exacerbate "an already complex and tense state of affairs."³⁷

Iran's recent announcement about the production of uranium metal has provoked an even harsher reaction from Moscow. Moscow urged Tehran for "restraint and responsibility" and stated that Russia is ready to work closely with the Biden administration to preserve the nuclear deal.

The IAEA as the Honest Nuclear Broker

The Agency has played the key role in restoring and revitalizing the JCPOA even at this arrangement's most critical moments. At the same time, the IAEA warned that its continuing inspections should not be used as a "bargaining chip."³⁸

The meetings of the IAEA Board of Governors in 2021 helped to identify the states' positions. The US again expressed its readiness to start negotiations on returning to the JCPOA, but only after Iran returns to faithfully fulfilling its obligations under this agreement. A similar position was voiced by J. Biden during the election campaign, was confirmed in his speech at the Munich Conference, and is also found in the Joint Statement of the US Secretary of State and the Foreign Ministers of France, Germany, and Great Britain on February 18, 2021.

³⁷ Notte, H., Azizi, H., 'Where are Russia's Red Lines on Iran's Nuclear Brinkmanship?', Carnegie Moscow Center, 19 Feb. 2021 <<https://carnegie.ru/commentary/83915>>.

³⁸ Tirone, J., 'Iran, U.S. Told Not to Use Atomic Monitor as Bargaining Chip', Bloomberg, 1 Mar. 2021 <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-01/iran-u-s-warned-not-to-use-atomic-monitors-as-bargaining-chips>>.

Tehran contends that the Biden administration should return to the terms of the nuclear deal and lift the sanctions imposed by the Trump administration. Earlier, in November 2020, Iran enacted a law that restricted “snap access” for inspectors to some sites and surveillance cameras, complaining that it is not reaping the economic rewards it was promised under the 2015 deal in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program.

The January 2021 IAEA report stated that Iran had informed the organization that it had begun working on equipment needed to produce uranium metal, which can be used to produce nuclear warheads.³⁹ In addition, it has increased the quantity and quality of uranium enrichment it allows. It happened after the International Atomic Energy Agency had reported that Iran had added 17.6 kilograms of uranium enriched up to 20% to its stockpile. It was reported on November 2, 2020 that Iran also increased its total enriched uranium stockpile to 2,967.8 kilograms, up from 2,442.9 kilograms.

The Agency and Iran then agreed to temporary measures that would extend the window for diplomacy. Rafael Grossi, the IAEA Director General, proved himself an apt and experienced diplomat as the deal might have fallen apart without his shuttle diplomacy. Under the last-minute deal worked out on February 21, 2021, during R. Grossi’s trip to Tehran, a certain level of access of the IAEA to Iranian facilities was retained. Most inspections could continue for three months, running approximately into Iran’s June election, when a successor to President Hassan Rouhani is chosen. Under this agreement, Iran said it would no longer share surveillance footage of its nuclear facilities with the IAEA but promised to preserve the tapes for three months. It will then hand them over to the IAEA if it is granted sanctions relief. Otherwise, Iran has vowed to erase the recordings.⁴⁰

³⁹ Norman, L., Gordon, M. R., ‘Iran Is Assembling Gear Able to Produce Key Nuclear-Weapons Material’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 13 Jan. 2021 <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-is-assembling-gear-able-to-produce-material-for-nuclear-weapons-officials-say-11610554933>>.

⁴⁰ *The Times of Israel*, ‘IAEA: Iran will extend inspection deal, won’t delete footage of nuclear sites’, 24 May 2021 <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/iran-says-itll-release-atomic-site-images-if-nuclear-deal-talks-see-a-result/>>.

The temporary agreement ensures that Iran's suspension of the Additional Protocol will not result in a gap of safeguards and monitoring, that creates space for Iran, the United States, and the other participants to negotiate a restoration of the JCPOA. Iran will bring the total number of the installed IR-2m centrifuges at Natanz to about 1,030, configured into six cascades. Within three months' time, Iran will be able to enrich uranium with and conduct research and development activities on 164 IR-6 centrifuges. Within one year, it is allowed to increase the number of IR-6 centrifuges to 1,000 machines.⁴¹

R. Grossi told member delegations in March 2021 that Iran has "begun feeding a newly installed cascade of 174 IR-4 centrifuges" to enrich uranium hexafluoride gas up to 5% U-235 uranium.⁴² Earlier, in November 2020, R. Grossi confirmed that Iran had begun enriching with IR-2m type centrifuges at the Natanz site. Iran announced that it had installed two cascades of IR-4 centrifuges, but it did not say where.⁴³ The IAEA has confirmed that Iran has begun operating a cascade of advanced centrifuges at an underground site. Iran has enriched uranium to slightly higher purity than previously thought due to "fluctuations" in the process.⁴⁴ Samples taken by the IAEA on April 22 "showed an enrichment level of up to 63%... consistent with fluctuations of the enrichment levels experienced in the mode of production at that time."⁴⁵

⁴¹ Murphy, F., 'Iran adds advanced machines enriching underground at Natanz: IAEA', Reuters, 1 Apr. 2021 <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-iaea-idUSKBN2BO5J3>>.

⁴² Rising, D., 'UN atomic watchdog confirms details of new Iran centrifuges', Associated Press, 17 Mar. 2021 <<https://apnews.com/article/tehran-iran-united-nations-nuclear-weapons-d56d90b97833cfbc2053c73162791f2c>>.

⁴³ Iran International, 'UN Nuclear Chief Says Iran To Grant "Less Access" To Inspectors', 22 Feb. 2021 <<https://iranintl.com/en/world/un-nuclear-chief-says-iran-grant-less-access-inspectors>>.

⁴⁴ Rising, 2021, op. cit.

⁴⁵ Rising, D., 'UN watchdog: Iran has enriched uranium to highest purity yet', ABC News, 12 May 2021 <<https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/watchdog-iranenriched-uranium-highest-purity-77642161>>.

Natanz under Attack: Undermining the Agreement?

On April 11, 2021 sabotage by using remote detonation of an explosive device previously smuggled into the Natanz facility destroyed most of its important equipment.⁴⁶ Tehran said that the “traitor” had been identified, and “the necessary measures were being taken.”

This allegedly Israeli attack targeted an electrical substation located 40 to 50 meters underground and damaged “thousands of centrifuges.” It managed to damage both the power distribution system and the cable leading to the centrifuges in order to cut power to them. Thus, the incident severely destroyed the internal power system at Iran’s Natanz uranium enrichment facility. The attack was carried out either via cybernet, sabotaged equipment or sabotage committed by agents. Iranians confirmed that the previous attack in July 2020 was also carried out with explosives that had been smuggled into a centrifuge assembly facility at the site, with the explosives embedded in a heavy table that was brought into the facility.

However, Iran’s Permanent representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Kazem Gharib Abadi, claimed that enrichment had not stopped at Natanz, despite foreign media reports to the contrary. Tehran alleges that the impacted centrifuges were “first-generation machines” that would be replaced with more advanced ones. The recent attack took place a day after Iran had begun injecting uranium hexafluoride gas into the advanced IR-6 and IR-5 centrifuges there.

This is by far not the first terror attempt on Iranian nuclear assets. The former head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, who now serves on the Iranian Parliament’s Energy Commission, survived an assassination attempt in 2010 in which bombs had been attached to the side of his car by men on motorcycles. Another nuclear scientist, Majid Shahriari, was killed in a similar attack the same day. Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, Iran’s top nuclear scientist, was killed in an assassination

⁴⁶ Joffre, T., Bob, Y. J., ‘Natanz attack hit 50 meters underground, destroyed most of the facility’, *The Jerusalem Post*, 13 Apr. 2021 <<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/natanz-attackdestroyed-facility-50-meters-underground-664979>>.

blamed on Israel in 2020. Iran's Foreign Minister, Mohammed Javad Zarif, complained to the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres about the attack, calling it "nuclear terrorism and a war crime."

Developments in 2021 as a Possible "Breakthrough"

Meanwhile, the negotiating process continued. Simultaneously with official meetings of the Joint Commission of the JCPOA, the participants in the Vienna talks hold informal meetings in various formats, almost on a daily basis. The two major issues being negotiated are the lifting of US sanctions imposed by D. Trump's administration, and the return of Iran to compliance with the restrictions imposed by the JCPOA on its nuclear program. The JCPOA participants (France, Germany, and the UK), without Iran taking part, met with the US delegation to negotiate full restoration of the nuclear deal.

Finally, Iran agreed on May 23, 2021 to a one-month extension of the agreement with international inspectors, which would allow them to continue monitoring the country's nuclear program, thereby avoiding a major setback in the continuing negotiations with Tehran. Under the agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency, Iran will extend access to monitoring cameras at its nuclear facilities until June 24. R. Grossi told reporters in Vienna, "I want to stress this is not ideal... This is like an emergency device that we came up with in order for us to continue having these monitoring activities."⁴⁷

Iran's Supreme National Security Council said in a statement that the decision was made "so that negotiations have the necessary chance to progress and bear results." The agreement will allow for other

⁴⁷ Rising, D., Jenne, P., 'Iran, world powers resume talks on US return to nuclear deal', Associated Press, 25 May 2021 <<https://apnews.com/article/united-nations-donald-trump-europe-middle-east-iran-5019de72182ad75ccaf34480a9c6ee41>>.

methods of continued international visibility into the nuclear program, but neither Iran nor the agency has publicly provided full details about their compromise.⁴⁸

There are visible signs of Tehran's optimism on the outcome of the talks. Iran is now exporting a significant amount of oil daily in violation of the US sanctions. It clearly suggests that Iran and its oil clients are expecting that the risks are surmountable, as they are sure that the Biden administration is poised to finally rejoin the nuclear deal that Trump dropped in May 2018.

Clearly, the restoration of the JCPOA will not happen immediately. It will take some time. Nevertheless, the negotiators perceive signs of progress in these Iran nuclear talks.⁴⁹ There is no doubt that success in restoration of the severed JCPOA in full strength will serve the promotion of nonproliferation goals and general amelioration of Tehran's relations with the West, especially with the traditional nemesis, the USA.

⁴⁸ Crowley, M., Fassihi, F., 'Iran Extends Agreement With Nuclear Agency, Averting Crisis', *The New York Times*, 24 May 2021 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/24/us/politics/iran-nuclear-program-inspections.html>>.

⁴⁹ Rising, D., Jenne, P., 'Iran nuclear talks show increasing hopes of a resolution', Associated Press, 19 May 2021 <<https://abcnews.go.com/Business/wireStory/iran-nuclear-talks-show-increasing-hopes-resolution-77781845>>.

6. TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY: IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICE

Victor NADEIN-RAYEVSKY

An adequate perception of the foreign policy of the Turkish Republic, which has undergone a major transformation under the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), must take into account the intimate connection of the country's foreign policy with the profound transformation of the entire ideological doctrine of Turkey's ruling elite. In charting Turkey's foreign policy course President Recep Tayyip Erdogan created an original ideological platform based on "moderate Islamism," "neo-Ottomanism" and the old idea of Pan-Turkism, effectively renouncing the ideology which underpinned Turkey's internal and external policy. His rule saw the emergence of a new Turkish ideology.

The founding father of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, had carried out revolutionary reforms and turned the empire into a republic: the sultanate and then the caliphate were abolished, the wearing of the fez was banned, the Turks were made to change into European clothes, women were forbidden to wear the veil and paranja, education reform was carried out, the Arabic alphabet was replaced with a Latin-based one and a massive language reform replaced foreign words with new Turkish words. The power of the religious authorities was curtailed: the *wakoofs*, the property of mosques and Sufi *tariqas* (brotherhoods), was nationalized and the *tariqas* were banned. Massive seizure of the property of Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians, Yazidis known as "Turkization of abandoned property" during and after the 1915–1923 genocide also played a part. So great was Kemal Atatürk's authority that no one dared to resist his reforms. After the leader's death in 1938 Kemal's principles of the development of the republic, referred to as Atatürk's "Six Arrows," remained immutable until the early 1980s.

The “moderate Islamism” of the Justice and Development Party

After the Second World War Turkish society saw a gradual resurgence of religion and activity of Islamist and ultra-nationalist parties, with the Turkish army recurrently stepping in to guarantee the republic’s secular character by removing religious political forces from power.

In these conditions Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whose political career began in the ranks of the *Refah* party,¹ and his fellow party members formed the Justice and Development Party. However, he needed electoral support and approval of his party’s platform, which was offered by Fethullah Gulen, a popular Muslim preacher and writer who had sympathy for the ideological and political principles of the new party.

Gulen is the author of numerous books translated into many languages,² advocating a dialogue of civilizations, Islamic humanism and cooperation with other religions. He saw political leadership potential in the young Erdogan and embraced the idea of what Erdogan would later call “The New Turkey.” In the 2002 parliamentary elections Gulen backed the AKP which positioned itself as “a conservative mass democratic party in the center of the political spectrum,”³ and won the election by a comfortable 34.3% majority.⁴

Erdogan compared the AKP, which promoted “moderate Islamism,” with the German CDU/CSU. After the party came to power, Erdogan and his ally, Abdullah Gul, launched a campaign against the Turkish army, the main guarantor of the Turkish Republic.

¹ Initially the Party of National Salvation led by N. Erbakan, which changed its name each time after it was banned.

² See: Gulen, F., *Life and the Islamic Faith*. (Moscow: Noviy svet Publishers, first edition, 2006) [In Russian].

³ ‘Conservative Democrat Political Identity’, *Akparti.org*. 12 Sep. 2017 <<http://www.akparti.org.tr/english/akparti/2023-political-vision>>.

⁴ ‘The Evolution of the Turkish Army in the Context of Political Change in the Country’, *21st Century (Bulletin of the Noravank Science and Education Fund)*, 2012, no. 5.

The struggle against the excessive power of the military lasted a long ten years, but eventually, with the support of Islamists, especially Gulen and his *Hizmet* movement, Erdogan and his team managed to bring about an amendment of several key articles of the Turkish constitution in the 2012 constitutional referendum and exclude the army from the political process. This also brought substantial changes to the country's foreign policy. Erdogan sought to become the spiritual leader if not of the whole Islamic world, at least of the Middle East Muslims. At the same time Erdogan directed his efforts toward practical international politics launching the "eastern vector" of the country's foreign policy, for example, supporting Palestinian Arabs against Israel and infringement of Palestinians' rights.

"Neo-Ottomanism" in Erdogan's foreign policy

The second important component of the ideology of Erdogan and his party is "Neo-Ottomanism." The idea is attributed to Professor Ahmet Davutoglu who published the book *Strategic Depth. International Position of Turkey*⁵ before the AKP came to power in Turkey. In his book he formulated the idea of Turkish dominance through "soft power" throughout the space of the former Ottoman Empire.⁶

Turkey claims interest in the territories covered by Turkey's Declaration of Independence (the National Oath),⁷ which included within its borders Cyprus, the strips along the whole northern border of Syria, and the border provinces of Iraq (Mosul and Kirkuk). These regions are the main targets of Turkey's "neo-Islamist expansion."

⁵ Davutoğlu, A., *Stratejik Derinlik. Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (İstanbul 2012).

⁶ Avatkov, V., 'Neo-Ottomanism. Turkey's Basic Ideologeme and Geostrategy' <<http://svom.info/entry/458-/>>.

⁷ On January 28, 1920 the Ottoman parliament passed the National Pact, or National Oath that determined the borders of the state entity that was formed on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, i. e. later became the territory of the Turkish Republic. See *The Recent History of Turkey* (Moscow, 1968), p. 28 [In Russian].

Turkey also has an eye for the other parts of the former Ottoman Empire. That is why it hailed the Arab revolutions that swept the region. Erdogan had an ambition to become the ideological leader of Muslim “renaissance.” However, things did not go according to plan, which eventually led to disenchantment within the Turkish society. The overthrow of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, who were the ideological allies of Turkish Islamists, dealt a heavy blow to the hopes of the Turkish leaders. Erdogan at the time lashed out against the Western countries: “The European Parliament is ignoring its own values in not calling military intervention in Egypt a government coup. It was a test of sincerity which the West failed.”⁸ Egypt’s Muslim Brothers were ready to take on board the experience of their Turkish like-minded persons, and they had shared views on foreign policy, for example, the wish to overthrow the Bashar Assad government in Syria.

Having said that, Egyptian Islamists perceived Turkey’s neo-Ottomanist goals as an attempt to restore the Ottoman Empire whose power Egyptians in their time sought to get rid of. Even so, in spite of the different views on history, Erdogan perceived the toppling and arrest of President Mohammed Morsi as a heavy blow on his own plans and on the relations between the two countries.

The neo-Ottomanist doctrine meets with criticism inside Turkey as well. Thus, the leader of the People’s Republican Party (PRP) Kemal Kylychdaroglu, addressing a conference in Baghdad on August 21, 2013 said that adherence to the “Ottoman dream” was wrong. “The Ottoman Empire was a great country in history. We were all part of the Ottoman Empire. But in the XXI century there are independent states. We should respect these states, the Ottoman dream is not the right approach,” said Kylychdaroglu.⁹

⁸ ‘Erdogan: By not Calling Egyptian Events a Coup the West Failed Sincerity Test’, *Regnum.ru*, 5 July 2013 <<https://regnum.ru/news/fd-abroad/turkey/1680606.html>>.

⁹ ‘Turkish Opposition Leader in Iraq Slams Ankara’s Foreign Policy’, *Regnum.ru*, 22 Aug. 2013 <<https://regnum.ru/news/fd-abroad/turkey/1698056.html>>.

Turning to the ideas of Pan-Turkism

The third component of the new Turkish ideology is Pan-Turkism, or the creation of the Great Turan, a vast state entity from the Adriatic to the Pacific.¹⁰ The core of this idea is radical Turkish nationalism oriented toward external expansion to the “Turkic world.” The idea of the unity of all Turks – Uzbek Turks, Kazakh Turks, Crimean Tatar Turks etc. – is deeply rooted in the mass consciousness of Turks.¹¹ Pan-Turkists seek to unite all the Turkic-speaking peoples around Turkey through the policy of “soft power.”

Over the nearly thirty years since the collapse of the Soviet Union dozens of Turkish colleges and universities have been established in the post-Soviet space through the Gulen educational program and future elites of Turkic republics have been trained under the TİKA government program.¹² Twenty-six thousand students from the Turkic-language republics and regions of Russia have received university education in Turkey under the TİKA program. Thus a new pro-Turkish elite has been created in practically the whole post-Soviet space.

In recent years Erdogan stepped up activities under the “Turkish project.” As early as October 3, 2009 the Turkic-Language States Cooperation Council, or Turkic Council, was set up, including Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey. Uzbekistan has joined recently. Turkmenistan and even Hungary are among prospective new members.

In the cultural sphere of “the Turkic World” mention should be made of the International Turkic Culture Organization (TURKSÖI) created in 1993. TURKSÖI holds numerous annual cultural events devoted to the common Turkic legacy.

¹⁰ Variants of the term “Turkism” current inside Turkey include *Türkçülük*, *Türklük*.

¹¹ For more detail see: Nadein-Rayesky, V.A., *Pan-Turkism; Myth or Reality? A Study of the Ideology and Policies of Modern Pan-Turkism*. (Simferopol: Russian Academy of Sciences’ Institute of World Economy and International Relations, 1995).

¹² The Turkish Agency for Cooperation and Coordination (*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı*, TİKA).

An informal online summit of the presidents of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kirgizia and Uzbekistan was held on March 31, 2021 under the Turkic Council auspices. Taking part in the summit were the Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán¹³ and the President of Turkmenistan,¹⁴ which is not a member. The summit participants welcomed the “liberation of Azerbaijani territories from military occupation” and committed themselves to close integration, including in the military field. It decided to reformat the Turkic Council into a “Union of Turkic States.”¹⁵ The participants in the summit are planning to approve the final name of the organization in time for the 8th summit to be held in Turkey in the late 2021.

Another issue discussed at the summit was the creation of a Turan Army that would unite the armed forces of Turkic states. Inter-ministerial cooperation bodies, including military and security structures, have been set up within the Turkic Council. These plans may raise eyebrows if one considers that Kazakhstan and Kirgizia are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), i.e. are allies of Russia,¹⁶ and Turkey is a member of NATO. Azerbaijan’s victory in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 breathed new hopes into these plans.

Turkey is the main champion of Turks, i.e. Turkic-speaking peoples, practically all over the world. In Iran, Turkey backs Iranian Azeris and Turkmen, in Iraq and Syria Turkomen, in Cyprus Cypriot Turks, in China the Uigurs, in Bulgaria Bulgarian Turks. In Russia, “Turks” were defended against the cruel Orthodox Tsar and later against victimization by the communist regime. In post-Soviet Russia a new goal has been protecting Crimean Tatars against alleged persecution by the Russian authorities. In Istanbul there are strong sentiments in support of a “return” of Crimea to the Turkish Republic.

¹³ Supporters of “Pan-Turanism” who consider “Turks” and Hungarians to be related peoples are a strong lobby, including in Hungary’s ruling party.

¹⁴ Kulagin, V., ‘Great Turks: How Turkey Unites Central Asia. Tokayev Calls for Modernizing the Turkic Civilization.’ *Gazeta.ru*, 1 Apr. 2021 <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2021/04/01_a_13543670.shtml>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Syrian and Libyan conflicts: claims and reality

Practically from the start of the Syrian conflict Turkey did not conceal its idea of creating a “security belt” on the border with Syria (officially to accommodate Syrian refugees). However, Russia stopped Turkish expansion to Syrian territory by not allowing it to occupy the entire northern strip of Syrian territory. The Turks managed to seize only the 100 km strip from Tell Abyad to Ras-al-Ayn after Kurdish units were withdrawn from there. Already during the Olive Branch operation in January–March 2019 the Turks seized the mainly Kurdish-populated city of Afrin and part of Aleppo province. However, the Syrian troops reached the Turkish border and regained government troops’ control over part of the regions, with the agreement of Syrian Democratic Forces. Part of the Idlib province in north-western Syria became the area of concentration of Islamic units and the Free Syrian Army created by Turkey and pro-Turkish Turkomen units. As a result of a successful offensive of the Syrian government forces, Iranian allies and Hezbollah Shia units and with the support of Russian air forces all the Islamic units from other Syrian regions were pushed into the region. Turkey was committed to preserving the Idlib terrorist enclave at all costs and President Erdogan declared that an operation of the Turkish military against the forces of Syrian President Bashar Assad in Idlib province was only “a matter of time.” Addressing his supporters Erdogan said that Turkey would ensure security in Idlib “at all costs.”¹⁷

Amid growing tensions a clash between Turkish troops and Turkish proxies on one side and not only the Syrian army and Shia units, but also with Russian special units on the other side, seemed inevitable by the start of 2020. Erdogan gave the Syrian authorities time until the end of February 2020 to withdraw their army to the positions it occupied before the offensive. To support these threats the Turks moved additional military hardware to Idlib and other Turkish-occupied regions.¹⁸

¹⁷ ‘Erdogan: Turkish Operation in Syria a Matter of Time’, *Radio Liberty*, 19 Feb. 2020 <<https://www.svoboda.org/a/30443327.html>>.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

The differences were only settled in a personal meeting between President Putin of the Russia and President Erdogan of Turkey held at the Kremlin on March 5, 2020 when after six hours of negotiations an agreement was reached on ending “all military actions on the existing line of contact as of March 5 midnight,” the creation of a “security corridor” (6 km wide) to the north and south of M4 highway in north-eastern Syria and joint patrolling of the corridor along the strategic M4 highway beginning from March 15, 2020.¹⁹

It has to be noted that Putin negotiated the preservation of the Syrian army’s control over the territories in and around Idlib. Another very important outcome of the meeting was the joint Putin–Erdogan statement on the need to destroy the fighters declared to be terrorists by the UN.²⁰

Predictably, these accords were rejected by the fighting arms of the terrorist opposition, *Hayat Tahrir al-Sham* and *Hurras al-Din* which follow *Al Qaeda*’s ideological principles and terrorist methods.²¹ However, the main irritant for the Turks and their proxies was still the units of the Syrian Democratic Forces Union whose core is the Kurdish self-defense units.

Turkey became actively involved in the civil war in Libya [which, like Syria, used to be part of the Ottoman Empire – *editor’s note*] on the side of the Government of National Accord (GNA) led by Fayeze al-Sarraj. Turkey sent to Libya, on various estimates, up to 15,000 Syrian fighters and Islamists recruited in Syrian Idlib. In addition, it sent to Libya its special forces, drones and other arms. As a result, the onslaught of the Libyan National Army (LNA) on the capital Tripoli led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar was stopped and the counteroffensive of the GNA forces consisting of Islamist and tribal units, with active

¹⁹ RIA Novosti, ‘Russia Assesses Results of Putin-Erdogan Meeting on Syria’, 5 Mar. 2020 <<https://ria.ru/20200305/1568220487.html>>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Interfax, ‘Russian Foreign Ministry Reports Idlib Militants Have Rearmed and Launched a Counteroffensive’, 16 Mar. 2020 <<https://www.interfax.ru/world/699314/>>.

participation of Syrian mercenaries, the Turkish commandos, drones that targeted armor, artillery and LNA air defense pushed back Haftar's forces and seized some strategically important areas.²²

Haftar, in turn, sought the support of France and Germany. During a meeting with the French President Emmanuel Macron Haftar promised to sign a peace agreement with Fayezi Sarraj, the head of the GNA recognized by the UN.²³ However, he failed to get the EU to support the UN resolution condemning Turkey's interference in the internal Libyan conflict. This had a great deal to do with Turkey's threat to allow hundreds of thousands of refugees to flee to Europe.

It was not until the summer of 2020 that a ceasefire and a truce were achieved in this war and, from the end of August 2020, fighting between GNA and LNA forces practically stopped. A permanent ceasefire was signed after talks in Switzerland on October 23, 2020.²⁴

Turkey hoped for a decisive victory over Haftar and his troops and consolidation of the GNA with which it had signed an agreement on the sharing of the Mediterranean continental shelf. In spite of the heavy cost of supporting Fayezi Sarraj's government Erdogan failed to achieve his goals in Libya while the relations with the Mediterranean countries were spoiled and the European Union backed Turkey's enemies.

Turkey may expect even more trouble from Libya's new government. The head of the interim government, Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dbeibeh, has said: "The mercenaries are a knife in the back, they must go" explaining reasonably that "their presence violates our

²² LNA forces had the backing of the Persian Gulf Arab monarchies, in the first place the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Besides, Marshal Haftar is thought to have the support of Russia, Egypt, France, and Saudi Arabia, although Russia has largely confined itself to calling for a ceasefire.

²³ Mustafin, R., 'Haftar Ready to Sign Ceasefire with Tripoli Authorities', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 10 Mar. 2020 <https://www.ng.ru/world/2020-03-10/6_7813_libya.html>.

²⁴ 'Haftar Sends Signal to Erdogan: "We Are in a State of War with Turkey"', *Eadaily.com*, 10 Dec. 2020 <<https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2020/12/10/haftar-poslal-signal-erdoganu-my-v-sostoyanii-voyny-s-turciey>>.

sovereignty.”²⁵ The chairman of the Libyan Interim Administration’s Presidential Council Mohammed al-Menfi has urged Turkey to withdraw Syrian mercenaries and Turkish military experts.²⁶

The issue of the Mediterranean shelf also got its share of attention. After talks with the Greek Prime Minister the head of the National Unity Government Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh stressed the need for a new treaty that does not violate the interests of the three states. To this end he proposed to form a joint committee to discuss dividing lines,²⁷ a turn of events that would hardly be to Erdogan’s liking.

Turkey and the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict

In 2020 Turkey was actively involved in the preparation and conduct of a new war in Nagorno-Karabakh. It had taken many years to restructure and modernize the Azeri army, train personnel and form modern and well-trained special operations forces. Turkish military advisers had long been controlling the training of Azeri forces and the main processes in the army and other military structures in Azerbaijan. All the elite units were trained by Turkish specialists both inside Azerbaijan and on Turkish territory. In 2001 new commando units, the Blue Berets, were trained by Turkish Special Forces’ officers (Maroon Berets). Training took place both in Azerbaijan and at the Turkish military base in Northern Cyprus. Azerbaijan’s special operations forces are closely

²⁵ Interfax, ‘The Head of Libya’s Interim Government Demands Withdrawal of Foreign Mercenaries’, 9 Mar. 2021 <<https://www.interfax.ru/world/755185>>.

²⁶ ‘Chairman of Libya’s Presidential Council Calls on Turkey to Withdraw Syrian Mercenaries and Turkish Military Experts’, *Arm-world.ru*, 30 Mar. 2021 <<https://arm-world.ru/news/novostnik/72148-predsedatel-prezidentskogo-soveta-livii-prizval-tureciju-vyvesti-sirijskih-naemnikov-i-tureckih-voennyh-jekspertov.html>>.

²⁷ ‘Libyan Government Says It’s Ready to Discuss Sea Border Demarcation with Greece’, *Riafan.ru*, 6 Apr. 2021.

cooperating with the special operations forces of Pakistan, the USA and Israel.²⁸ These units played a key role in the Azeri army's ground operations.

Turkey stepped up its arms supply to Azerbaijan in 2020. Between January and November 2020 it increased by 610%, while Turkey's military exports to Azerbaijan almost hit the \$300 million mark. Azerbaijan's total military budget in 2020 stood at about \$2.2 billion, i.e. more than 20% more than in 2019.²⁹

An important part of Turkey's arms supplies was *Bayraktar* TB-2 UAVs and their weaponry as well as reconnaissance-type UAVs and airborne guided anti-tank missiles.

On July 31, 2020, after clashes on the Armenian-Azeri border at Tavush on July 12–13, Turkish Air Forces' F-16 aircraft was deployed in Azerbaijan to take part in the joint *TurAz Qartali 2020* exercises. As part of the same exercise military transport planes delivered T-129 ATAK assault helicopters to Nakhichevan.³⁰

After the start of the Azeri forces offensive on the Nagorno-Karabakh Defense Army positions on September 27, 2020 Turkey rendered all-out support to "fraternal Azerbaijan" while flatly denying Turkish troops' involvement in that war.

Taking part in planning and executing the Karabakh operation was Lieutenant-General Sheref Ongay, commander of the Turkish Land Forces' 3rd Field Army. Reportedly, about 200 Turkish military advisers were engaged in organization and staff work supporting Azerbaijan's

²⁸ Knutov, Yu., 'Armenian and Azeri Special Forces: Rendezvous Place Can't Be Changed?', *Eadaily.com*, 3 Nov. 2020 <<https://zvezdawebweekly.ru/news/202010301310-u5TSk.html>>.

²⁹ 'Turkey's Military Export to Azerbaijan Grew by more than 600 Percent in 11 Months', *Voyennoye obozreniye*, 3 Dec. 2020 <<https://topwar.ru/177758-voennyj-jeksport-iz-turcii-v-azerbajdzhan-za-11-mesjacev-vyros-na-600-s-lishnim-procentov.html>>.

³⁰ 'Azerbaijan and Turkish Air Forces Demonstrate "model of brotherhood" over Nakhichevan', *Eadaily.com*, 16 Sep. 2020 <<https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2020/09/16/vvs-azerbajdzhana-i-turcii-pokazali-nad-nahichevanyu-obrazec-bratstva>>.

operation. These activities were also backed by two special satellite communications stations, one in Baku and another on the territory of Gabala military airport.³¹

At the end of the day, Turkey's participation in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict on Azerbaijan's side made the decisive contribution to Azerbaijan's victory.

Turkey and its Western allies

In the European department of Turkey's foreign policy the chances of achieving the declared strategic task of joining the EU are becoming more and more remote. At a press conference on April 17, 2018 the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, Johannes Hahn, presented a report on Turkey noting that Turkey was continuing to move away from the EU, especially as regards the rule of law and basic rights and freedoms. But he noted that "Turkey retains its strategic significance for the EU."³² The Europeans sharply criticized human rights violations and mass arrests in Turkey where, after the introduction of the state of emergency, more than 150,000 people were detained, 78,000 were arrested and more than 110,000 civil servants were fired.³³

The EU demanded the restoration of parliamentary immunity to ensure freedom of expression for MPs.³⁴ The EU stepped up its criticism after the parliamentary and presidential elections in Turkey, but the Turks ignored the criticism.

Erdogan is using the problem of Syrian refugees to bring pressure to bear on the EU. On March 20, 2016 the agreement between Brussels and Ankara on measures to limit the flow of refugees to Europe was

³¹ Veselov, A., 'Which Turkish General Commanded the Attack on Karabakh?', *Yandex.ru*. 12 Nov. 2020 <<https://yandex.ru/turbo/vz.ru/s/world/2020/11/12/1069822.html>>.

³² Asalyoglu, A., 'Ankara Walking Away from EU with Seven-Mile Strides', *Regnum.ru*, 20 Apr. 2018 <<https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2407030.htm>>.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

signed. The EU leaders and the then head of the Turkish government, Ahmet Davutoglu, agreed a detailed plan to settle the migration crisis. Ankara was to take back all the illegal migrants who were being ferried from the Turkish shores to Greece, including economic migrants, and the EU was allowed to send all the illegal migrants back to Turkey.³⁵

For its part the EU promised to speed up the liberalization of the visa regime with Turkey and agreed to start negotiations on one of the criteria for Turkey's admission to the EU, i. e. availability of sufficient financial resources. Turkey had to comply with 72 conditions to qualify for a new status. Brussels agreed to speed up delivery of 3 billion euro financial aid package (Turkey had asked for double that amount). In practice fulfillment of agreed pledges ran into Turkey's categorical refusal to comply with a number of EU conditions, first and foremost, to repeal the counter-terrorism law. Under that law anyone who dared to speak out in favor of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and even to call for resuming talks with it could be declared a terrorist. The Turks also refused to stop the prosecution of journalists, to repeal the law on insulting the authorities under which about three thousand people were being prosecuted. Erdogan threatened to stop holding back the flow of refugees if the EU continued pressing its demands while the Europeans tried to stand their ground while gradually yielding to some of Turkey's demands.³⁶

Relations with the Mediterranean states and with the EU further deteriorated due to Turkey's increased activity in Eastern Mediterranean and exploration of supposed major gas deposits there. The agreement on delimitation of Turkey's continental shelf with the then National Accord

³⁵ Deutsche Welle, 'EU-Turkey Agreement on Refugees: Disputed Issues Remain?', 20 March 2016.

³⁶ In September 2016 the European Union announced the launching of a program of aid to a million Syrian refugees from Turkey as part of a financial aid package in exchange for limiting the flow of refugees to Europe. As of October 2016 every refugee was eligible for a 30 euro allowance (100 Turkish liras at the exchange rate at that moment). The EU earmarked almost 350 million euros for the total program. See 'Media: EU to Pay €30 to Syrian refugees in Turkey', *Izvestia.ru*, 27 Sep. 2016 <<http://izvestia.ru/news/634702>>.

Government of Libya contradicts the 1982 UN Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS). However, the international court cannot consider claims to Turkey as Turkey is not a signatory to the Convention.

Turkey ignored the EU demand to stop “illegal exploration in the Mediterranean.” Further pressure on Ankara was needed. The EU summit in November 2020 told the EU Council to adopt an additional black list pursuant to the November 11, 2019 decision on restrictive measures concerning the illegal activities of Turkey in the Mediterranean, says the official statement of the European Union leaders, who are prepared to coordinate their actions vis-à-vis Turkey with the US authorities.³⁷

At the same time European Union heads of state or government urged the need to leave open the channels of dialog with Ankara, including on restraining Middle East migrants and aid to Syrian refugees.³⁸ All this puts into question the effectiveness of EU pressure on Ankara.

However, Turkey stopped its exploration off the Cyprus coast ahead of schedule in January 2021 to placate the EU. The German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas called it a positive signal. He said that Germany welcomed the signs of détente coming from Turkey. Early termination of seismic explorations due to the withdrawal of the *Barbaros* research vessel was also a positive signal, he said.³⁹ Another positive sign was the change of Erdogan’s rhetoric concerning the French President Emmanuel Macron. Following reports about Macron catching COVID-19 in mid-December of 2020, Erdogan sent him a letter wishing a speedy recovery. Addressing him as “Dear Emmanuel,” he wrote that he would like to discuss again the common fight against the COVID-19 epidemic, bilateral relations and relations between Turkey and the EU as well as regional issues “as soon as you

³⁷ Poplavsky, A., ‘Sanctions against Turkey and Budget Breakthrough: what EU Leaders Agreed on’, *Gazeta.ru*, 11 Dec. 2020 <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2020/12/10_a_13394101.shtml>.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Poplavsky, A., ‘Pivot to the West: How Ankara Tries to Make Peace with the EU’, *Gazeta.ru*, 21 Jan. 2021 <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2021/01/21_a_13449536.shtml>.

feel better.’⁴⁰ The latest positive step on Turkey’s part was resumption of the dialog with Greece on disputed territorial waters as the two sides agreed to sit down at the negotiating table.

Turkey’s relations with its main ally, the United States, have also been patchy. In 2016 Erdogan put the blame for an abortive government coup in Turkey on Fethullah Gulen, who lives in the USA, and demanded his extradition. The US Federal Court ruled that the documents Turkey presented were not convincing proof.

The problem was compounded by America’s support of Syrian Kurdish Self-Defense units (YPG) which Turkey considers to be part of the Workers’ Party of Kurdistan which is waging a guerilla war for Kurdish autonomy in Turkey.

The US in turn was unhappy about Erdogan’s refusal to support sanctions against Iran after the US withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal. Turkey’s intention to buy Russian S-400 air defense systems also provoked America’s ire. Turkey got warnings from NATO, too, but Erdogan did not budge, especially since the US refused to supply earlier requested American Patriot systems.

In 2017, against the background of the stand-off between the two countries, the Turkish Central Bank withdrew from the US all its gold reserves, about 28.7 tons of gold bullions. The total gold reserves in the country are estimated at 564.6 tons, worth more than \$20 billion.⁴¹ US President Trump then imposed import tariffs on Turkish steel and aluminum. Turkey countered by imposing tariffs on 22 types of goods from the US to the tune of \$266.5 million.

The arrest in Turkey of Andrew Branson, an American pastor from North Carolina, on charges of spying, involvement in a coup attempt and support of terrorism triggered a full-scale trade war against Turkey. Against the background of the trade war and mutual customs duties in the summer of 2018 the Turkish lira depreciated to the dollar by some 30%, and yearly inflation in Turkey approached 16%. The US Senate banned the supply of F-35 fighter aircraft in retaliation for

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ ‘Turkish Crisis and Economic Collapse’, NewTopru.org, 13 Aug. 2018
<<http://new.topru.org/krizis-v-turcii-i-krax-ekonomiki/>>.

Turkey's purchase of S-400 missiles from Russia.⁴² The introduction of duties on steel and aluminum meant that exports dropped by \$1.4 billion and \$50 million respectively.⁴³ It has to be noted that Turkey is one of the world's top ten steel producers, occupying 7–8th places.⁴⁴

Speaking at the opening of the US Embassy in Jerusalem on May 14, 2018 President Erdogan said: “We believe that the decision to move the US Embassy to Jerusalem is very wrong, especially its execution. We reiterate our rejection of the decision.”⁴⁵

Having said that, in the fall the American pastor Andrew Branson, after being indicted by the court, was released on October 12 sanctions on both sides were lifted,⁴⁶ and tensions in relations with Washington began to subside.

* * *

Turkey's ideology has undergone substantial changes during the years of the reign of the AKP which was initially committed to moderate Islam. It took on board neo-Ottomanism with its claim to dominating the whole former territory of the Ottoman Empire and then Pan-Turkism which strengthened the trend toward an alliance with the Nationalist Movement Party although this runs counter to the concept of Islamism which rejects the primacy of “the national.” Obviously, in his foreign policy and claims to leading the Turkic world Erdogan draws support from the country's nationalist-minded electorate.

Russia, in its relations with Turkey, seeks to keep Turkish expansionist aspirations at bay. At the same time it is addressing the issues of economic cooperation and is implementing large-scale projects of mutual interest.

⁴² ‘Israel and Egypt threaten Turkey with “military intervention”’, *Regnum.ru*, 5 Aug. 2018 <<https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2459629.html>>.

⁴³ Asalyoglu, A., ‘Is the Crisis in Turkey Becoming Global?’, *Regnum.ru*, 16 Aug. 2018 <<https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2465991.html>>.

⁴⁴ Turkish Crisis and Economic Collapse...

⁴⁵ Asalyoglu, A., ‘Ankara Backs Palestinians Only in Words?’, *Regnum.ru*, 20 May 2018 <<https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2417815.html>>.

⁴⁶ RIA Novosti, ‘US Lifts Sanctions Against Turkish Ministers’, 2 Nov. 2018 <<https://ria.ru/20181102/1532041895.html>>.

7. CONFLICTS WITHIN THE MUSLIM WORLD AS A THREAT TO STABILITY AND SECURITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Stanislav IVANOV

In the Middle East in the recent years, against a background of some easing of conflicts between Israel and several Arab states, and the signing of agreements on normalization between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain in September 2020 in particular,¹ the growing tensions within the Muslim world between the two main branches of Islam, Sunnism and Shi'ism,² are becoming more apparent. By now, Shi'ites and adherents of smaller related branches of Islam account for about 15% of the total number of Muslims in the world, and Sunnis for the remaining 85%, respectively. Shi'ism is professed by most Muslims in Iran, Iraq, and Bahrain, while in the rest of the Islamic Middle Eastern states Shi'ites are confessional minorities.³

The inter- and intra-state conflicts that have plagued the Middle East in the recent decades have intensified the sectarian tensions and the struggle for power and resources between the governing elites and opposition groups, usually representing these two different branches of Islam. The so-called non-state radical Islamist actors – *Islamic State*, *Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham*, *Hezbollah*, etc. – also continue their terrorist activities in the region.

These processes are characterized by many scholars as the “politicization” or “renaissance” of Islam, pointing out that they began to develop, in part, because of the ideological crisis of Arab socialism / nationalism and Pan-Arabism, which had formed the basis

¹ TASS, ‘Israel, UAE and Bahrain Sign Agreements to Normalize Relations’, 16 Sep. 2020 [in Russian].

² The key difference between them is that Sunnis recognize the Prophet Muhammad exclusively, while Shi'ites equally venerate both Muhammad and his cousin Ali.

³ Suponina, E., ‘Shi'ites and Sunnis: The Danger of a Great War from Syria to Pakistan’, RSMD, 23 Apr. 2014 [in Russian].

of the state ideologies in many Arab countries during the second half of the 20th century and actually discredited themselves by the late 1990s. Whatever it was, the Shia-Sunni confrontation, which has significantly intensified in the recent years, has clearly manifested itself in virtually all regional conflicts (Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq) through either open support from the regional states for “pro-Sunni” or “pro-Shia” parties, or their tacit assistance, deploying “proxy formations” and other military and political means into conflict zones.

Stages and Key Milestones of the Shia–Sunni Confrontation

The causes of modern religious confrontation and conflicts between Shi’ites and Sunnis in the Middle East date back to the events of the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution, which brought to power in Iran the Shia fundamentalists led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. In Iran Shi’ism has become not only the state religion and the basis of legislation, but also an important tool in Iranian foreign policy, aimed at strengthening the country’s position in the Middle East and in some other regions. In fact, the Iranian Ayatollahs aimed to promote Shi’ites in power in those Muslim countries where they were in the majority, and to achieve equal rights for Shi’ites and Sunnis and ensure greater representation of Shi’ites in the authorities and business in those countries where they were a religious minority.⁴

An important step in Shia expansion in the Middle East was the recognition of Syrian Alawites as Muslims close to the Shia branch of Islam by Shia spiritual leaders in Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran. However, Sunni-majority countries, including members of the Arab League, and their Muslim spiritual leaders accordingly, still do not consider Alawites to be Muslims, and largely for that reason do not recognize the legitimacy of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. In turn, Tehran managed to strengthen its partnership and alliance with the ruling Alawite Assad family in Damascus – in fact, even before the 2011 civil

⁴ Mirsky, G., ‘Islamic Fundamentalism, Sunnis, and Shi’ites’, *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnoshenia*, 2008, no. 9, pp. 3–15 [in Russian].

standoff and subsequent war in Syria. At the same time, Iran was also able to increase its influence on the Shia community in neighbouring Lebanon through its support for *Hezbollah*.⁵

The overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq in 2003 eventually brought to power in Iraq democratically elected political leaders from a religious majority, Shia Muslims. Some of them were in exile during the years of Saddam's rule in Iraq, particularly in Iran, and were quite closely connected with the Iranian governing circles and special services. As a result, despite the long stay of the US troops in Iraq, the Iranian ayatollahs gradually managed to become one of Baghdad's main allies in the region and gained a firm foothold in this country. In addition, Tehran has made significant efforts to create pro-Iranian units of the *Al-Hashd al-Shaabi* Shia militia group, which not only impose their own special order in Iraq, while weakening the positions of Sunni Arabs and Kurds, but are also involved as mercenaries in combat operations in neighbouring Syria on the side of the government of Bashar al-Assad.

With the outbreak of the so-called "Arab Spring" in 2011, when large-scale protests against the authorities covered almost the entire Arab East,⁶ Iranian political and military influence over a number of states in the Middle East increased significantly. There emerged the so-called "Shia crescent" or "Shia arc" of countries and regions from Iran and the Persian Gulf coast through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon to

⁵ *Hezbollah* was the only armed group that was not disarmed after the end of Lebanese civil war in 1990, and today it wields considerable political influence and military power in Lebanon. *Hezbollah* is largely financed and armed by Iran, and its leader Hassan Nasrallah recognizes the authority of the Supreme Iranian Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. See Peters, D., Sydow, Ch., 'Irans schiitische Internationale', *Der Spiegel*, 17 May 2017 <<https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/iran-die-islamische-republik-unterstuetzt-arabische-schiiten-milizen-a-1146838.html>>.

⁶ Pechurov, S.L., *The Arab East: From 'Spring' to Chaos?* (Moscow: Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2013), p. 115 [in Russian].

the Mediterranean Sea,⁷ which could not but provoke a hostile response from Sunni governments. At the same time, this has led to an increase in the activities of radical Sunni Islamist groups like *Al-Qaeda*, *Islamic State*, *Jabhat al-Nusra*, *The Muslim Brotherhood* (organizations banned in the Russian Federation), and dozens of others across the Middle East. To some extent, the proclaiming of the so-called “Islamic Caliphate”, a quasi-state in Syria and Iraq in 2014–2016, could actually be seen as an attempt by radical Sunnis to ostensibly “restore historical justice” and return power to the “true Muslims”, i.e. the Sunnis of Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon.

Armed Conflicts and Political Instability in the Middle East

With the outbreak of the Arab Spring, Tehran supported the uprising of the Shia majority against the Sunni authorities in Bahrain. Although the ruling Sunni Arab minority, with the help of the troops of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), restored constitutional order rather quickly, Bahraini Shia community had been able to make some improvements. At the same time, the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) had reportedly continued to support the Shia opposition and radical organizations in Bahrain for a while.

The Iranians have also been very active in supporting the uprising of the Yemeni Houthis, who are close to their faith.⁸ To restore the legitimate authority and prevent further Iranian interference in Yemen on the side of the Houthis, Saudi Arabia and the UAE formed in 2015 the “Arab coalition,” which is still engaged in combat operations

⁷ “Shia crescent” is the term has taken hold among experts and scholars, thanks to King Abdullah II of Jordan. In a 2004 interview, he warned of the “Shia crescent” that, after the topple of Saddam Hussein’s Sunni regime, “would spread from Iran through Iraq and Syria to Lebanon” and “could play a very destabilizing role for the Gulf states.” See Peters and Sydow, 2017.

⁸ Yemeni Houthis profess the Zaidi (Shia) Islam.

in Yemen.⁹ Throughout the civil war in Yemen, Iran, for its part, has continued to secretly provide significant financial support and ship advanced weapons to the Houthis.

Not without Tehran's help, the Shia communities in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, and other Arab countries have also become active. The most serious anti-government Shia demonstrations took place in the oil-rich Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. The Persian Gulf monarchies were forced to make some concessions to the protesters and improve the socio-economic situation of the Shia communities.

In early 2016, the tensions rose sharply between the KSA and Iran. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia severed diplomatic relations with Tehran after an attack on Saudi diplomatic missions in Iran. These events followed the execution in Saudi Arabia of Shia preacher Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has also contributed to the growing hostility between the countries, comparing Iranian spiritual leader Ali Khamenei to Hitler in one of his remarks.¹⁰

Since 2011–2012, in addition to Yemen, Syria has become the epicentre of regional confrontation and open armed struggle between Shi'ites/Alawites and Sunnis. With the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, the Iranian authorities have strongly supported Bashar al-Assad in the fight against radical Islamist groups and the Sunni Arab armed opposition. The Gulf monarchies and Jordan, in turn, began to provide financial, military, and other assistance to Assad's opponents. Sunni Turkey also opposed the Syrian authorities and their Shia foreign allies.

The Syrian government has managed to retain power and establish formal control over most (about two-thirds) of the country's territory, relying on the military efforts of Russia and Iran, as well as their financial and material support.¹¹ Even so, the Syrian

⁹ Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, and Pakistan have participated in the coalition, but the fighting on the ground is mostly done by Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

¹⁰ Poliak, V., 'Will Riyadh and Tehran agree on peace? Israel will be left alone', *Details – Israel News*, 7 Jun. 2020 <<https://detaly.co.il/er-riyad-i-tegeran-dogovoryatsya-o-mire-izrail-ostanetsya-odin/>>.

¹¹ Sazhin, V., 'Iran in Syria: the Price of the Help', *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn*, 1 Jan. 2018 <<https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/19090>> [in Russian].

government-controlled provinces are now home to only a third of Syria's pre-war population (6–7 million people). B. Assad's government and Tehran, according to a number of assessments, seem to be quite satisfied with the changed balance of the confessional structure of the population in favour of Alawites and Shi'ites. At the same time, the Syrian army, shrunk during the war, continues to be reinforced by military advisors and specialists from the IRGC of Iran, Shia groups of Lebanese *Hezbollah*, and Shia mercenaries from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen, and Palestine. It can be said that the B. Assad part of the Syrian territory has been largely controlled by Iranian forces and pro-Iranian foreign Shia groups for the past two or three years. They also continue to take part in military operations against units of the Syrian armed opposition and radical Islamist groups in the north-western part of the country.

During the Syrian conflict, not only the USA, the EU, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, which supported the Syrian opposition, but also Sunni Turkey has acted as a counterweight to the Shia expansion in Syria. Since August 2016, its troops have conducted a series of military punitive operations in northwestern and northern Syria (*Euphrates Shield*, *Olive Branch*, *Peace Spring*, and *Spring Shield*), while occupying some Syrian territories, including Jarabulus and Afrin region.¹² In the territories under its control, Ankara is seeking to establish regional and municipal authorities, new armed forces, special services and police forces that are alternative to Damascus.¹³ Erdogan is betting on the members of the Sunni Arab opposition and Syrian Turkmen living along the Turkish border, who also profess Sunni Islam. The Turkish authorities are planning/plan to begin relocating to northern Syria up to 1 million Syrian Sunni refugees from the camps in Turkish territory. Some radical militants from such Islamist terrorist groups as *Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham* are used by the Turkish authorities to form local security and police forces, while others are reportedly

¹² TASS, 'History of Turkey's Military Operations in Syria', 9 Oct. 2019 <<https://tass.ru/info/6981077>> [in Russian].

¹³ Ivanov, S. M., 'President Erdogan's Imperial Passions', *Voenna-Promyshlenniy Kurier*, 20 Apr. 2020 <<https://vpk-news.ru/articles/56592>> [in Russian].

being sent to fight in Libya against Marshal Khalifa Haftar's forces. It is possible that some of these militants were also involved in the armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh in the fall 2020.

The Syrian authorities are still unable to control the northeast of the country, where the Kurdish Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (Rojava) is proclaimed, as well as the eastern bank of the Euphrates River, where Kurdish militias in alliance with local Arab tribes hold the main oil and gas fields. The Kurds and Arabs on the eastern bank of the Euphrates are also mostly Sunni Muslims. Given this circumstance, and under pressure from Washington, the authorities of Saudi Arabia and the UAE are providing targeted financial and material support to the most affected areas in the east. In particular, they have allocated about \$300 million for the reconstruction of Raqqa, the former capital of the so-called "Islamic Caliphate." After the relevant negotiations, agreements were also reached on providing military and military-technical assistance by Saudi Arabia to the fighters of the local Syrian Democratic Forces militia.¹⁴

The Iranian Shia expansion across the Middle East meets the fiercest resistance from Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who claims to be the leader in the Muslim and Arab world.¹⁵ In turn, the Turkish leadership also seeks to limit Iranian influence in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria, considering these states to be its traditional sphere of influence. At the same time, Turkey, which in recent years has changed its course from the values of the Kemalist secular republic to a Muslim regional power, also claims to be one of the leaders of the Muslim world. Both Saudi Arabia and Turkey consider the Iranian Ayatollahs as competitors and rivals, both politico-military and religious.

¹⁴ Subbotin, I., 'Saudis will fight back against Turkey and Iran in Syria', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 5 Feb. 2020. <http://www.ng.ru/world/2020-02-05/1_7786_saudiarabia.html> [in Russian].

¹⁵ The King of the Saudi Arabia holds the title "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques": the Holy Mosque *Masjid al-Haram* in Mecca and the The Prophet's Mosque in Medina.

Is a Joint Anti-Iranian Bloc Possible?

US President Donald Trump worked hard to form a joint anti-Iranian (anti-Shia) bloc of Middle Eastern states, which is fully consistent with the US foreign policy interests in the region. D. Trump made his first official foreign visit in May 2017 to Riyadh, where he not only had very successful talks with the King of Saudi Arabia, but also addressed the summits of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The US President called for joint efforts to counter both radical Sunni jihadist groups, like *Islamic State*, and Shia fundamentalists, thereby essentially equating these two threats from opposing forces. Washington's subsequent declaration of Iran's IRGC as a terrorist organization and the killing of IRGC leader General Qasem Soleimani by US Special Forces in Iraq confirmed the seriousness of D. Trump's intention to limit the activities of the Iranian authorities and Iranian Shi'ism in the region.

That same 2017 Middle East tour by D. Trump was also marked by the conclusion of an unprecedented arms deal between the USA and the KSA for the supply of arms and military equipment worth \$110 billion.¹⁶ These arms transfers were complemented by a number of other major arms contracts with the GCC countries.¹⁷ There was also discussion of creating a regional missile defence system similar to the European BMD, which could protect the Arab Gulf states and US military bases in the GCC countries from possible Iranian air and missile attacks. Washington made it clear that such a system could interact with the US naval BMD capabilities and NATO missile defence in the region.

It should be noted that the Gulf monarchies have achieved a fairly high level of integration in various areas (political, military, military-technical, trade and economic, customs, etc.); they conduct

¹⁶ TASS, 'Trump's visit to Riyadh: Record arms deal and strategic partnership', 21 May 2017 <<https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/4268498>> [in Russian].

¹⁷ As a result, the US actual exports of weapons and military equipment to the Middle East region have increased from \$15 billion in 2011–2014 to \$27 billion in 2015–2019, according to SIPRI.

joint exercises and manoeuvres of all branches of the armed forces, to which representatives and military contingents of Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and other Arab countries, and in some cases also Pakistan and India are invited. Politicians and experts are also considering the idea of creating a NATO-style regional Arab military-political alliance (“mini-NATO” or “Arab NATO”), in which a key role could play a “security pact” between Arab countries and the USA, formalizing the creation of a Middle East strategic alliance.¹⁸

Nevertheless, despite the relevant efforts of Washington and Riyadh, a joint anti-Iranian political and military bloc has not yet been formed. Egypt, Kuwait, the Sultanate of Oman, and Qatar take a special position on Iran. The latter three states do not refuse to cooperate with Tehran in trade, economic, and other areas and believe that all disagreements with the Iranian leadership are best resolved through dialogue and negotiations. Egypt, which has pursued a multi-vector foreign and military policy for many years and has the largest army in the region after Saudi Arabia, is not ready either to participate in an alliance that would be anti-Iranian and, possibly, also anti-Russian and anti-Chinese.¹⁹ Only the UAE, Bahrain, and Jordan directly support Riyadh in its growing confrontation with Tehran.

Given the continuing antagonism between the Gulf Arab states and Israel over the unresolved Palestinian issue, President D. Trump held separate talks with Jerusalem as part of his presidency. At this stage, the USA is quite happy with the shift in emphasis in the regional confrontation between Riyadh and its GCC allies with Israel in the direction of potential Iranian threats. In that case, even without any direct interaction between Israel and the Sunni Arab states, they will be forced to counter Iranian expansion in the Middle East, and Washington will be able to coordinate their efforts in this direction to a greater or lesser degree.

¹⁸ Ibragimova, G., ‘The Americans are creating an “Arab NATO”. Will Russia stop them?’, RIA Novosti, 19 May 2019 <<https://ria.ru/201905191553581668.html>> [in Russian].

¹⁹ Ibid.

Judging by the first statements and practical steps of the Biden administration, Washington may agree to restore its participation in the “nuclear deal” with Iran, which will reduce the level of confrontation in the region, create prerequisites for Iran’s withdrawal from the international isolation and for starting a dialogue between Riyadh and Tehran.

Assessment of Scenarios for Further Shia-Sunni Confrontation and Other Conflicts in the Region

The COVID-19 pandemic and falling hydrocarbon prices, as well as the still-existing restrictive sanctions against Iran, have significantly limited Tehran’s ability to support Shia communities in the Middle East and wage proxy wars in Yemen and Syria, both financially and militarily. The budgets of Saudi Arabia and other petrostates of the Arab East were also strained by the oil price crisis. This will obviously contribute to the fact that the Shia-Sunni conflicts can be limited in scope or even frozen for a while. It is unlikely that Washington and its Western allies will object to the resumption of the dialogue between Riyadh and Tehran, interrupted several years ago, to achieve some consensus between them on the most pressing regional problems. A number of Muslim countries, including Pakistan, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar, have expressed their willingness to mediate in establishing contacts and settling relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

However, in the ruling circles in Riyadh and Tehran, there persists mistrust and hostility towards each other as major regional rivals. The Iranian governing circles are skilfully playing out the image of an external enemy to their population, presenting the Saudis as “accomplices of American imperialism,” while Saudi Arabia, in turn, accuses the Iranian authorities of interfering in the internal affairs of Arab countries and subversion of the region. The antagonism in the relations between the elites of these states and the level of confrontation between them may not allow to overcome the objective and subjective contradictions between the KSA and Iran in the coming years and normalize bilateral relations in their entirety.

At the same time, it is possible that the mutual hostile rhetoric at the state level may subside for a while, the conflicts will be frozen, and the current *status quo* will be maintained in the Shia-Sunni confrontation. But Iran is unlikely to give up further support for Shia communities in the Middle East, since this is an important component of its foreign policy, and the Al Saud royal family will do all they can to maintain the dominant position of the Sunni Arab majority in their country and in the Muslim world as a whole. This means that Saudi Arabia and other Gulf monarchies, as well as Jordan and Turkey, are not likely to give up further financial, material, and military support to Sunni Arab groups in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Lebanon. It is also possible that radical Islamist pro-Sunni organizations, including terrorist groups, will continue to receive financial support via unofficial channels.

In the current circumstances, an open armed conflict between Iran and the Saudi-led Gulf monarchies is unlikely, even in the context of any large-scale provocation by one of the parties. There is an understanding in Tehran and Riyadh that any war between them as regional powers can lead not only to a great loss of lives and destruction of infrastructure, but most importantly destabilization of the political regimes in both countries and loss of power by the current leaders.

Iran's population is 2.5 times larger than that of Saudi Arabia (83.5 million versus 33.5 million, respectively), and the Iranian Armed Forces are more than twice the size of the Saudi Arabian Army. According to various estimates, the Iranian Armed Forces, including the IRGC, has between 540,000 and 900,000 troops, against 230,000 troops in Saudi Arabia.²⁰ Iran's military budget is much smaller than Saudi Arabia's, totalling only \$22 billion, while the KSA's is \$62 billion. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia's overall defence potential and mobilization resources are markedly inferior to Iranian capabilities and capacities.

But Tehran still has fresh memories of the inconclusive and bloody eight-year war with Iraq in 1980–1988, when a total of about a million people were killed on both sides. The Iranian leadership also

²⁰ Sazhin, V., 'The Evolution of Iran's Armed Forces in the Post-Revolutionary Period', *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn*, 19 Apr. 2019 <<https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/22262>> [in Russian].

takes into account the fact that an attack on Saudi Arabia in one form or another may involve in the conflict the KSA's allies from other Sunni Arab states, primarily the GCC countries: Bahrain and the UAE. The relative advantage of Iran in terms of military capabilities²¹ is also completely levelled by the fact that in case of a direct conflict in the Gulf region, it is quite probable that the US Army and Air Force units stationed at the military bases in the region, as well as the US Navy carrier strike groups in the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean, intervene on the side of Saudi Arabia. Some of these formations are constantly on duty and participate in exercises and manoeuvres in the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Oman, and the Persian Gulf.

Given the above, the most probable option for a military or military-political confrontation between the KSA and Iran can only be limited-scale conflicts and clashes at sea and the adjacent parts of the coast. The parties can hypothetically exchange attacks on their ships, limited missile strikes, air strikes, drone strikes, deploy mine barrages, and carry out mine-laying and sabotage in the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, and the Strait of Hormuz. Some of these incidents took place in the area, both during the Iran-Iraq war and in the last few years. That is why both sides are paying special attention to the development of their naval and coastal defence forces.

The Iranian Navy has a fleet of 66 surface combatants and boats, and 11 landing craft. In recent years, Tehran has been rapidly developing its submarine fleet: there are more than 25 submarines of various types, with 1–2 new medium-class submarines commissioned every year. The most powerful part of the Iranian submarine fleet consists of three Project 877EKM *Varshavyanka* (NATO reporting name: *Kilo*) advanced Russian-built diesel-electric submarines. They are armed with cruise missiles, torpedoes, and mine-laying equipment. There were noted their long, lasted for more than two months, patrols to the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea, and the Gulf of Aden. *Kilo*-class submarines have a fairly high speed and low noise, which increase their stealthiness. They can perform a wide range of missions, including

²¹ Ryabov, K., 'Iran's Military Power', *Voennoe Obozrenie*, 4 May 2017 <<https://topwar.ru/114847-voennaya-mosch-irana.html>> [in Russian].

attacks against enemy surface combatants and submarines, mine-laying operations, sabotage operations, reconnaissance, etc. The Iranian Navy also has over 1,000 small boats (the so-called “mosquito fleet”)²² and units of combat swimmers and saboteur divers. In case of threats to its national security, the military-political leadership of Iran is planning an “asymmetrical response” in the Persian Gulf to a potential aggressor, be it the Saudi Arabian Armed Forces or even the US and NATO naval forces.

The Royal Saudi Navy also operates more than 60 various surface combatants: frigates, corvettes, missile, patrol and other boats, minesweepers, and landing craft.²³ A significant disadvantage of the Saudi Navy is lack of submarines and weakness of the minesweeping forces. Riyadh is trying to compensate for this by reinforcing its naval aviation, both by airplanes and helicopters, and coastal artillery. In particular, just recently a batch of 10 anti-submarine multipurpose MH-60R *Seahawk* helicopters were delivered to the KSA Navy from the USA.²⁴

An important component of Iran’s potential limited-scale military actions against the KSA and its Gulf allies could be attacks by using missile weapons (surface-to-surface, air-to-surface and anti-ship missiles) as well as combat drones. Forced since 2015 to phase out the military part of its nuclear program under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Nuclear Program (JCPOA), Iran has at the same time become more focused on the development of its missile program and drones.

Iran now has advanced missile forces capable of causing serious damage not only to Saudi military facilities, but also to its allies, including the USA and NATO. Iran’s missile arsenal is concentrated in the IRGC Aerospace Forces. It is based on the *Shahab* family of missiles: *Shahab-1* (300 km) and *Shahab-2* (500–700 km) short-range

²² Sazhin, V., ‘The Persian Gulf, an eternal arena for battles’, *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn*, 2 May 2020 <<https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/26227>> [in Russian].

²³ *The Military Balance 2021* (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, Routledge, 2021), pp. 363–364.

²⁴ ‘Saudi fleet receives first anti-submarine helicopter from US’, *Flot.com*, 14 Sep. 2018 <<https://flot.com/2018/310155/>> [in Russian].

ballistic missiles, as well as *Shahab-3* medium-range ballistic missiles, which can deliver a 600–900 kg warhead at a range of 2,000 km. Active work is underway to develop *Ghadr* long-range ballistic missiles in three variants: the *Ghadr-101* single-stage missile with a range of 800 km, the *Ghadr-110* two-stage missile with a range of 2,000–2,500 km, and the *Ghadr-110A* missile with a range of 3,000 km – but they are not yet deployed.²⁵

In May and June 2019, there were unidentified vessel attacks on tankers from Saudi Arabia, Norway, and Japan travelling from the Persian Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz towards the Arabian Sea. There were explosions and fires on board these tankers. Iran denied all accusations made by Washington and its allies of its involvement in the attacks and announced its intention to accelerate the construction of the Goreh–Jask Pipeline, which from the 2021 second quarter could allow Tehran to load crude oil into tankers from the southern coast of its country bypassing the Strait of Hormuz.

On September 14, 2019, Yemeni Houthis successfully attacked the Khurais oil field and the Abqaiq oil refinery in Saudi Arabia using drones and cruise missiles. The material and financial damage to the KSA's oil industry was significant. Although the Houthi rebels of Yemen's *Ansar Allah* Shia movement claimed responsibility for the attacks, Riyadh and Washington blamed Tehran for the attacks on these strategically important Saudi oil facilities.²⁶

Shortly after these attacks, from October 25 to November 15, 2019, major US-led naval exercises took place in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, as well as in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba. The naval forces of more than 50 nations participated, including Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and several other countries in the region.²⁷

²⁵ Sazhin, 'The Persian Gulf...'.

²⁶ TASS, 'Attacks on Saudi Aramco facilities. Facts', 14 Sep. 2019 <<https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/6887707>> [in Russian].

²⁷ 'US Navy Conducts Exercise in the Arabian Sea', OTR-online.ru, 6 Nov. 2019 <<https://otr-online.ru/news/vms-ssha-proveli-ucheniya-v-araviyskom-more-138414.html>> [in Russian].

The beginning of 2020 was marked by an increased confrontation and provocative actions of the Iranian and US naval forces in the Persian Gulf. On April 15, Iranian small missile boats and US warships had a dangerous close call, after that the US President ordered the country's Navy to destroy Iranian warships chasing US ships at sea. The Command of the IRGC Navy also declared its readiness to attack American ships "in case of a threat to the security of civilian ships and warships."

* * *

The practice of sanctioning and further isolation of Iran, which the USA has pursued in the recent years having unilaterally withdrawn from the "nuclear deal" with Iran, has borne little fruit and has actually provoked a new wave of crisis in the region. In this sense, a more justified solution would be to restore the hard-won by common efforts JCPOA, especially since most experts consider this document to be an important step toward preserving and strengthening the NPT. In this regard, taking into account the claims made earlier by the USA on the JCPOA, more talks could be held with the Iranian leadership on Iran's missile program and other relevant issues.

A respectful dialogue and restoration of the US nuclear engagement with Iran could create favourable conditions for other agreements to be concluded with Iran, including normalization of relations between Tehran and Riyadh. Taken together, this could help reduce tensions in the political-military situation in the Middle East region.

PART III. DOCUMENTS AND REFERENCE MATERIALS

10. Key documents of the Russian Federation on national security, defence and arms control (January–December 2020)

8. KEY DOCUMENTS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION ON NATIONAL SECURITY, DEFENCE AND ARMS CONTROL (JANUARY–DECEMBER 2020)

Sergey TSELITSKY

Legislative acts

Federal Law № 17-FZ of 18 February 2020 ‘On Ratification of the Protocol between the Russian Federation and the Kyrgyz Republic on Amendments and Additions to the Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Kyrgyz Republic on the Status of and Conditions for Stationing a Joint Russian Military base in the Kyrgyz Republic of September 20, 2012’

The Federal Law was passed by the State Duma (SD) on 11 February 2020, approved by the Federation Council (FC) on 12 February 2020 and signed by the President of the Russian Federation (President) on 18 February 2020.

Federal Law № 28-FZ of 1 March 2020 ‘On Ratification of the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic on Cooperation in the Field of Military Postal and Courier Communications’

The Federal Law was passed by the SD on 13 February 2020, approved by the FC on 26 February 2020 and signed by the President on 1 March 2020.

Federal Law № 257-FZ of 31 Jul. 2020 ‘On Denunciation of the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the terms of Transfer and on the Procedure for further Use of the Kazakh Balkhash Node in the Russian Missile Attack Warning System’

The Federal Law was passed by the SD on 21 Jul. 2020, approved by the FC on 24 Jul. 2020 and signed by the President on 31 Jul. 2020.

Ordinance of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation № 8820-GD of 29 September 2020 ‘On the Statement of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation ‘On the complete ceasefire and termination of hostilities in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone’

Federal Law № 355-FZ of 9 November 2020 ‘On Ratification of the Agreement between the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan on Cooperation in the Area of Security’

The Federal Law was passed by the SD on 21 October 2020, approved by the FC on 3 November 2020 and signed by the President on 9 November 2020.

Ordinance of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation № 478-FC of 18 November 2020 ‘On the use of the military formation of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in Nagorno-Karabakh’

Federal Law № 492-FZ of 30 December 2020 ‘On Biological Safety in the Russian Federation’

The Federal Law was passed by the SD on 24 December 2020, approved by the FC on 25 December 2020 and signed by the President on 30 December 2020.

The Federal Law regulates biological safety in the Russian Federation and defines the principles for ensuring biological safety, a set of measures to protect the public and the environment from dangerous biological factors, to stave off biological threats (hazards), to create and develop a system for monitoring biological risks.

2. Normative acts of the executive power

President’s Directive № 46-rp of 21 February 2020 ‘On Signing the Agreement on the exchange of information on combatting the legalisation of proceeds from crime (money laundering) and

financing of terrorism by transferring cash and (or) monetary instruments via the customs border of the Eurasian Economic Union’

Government Order of the Russian Federation № 429-r of 26 February 2020 ‘On Signing the Protocol on Amendments to the Agreement between the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Government of the Hellenic Republic on the Prevention of Incidents at Sea Outside the Territorial Waters of April 10, 1991’

Government Decree № 226 of 4 March 2020 ‘On submitting to the President of the Russian Federation of a proposal to sign the Protocol on amendments to the Agreement on combatting the legalisation of proceeds from crime (money laundering) and financing of terrorism by transferring cash and (or) monetary instruments via the customs border of the Eurasian Customs Union of 19 December 2011’

Government Order № 513-r of 4 March 2020 ‘On Signing the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Cooperation in Ensuring the International Information Security’

**President’s Executive Order № 164 of 5 March 2020 ‘Basic Principles of Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic to 2035’
Government Order № 1061-r of 17 April 2020 ‘On Signing the Agreement on the Joint (integrated) Communication System of Armed Forces of the State Parties of the Commonwealth of Independent States’**

President’s Executive Order № 283 of 22 April 2020 ‘On Amendments to the Regulations on the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, approved by President’s Executive Order № 631 of July 23 2013’

President's Directive № 138-rp of 25 May 2020 'On Signing the Treaty of the State Parties of the Commonwealth of Independent States on combatting the legalisation of proceeds from crime (money laundering) and financing of terrorism and financing of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction'

President's Directive № 139-rp of 25 May 2020 'On the Nomination of the Russian Federation as the Chair of the Missile Technology Control Regime in 2021–2022'

Government Order № 1446-r of 29 May 2020 'On Signing the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Serbia on cooperation in the fight against terrorism'

President's Directive № 145-rp of 29 May 2020 'On Signing Protocol № 1 to the Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Syrian Arab Republic on deploying an aviation group of the Russian Armed Forces on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic of August 26 2015 about Transfer of Additional Immovable Assets and Water Area'

President's Executive Order № 344 of 29 May 2020 'On approval of the Strategy for Countering Extremism in the Russian Federation through 2025'

President's Executive Order № 355 of 2 Jun. 2020 'On the Fundamentals of Russia's Nuclear Deterrence State Policy'
President's Executive Order № 374 of 5 Jun. 2020 'On the Military-Administrative Division of the Russian Federation'

Government Order № 1622-r of 18 Jun. 2020 'On Signing the Protocol on Amendments to the Agreement between the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and

the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands concerning the Prevention of Incidents at Sea outside Territorial Waters, 19 Jun. 1990'

Government Order № 1746-r of 4 Jul. 2020 'On Signing the Protocol on Amendments to the Agreement between the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Government of the Kingdom of Norway concerning the Prevention of Incidents at Sea outside Territorial Waters, 1 October 1990'

Government Order № 1860-r of 16 Jul. 2020 'On Signing the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of India on the procedure for sending military formations, warships and military aircraft of the Russian Federation to the territory of the Republic of India and military formations, warships and military aircraft of the Republic of India to the territory of the Russian Federation and organizing their mutual material and technical support'

Government Order № 2393-r of 18 September 2020 'On Signing the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on Cooperation in Ensuring the International Information Security'

Government Order № 2657-r of 15 October 2020 'On Signing the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Serbia on creation of the representative office of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation at the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Serbia'

President's Directive № 261-rp of 26 October 2020 'On Signing the Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan on Military Cooperation'

President's Executive Order № 645 of 26 October 2020 'On Strategy for Developing the Russian Arctic Zone and Ensuring National Security until 2035'

The Strategy is a strategic planning document on ensuring the national security of the Russian Federation, which was drafted to implement the Basic Principles of the Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic to 2035. It determines the measures aimed at fulfilling the main tasks of developing the Arctic zone and ensuring national security, as well as the stages and expected results of carrying out these measures.

President's Executive Order № 695 of 10 November 2020 'On measures to maintain peace in Nagorno-Karabakh'

In accordance with the Ordinance of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation № 355-FC of 30 September 2015 'On the use of the military formation of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in Nagorno-Karabakh' and in order to maintain the ceasefire and peace in Nagorno-Karabakh, on the basis of the joint statement of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and the President of the Russian Federation of November 9 2020, I resolve:

1. The military formation of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (hereafter peacemaking forces) shall be deployed to Nagorno-Karabakh, namely, 1,960 troops armed with firearms, 90 armoured vehicles and 380 motor vehicles and units of special equipment. The peacemaking forces of the Russian Federation will be deployed for five years, a term to be automatically extended for subsequent five-year terms unless the Republic of Azerbaijan or the Republic of Armenia notifies about its intention to terminate this clause six months before the expiration of the current term.

2. The peacemaking forces shall be deployed along the contact line in Nagorno-Karabakh and along the Lachin Corridor.

3. The Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation shall be responsible for overseeing the transport connections between the western regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic in order to arrange unobstructed movement of persons, vehicles and cargo in both directions.

4. The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation shall replace the personnel of the peacekeeping forces at least twice a year, and replace military equipment as the resource and technical need are developed.

5. The Government of the Russian Federation:

a) Ensure in accordance with the established procedure the financing of expenses of the peacekeeping forces related to their activities, providing for the material support of military personnel and the payment of allowances including the provision of additional guarantees and compensation to them as well as their family members in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation;

b) Make other decisions necessary for the implementation of this Executive Order, and submit relevant proposals on issues requiring a decision of the President of the Russian Federation.

6. This Executive Order shall come into force on the day of its signing.

President's Executive Order № 704 of 13 November 2020 'On the Enactment of the Russian Federation Defence Plan for 2021–2025'

Government Order № 3005-r of 16 November 2020 'On Signing the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Cooperation in Ensuring Information Security'

President's Directive № 279-rp of 16 November 2020 'On Signing the Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Sudan on the creation and deployment of a logistics centre for the Russian Navy on the Territory of the Republic of Sudan'

Government Order № 3023-r of 18 November 2020 'On Signing the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Nicaragua on Cooperation in Ensuring the International Information Security'

Government Order № 3036-r of 19 November 2020 ‘On Signing the Protocol between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan on transfer of immovable property released by military formations of the Russian military base to the Republic of Tajikistan’

President’s Executive Order № 803 of 21 December 2020 ‘On the Northern Fleet’

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